

THE SCIENCE, THE STRATEGY, THE LEADERSHIP FOR AN ACTUAL REVOLUTION, AND A RADICALLY NEW SOCIETY ON THE ROAD TO REAL EMANCIPATION

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[The following is the text of a presentation given in the summer of 2015 by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, to a gathering of some members and supporters of the RCP, including some people in the Revolution Clubs. The text is followed by endnotes, a selected list of works cited, and a table of contents, with links to the sections of the text.]

Introduction and Orientation

This gathering is taking place at a very important time, when masses of the oppressed in this country, and in particular those most bitterly oppressed, have been rising up—refusing to take the brutality and murder to which they are continually subjected, particularly by the police, acting as the enforcers of this system of oppression—and these uprisings have been joined by people from other sections of society. Rebellion and resistance on this level around such a crucial contradiction and “fault line” of this system, the depth and determination of this rebellion and resistance, and the way in which it has continued, and continues, to “flare up” with new outrages—this is something that has not been seen in a long time. And, with the aim of propelling this resistance to a qualitatively higher level and concentrating it in a qualitatively more powerful way, impacting all of society, and the larger world—and, from our standpoint, working to make this serve the strategic goal of an actual revolution that will put an end to this, and other outrages that concentrate major social contradictions of this system, as embodied in the “5 Stops”¹—a massive mobilization of people, demanding that the outrage of police brutality and murder, as well as mass incarceration, must be stopped, has been called for this fall, RiseUpOctober,² focused in New York City on the days of October 22-24, putting forward the challenge to all of society around this: *Which side are you on?* All this poses great potential, great necessity, and great challenges for those working for an actual revolution that would put an end to this, and to all, oppression. At the same time, in the larger context in which this is taking place, the contradictions within this system are sharpening, internationally as well as within particular countries, and in some places—many places, in fact—these contradictions are boiling over. And there is the fundamental reality that communist revolution, and nothing less, is necessary to deal with the egregious outrages and injustices, and the profound contradictions, that mark the current world and the system of capitalism-imperialism that still dominates the world, at the cost of so much suffering for the masses of humanity.

In this context, in reading reports on work in various areas over the recent period, and looking at our website (revcom.us) in particular, I think of the comment by people in Baltimore, when people went out to them with revolution—and it's a comment you hear quite frequently when you go out to masses of people, taking the revolution to them. They sharply posed the question: "Will you be here? We've seen people come here, we've seen groups come and go and talk a lot of talk. But is this serious? Will you be here?" This is a very important question and poses a very direct challenge for us. We have to meet this with the answer "yes" in the immediate sense, but also in the most profound and all-around sense. We have to be here, now—and we have to be here for the whole thing. Whether any particular individual is there at a given time, that's not the question that's really at stake; it's whether or not the movement for revolution and, above all, the Party, the leadership that people need to get out of this nightmare, is going to be there, in an overall and fundamental sense, because when you get down to it, ultimately the people really do have nothing if they don't have a party based on the science that can lead them to emancipate themselves and emancipate all of humanity. This is true whether, at any given time, the people know it or not.

And I was thinking about something even heavier when reading about the work being done in Baltimore: the comment of a woman, one of the basic masses in Baltimore, who said, "I am getting worried"—when people were bringing the revolution to her—"I'm getting worried." Now, you might say, why was she getting worried? She explained: "Because I am beginning to hope." Now, think about what that means for the masses of people, that they are afraid to hope. Afraid to hope that maybe the world doesn't have to be this way, that maybe there is a way out of this. Afraid to hope, because their hopes have been dashed so many times. Now, we know there's a ruling class out there. We know how, along with the vicious repression they carry out, they maneuver and manipulate whenever the people rise up. We have seen it already again in Baltimore, for example: Oh, all of a sudden there's a crime wave, they say; and they insist that they have to come down even heavier with the police and that they need the federal authorities to come in and help out the police, because the masses are running wild, and the police can't go out and kill them with impunity, right now.

So, all this is why people say, "I'm getting worried." They are afraid to hope. And if we don't intend to meet the responsibilities that we have, if we don't intend to follow through when we go to people and say there is a way out of this, we should get up and leave right now. Because the masses of people do not need anyone else who comes along, fly-by-night, and leaves them to the miserable conditions they will be subjected to, and the even worse horrors of this system coming down on them. We have to mean it when we say we're serious about revolution.

This brings us to the question of *for whom and for what* are we doing what we're doing. This is not about any individuals, including ourselves. This is one of the first things you have to come to grips with—that this is not about any individual, but is about something much bigger. Look, many people do come to revolution out of their own direct experiences, what this system has done to them, even though they don't understand it's

a system—or even if they have heard this word “system,” they don’t really know what that system is. But a lot of people do come to this out of their own direct individual experience—they don’t immediately understand that it’s part of a larger picture of what’s happening to literally millions and even billions of people around the world. This is the understanding we have to bring to them. But, first of all, we have to understand: *for whom and for what?* This is for the emancipation of humanity. This is for the masses of oppressed humanity who desperately need this revolution. It’s not about anything else—and it’s certainly not about ourselves; it’s not about our egos, it’s not about whether we look good or don’t look good, or any of these kinds of questions that should be completely out of the picture.

I’ve talked about this before, but think about it in these terms: People are going to go out here to make a revolution, and the people who are acting as the leadership, as the vanguard, are going to sacrifice, there are going to be big sacrifices. You don’t make a revolution without tremendous sacrifice, and if we don’t understand that, once again, we should just fold up and go away. There’s going to be suffering. There’s going to be dying. There’s going to be terrible repression. There’s going to be torture. I’m not saying this to make some kind of religious-sounding appeal—“let’s gather up our courage like monks whipping themselves”—or something like that. But this is the reality of what you have to go through to get to a better world.

And here is what makes it even harder, ideologically, in terms of how you think about this, how you feel about this. People are going to sacrifice in all kinds of ways. And let’s say you have a revolution, and you’ve lost comrades, you’ve lost friends and loved ones—you’re part of the vanguard of this revolution, or you’re part of the masses who are the backbone of this revolution, and you’ve lost many friends and many comrades, you’ve seen people torn away, tortured, subjected to all kinds of horrors. Meanwhile, a lot of people sat there with their arms folded, or even sniped at you from the sidelines and tried to undermine everything you were doing. And then you get to the new society and you have a new constitution—think about the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America*³—you have a new constitution, and all of a sudden, all these people who didn’t do a damn thing to help the revolution, and maybe even tried to undermine it, come out of the woodwork, and every time you’re trying to do something with the economy, or you’re trying to build new political institutions and bring into being new social relations, or you’re sacrificing for the world revolution—they come along and they go blee, blee, blee, blee, blee, blee, blee, blee, blee, with all their little petty complaints about how they don’t have this and that, that they had in the old society. You feel like saying to them: “Shut the fuck up! You didn’t do a damn thing when people were out here sacrificing and dying in all kinds of terrible ways, and now you want to come around with your little petty complaints.” But you can’t do that. And that’s what makes it so hard. You can’t do that. You can struggle with them, you have to struggle with them. You can say, “You don’t know what the hell is going on. You don’t understand any of the contradictions we’re up against, and you should try to actually come to grips with what we’re doing here and what we’re up against.” You can struggle like crazy with people. You have to. But you can’t take revenge on them. You can’t even

say, “Who the hell are you to raise any criticisms of what we’re doing, because you didn’t do anything to help—in fact, you tried to undermine things when people were out here fighting and dying.” Why can’t you do that? *For whom and for what?* This is not about us. If we aren’t prepared to sacrifice, then we’re not serious. This is about getting to a different world where all these horrors for the masses of people don’t go on any longer. And that’s the way we have to approach this. This is our role. This is our responsibility to the masses of people of the world who are suffering so terribly—and, what makes it all the worse, suffering so unnecessarily.

So this has to be our orientation in everything we do, in the way we struggle with each other, in the way we struggle with masses of people. There’s a need for a tremendous amount of struggle. But *for whom and for what?* This is what we have to keep uppermost in our mind.

Now, I want to turn to the question of why are you here, in particular. Many of the people here come from among the basic masses of people, or have ties with basic masses. And, in any case, people here generally can play a very important role as “levers,” if you want to put it that way, in bringing forward to the revolution growing numbers of people, from among basic masses, as well as students and others.

So, with that in mind, let me turn to the purpose and aim and the approach in what we are doing here—what it is, and what it is not. To begin, as I think you’ve been advised, this presentation will cover a lot of ground, speaking to fundamentals of the communist revolution, and what should guide us in working to bring about an actual revolution. Then we will grapple together with key points that have been raised. So everybody should buckle in, in your seatbelts, and get ready for the ride. There will be a great deal to “take in,” but that’s because, as Mao once put it, so many deeds cry out to be done—to rise to the challenges and responsibilities we face, to do all we can to work actively for the revolution that is so urgently needed by the masses of humanity, and to continually bring forward more people to join the ranks of this revolution and the Party as its leading core. Here, I want to emphasize this important point of orientation: No matter whether we have been involved for a long, or a relatively short, period of time, we all have to keep on learning—and everyone here is fully capable of taking part in the process of what we are doing here and contributing to it while learning from it. We should all have the approach of wrestling together and struggling, in a good way, with each other, based on a sense of the importance of the questions we’ll be digging into. Everybody should fully plunge into the discussion following this presentation—and do so with a conquering spirit, based on an understanding of the need, and the basis, for everyone to apply a scientific method and approach to the biggest problem facing humanity: how to put an end to this system that is the fundamental source of so much misery and torment in the world, and bring something radically different and much better into being. It’s with this orientation and this goal in mind that we should grapple deeply with what will be discussed here, learning and contributing as much as we can.

This is an unusual opportunity—to, in a sense, “step back” and dig into these big

questions. And it is very important, even with everything going on in the world, and all the responsibilities we have in relation to this, that we have carved out the time to get into the big questions we will be taking up here. But it needs to be understood that this is NOT just some kind of “study group” or “discussion group” in some aimless sense, where “interesting ideas” are batted around just for our own intellectual stimulation or enjoyment—or as some kind of “diversion” from what we are normally concerned with. We will be dealing here with theory, and going deeply into some things on a high level of theoretical abstraction. Ooh, right away that may sound scary. And it’s gonna be challenging. But this is a challenge we should all welcome, because whether or not there is going to be a scientific approach to revolution and a group of people, a growing group of people, organized to apply that science to really transforming the world toward an actual revolution—that makes all the difference for the masses of people. What we will be doing here is, in one sense, far removed from what, spontaneously, masses of people are concerned with and thinking about on a daily basis; but it has everything to do with whether the masses are going to be brought forward and led to emancipate themselves and contribute to the emancipation of humanity from the systems and relations of oppression and exploitation that weigh down on masses of people all over the world, and all the horrors that flow from this. For it is a very real and profound truth that without revolutionary theory—theory based on a consistently scientific method and approach, and in particular the scientific method and approach of dialectical materialism—and without this theory being taken up and applied by growing numbers of people, there can be no emancipating revolution, and the horrendous outrages and abuses to which the masses of humanity are continually subjected will go on—and on. It is also profoundly true that anyone who applies themselves to this, and does the work, can take up this scientific method and approach, can continually deepen their grasp of this theory and the ability to apply it and popularize it, learning and doing in a dialectical—a mutually reinforcing—relation between theory and practice. With this understanding, the basic orientation and goal here is to make leaps, real leaps, in grasping this theory in order, then, to return it to practice—and not just “any old kind of practice,” but practice, guided by this theory, which is in fact aimed at revolution, an actual revolution, and nothing less.

To return for a minute to what the approach is NOT—it is not, and must not be, an approach where things are taken up here in a certain “heavy” and lofty way, and then this is forgotten, or “put aside,” in returning to the “normal, everyday” situation and political work that all too often is marked by the implementation of some other orientation, method and approach. Nor can people’s approach here be, “Let me see if there are some things here that are useful for the work I am doing”—for then that work will not be the kind of work it needs to be; it will be something else than really working for an actual revolution. And, to emphasize it again, because it can’t be emphasized too many times: Our grappling here with crucial points of theory and of strategy should not be approached as some kind of “educational experience,” in the bad sense—as a kind of “scholastic exercise,” which will then find its mirror image in practice divorced from communist theory and from actively working for an actual revolution. At the same time, the point here is not to create expectations of being able to “master,” all at once,

everything that is gone into here—and, in terms of this opening presentation, the way to approach it is not to try to fully “digest,” right away, every one of the points that is spoken to (or to become frustrated if that proves not to be possible!). A lot of points will be returned to, things will be woven together, and by the end hopefully things will become clear which perhaps weren’t clear right at first; and then we’ll go into the discussion where things will be drawn out more fully. So the point is to take in this presentation overall and keep in mind the process here, in which this presentation will serve as the introduction to and the foundation and framework for several days of vigorous discussion and struggle. To be clear also, the point is not to leave here with the expectation of taking everything that has been learned here and “force feeding” it, all at once, to people we are working with and going out to: “Hey, let me tell you, I’ve just learned a whole bunch of heavy stuff!” The purpose, what we are aiming for here, is to get a much stronger grounding in what we will be engaging here—and, above all, method and approach—with the orientation of correctly linking theory and practice; and, as we go forward from here, continuing to grapple with and grasp communist theory, more fully and deeply, in dialectical relation with carrying out *this, and no other*, line—*this, and no other*, method and approach—taking the basics of this to people, and working with them to get into this more deeply as we join with them in fighting the power, while at the same time we are consistently fighting, in the appropriate ways and with the right spirit, for *this line, and no other*, to in fact be the line that is in command in giving impetus and direction to building a movement for an actual revolution, with the Party as its leading core.

Foolish Victims of Deceit, and Self-Deceit

Now, let’s move right into the substance of this presentation. Let’s begin with a statement by Lenin which not only has great importance in an overall sense but is also highly relevant in today’s world. Lenin said:

People always were and always will be the foolish victims of deceit and self-deceit in politics until they learn to discover the *interests* of some class or other behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises. The supporters of reforms and improvements will always be fooled by the defenders of the old order until they realize that every old institution, however barbarous and rotten it may appear to be, is maintained by the forces of some ruling classes.⁴

This is a very important statement by Lenin, so let’s dig into it. Let’s begin with the first sentence: “People always were and always will be the foolish”— notice what he says—“victims of deceit and self-deceit in politics...” In other words, people get fooled, and they fool themselves, “until they learn to discover the *interests* of some class or other behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises.” Now, you can see this right around you in the electoral process—the whole circus around the bourgeois elections that is being promoted now. You can’t even turn on the news without having someone like Donald Trump stuck in your face. And then here comes

Hillary Clinton. Will Joe Biden run or not? And what about Bernie Sanders? You can't get away from it. You'd think the election were next week—and it's more than a year away. But they want you to focus on this, and they want you to think that this is about you—that somehow these people represent you—when in fact they represent what? A ruling class that's ruling over you and ruling over the masses of people. Beyond just the relentless hype, even the serious contention that goes on through this bourgeois electoral process is contention among **candidates for the position of presiding over a literally, and massively, murderous system of exploitation and oppression, on a world scale.** To the degree that people do not recognize this, it is not because it is not true, but because, to invoke again Lenin's critical insight, they have not learned to recognize the interests of the ruling class behind all this, and they remain the foolish victims of deceit and self-deceit.

There is this old saying that George W. Bush couldn't get right. The actual saying is: "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on *me*." But this goes even further, because not only do they fool people over and over again with this electoral process, but they often fool you while they're *telling* you they're fooling you. I was watching this commentator, this guy named Jonathan Alter, who was on MSNBC the other day talking about the elections, and he said Bernie Sanders, everybody knows he's not really gonna be the candidate, but he can generate a lot of enthusiasm and momentum, and then that'll be very helpful to Hillary Clinton when she runs. They're *telling* you what they're doing, how they're manipulating you. They're manipulating you right now and telling you, "Hey, by the way, we're manipulating you."

So shame on you, if you don't get it. But then there's the *self*-deceit, where people don't *want* to get it to a certain degree. I made the statement one time about liberals, that liberals have an oedipal complex. Now, Oedipus was this character in Greek mythology who ended up, unknowingly, sleeping with his mother; and then, when he found out that that's what he'd done, he stabbed his own eyes out. So I said, liberals have an oedipal complex: It's not that they want to sleep with their mother, it's that they deliberately blind themselves—blind themselves to the reality of what's going on in the world. This is a real problem with liberals.

And there's the phenomenon I call "Fisher-Price ruling class." Now maybe you all are familiar with Fisher-Price—they make toys for kids, right? They have a little tea set, and kids can come out and pretend—there's no tea in there, but they can pretend they're having a tea party. Or they make little trucks and kids can pretend they're driving on a highway, while they're puttering around in their little trucks. Well, now you've got what I call "Fisher-Price ruling class," where you turn on something like Bill Maher on TV, and here's Alec Baldwin, the actor, talking about, "This is what we ought to do in Iraq." What do you mean "we," white man? You're not running the fucking country. But they've got these people—you know, Hollywood people, "Meathead" Rob Reiner and the rest—trying to act like they're gonna shape what the politicians do, ignoring—or being ignorant of—the fact that *the system* is gonna dictate what the politicians do. People like that are just playing around with little Fisher-Price toys, pretending like they have some

role in the running of the government.

And then there's the role of the media, and in particular the "news" media. These are not vehicles for providing people information about important things in society and the world—and they are certainly not "objective," if that means presenting reality as it actually is, nor are they a "free press," in the sense of not being beholden to and controlled by powerful interests. They are in fact *the propaganda machinery of the capitalist-imperialist ruling class*. This is not "rhetoric," but something which can be, and has been, clearly demonstrated on the basis of scientific analysis of these media: who owns and controls them, how they "manage" and distort what information they provide (and don't provide) to people, and what this has to do with the basic relations in society. But people will not see this—and see through the ways these media operate to shape and manipulate their understanding of things—until, again, they learn to *recognize the interests of this ruling class behind these media, as well as all other major institutions in society*.

You can see this same kind of phenomenon with things like the environment. You'll see people do really good exposure, deep and all-around exposure, of the desperate situation with the environment, where things really are on the precipice of going over to where it will be very hard, if not impossible, to reverse the damage to the environment; these people go through all that, graphically bringing this alive, and then they get to the end and they act as if everything they just said had no meaning. They start talking about, "If you recycle this, or you get a hybrid car, that is gonna solve the problem"—a problem they just described as so enormous that it would be impossible to solve it in that way. But they're deceiving themselves *because they can't see beyond the confines of the existing system*, or they *resist* seeing beyond the confines of the existing system. So, as Lenin so sharply characterized it, they remain supporters of reforms and improvements who are always the foolish victims of deceit, and self-deceit. As long as they stay within this framework, they're always fooled by the defenders of the old order, because they haven't yet realized that every old institution, however barbarous and rotten it may appear to be, is maintained by the forces of some ruling classes.

Or think of what some people say about police murder: put cameras on the police. Well, I think we know that there was a video of what happened to Eric Garner! They have had cameras taking pictures of many other people murdered by the police, but the idea is that, somehow, if you record it, that's gonna change things. Or if you have "sensitivity training" for the pigs—you know, let's get the pigs to be more "sensitive"—so now, instead of oinking when they murder someone, they first say, "Excuse me sir, may I shoot you?"—BAM! All these illusions, because people don't understand that every old institution, however barbarous and rotten it may appear to be, is maintained by the forces of some ruling class. The police are part of the forces of the ruling class and its state apparatus of repression. They're part of the machinery that enforces, on behalf of the ruling class, and with all the violence they deem necessary, the existing system of exploitation and oppression. And you cannot reform that away. Now, it isn't enough to just say that; if you can't make the case, then you might as well not bother to say it,

because you're not going to convince anybody. So, we need to get into that more deeply, to the scientific basis for understanding why this is so.

But we have the problem, which I pointed to in *Ruminations and Wranglings*,⁵ that every class wants to “remake the world in its image.” In other words, you’ve got people in the middle class who are always promoting reforms and things like that, because they don’t want things to “get out of control,” they don’t want the conflicts in society to become really sharp, because then they’ll be caught where? Right in the middle. They have a sort of privileged position, even as many of them don’t like a lot of abuses that are perpetrated under this system. This is something spoken to very powerfully in the Interview with Ardea Skybreak that you have all read (*SCIENCE AND REVOLUTION: On the Importance of Science and the Application of Science to Society, the New Synthesis of Communism and the Leadership of Bob Avakian*).⁶ So, people like this are strongly inclined toward the sentiment: “Let’s not have things get extreme.” As if it’s not extreme what’s happening with the environment. As if it’s not extreme what’s happening to women all over the world. As if it’s not extreme what’s happening to people in the inner cities, with the police and with their conditions overall. As if it’s not extreme what’s happening with immigrants, being driven thousands of miles from one part of the world to another because of wars and overall desperate conditions. As if it’s not extreme with people being blown apart by bombs in all these different countries where wars are going on. “Oh no, let’s not have things become too extreme,” say people in the middle class because, even though they can’t do it, in their minds they’re constantly trying to remake the world into one where all these conflicts can somehow be resolved without a lot of chaos, upheaval and destruction.

Here is something important to understand: The way people look at things is a reflection—not in a mechanical one-to-one sense, but in a fundamental sense it is a reflection—of the position and inclinations of some social group or some class of people in society. Now, why am I emphasizing that we shouldn’t approach this in a mechanical way? Because people can and do take up the viewpoint of a social group or class other than the one that they themselves are part of. For example, basic masses, who are not in the middle classes, can take up the outlook that’s common among the middle class. They can get influenced by that. Or they can get influenced by ideas that come directly from the ruling class: “Well, you can’t do anything about this or that problem because it’s all human nature.” Who hasn’t heard that? Or: “Nothing can be done about that because it says right in the Bible that nothing’s gonna happen until the book of Revelation is fulfilled.” These are ideas that are pumped at people by the ruling and dominant institutions; and, in a fundamental sense, these ideas represent the viewpoint of a class of people that wants people to believe that you can’t do anything about the problems of society and the suffering of people—or that the most you can hope for is a few petty reforms—because this class, this ruling class, wants to keep the existing system going the way it is. In a basic sense, we can say that every class either wants to keep the world as it is, or to remake it in line with what it would like it to be, whether there’s actually a basis for that in reality or not.

But we have to go further. It is true—a very important truth pointed to by Lenin—that all these outmoded institutions are maintained by the forces of some ruling class; and it is also an important truth, understood correctly and not mechanically, that every way of looking at the world reflects the viewpoint, or the approach, of one class or another; but if you stop there, you could still be trapped within the confines of going for reforms: “This ruling class is dominating things too much, so, like Bernie Sanders says, let’s take away some of the power and some of the wealth from those people, and spread it out more in society.” You could still look at the existing framework and just try to rearrange things so they wouldn’t be so dominated by one class, or so that things wouldn’t be so prejudiced toward the middle classes, or however you look at it. We have to dig deeper. We have to ask the questions: *What are classes rooted in?* And can you change the system of class relations, the system where some classes dominate others, within the existing system—or does it require a *complete break* with that system in order to change this?

This gets us to a question which I’ll be touching on a number of times: *through which mode of production* are problems addressed. I’ll come back to that and we’ll dig into it, so if it isn’t clear right now what that’s getting at, that’s OK. But here we need to focus on the question: *what are classes*, in the scientific sense—what are they rooted in? The middle class, the bourgeois ruling class, the proletarian class, the people on the bottom of society: what are these classes rooted in? They’re rooted in *a system of production*. So let’s dig into that further.

This takes us to a famous statement by Marx that I’ll also keep coming back to, for reasons that should become increasingly clear. This statement by Marx has come to be known as the “4 Alls.” Marx said that the goal, the final aim, of the communist revolution is *the abolition of all class distinctions* among people; *the abolition of all the production relations* (the economic relations) on which those class distinctions rest; *the abolition of all the social relations*—such as the relations between men and women, or between different peoples and nations, or between intellectuals and people who do manual labor—that go along with and correspond to those production relations; and *the revolutionization of all the ideas* that go along with those social relations. In this very concentrated formulation, what Marx was making clear is that, in order to really change the world to get rid of all exploitation and oppression, you have to get to a communist world where you no longer have some classes dominating and exploiting others and no divisions among people by class, the way the world is now so sharply marked. You have to get rid of and transform the economic relations that give rise to those class differences among people; you have to transform the social relations that go along with those economic relations; and you have to transform the ideas that arise from and reinforce relations of exploitation and oppression.

Now, again, I’ll come back to this and we will be going into it more fully, but the fact is that the actual character and goal of the communist revolution is constantly distorted by people who are in fact defenders of the existing order. For example, someone like Hannah Arendt wrote a book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*,⁷ and the way she

presented the communist goal of getting beyond classes was (to only very slightly vulgarize what she said) that the communists go out and shoot all the people who are in classes other than the proletariat. That (again with only slight exaggeration) is how people like Arendt present it: communists want to eliminate classes, so they'll just kill all of the bourgeoisie, then they'll kill all the people in the middle classes (the petite bourgeoisie), and so on, until finally there will just be one class, the proletariat, and somehow everybody left in society will be proletarians and communists. This reminds me of a TV program I saw on PBS a little while ago. It was a mystery set in the period shortly after World War 2, when the Soviet Union and the U.S., with Britain on the side of the U.S., were locked in the Cold War. Well, as it turned out, the mystery was about espionage being carried out by somebody in the British military who was a secret agent of the Soviets, a "dastardly" agent. And, finally, he's exposed, and then he gives his final lament. He says, "All my life I've been dedicated to the goal of communism: one world, one mind, everybody equal." This is how the bourgeoisie likes to present the goal of communism—one world, with everybody thinking exactly alike (one mind), and everybody equal—and you could imagine *what kind* of equality that would be.

In opposition to this kind of ridiculous distortion, the point is that to eliminate classes you don't go about killing all the people in the different classes, except for the proletariat. No, you *transform the underlying conditions that give rise* to these differences among people, you transform the social relations between people, like between men and women, or oppressor and oppressed nations (or "races," as they're sometimes referred to), or between people who work mainly with their minds, carrying out mental labor, and other people who work mainly with their hands, so to speak, carrying out manual labor. You have to overcome, through a radical transformation of society and ultimately the world as a whole, all these things while you're also revolutionizing the ideas, the ways of thinking, of people, in order to get beyond these oppressive divisions among people. Today, clearly, we have class divisions in the world—very profound ones, very exploitative ones, very oppressive ones—and, in order to get beyond them, you have to get beyond all the things that are the soil out of which those class differences arise, and by which they are maintained.

Now, to go even deeper with this—and we do have to go even deeper: What are the basic relations in society that give rise to an economic system and economic relations? This is something around which some people have done a lot of work for us, and there's a rich treasure house of things that we can learn from. Marx did a lot of work for us. Engels along with him. Lenin. Stalin sometimes, sometimes not. Mao did a lot of work for us. Well, going back to the beginning of communism, Marx made the discovery, by doing a lot of work—spending years and years in a library, studying and sifting through a lot of things—to bring to light what was basic but was not obvious, which is the fact that the fundamental relations in any society are the relations between the *forces of production* and the *relations of production*.

Now, what do we mean by that? The forces of production are all the things that go into producing something: land, raw materials (minerals, oil, things like that), factory

buildings, technology of various kinds, and people with their knowledge and abilities. All those things are the forces that you can rely on to produce things and to innovate and to keep developing production. What are the relations of production? The relations of production are the economic relations that people enter into—not by just choosing what kind of relations they want to have, but the relations they enter into to carry out production in accordance with what the character of the productive forces is.

Let me illustrate this from the history of this country. Let's look at the period after slavery was (mainly) ended through the Civil War, back in the 1860s—I say “mainly” ended, because they still found new ways, even after the Civil War, to maintain slavery in the South among Black people. For example, they would pass vagrancy laws where, if you were in an area and you couldn't show that you had a job, you were declared to be a vagrant, and you'd be arrested and put in prison—and then you could be legally forced to do slave labor. So this is a way that, even after, in the main, slavery was abolished in this country, they still maintained some ways in which they enslaved Black people, particularly in the South. But in the main, they did away with slavery through the Civil War. And then after about a decade or so of a lot of turmoil, things were enforced in such a way that, rather than being literal slaves on the plantations in the South, Black people in their masses, and some poor white people, were forced to be tenant farmers and sharecroppers still working for big landowners, often in plantation-like agriculture. How did this operate? Well, each of these tenant farmers or sharecroppers would have a little plot of land that they would work, usually with a plow pulled by a mule or a horse—that's why if you go back and listen to blues music from that period you'll hear things about the mules, how stubborn they are—won't do what they're told to do, and so on and so forth—and the trouble people have getting them to do what they're supposed to do. So the mules would pull a plow, and the sharecroppers would plow a small plot of land, and then they would harvest the crops; but they were in a system—economically, and with all the laws on top of that—which forced them to turn over a large share of the crop to the big landowner who had loaned them money to buy the tools and so on, in many cases. And then—by tradition, custom, and laws, and Ku Klux Klan terror—the sharecroppers were forced to buy almost everything they needed themselves from a store that was owned by the company, or by the big landowner. So, lo and behold, they'd work all year long, get a harvest, turn in their harvest—and when they got ready to get their share of money for the part of the crop that they didn't have to turn over to the landlord, it turned out they didn't get anything, they were actually in debt to the store, often owned by the same landowners. So they could never get off the land and go somewhere else, because they were always in debt; and if they tried to leave, here came the police and the Ku Klux Klan—“You're in debt, boy”—and they'd bring you back if they didn't kill you.

This went on after the Civil War until World War 2 in the 1940s. Now, one of the things that happens—this has been true in an overall sense in the history of human society, but it's particularly so under this system—is that a lot of new technology gets developed when the ruling classes go to war. They have a need to develop technology in order to improve their war making. Then, out of that, they turn it to civilian uses a lot of times,

coming out of the war. And this happened through World War 2. As a result of World War 2, there was a lot more impetus, a lot more push, given to the development of new technology. And, in the South, you had production of a lot of tractors, and a lot of automatic picking machines. So instead of a mule, or a horse, pulling a plow, you had a tractor that would plow the ground. Obviously, this was much more efficient, it could cover a lot more ground in a shorter period of time with less physical labor by the person working it. And the picking machines were a lot faster than individuals dragging a bag of cotton behind them, picking and separating the cotton fiber from the seed, and so on. To step back further for a minute, when you go back to slavery, cotton became the big product of slavery and was actually one of the main things that was sold on the world market to propel the U.S. economy to rise as a major economy over a century or so, from the 1800s into the 1900s; and it was the development of a certain technology that enabled cotton to play that role in the U.S. economy and in the whole world market. What was it? It was a little thing called the cotton gin. It was invented in the early 1800s, and what it did was to make it much easier and quicker to separate out the cotton fiber from all the seeds and all the other parts of the cotton that were no good for making textiles, out of which clothes would be made. So, because of that little technical innovation, you had the horrors of slave-produced cotton on a massive scale going on for generations and generations in the 1800s in the U.S.

Now, if you read something like the book that I mentioned in the Dialogue with Cornel West,⁸ the book by Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*,⁹ you will get a real picture of the horrors of this. I was watching—oh man, sometimes it's really hard to not just completely go wild—I was watching TV the other night and there was this skeptic, a secular guy, anti-religious guy named Michael Shermer, and he was exposing how the Bible is an outmoded way of thinking—making the point: who wants to live in a society where you have to kill children if they're disobedient to their parents, you have to kill all the gay people, and so on and so forth—but then the moderator who was interviewing him asked him (this was on C-SPAN, I think): “Well, has America been mainly a moral force for good in the world?” And Shermer says, “Oh, yes. Of course, we've had our setbacks, like slavery.” And he went on like that. And he talked about how free markets and a political system of democracy is the best way to have a good system, and the best basis for changing things when there are problems. “A setback?!”—slavery was just, you know, a little setback. But you read that Edward Baptist book, and you'll see that he calls the slave system, and in particular the raising of cotton by the slaves—it's a very apt, very correct way to describe it—he calls it “the whipping machine.” Because that is the way the cotton-growing slave system operated—this was true of the slave system in general, but cotton was a concentrated example of this, and you saw it in the movie *12 Years A Slave*: On a cotton plantation, every slave had a quota for how much they had to pick for the day. If you didn't meet the quota, you were whipped, mercilessly. If you *did* meet the quota, they would *raise* your quota. So then, you'd be whipped again until you met that new quota. And on and on. This was what was driving the system of cotton plantation slavery. “A little setback!” And, when you read on in that book by Baptist, you find that thousands of women, African women, were bought by slaveowners in order to be raped—systematically raped, constantly raped. **That** is the system that provided a

great part of the basis for the United States to build itself in to a major world economic, and military, power. It was not a little setback!

But when World War 2 came along—now we’re coming back closer to the present time—tractors, picking machines, and so on, were introduced in a big way. Well, a tractor is not efficient on a small plot of land. Imagine, you’re driving a tractor and you’re trying to drive it around a space just as big as this place where we’re meeting. It’s very hard to maneuver it, you can’t do much. To be really efficient, you have to have a big area over which to use the tractor. So that meant getting rid of all these little small plots of land that all these sharecroppers worked on (and, again, the reason they were called “sharecroppers” is because they had to share the crop: they grew the crop, they harvested the crop, but then they had to share a big part of it with the landowner, the plantation owner). So, when they brought in the tractors they got rid of these kinds of small plots, over time—but not over that much time, really only a couple of decades—and then they didn’t need as many people working on the land by hand, because machines were replacing people. So what happened? All of a sudden, millions of people—who had wanted desperately to get away from this land, and from everything that it captured them up in, but who had been forced to stay on this land—were now forced *off* the land in large numbers, instead of being violently and forcibly maintained on the land under the old sharecropping system. Then you got this massive migration, where millions of Black people went to the North and to the West—leaving the South, to get away from the horror there, hoping they’d find a better life elsewhere. But what drove that—what were the underlying factors driving that? What drove that were changes in the forces of production, in the machinery in particular, that was given a push off of World War 2.

Now, here’s what’s important to understand. It wasn’t just that somebody wanted to get a more efficient way of raising cotton. It was also that these landowners in the southern U.S. were driven by competition, in places far away, as well as other places in the U.S. itself. If you go back and read analysis by the RU (the Revolutionary Union), the forerunner of the Party—if, for example you read *Red Papers* [6¹⁰](#)—you’ll see some of this discussed there. As far away as Pakistan, way over on the other side of the world, you had cotton growing that was developing further, and in Arizona you had cotton growing that was being developed through more modern means of irrigation. So the cotton growers in the South were not just looking around for a better way to have cotton produced, in some general and abstract sense: they were forced, out of competitive compulsion, to introduce this new technology. Here you see the nature of the capitalist system. It’s not just one big association of capitalists, with all the capitalists working together to exploit people. It’s all these different capitalists, in far-flung parts of the world—and that’s all the more so today: in far-flung parts of the world—it’s all these capitalists in competition with each other, forcing each other to find ways to more efficiently produce, and more effectively exploit people, even if that means throwing a bunch of people out of work, or off the land, or whatever.

So, you see, the relations of production (the relations people enter into in producing

things) changed with these changes in the forces of production. When they brought in the tractors and the other machinery, then people no longer were organized into small landowners, or people renting small plots of land and renting machinery and working as individuals on small plots of land. Instead, they were thrown off the land in large numbers; they were drawn toward the cities, where they started working in bigger groupings of people, in factories and places like that, where you have maybe thousands of people all working together. That is a different relation that people then had to the process of producing things than they had when they were small farmers. So these changes in the *forces* of production—and in particular the machinery that came in—propelled changes in the *relations* of production.

And this also gave rise to big changes socially—or, a better way to put that is that it provided a new platform on which social changes could be fought for. So then what did you get coming out of these big changes? You got the civil rights movement. Not automatically as a result of the changes in technology and the changes in the relations that people were entering into to produce, but on that foundation. People found themselves not tied to a particular piece of land. They found themselves freed from that, although not freed from oppression. They went into the cities, in large numbers. And people also came back from World War 2, a lot of Black soldiers, where they were segregated in the U.S. armed forces. I mean, it was not good to be fighting for these imperialists anyway, but on top of that, Black people, as well as Mexicans and some others, were not even allowed to fight in the same units with white soldiers. So they go into this war, they go over to all parts of the world, they're "fighting for democracy, for freedom," they're told, and then they come back and they're still "second class citizens"—"niggers," "spics," this and that—and they can't go here and they can't go there. They're a grown man but they have to step off the sidewalk when some 15-year-old white boy comes their way. But many said, No, we don't have to do that any more, we're in a different position now.

So then you've got a tremendous struggle. But it wasn't predetermined what would result from all this, there was no guarantee that it would result in some positive change. All the forces of the old order didn't say, "Oh yeah, OK, you're in a different economic position now; so, of course, you should have certain rights." No, they didn't say that. There was a tremendous fight that went on, and the forces of the old order used the police and the Ku Klux Klan, once again, to terrorize people and try to defeat their struggle.

But then there were larger forces of the U.S. ruling class, who were looking at the picture of the country as a whole, and looking beyond that to the whole world, where they were in this Cold War with the Soviet Union, and they wanted to present America, as they always do, as the "land of freedom and democracy." You know how they always talk about the president of the United States: "the leader of the free world." So, they wanted to present America as the land of freedom. Well, how does it look if you're presenting America as the land and the beacon of freedom, of democracy, and you're segregating and terrorizing and murdering all these people inside your own country? It doesn't look

so good. So the representatives of the ruling class in a larger sense, the Kennedys and people like that, said, “We’ve gotta allow some changes because things are changing in the society, but also because we’re in this contest throughout the world and we’re gonna lose out if we don’t make some changes. The Soviet Union is over there saying: ‘Look at America! It talks about how it’s a land of freedom, but look what it’s doing to all these Black people, lynching them and shooting them down; look what it’s doing to all these Mexicans in the Southwest. That’s no land of freedom and democracy.’” Well, it was pretty hard to argue against that. So they had to make certain concessions finally. All these things, all these changes, were fought out, but they were fought out on a certain platform, or a certain foundation, of what was going on in the basic economic system, and the changes that were taking place there. Of course, in a larger sense, all this was taking place within the overall framework of the capitalist system, and that is why, although there were major changes—and specifically major changes in the situation of Black people—this did not bring about the end of oppression, even as it did bring about significant changes in the *forms* of that oppression.

Now, I’ve talked about the relations of production. So let’s get into that a little more. Again, Lenin did some valuable work for us which we should utilize. Lenin analyzed that there are *three basic parts* to the relations of production. One is *ownership*, whether or not you own what’s called the *means of production*: land, raw materials, factories, machinery and technology of various kinds. That’s the first and most fundamental thing in terms of relations of production. Do you own or do you not own means of production? Now you know what it means if you don’t own them: you got to go to work for somebody who does. Everybody knows about that. You don’t own a factory, you don’t own a hospital, and so on—well, you got to try to find a job from somebody who does, that’s the deal. So ownership (or non ownership) of technology, land, other means of production—that’s the most basic thing about the economic relations, the relations of production.

The next thing is what’s your *role in the overall division of labor* in society. This refers to the fact that there’s a whole process through which society is functioning, through which it’s producing the basic things people need to live and to reproduce. What role do you play in that? If you’re an owner of means of production, then you command all the people who work for you. If you’re somewhat lower down—say, you’re somebody in management—then you kind of occupy a middle position. You work for people who have ownership of means of production, but you also order a bunch of other people around below you. Or, if you’re working as an intellectual, in academia, or someone in a similar position, then you’re also sort of in a middle position in the overall division of labor of society. Or you may be on the bottom of society—either you have no job and you’re scuffling the way you can, or you get a job and somebody exploits you. And to get that job, you have to go and sell yourself. That’s what you do. You go in for a job interview and they say, “Well, now, let’s go into your history,” and all that. Sometimes they want you to piss in a bottle, and sometimes they want to know everything about your personal history, they want to know if you have ever been arrested, or do you have a felony conviction. And you can’t say, “What the fuck, just give me the job, goddamn it, I’m hungry!” You’re out the door. You can’t even more politely say, “Excuse me, but that’s

kind of a personal question, don't you think?" No, because the person interviewing you is in that middle position working for the people who own the means of production, and you don't own any, so you're in a powerless position, because if you don't satisfy them, they don't hire you. And you can't go in there and turn things around and say, "Well, OK, since we're having question and answer, let me ask you a question: Does the company you work for own anything in Bangladesh? Are you responsible for any of those fires over there in Bangladesh where all those women died in the fires in those factories?" Your ass is out the door. You don't get to ask questions like that. That's because, in the division of labor, you're on the bottom. You own no means of production and you don't have a lot of intellectual skills. You've been prevented from developing the kind of intellectual skills that might enable you to work in a more privileged position. You don't have a college degree or a post-graduate degree that enables you to go into medicine and be a doctor, or go into management, or be working for one of the internet companies developing new technology, and so on. You are on the bottom.

And then we get to the third part of the relations of production: what is your *share in the distribution of the overall income* of society? Think about it. If you're on the top, owning means of production, you may own billions of dollars, or hundreds of millions of dollars, worth of factories and machinery, and so on—not just in one country, but in many parts of the world—so you're going to get a big share of the wealth. Even if you reinvest a lot of it to keep the process going and compete with others, you're going to get a big share of the wealth. If you're in the middle, with a certain amount of intellectual skills or owning a small amount of means of production—maybe you're a small store owner or something, you own a little means of production or distribution but you don't own much—then you're going to get a lesser share. And if you're on the bottom, owning nothing except your ability to work, and you don't have a lot of highly developed skills, intellectual training, degrees and so on, you're going to get a small share.

So if you put those three things together—whether you own a lot of means of production, or you own a little bit, or you own none; what your role is in the overall division of labor of the society; and consequently what share you have in the distribution of society's wealth—then you can identify pretty much the class structure of a society. In very basic terms, you have the people at the top, the *bourgeoisie* (which is a French word that basically means capitalists, the capitalist class); then you have the *petite bourgeoisie* ("petite" is a French word that means small) so you have the small bourgeoisie, the "in between" class, made up of owners of a small amount of means of production, and people who've developed intellectual skills, have degrees, and so on, people in management or in medicine, and so on—and then you have the people at the bottom, the *proletariat*, which is a word that means people who don't own anything except their ability to work. This is why you have different classes in society—it's all related to what the economic system is and what people's role is in that overall economic system.

So when we think about getting beyond class distinctions, we have to think about changing all that, as well as changing the kinds of social relations where men oppress women, where one "race," or nationality, oppresses others, where some people have

advantages over others in terms of having a high degree of intellectual training, degrees and so on, where they can work with their minds mainly, while other people, who of course also have minds and think, are forced to carry out manual labor. You have to get beyond all those things if you want to get rid of exploitation and oppression. This enables us to understand more deeply Lenin's statement about how people are the foolish victims of deceit and self-deceit until they learn to recognize the class interests involved in things going on in society and the world as a whole. You have to look to the classes in society and see what economic and social relations, and what system of political power that enforces those relations, do different ideas serve. What class interests do those ideas actually express? Those corresponding to the outlook and interests of the big bourgeoisie? Or of the petite bourgeoisie? Or of the lower masses of people, the proletariat and the poor people?

But beyond that, if you just do that and you don't dig deeper for the roots of all this, then it's like the difference between a cow and a sheep. A cow comes along and eats the vegetation, but it leaves the roots. A sheep pulls everything up by the roots. That's why in the Old West, they used to have all these range wars between the sheep owners and the cow owners: the cow owners got pissed off at the sheep owners because the sheep came along and pulled up all the plants, so then the cows couldn't graze, whereas the cows just grazed along the surface so the plants would still grow back. Anyway, without getting too far afield with this awkward metaphor (!), the point is this: If you just look at classes, and that's all, you're not going to get to the roots. And if you want to really change something, you have to get to the roots.

So, with that as a basic introduction and orientation, there are four main parts to the rest of this presentation.

I. Method and Approach, Communism as a Science

To get into this, let's start with some basic and essential questions: 1) Is the world actually a horror for the masses of humanity? 2) Is revolution, and the final goal of a communist world, the necessary means for radically changing all this, to eliminate oppression and exploitation, and the plundering of the environment? 3) Can such a revolution actually succeed, can a radically different and liberating society and world really be brought into being? Those are three big questions. Now, I imagine that we can all recite the "correct answers" to these questions: yes, yes, and yes. And the substance of these answers—the compelling reasons why those are the answers in fact—all this is brought to life in talks and writings of mine and, in an ongoing way, through the website revcom.us and *Revolution* newspaper. But here we need to focus on this question: How, with what method, do we arrive at these answers—by religiosity and just repeating dogma, or by some other means? And what approach do we take to understanding things in general? This has everything to do with epistemology—with the theory of knowledge, how people acquire knowledge and how they know whether something is true, whether it has to do with reality or not. In other words, questions such as: What is truth? Is there objective reality—believe it nor not, that's a question that is hotly debated in society—is there objective reality and can we come to know it, and how do we go about knowing the truth about reality? We are never going to get where we need to go without a correct, scientific method and approach for knowing the world as it really is, and as it is moving and changing. And we are never going to get where we need to go without challenging not only what people think but, even more fundamentally, how they think—and how they "approach the world."

The science of communism—communism as a science—this is another thing that's thrown around a lot. But this question, communism as a science—whether in fact communism is a science, whether it meets and applies the standards and methods of science, and whether it can, and needs to be, applied to society and to transforming society—all this is sharply contended not only in this society, and the world, overall and in general, but also specifically among many who claim to be seeking some kind of "progressive" or radical change, and even among many who proclaim themselves to be "communists," "Maoists," and so on. All this is spoken to in very important ways in the Interview with Ardea Skybreak, *SCIENCE AND REVOLUTION: On the Importance of Science and the Application of Science to Society, the New Synthesis of Communism and the Leadership of Bob Avakian*, as well as in the article, the polemic, in *Demarcations* #4, "Ajith—A Portrait of the Residue of the Past."¹¹ And those works definitely deserve to be returned to and dug into repeatedly. Now, again, I would expect that, at least at this point, people here would answer "yes" to the question of whether communism is a science that must be applied to changing reality, and in particular the reality of human society—although it does need to be asked, and we should ask ourselves, whether people have actually thought this to be true before now, and have acted consistently in accordance with that. But, rather than directly pursuing that question, right now, let's instead get into some of the basic elements of communism as a science.

To begin with a basic question: what is science? This, too, is spoken to in a very straightforward, substantial and compelling way in the Interview with Ardea Skybreak, emphasizing that science is an evidence-based process (in that Interview, she says many times: you can't just tell me this and tell me that, show me the evidence, I want to see the evidence). Science is an evidence-based process which seeks to understand reality—not just the surface phenomena and what is immediately apparent, but the broader patterns and deeper relations of things in the real world of material reality—things as they actually are, and as they are changing.

Rather than going into that further here, because we don't have infinite time, I will refer people to that part of the Interview with Ardea Skybreak—and to the Interview as a whole—which is, once again, definitely something that should be repeatedly returned to and dug into. But here let's explore this question: We communists often say that dialectical materialism is a thoroughly scientific method and approach—in fact, the most thoroughly and consistently scientific method and approach—but why is this so?

Materialism vs. Idealism

Here we get to materialism versus idealism. First of all, there is the question: what is materialism? Materialism has everything to do with and flows from the scientific method and approach. Materialism means that you approach, and seek to understand, the world as it, in fact, objectively exists. It means that you understand that there is a material reality and that all of reality, all of existence, is made up of material reality and nothing else. Engels, who along with Marx, was the founder of the communist movement, made the point, a very important point, that there are, in basic terms, two fundamental and two fundamentally opposed schools of philosophy: one is idealism and the other is materialism.

Now, we have to understand these terms not as they're often used by people in everyday language, but in a scientific way. A lot of times people use idealism in a positive way: so-and-so is very idealistic, they have high ideals, meaning they have a lot of principles and they're not narrow-minded or selfish or whatever. But in the philosophical sense, idealism, the school of idealism, means that you think that reality is an extension of ideas—that's why it's called idealism, you think reality is an extension of ideas—ideas in the mind of individuals. For example: "Maybe this doesn't exist for you, but it exists for me." We hear this kind of thing all the time, this relativism: "Well, that may be your truth, but my truth says something different. God may not exist for you, but God definitely exists for me." No! If god exists at all, then god exists for everybody. See, that's the thing we have to recognize. Either there's a god or there's not. God is not the kind of thing that can just exist in one person's mind—unless it's your own personal god that you just made up, and then that's easy to deal with. But the idealist school of thought in philosophy says that the reality that we perceive is an extension of ideas—either different individuals' ideas or the ideas of one great mind, which is another way of saying what? God. So, naturally, you can't test those ideas against reality, because their

basis exists within the mind of either some supposed god or of individual human beings. And this is completely out of line with reality—the idea that there are multiple realities depending on each individual's, or some supposed god's, thinking or feelings or ideas or whatever—it's completely out of keeping with the actual reality. (Ooh, there's that scary concept again, objective reality, actual reality. We're on the verge of totalitarianism now!)

Engels also made the point that one of the ways we know this, that material reality actually exists, is that we can interact with it—not only learn about it, but change it. And when we change it, it changes the same way for everybody. Different people may respond to how it changes in different ways, or have different feelings or thoughts about it, but it changes objectively. So that's the philosophical school of materialism, as Engels pointed out. The school of materialism, as opposed to idealism, says that the material world objectively exists independently of any individual, or any supposed god, and their ideas and thinking. And that, in fact, individuals and their thinking is a process of material reality itself—people's brains, nervous systems, and so on—this is what goes into thought. Now, it's true, we don't understand everything about how this works, although more is constantly being learned, and at the same time there is struggle over how to interpret what's being learned in many cases. But we do know that the human nervous system and brain are actual material reality that undergoes actual material processes, and that's what thoughts are constituted of. And those thoughts in turn are ultimately, and in a fundamental sense, a reflection of objective reality, a reflection in the minds of the thinking person. These ideas may be a correct or an incorrect, an accurate or an inaccurate, reflection of reality, but that's what they ultimately are, some reflection of reality. So that's a fundamental dividing line, between materialism and idealism.

Now it's true that, for example, in art, in culture, often things will be presented which are different than actual material reality. And that's a good thing. You wouldn't want to see art that only, always and simply, reflected reality back to you just exactly the way it is. You want it presented in different ways, including many ways that are not in keeping with how reality actually is, which can inspire and challenge and provoke you to think, including about actual reality. So there is that role in art. But that art, that culture, is still a reflection of material reality in the final analysis. That's the raw material—the actual reality out there is the raw material out of which art is built, even if it deliberately distorts and skews it in order to present things in a different way. So we're back again to this fundamental dividing line between a materialist understanding and an idealist mis-understanding of how things actually are.

What we mean by materialism, as one of the two opposing schools in philosophy, is different once again than the way this is often used in everyday life—for example, how preachers sometimes use this term, or how it is often used in popular language—meaning something like consumerism: “That person's very materialist,” meaning they want to go out and grab a bunch of consumer goods, they're continually consumed with shopping, buying more video games, or shoes, or whatever. Or, sometimes materialism

is used by religious people and others to refer to people who are very narrow and grubby: they're philistine—they don't think about big things, they're very "materialist" in the sense of wanting to just deal with the narrowest scope of things, and don't have much use for big philosophical questions, or questions of "spirituality," and so on. But, in the scientific sense, in terms of the two basic schools of philosophy, materialism means that you recognize that material reality objectively exists, that everything that actually exists is made up of material reality, in many different forms, and that this includes the minds of people and their thoughts.

Now, once again, people sometimes say things like: "Well, maybe the world objectively exists, but we can't actually know it as it objectively exists, we can only know it as we perceive it, or as we construct it in our minds, out of our perceptions." Engels pointed out the prominent philosopher Immanuel Kant was an example of that. But without going into all that right now, the point is, as Engels made clear, that even people who argue in that way are still in the philosophical camp of idealism, because if you say we can't really know anything about reality outside of how we perceive it, or how we construct it in our minds, then in effect you're saying that the only material reality there is, or the only material reality you can be certain of, is the material reality you perceive and how you perceive it, or "construct" it. All that falls into the philosophical school of idealism that says that reality exists in the minds of people, or in the mind of one great god, and then everything else is an extension of that. So, once again, this is a fundamental dividing line in how you approach understanding the world and therefore your ability to change it. It may sound like we're talking about obscure theoretical abstractions, but everybody here, I'm sure, in talking to people, runs into this kind of thinking—the idealist way of thinking—in all different kinds of forms. You get it in very sophisticated theses sometimes—or sometimes not very sophisticated feces—from some of these academics. And you get it in very down-on-the-ground everyday terms from "regular people." Again, "That may be true for you, but it's not true for me." Or, "How can we really say what's true?" Or, "God may not exist for you, but I know God exists for me—without God I couldn't have done this, I couldn't have done that, I couldn't have gotten off drugs, so God exists for me, anyway." I've even had people tell me: "Well, you may not believe in God, but I believe God sent you here to do this."

We hear this kind of thing in all different kinds of forms all the time. And it's very important that we approach things correctly in how we deal with this and how we struggle over this with people. I mean, you're not going to go to the masses of people and say, "Now, listen, you have to understand there are two basic schools of philosophy—Engels pointed out..." "What the fuck are you talking about?!" No, you have to break this down for people—it's not that you should water it down, but you have to break it down, you have to make this accessible to people. At the same time, you have to remain firmly grounded in the basics here. Otherwise, you're going to lose your bearings, you're not going to be able to struggle in a good way with people, because people will set all kinds of terms on which they want to discuss and struggle with you about things, and you have to recast the terms back to what they actually are, or else you get lost and run around in a circle. I think everybody has experienced this at one time or

another.

So that's materialism as opposed to idealism, two basic schools of philosophy: one in accord, in correspondence, with how things actually are, and one completely out of line (upside down, if you will) in terms of how things actually are.

Dialectical Materialism

We don't just talk about materialism, however, and this is an important point. The science, the scientific method and approach, is *dialectical* materialism. Why? Because reality is not static. As we've seen, and as I've been referring to, reality is constantly in the process of change. Reality is made up of contradiction—and we'll get into that. *Dialectics* is a word of Greek origin that means dealing with conflict, or opposing things, or contradiction. It means recognizing and dealing with contradiction and the struggle between things in contradiction. Reality is made up of things that, as an expression of contradiction, are constantly moving and changing in one form or another: sometimes it's a relatively minor change, and then sometimes there's a big leap in how things change from one thing to another. There are all kinds of simple as well as more complex ways in which this happens. An example of a simple way is that you boil water and it heats up and eventually becomes steam. But (this is an important point too): it's not just water, water, water—and then, whoomp, all of a sudden, it's steam. It's undergoing relatively minor changes and then it makes a leap to become something else. This goes on in all kinds of ways in reality. So, if you just have a materialist approach, you're going to end up being very *determinist*, that is, you're going to bow down to material reality as it is and not see the possibility for change, or at least not major change, because you've only done half the work, so to speak. You've seen and recognized that the actual material reality out there is what exists, and all that exists is material reality, and what is true is what corresponds to that material reality. But you haven't recognized the contradiction, the motion and the change, so all you can see at any given time is *what is*—you see the possibilities of what *can be* as *determined and confined* by *what already is*—and then you're a slave to that, you bow down to that, you limit yourself to that, because you don't see the contradictions, not only those contradictions which are more apparent but the deeper contradictions that are really driving things and driving changes, and that hold the potential for change, even as they also pose obstacles to that. That's the struggle we have to wage—to grasp the basis for change, and to bring about change on the basis of the contradictions within material reality, and in particular the deeper, fundamental and driving contradictions.

So we have to be *dialectical* materialists. We have to look for, and work to understand, things as they actually are, and as they are moving and changing. And it takes work. I'm going to give some examples of that as we go along. It takes work. You have to work. If you want to make a revolution, you have to work, OK? If it were easy, if we could just fall into it, then that would have happened a long time ago, because there are plenty of horrors in the world, there is plenty of reason for people to want a different world. But there are also all kinds of things pulling on them in other ways, all kinds of

contradictions that they're caught up in. So you have to work, you have to dig for the deeper contradictions. Yes, you should recognize the ones that are right on the surface, but you have to dig for the deeper ones, the underlying ones, the driving ones. And this is in accord with reality. It's not that it's better not to be determinist—"Let's be dialectical because that way we won't be slavish to objective conditions, it's much better that way and we'll feel better." No. This is the way reality actually is. It actually objectively exists, and truth does, in fact, mean that your ideas, if they are true, are in correspondence with objective reality, as it is, but also as it's full of contradiction and is moving and changing. And only if you get these two elements and you correctly synthesize them, and you're actually understanding particular aspects of reality but also understanding this in its relation to the larger context—only if you do that can you have a consistently and thoroughly correct approach to reality. Of course, that doesn't mean you understand everything at any given time, or that you understand what you do understand perfectly, necessarily. But this is the only method and approach for actually getting at reality as it actually is—and as, in fact, it is moving and changing.

It's for these reasons that we need to be dialectical materialists, and not because it's some religion of ours. It's because this corresponds to reality. And by the way, dialectics that lacks materialism—there's a lot of that in the world too. People talk about contradiction all the time, but it's floating around in the air, with no basis in material reality. Whether they call it contradiction or not, people talk about contradictions all the time, things in conflict. But is that actually rooted in material reality, or is it ideas in their head that are out of keeping with material reality?—because the way they see the world has been influenced by the dominant way of thinking that's promoted in this society, which, to greatly understate it, is not scientific.

So it's not because we like this better, or that we're communists and therefore we are supposed to be dialectical materialists. No. We're dialectical materialists because that actually is the method and approach that corresponds to the way the world really is, and it gives you the basis for understanding and, yes, changing the world, in accordance with how it actually objectively is and how it's moving and changing through contradiction and struggle.

Through Which Mode of Production

Another point of materialism—dialectical materialism—that I want to return to and go into further here, is something that's in the compendium *Break ALL the Chains! Bob Avakian on the Emancipation of Women and the Communist Revolution*.¹² Now, I have to laugh, because nobody's touched something in that compendium, at least as far as I know. There's an article in that compendium (which was previously unpublished but has now been published as a separate article, as well as being included in that compendium): "Can This System Do Away With, or Do Without, The Oppression of Women?—A Fundamental Question, a Scientific Approach to the Answer."¹³ And when I say nobody has touched this, what I mean is that there are a series of questions that are posed in that article: If you're going to say that the oppression of women can be done

away with, without a communist revolution—can be done away with under the present system— then you’ve got to answer some very basic questions of the kinds that are indicated in that article. And I didn’t put that in there just because I thought it would be fun to include those questions—it’s actually posing a challenge: Let’s see if people can come up with a way that you can do away with the oppression of women under the current system. And again, at least as far as I am aware, no one has yet taken up that challenge. But, anyway, the point is that what we’re about is not a religion. We have to be materialists, dialectical materialists. If somebody could show us that you can do away with the oppression of women under this system, well then there are still plenty of reasons to get rid of this system, but that wouldn’t be insignificant, if you could do away with the oppression of women under this system. Now, to be clear, I’m not being agnostic here: “Oh we don’t know...” No, I’m firmly convinced, on a scientific basis, that the answer to this question is that you can’t—you can’t do away with the oppression of women under this system. But the point of posing those questions in that article was to try to provoke and inspire people to take up a certain method, to actually investigate and probe reality as materialists, dialectical materialists, rather than just going on faith like a religion, or just because somebody who seems to know what they’re talking about said that, so it must be true, which gets us into all kinds of trouble all the time.

If you’re going to go out and win masses of people, you better have something underneath what you’re talking about. You go out and say: “We’ve gotta fight against the oppression of women and we gotta make revolution because, for one thing, we can’t get rid of the oppression of women under this system.” But what if somebody says, “Why not?” Uh-oh. You see, this is what I’m talking—this problem of religiosity. We have to keep working. People come up with plenty of theories about how you can do that—how you can get rid of all kinds of oppression under this system—when in fact you can’t really do that. But we have to be able to answer these things for the masses of people. If you want to win people to what they need to understand about the world, and to act in accordance with that, then you better have something underneath it that you’re working with.

And notice that this particular article begins with an important point. It begins by saying: “Through which mode of production will any social problem be addressed? That is the most fundamental question.” Well, here again, that sounds like some sort of heavy thing, or a good communist nostrum. But why is it true? Or is it true? These are questions people should be grappling with continually.

Now, what do we mean by mode of production? People have heard the word “mode” maybe most often when you have pie—you know, pie “à la mode,” pie with ice cream. Well “mode” doesn’t actually mean ice cream—it means a way (or, in this case, a style) of doing something. It’s from the French, à la mode, and it means: in a certain way, in a certain style (just as it came to be a certain style to have pie with ice cream on it). So that’s why it’s called à la mode (pie à la mode, pie with ice cream). Mode means a way of doing things. A mode of production is a way that production and the exchange of what’s produced is carried out, a system through which production, and exchange, is organized

and carried out. That's what we mean by a mode of production.

To really dig into these things, to understand the importance of the mode of production, we actually have to be scientists and be scientific and—here's the thing—not be afraid of the real world. You know what? If the real world showed that all these horrors we talk about all the time can be done away with, without a revolution, then we could all go on vacation. OK? But that's not the reality. As scientists, we have, and we should have, nothing to fear from reality, no reason to run away from it because, uh-oh, it might prove that our dogma isn't really real—doesn't really have any basis to it. If that's the way we're proceeding, then we are not going to get anywhere. That is a very flimsy and very brittle way of approaching things, which will be punctured very easily. So we have to do the work.

Why is it said in that article, that through which mode of production will any social problem, such as the oppression of women, be addressed is the most fundamental question? Does that mean that the oppression of women is simply an economic matter that is reducible to just whatever the mode of production is, whether it's a capitalist or a feudal mode of production, and so on? Does it mean that it's just reducible to that? No. The oppression of women existed before capitalism, it existed before feudalism. Here, too, Engels did a lot of work, and others have done work—Ardea Skybreak wrote a book about this, *Of Primeval Steps and Future Leaps*,¹⁴ speaking to the origins of human beings and the origins, and the deeper causes, of the oppression of women, and the road to emancipation out of that. And more work, ongoing work, needs to be done to deepen our understanding of this, as of things in general. But there is a basic grounding of understanding of where the oppression of women arose from and how, in fact, it can be finally eliminated. But the reason that this article says, “Through which mode of production will any social problem be addressed?” is the most fundamental thing is because, in a fundamental sense, anything you're doing in society is shaped and ultimately limited by whatever the economic system is (which, again, is another way of saying “the mode of production”). Now, in today's world, especially living in a parasitic society like the U.S., most people have no idea about this, especially if you get away from people who are actually producing material things—you get into the middle strata, and so on—people generally have no idea, or no real understanding, about the basic reality that, if there's not a way of producing and distributing the material requirements of life, human beings can't live and can't reproduce, they'll die out.

You know most people, especially if you get into more privileged strata in society, they just think things are there. You go to the grocery store, of course the shelves are full of things. Or you go to a video games store, of course there are video games there. You go to the mall, of course there are all kinds of stores with all kinds of stuff. But where does all this come from? How many people really think about where this comes from and how all this takes place? People just assume these things are going to be there, because somebody else, somewhere else, is doing all the work to produce all those things. And the question: What is the way in which that gets done, what is the mode of production through which all this takes place?—people don't think about that or have no real

understanding about that. But it's fundamental, if you think about it.

There was a movie made a while ago—I didn't see it, unfortunately, although people said it maybe wasn't that great artistically, but it was making an important point. The title of the movie was *A Day Without a Mexican*. It was making the point: What if all the Mexicans, who are always slandered—and now there are people like Donald Trump aggressively putting out this slander—what if all those Mexicans stopped working for a day? What would happen? Well, you can expand that and say: What if all the people, all over the world, who produce and distribute all these things that people use every day, stopped working for a day or a week or a month? All of a sudden, people would say, “Hey, what the hell's going on, the shelves are empty!” So this is something that is basic to society, not only that things get produced but how they get produced. What relations do people enter into in carrying out the production of things? In other words, we're back to the relations of production, what relations people enter into in producing and distributing and transporting these things. Another way to say that, once again, is what's the mode of production through which all this is done? That sets the basic terms for everything that happens in society. It isn't everything that happens in society, but it's the foundation and sets the basic terms for everything that happens in society. If you think about it, that's pretty obvious, for the same reason that this movie was made. If people stopped producing those things, everything would grind to a standstill.

And if you try to do something in society that's basically out of line with the mode of production of the existing system, then either you're going to fail—or you're going to have to make a revolution. So, more thinking should go on, more work should go on: Why is this true, that through which mode of production is the most important, the most fundamental question—not the only, but the most important and the most fundamental question—to be posed? When you're taking up any kind of question in society, any form of oppression, anything that you feel needs to be changed, the most fundamental question is what is the mode of production that's setting the basis and the ultimate terms and the ultimate limits for what can be changed and how?

As I have said, we've got to do the work—and, by the way, I'm not gonna do all the work here. A good part of what I'm doing here is posing questions which we'll dig into, because we all have to do this work, and it's no good if we have an attitude that somebody else, somewhere else, will do the work and we'll just follow along. Everybody has to dig in and work on these things. If we are going to be serious, we all have to do this work. Yes, some of us have been at it longer, have more experience and have developed in certain ways to be able to do this, but we all are capable of doing this and we all have to throw in fully and do it. So, an important part of what I'm going to be doing here is posing questions. And this is a big question: Is it true that through which mode of production will any social question, including the oppression of women, be addressed, is the most fundamental question? And why is that true? I said a little bit about that, but I want to throw it out as a question for people to grapple with.

And, look, you run into this all the time: What goes on in this society and the world is

that, constantly, people just say any old thing they feel like saying, or they repeat what they heard from their friend, their professor, and so on. I was reading a report where someone we encountered said, “I went to my gender studies class”—I think you might guess what’s coming, maybe you’re familiar with this kind of thing—“I went to my gender studies class and the professor said *The Communist Manifesto*¹⁵ doesn’t talk about women, so we need something else.” Well, you might read the fucking thing, to start with. I mean, *The Communist Manifesto* is not a manifesto about the oppression of women, but it’s very radical—it actually calls for the abolition of the family, for one thing. It talks about the oppression of women. OK? And then, as I referred to, Engels wrote a whole book called *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*,¹⁶ which deals extensively with this question of the oppression of women and the means for putting an end to that oppression. Have you read it? Do you know anything about what’s in there? Quit talking nonsense.

I mean, really, there’s just a lot of nonsense that people get away with. Now, you can’t ultimately blame the people themselves, but we do have to struggle with people. That’s not an acceptable method, just to be repeating what is said by your gender studies professor, because your gender studies professor very likely has got a thing going where they want to do something other than have a real revolution, so they’re going to tell you *The Communist Manifesto* is no good, stay away from that. You can’t just accept that. People gotta be critical thinkers. We need critical thinkers, and we need to struggle with people that they need to be critical thinkers. Whether they agree with us right away or not, the first thing people can do is be critical thinkers. And especially when anything is coming from the dominant institutions of society, immediately be a critical thinker, because there is a proven record that these people are world class liars. And you know what else, they don’t even understand their own system, or the world as a whole.

Think about it. There are not only the deceptions that the ruling class puts down on the people, keeping them from understanding things; there is also the way in which the representatives of this ruling class deceive themselves. For example, they actually believe that everybody in the world wants to have a system just like theirs, with a hierarchy with them sitting on the top. So they decide: We’ll go into Iraq, we’ll invade Iraq and they’ll all welcome us. Except for a few people we’ll have to shoot down and bomb to oblivion, everybody else will welcome us. Like Dick Cheney said, they’ll give us flowers, they’ll put flowers on the soldiers’ weapons. They’ll welcome us, and they’ll all want to have a society just like America—with the kind of free markets and democracy we have—of course under our domination.

Well, it didn’t turn out that way. Because the people in countries like Iraq have a whole history, they also have a culture of their own that goes back thousands of years. Plus, the imperialist system that these people like Cheney are presiding over has been creating all kinds of havoc in these countries even before they invaded, and this is producing all kinds of forces who want to go some place other than have a society that’s a mirror image of America. But people like Cheney, and other ruling class representatives and operatives, don’t even really understand their own system.

I remember when the Egyptian uprising was in full swing, the “Arab Spring” which reached a high point in Egypt a few years ago. I was watching CNN and there was that guy Elliot Spitzer on there—remember him, he used to be governor of New York until they discovered he was going to prostitutes and using public funds to pay prostitutes, so he was kicked out of the governorship, but then CNN gave him a job for a little while. He was an anchor of a show on CNN, and while the Arab Spring was going on and things were reaching a high point in Egypt, he had on this Islamic fundamentalist who was in Britain but was connected to the Islamic fundamentalists, the Muslim Brotherhood, in Egypt. And Elliot Spitzer—you could almost see this physically, but you could hear it in his voice—he was swaggering around, telling this Islamic fundamentalist: “See, everybody in Egypt, everybody everywhere, wants to live like we live in America. Everybody wants to have democracy like we have in America. And people like you, history’s running right by you. You’re irrelevant. History is going by you.” Well, the Islamic fundamentalist answered, very simply, “Just wait and see.” Now, this Islamic fundamentalist wasn’t scientific. That’s definitional, OK. You’re an Islamic fundamentalist, you’re not scientific. That’s basic. But he had a certain sense of some of the deeper things going on in Egyptian society—that the havoc that imperialism had created, economically, socially, politically, had produced the soil for many people to gravitate, at least in the short term, toward the Islamic fundamentalist program. And you saw that when they finally let them have a “democratic election” in Egypt: they voted in the Muslim Brotherhood, they voted in the Islamic fundamentalists. So these capitalists, these imperialists, they don’t even understand their own system, because their view of it is distorted through the relations and the ideas that correspond to a system of exploitation and oppression, and that view is out of line with reality.

Well, what *we* have to do is dig deeper into that system and the actual relations and dynamics that do characterize and define it.

The Basic Contradictions and Dynamics of Capitalism

Raymond Lotta, in the polemic (in *Demarcations* #3)¹⁷ on why anarchy is the principal form of motion, and the driving force, of capitalism and its fundamental contradiction, makes the following statement: “The basic change wrought by bourgeois society is the *socialization* of production.” Let’s dig into this.

First of all, let’s contrast this with other—prevailing, but incorrect—notions of what is most important about this bourgeois society we live in. The people who rule this society don’t say, “The main thing we did was socialize production.” They say, “The great thing about this society is the sanctity of the individual and individual rights. Now, of course, we have had certain minor flaws, like slavery, but it’s the sanctity of the individual and individual rights which is the most important change brought about by this society. When people lived under monarchies, when people lived in a feudal system with lords of the manor and all that kind of stuff, and the serfs were doing all the work, people didn’t have that, individual rights, and their sanctity as individuals was not upheld; but in this

society that's the great thing, we recognize and celebrate and institutionalize the sanctity of the individual and individual rights." Well, they should hope that you don't look too closely at their system, because, if you do, you'll see that for millions, and ultimately billions, of people around the planet who are crushed and pulverized by the daily workings of this system—whether people in garment factories in someplace like Bangladesh, or people in Honduras or El Salvador, or people in Pakistan—you will see that their individual rights, and their individuality, is hardly sanctified. It counts for nothing under the grinding dynamics of this system, which literally pulverizes them into the earth. But, these bourgeois rulers will still insist, it's the sanctity of the individual and individual rights that is what characterizes, and is so great about, this system.

Now, besides exposing what hypocrisy and what a towering lie that is, and how it's profoundly contradicted by the reality of how this system actually operates, here and throughout the world—how this system grinds down people, and when people rise up against it, they shoot them down, they assassinate them day after day after day, or pulverize them with weapons of mass destruction of various kinds—besides all that, let's look at what is actually most fundamental and essential about this system. Let's look at Raymond Lotta's statement that the socialization of production is the most important change brought about with the development of capitalist society, and see how this relates to the nature of this system as a whole.

What do we mean by socialization of production? We mean people not working each on their own little plot of land, or in their own little workshop with their own tools. You do have some "hipsters" who raise chickens in their backyards these days, but mainly people don't work on their own, on their own small plots of land or with their own tools in their own little workshop, making the things they consume. Overwhelmingly, things are made by thousands, ultimately millions and even billions of people, working in an internationalized process, so that the things people consume are overwhelmingly made by *other* people—not individuals working all by themselves, but people gathered together under one roof, or in different sites of production, working as part of a collective process, carrying out work that can only be done collectively, and can't be done by individuals working on their own.

Now, of course, it's not true that there was no socialization of production before capitalism. If you go back to the process of building the pyramids in Egypt, for example, they had procession lines, or whatever—people passing the stones, one to the other, to make the pyramids. So, in a sense that was socialized labor. That was a bunch of people, in that case being forced—some of them were outright slaves, some of them were more like artisans, but they were being forced to work together to build these pyramids. But that, first of all, was very primitive compared to the socialization that today is carried out on this very modern machinery. And it did not characterize how things were produced and distributed in the society and the world as a whole in those previous eras, in the way it does in this era of capitalism—there was still, up until the capitalist system fully developed, a lot of production carried out by individuals on their own plots of land, or in their own small workshops, with their own tools, sometimes exchanging what they

produced, but often consuming what they produced themselves. So, even while there was socialized production in previous eras, capitalism represents a qualitative change in the role of socialized production.

It's also been pointed out that, in this age of highly globalized capitalist imperialism, not only is production highly socialized, with a lot of people working together to make things—for example, on an assembly line nobody makes a whole product, each person just works on a part of what will become the finished product—but these days this process is also much more *internationalized*. So, for example, a car is not made, from beginning to end, in an auto plant in Detroit (and this is why a lot of people in Detroit aren't working now); it's made in far-flung parts of the world—part of it is made in one country, then that's shipped to another country where another part is made, then to another country where another part is made, and then finally the finished product might be put together in Mexico, for example—all because it's cheaper to do it that way, where you can pay people low wages in all these different countries, than it would be to do it in this country. So that's why you used to have, in Detroit, mammoth auto plants like the River Rouge complex, where tens of thousands of people were employed, but those jobs are almost entirely, if not entirely, gone, and the production has gone to all these different places, because it's cheaper, actually, to make a part in one country and transport it to another country, then make another part and do the same thing again, than it would be to do it all in the United States, with the wages you'd have to pay to keep stability in this country. So this is the way production is carried out under capitalism: It's more and more socialized and, these days especially, more and more globalized, internationalized.

This is fundamental to how the capitalist mode of production operates. What is also a very important and defining feature of capitalism is that, along with this highly developed socialization and the increasing internationalization of production, things are produced and exchanged as *commodities*. Now, what is a commodity? You hear this all the time, “commodity,” you hear the word all the time. A commodity is something which is *produced to be exchanged*. I used this example back in 2003 in the talk, *Revolution: Why It's Necessary, Why It's Possible, What It's All About*:¹⁸ Let's say you're making chocolate chip cookies in your own house. You get all the different ingredients (I think I said, in that talk, that you use milk, but you don't always use milk; but let's leave that aside). You get the flour and the sugar and the butter and the chocolate chips, and so on; you make up the dough; and you bake the cookies. And then you call in all the kids and the neighbors to share them, or you eat them all yourself, and that's it. There's no money exchanged, there's nothing exchanged for them, nobody gives you anything, you just make them and eat them, or share them with others. But then somebody comes along and says, “Mmmm, boy, your chocolate chip cookies are realllly good—you should go into a start-up business with these chocolate chip cookies.” So you start producing these cookies to be exchanged, to sell them. But then you find that you can't produce them all by yourself—not enough to be able to sell them on the scale you need to—so you make your kids start working for you. And then, of course, you've got problems! But anyway, you expand further—you set up an assembly line making the cookies, but the kids start

eating the cookies, and you slap their hands away and say, “No, you can’t eat those cookies, we’ve gotta sell them now.” Oh, you’re into it now! But anyway, you’re producing these cookies now, not to eat them yourself, you’re producing them to sell them. They’ve become a commodity—something that’s produced, not to be immediately used, but to be exchanged. But here’s the trick: A commodity is something which has to have exchange value—in other words, it can bring a price, you can get something to be exchanged for it, money or something else. But, at the same time, in order to have *exchange value*, it also has to have *use value*. Somebody has to find it useful. In other words, if everybody were to decide that they don’t like chocolate chip cookies, then you would have put all this money into buying all the ingredients, and the other costs of producing the cookies, but you would go out of business because nobody’s buying them. Or if most people don’t find your particular brand of chocolate chip cookies useful, that is to their taste, then somebody else will beat you out.

So a commodity has got this contradiction built into it, that it has a potential exchange value—in other words, it is produced to be exchanged, to get money or some other thing back in exchange—but in order to get that exchange value realized (in order to get money, or some other commodity, exchanged for it), it has to be useful in some way, and it has to be more useful than all the different variations of more or less the same product that other people are making and putting out into the market. This has to do with the anarchy of capitalism, which we’ll talk about in a little while. But a major phenomenon that characterizes capitalism, that goes along with the socialization of production, is that, overwhelmingly, things are produced and exchanged as commodities, that’s the generalized way in which things are done under capitalism. If you think about your own life experience, you know that everything that you need, or that in any case you consume, is something you have to exchange another commodity for (in general, money). *Production and exchange of commodities becomes generalized under capitalism*. But that is not all. A particular commodity plays a crucial role under capitalism. That commodity is *labor power*. Now, what is labor power? Labor power is the ability to work, in general. Not a specific kind of work you do, but the ability to work in general. If you think back to what I was saying earlier, when you go looking for a job, what are you doing? You’re telling somebody: I can work. Unless you’re highly skilled and you can bargain a bit on that basis, you generally don’t go in and say: “I will do *this* job for you, but not *that* job.” You go in and say, “I can work, do you have a job?” And then they tell you how they’re going to use you. They tell you how your ability to work, your labor power in general, will be used.

So, if you don’t own means of production, if you’re just a poor person or a regular person, this is the commodity that you have that may enable you to live—on the basis of selling that commodity. You’re not an outright slave—you don’t literally sell *yourself* to the owner of the factory, or the hospital, or whatever it might be; and whoever might employ you doesn’t own you for the rest of your life. You go and sell your ability to work. You don’t sell yourself. They don’t buy you like a slave, they buy your ability to work for as long as it’s profitable for them—and if it becomes not profitable, or not profitable enough, you’re out the door. This is different than outright slavery. If you’re a

slaveowner, and you buy a slave, you've spent a certain amount of money on that slave, and you have to keep that slave, and work that slave, at least until you make back what you paid for that slave; and then hopefully, from your point of view as a slaveowner, you keep them longer to make more money, or else you're just spinning your wheels. But under capitalism, if you're a capitalist, you don't buy people—you buy their ability to work. And that commodity—the ability to work, in general, labor power—is at the heart of capitalism.

Why? Because, when people are put to work, they spend part of the day creating value, in the products they work on, that is equal to the value of their labor power. What is the value of labor power? I'll get more fully into why this is so in a little while, in discussing the *law of value*, but the fact is that the value of labor power is determined in the same basic way as the value of all other commodities, and the value of your labor power is what is required to maintain you alive and able to keep on working, and to bring forward new generations of people who can do the same. So they pay you a certain wage—let's say 15 dollars an hour, whatever it might be. That's based on how much skill you've developed, and how much value—how much socially necessary labor time—is embodied in the development of that skill. And you have to go and exchange what you get as a wage (or salary) for all these different commodities that you need to live—food, clothing, shelter, electricity, health care if you can get it, and so on and so forth. So, when you're working on this job, part of the day is made up of the time that it takes to earn the amount of money that's equal to your wage. And the rest of the day belongs solely to the capitalist. Let's say that, working on these products, you can produce value equal to what your wage is in three hours. But you don't get to go home then. You don't get to say, "OK, I made the amount of value equal to my wage, so I'm going home now." They say, "No, we own your labor power, you're gonna keep on working for another five hours or more, producing wealth for us, producing surplus value—value beyond the value that's equal to what you need to live." All that surplus value goes to the capitalist. And the more that they can reduce the time that it takes for you to produce the value that's equal to what you need to live (equal to your wage), the more extra value (surplus value) they get out of the labor that you are carrying out, along with everybody else working for them. So this is why you see that the capitalists are constantly seeking to find ways to reduce the cost of production, and to have more produced in the same amount of time, in order to be able to compete with other capitalists, all of whom are trying to do the same in order to be able to sell more, more profitably, than the other capitalists.

Now, think about it this way. Let's say you're working on shoes, and you can make 10 pairs of shoes in an hour, working on the machinery with everybody else. Not just you personally, but this process you're part of produces 10 pairs of shoes in an hour. Then they bring in some new technology that makes it possible to produce 20 pairs of shoes in the same hour. Alright, now the capitalist has doubled the amount of shoes produced in that unit of time (an hour). The cost of production and the value of each pair of shoes is actually going to go down, because it took less time to make each. So then, this capitalist can charge a little bit less than the other capitalists who are working with the old way of producing things; he can charge a little bit less but still make more profit and

outcompete the other capitalists and get more and more for himself, and buy out or push out many of his competitors. These are the dynamics of capitalism, and this need to outcompete other capitalists is what's driving each capitalist (or each group of capitalists) to push their workers harder, to make them work faster, and to go all around the world and find people they can make work for lower wages; and to bring in new means of cheapening the cost of producing things, in a given amount of time, in order to be able to lower the costs of production and the selling price of their products, to outcompete their rivals and accumulate more profit. Now that's a somewhat simplified explanation. But it does get to the basic dynamics of how capitalism works and why they're constantly moving their operations from one part of the world to another, shutting down factories here, going to Indonesia—a company like Nike goes to Indonesia, makes shoes, then whoops, they go over to Vietnam—and, if you think about it, what a terrible tragedy that is, that the Vietnamese people heroically fought to keep the U.S. imperialists from dictating to them and forcing them to live under their domination; several million Vietnamese people gave their lives, and now they're being exploited by U.S. corporations as miserable, desperate wage slaves. But this is the way capitalism operates. They go to Indonesia. They go to Vietnam. They go to Guatemala. They go to Colombia. They go wherever they can go—Pakistan, whatever it might be, Egypt—they go wherever they can get the cheapest production costs in order to be in a position to outcompete the other capitalists, all of whom are trying to do the same. And this is why you don't get just one single association of capitalists sitting on top of the system, just working together to keep everybody else down and exploited; even as they're exploiting people, they're also in fierce competition with each other.

This gets us to the basic point of why anarchy is the principal form of motion, and the driving force, of capitalism and its fundamental contradiction. Now what do we mean by anarchy? There are a lot of different ways that anarchy or anarchism is expressed—some people proclaim themselves anarchists, and we'll talk about them. But anarchy, basically, means something—a thing or a process—which is not consciously regulated. It might be regulated in some way, but it's not consciously regulated in the society overall. So let's talk about anarchy and how it fits into this capitalist system—why anarchy of production is the main driving force of capitalism, and why this driving force of anarchy forces the capitalists to constantly intensify the exploitation of the people who are working as their wage slaves—the proletarians, the people without means of production who have to sell their labor power—and why the capitalists are constantly going from one part of the world to another to find people they can exploit even more ruthlessly. What needs to be understood—and right now is very little understood—is that it's not just that they're greedy, but that there are driving compulsions that the capitalists themselves are under, which force them to constantly do these things, including to more intensely and viciously exploit the people who are working under their command.

Now, in the polemic by Raymond Lotta in *Demarcations* #3, “On the ‘Driving Force of Anarchy’ and the Dynamics of Change,” an important statement of mine is cited, which gets to the heart of this, so I'm going to get into some of this and break it down a bit. It begins:

It is the anarchy of capitalist production which is, in fact, the driving or motive force of this process [of capitalist production], even though the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and proletariat is an integral part of the contradiction between socialized production and private appropriation.

That's the first sentence of this statement, and let's stop there for a minute, because there's a lot packed into that. What does it mean, "the contradiction between socialized production and private appropriation"? Well, we talked about what socialized production is: a lot of people working on a production process, not a bunch of individuals each producing things with their own means of production—their own little plot of land, or their own tools, or whatever. So that's the socialization of production. But while production under capitalism is carried out in this kind of socialized way, the people who control it and appropriate the products of it, and make the profit from it, are individuals, or corporations, groupings of capitalists. So, thousands and ultimately millions of people work in this process socially, but a small number of people in different aggregates, different groupings of corporations and other forms of capitalism, takes the products as their private property and sells them, accumulating for themselves the profit that comes from doing that. The people who do the work in a socialized way don't get the product that they work on. That goes to a capitalist (or group of capitalists) that pays them a wage; and then, as previously discussed, they have to go out and buy other things, other commodities. So you don't work in an auto plant and, at the end of the day, you can say, "Well I've worked here three weeks, I think I've produced the value of a car, so I'm gonna drive it home." How many years in prison would you get for that? So, it's *private appropriation on the basis of socialized production*. That's the fundamental contradiction at the heart of capitalism. But what I quoted, just a minute ago, says that it's the anarchy of capitalist production which is the driving force of this process. And then that statement goes on to elaborate: "While the exploitation of labor-power is the form by and through which surplus value is created and appropriated, it is the *anarchic relations between capitalist producers, and not the mere existence of propertyless proletarians or the class contradiction as such*, that drives these producers to exploit the working class on an historically more intensive and extensive scale." And: "This motive force of anarchy is an expression of the fact that the capitalist mode of production represents the full development of commodity production and the law of value."

What does this mean? Well, I have talked about what commodities are, and how, under capitalism, in general things are produced not to be used directly by the people who produce them, but as things to be exchanged in society (and the world) as a whole, through a whole network of relations that are held together by money (or things which act as a stand-in for money). This is what it means to say that the capitalist mode of production represents the full development of commodity production. OK, so far maybe so good. But what about this law of value? The law of value says this: the value of any product—that is, any commodity, anything produced and exchanged—is equal to the amount of socially necessary labor time to produce that particular commodity. And the

reason that anarchy is at the heart of this, is that all these capitalists are engaging in commodity exchanges with each other, as well as commodity exchanges with consumers, and it's all tied together by this law of value—that's what regulates it in the ultimate sense, even as it's a bunch of different capitalists accumulating privately, in competition with each other, in the same field of production or in different fields of production, or in the realm of finance, and so on. But, once again, underneath all this is this *socialized process of production*.

Now, if it were the case that you just had one big group of capitalists exploiting people, and you didn't have this whole commodity system, then this one big group of capitalists could regulate things and keep all this madness from happening, where people are thrown out of work, plants are closed down, corporations go from one part of the world to another, with all the consequences of that for people. I mean, look at Detroit. I made this point, in *Revolution—Nothing Less!*¹⁹ that, after the rebellion in Detroit in 1967, all of a sudden the ruling class said, "Ooh we got a big problem here in Detroit, we've got all these Black people without jobs, they're being discriminated against, and brutalized by the police, we better go out and hire a bunch of them, give them a well-paying job in the auto plants"—and they went out and hired thousands of Black people right after the rebellion. Now all those jobs are gone. Detroit is a basket case where large parts of the people in the city can't even consistently get clean water. Why? Because of the dynamics of capitalism—the unregulated character, the anarchic character of capitalism, where these different aggregates of capitalists, privately appropriating socially produced wealth unto themselves, in different segments, are in competition not only with each other in a particular country but are in competition with capitalists all over the world, and therefore they are constantly having to change the way they produce things, constantly having to shift the arena, or the part of the world in which they're operating, in order to try to outcompete each other, with the threat of going under if they aren't more efficient than the others. If they don't more efficiently exploit people, they will go under, or be reduced to second-class capitalist status, on the verge of going under, even if they're billion dollar corporations.

When I was a kid, for example, Sears was a big department store. When I was really young they even had the Sears Roebuck catalog: You didn't order things with your smart phone, you got a catalog and ordered things through the mail from the catalog. Well now, Sears is still around, but it's not big like Walmart or something, because Walmart came in, found cheaper ways to do things, paying people low wages in the South, then expanding into many parts of the world, particularly the Third World. It's got operations in places like Bangladesh. The factory that collapsed on the women and killed them in scores, and the fires in the factories there that killed hundreds, were making products for Walmart, and that's why Walmart could sell them more cheaply than Penney's or Sears or whatever, and so Penney's and Sears are in danger of going under—and forget about K-Mart, it's just kind of limping along.

Or there is the situation with the major supermarket chain A&P, which we now hear is going under. And where is Radio Shack now? Or, to go further back, where is the Kaiser

automobile (there is Kaiser Health Care, but where is the car that Kaiser used to make)?

These are just a few examples—many others could be cited. This is an expression of the anarchy of capitalism—it's not all regulated from one center, it's all these different capitalists in fierce competition with each other, even sometimes huge groupings of capitalists controlling billions of dollars but always under the threat of going under if they can't do things more profitably than others who are in the same field, or in some other field, who then buy them up or drive them out of business altogether.

This is the nature of capitalism. Things are constantly changing. I once made this comment to people: You know, things are going along in the economy and then some twit invents an app, and then all of a sudden everything changes. One of these guys coming out of Stanford, or wherever, invents some new device, some new technology, that both makes it possible, and at the same time makes it more and more necessary, to do something through the Internet, more productively and efficiently; and then some of the previous ways of doing things get undermined. Think about Uber and taxis. Uber is undercutting the taxi business, and you had this big thing in France where all the taxi drivers were trying to burn down Uber, because it's putting all the taxi drivers out of work. Well, this is just an example, again, of the anarchy of capitalism. Somebody comes up with a new innovation for how to organize the production or the distribution of things more efficiently, with greater profit, with less costs of production—and BOOM, the people who had their money in the more traditional way of doing things, even if they'd been doing well for a while, may go under.

These are the basic dynamics of capitalism. For the reasons I've been speaking to, there is the continual competition, with even big fish getting eaten up by more efficient "sharks." And, at the same time, all these capitalists are linked, and ultimately regulated, by the law of value—they're all tied together by the reality, expressed as the law of value, that the value of things produced is equal to the amount of socially necessary labor time that goes into their production. And this contradiction—capitalists, or groups of capitalists, that exist and operate as separate units of capital, while at the same time they are bound together by, and forced ultimately to proceed on the basis of, the law of value—this is what leads to the anarchy of capitalism, what leads to anarchy being the driving force of capitalism and the key expression of capitalism's fundamental contradiction, between socialized production and private appropriation. That anarchy is what drives the capitalists to exploit and oppress people in all the ways that we're all too familiar with, including giving not a damn if you worked for them for 30 years and your children are dependent completely on the wages or salary that you earn—if it's more profitable to shove you out the door and go somewhere else, that's just the rules of the game, baby, too bad for you, because it's do that or die on the part of the capitalists, because they're in competition with a whole bunch of other capitalists.

As a sharp illustration of this, there was a very good article^{[20](#)} on the revcom.us site about this capitalist who had investments in Bangladesh but who wanted to be a socially-conscious capitalist. This article ran down all the ways in which he tried to do things

differently, do them in a way that would not so viciously exploit the women working in the plants that he owned—not have them in such horrific conditions, give them more social benefits—and how he was forced to give that up by this very driving force of anarchy, by the competition from other capitalists doing things in more efficient, more ruthless ways. So even though he was a good-hearted capitalist—and that may sound like an oxymoron (a contradiction in terms), but he was actually a good-hearted capitalist—still, he couldn't keep up his “kind capitalism” because of the basic dynamics of what drives capitalism.

This is very important to understand, because it shows why you can't reform this system. You can't, for example, get capitalists to act more responsibly toward the environment. Look at Obama. He's the “green president.” Yet he's opened up all this oil drilling in all these new areas, which is going to heighten the environmental disaster that's already developing, because the U.S.—that is, the ruling class, the capitalist-imperialists that Obama represents—they are in competition with other capitalists all around the world for sources of oil, and to be able to produce oil more cheaply. And oil is a strategic resource that has everything to do with military power. Militaries run on oil, and the U.S. military is one of the world's largest, if not the largest, consumer of oil. So, even if Obama wanted to be an “environmental president,” in a real sense, the dynamics of this capitalist system wouldn't allow him to do that. This is what so many people don't understand. They constantly are deceived, and deceive themselves, because they don't understand the fundamental dynamics and “rules” of the system they live under and how that sets the terms for what is, and is not, possible in terms of changing things. Even if something seems to make a lot of sense and to be rational from the point of view of the needs and interests of humanity as a whole, if it doesn't fit into those dynamics of capitalism, if it can't be made to work through the relations and dynamics of capitalism, it won't happen under this system. And that's why the situation with the environment is getting worse and worse. Yet, here you have someone like Jared Diamond who wrote this overall very good book, *Guns, Germs and Steel*,²¹ talking about why the world's the way it is, and why it came to be that in some parts of the world people have a lot more technology and power, while in other parts of the world people have much less and are oppressed by the people who have more, and so on. He has a certain amount of materialism, even some dialectics thrown in there, but then when he looks at the environment,²² he sees the desperate situation with the environment, the tremendous havoc that's being wreaked on the environment, and the fact that it's almost reaching a tipping point where it won't be possible to undo this, and what does he come up with? The idea that we have to go convince the heads of these corporations that it's in their interests, it's in accordance with their bottom line, to be more rational about the environment—that's what he comes up with! He just completely throws out the kind of basic understanding that went into *Guns, Germs and Steel*, even with certain limitations in that book. He just deceived himself because, even though he had a certain understanding to a certain level, he didn't really deeply grasp the basic dynamics of how this system works and how you can't change it into something else just by talking to people about what would be better for the earth and for the people of the earth, in the abstract. This, once again, gets to the fundamental question of why this system cannot

be reformed and why you have to have a completely different system in order to address these social problems of such great magnitude, like the environment, or the oppression of women, or the oppression of different nations and peoples.

Now, it's not that the contradictions of the economic system—the fundamental contradiction of capitalism, between socialized production and private appropriation, and within that the driving force of anarchy—it's not that this is the only significant part of reality, the only significant contradiction in this society or in the world as a whole. There are other very important contradictions which have a certain life and a certain dynamic of their own. For example, the oppression of women: As I have pointed out, this arose way before capitalism. And so did the oppression of one group of people by others, in a number of different forms. But at this point, with the system of capitalism, with its tentacles reaching out and ensnaring the whole world within its overall dynamics, all these different contradictions now take place within the fundamental framework of the capitalist system. So while these different social contradictions have to be addressed in their own right, and they have their own dynamics—and you can't simply say, "If we want to get rid of the oppression of women, we just have to change the economic system," you have to do a lot more than that—still, in regard to such things as the oppression of women, and even as you're addressing this in its own right, ultimately what you're able to do will be determined by what the character of the economic system is, because it's fundamentally the functioning of the economic system that sets the basic terms, and the basic limits, of what can take place. So even if a problem didn't arise with the capitalist mode of production, it is now taking place within a world where the dynamics of that economic system fundamentally and ultimately set the stage and the terms within which you are operating.

To summarize this crucial point, we could put it this way: *Ultimately, the mode of production sets the foundation and the limits of change*, in terms of how you address any social problem, such as the oppression of women, or the oppression of Black people or Latinos, or the contradiction between mental work and manual work, or the situation with the environment, or the situation of immigrants, and so on. While all those things have reality and dynamics in their own right, and aren't reducible to the economic system, they all take place within the framework and within the fundamental dynamics of that economic system; and that economic system, that mode of production, sets the foundation and the ultimate limits of change in regard to all those social questions. So, if you want to get rid of all these different forms of oppression, you have to address them in their own right, but you also have to fundamentally change the economic system to give you the ability to be able to carry through those changes in fundamental terms. To put it another way: *You have to have an economic system that doesn't prevent you from making those changes, and instead not only allows but provides a favorable foundation for making those changes.*

We'll come back to some of these themes. I know they're complicated, and political economy is something that's particularly difficult. I'll talk more about that later, including some of my own experience with taking up political economy and having to

struggle through it, but also why it is necessary to do this—to get a basic understanding of this and, over time, continue to deepen that understanding. Otherwise, we’ll be skimming along the surface, talking about how we need revolution, not reform, but not really having a grounding in why that’s so, and therefore not really being able to convince people when they raise those questions that we sometimes wish they wouldn’t raise, but which actually do need to be raised because we really do need to deal with the real world and not just keep to a narrow little sphere where we feel comfortable saying all the things that we’ve learned to say.

But, at this point, let’s move on to other very important questions.

The New Synthesis of Communism

Earlier this year (2015), the Outline I wrote, “The New Synthesis of Communism: Fundamental Orientation, Method and Approach, and Core Elements”²³ was posted, and featured prominently, on revcom.us and in *Revolution* newspaper; and in publishing and featuring it, it was emphasized that this Outline is important itself and also an important companion to the Interview with Ardea Skybreak, which people should continue to study and to use and popularize broadly.

This Outline on the new synthesis of communism provides a basic sense of the scope, and of the essential scientific method and approach and strategic orientation, that marks the new synthesis as a further, qualitative development of communism; and it should provide important guidelines for further engagement with and immersion in the new synthesis. Here, rather than going through the whole Outline, which is available for people to read and dig into—and people should go back to it repeatedly—I want to discuss the importance of, and further stimulate, serious study of not only the Outline itself but the content of the new synthesis it is summarizing, in a concentrated way.

In the first part of this Outline (the “Introductory Point of Orientation”) it says the new synthesis is still a “work in progress,” even while it represents a qualitative development of the science of communism. Now, I have to say that I’m constantly astounded by the ways in which people can distort things in order to take the heart out of them and reduce communism to revisionism. What do we mean by revisionism? Revising the revolutionary heart out of communism and turning it into a feeble approach to tinkering around the edges of things, striving only for some reforms, and, even in the name of communism, keeping things within the confines of the capitalist system, its relations, its ways of thinking. So I’m constantly astounded by how people can take things, of communism, even things talking about the further development of communism, and refashion them into paltry revisionism. Now the reason I say that is I heard a report recently indicating that when this Outline came out—and in the Outline it was said that the new synthesis is, in a real sense, a “work in progress,” since I am still actively applying myself to leading and learning from many different sources, but it is correct to say that this new synthesis represents a qualitative development of communism—someone who should know better said, “Well, the important thing here is that it’s still a

‘work in progress.’” No, clearly what was being emphasized as the main thing, and what is objectively the case, is that this new synthesis is a qualitative development of communism, even as it’s still being worked on. If you reverse this, and emphasize as the main thing that it’s still a “work in progress,” then you don’t really have to take it all that seriously: it’s just a “work in progress,” it’s not really “all that,” it’s just something somebody is working on, and maybe someday it will develop into something really important. In fact, the reality, and the important point, is that in terms of the fundamental and most essential element of the new synthesis—which is scientific method and approach, the further development of communism as a science—and all that flows out of, and is informed by, that, in all these different areas (including the strategy for revolution, the nature of the society we’re going for, the internationalist orientation of our whole struggle), communism as a science has been further developed, in a qualitative way.

But let’s stop for a minute and speak to this: Who cares if communism has been further developed? At this point, a lot of people will say, “I’m not a communist, so I don’t care if communism has been further developed.” Well, first of all, if you’re not a communist, you should be. The fact is that, as spoken to earlier, communism represents the most consistent and systematic way of understanding and transforming the world, not just in some general and abstract sense, but toward a certain goal which the science of communism—not a religion, but the science of communism—reveals to be possible as well as desirable. You see, it’s not like, “Oh, we’d like to have a communist world without exploitation and oppression, so let’s find a science that will get us there.” No. The fact that there can be—not that there’s any guarantee of this, but through struggle there is a possibility to have—an entirely and radically different world, a communist world without exploitation and oppression, that fact itself is scientifically determined by examining the actual dynamics of human society throughout history, how it has changed, what that has led to, and what possibilities that now has opened up. So even the goal of communism, in the first place, is a scientifically determined goal, not something we just wish could be true. And then, in order to get to that goal, the means for achieving that goal also have to flow out of a scientific method and approach, because if you’re not being scientific, if you’re not actually examining the world the way it actually is, and as it is moving and changing through contradiction and the struggle between opposing forces, then you will not be able to achieve the kind of change that needs to be achieved, and you will constantly fall into being deceived and into self-deception.

So that’s why it’s important that the science of communism has been developed further, in a qualitative way, by building on what has gone before, in the main, but also casting off certain secondary aspects of the previous understanding of communism, which actually ran counter to, were in opposition to, its essentially scientific character. Since the time of Marx up through Mao, communism has been mainly scientific in its method and approach. But there have been elements in it that have run counter to that scientific method and approach, and the new synthesis is taking what is positive, is building on the essential parts that were positive, but is also rejecting, casting off or recasting in a

more correct light some of the things from the earlier times in the development of communism that were not thoroughly scientific. Now, that doesn't mean that everything about it is perfect, it doesn't mean that a hundred years from now some other people won't come along and say, "Well this thing here is not quite right." That has to do with the nature of science, as opposed to religion. It's something that's constantly developing. I spoke to people one time about Mao's statement, where he said that ten thousand years from now, we will all look rather foolish. This is undoubtedly true—and maybe it will be in even less time than that. What Mao meant was that for us communists, as well as people more generally, our understanding will be shown to be very undeveloped, relative to what people will learn in future generations, assuming people are still here in the world.

But the main aspect of communism is **not** that it's foolish. It's that it's scientific and, at the same time, one of the essential qualities of a science is that it's constantly developing, it's constantly subjecting itself to criticism, as well as listening to and learning from the criticism of others. It's constantly interrogating itself, to use that phrase, as well as investigating and interrogating reality, and constantly developing. But, like all science, it doesn't go back to zero every time something new is learned. It builds on what has been shown to be true before, even while it's open to the understanding that at least parts of what were known to be true, or thought to be true before, could be wrong. That's the nature of science. Whether in biology or physics or chemistry or astronomy or any other field of science, that's the way you proceed. You proceed on the basis of a certain core understanding that's been shown, through the scientific method of investigating and synthesizing reality, to be true; and you go out and apply that to new problems, to new experience, always being open to the possibility that even parts of what you knew to be true at a given time may not be true, but not just going back to the drawing board and starting all over as if you don't know anything every time you go out to investigate reality. You have to have a core of knowledge that's been shown to be true through the scientific method, with which you go out to learn more, even as you're open to considering that what you know at a given time may not be correct in certain aspects, or even a part of it may be entirely wrong and you have to throw that out—but you don't throw out the whole core of accumulated knowledge.

So the significance of the new synthesis of communism is not that communism as a science, and its application in many different spheres, has been invented anew, but it has been further developed in many of these key areas, and this provides a qualitatively new basis for people, not just here, but throughout the world, to carry on the struggle to get beyond a world full of all the horrors that we're now living under.

In an earlier talk²⁴ I made the comparison between Marx and Darwin. Darwin, as people know, developed, or systematized, the theory of evolution, showing not only that things had evolved, which a number of other people had an idea might be true, but also what was the essential means and mechanism through which that took place—that it was descent with modification that held the possibility of new species developing. Without going into all that now, it was a major revolution in human thought, what Darwin

brought forward, the theory of evolution. Marx, who was alive at the time, was very impressed by what Darwin had brought forward. Marx recognized the importance of this in terms of its being a qualitative breakthrough in the scientific approach to reality, and when Marx wrote his major work, *Capital*,²⁵ he actually wanted to dedicate it to Darwin because of his recognition of the importance of what Darwin had done; but Darwin was uneasy about that—he was already catching enough hell for going up against religious forces, and everything else—so Marx didn't do it. But that reflected Marx's recognition of the importance of what Darwin had brought forward with the theory of evolution. And I made the point in an earlier talk that what Marx did in the realm of human society—scientifically approaching, analyzing and synthesizing, human society and its historical development and the driving contradictions and forces in that—was equally a revolution in human thought, *on the level of what Darwin had contributed to natural science*. It is really true that you cannot do natural science today if you don't proceed on the basic foundation of what Darwin brought forward, even though a few things that Darwin thought were not actually quite correct, and important things have been learned since Darwin's time. Darwin, for example, didn't know anything about genetics. That particular branch of science had not been developed yet in Darwin's time. But genetics has come along and confirmed, very strongly, Darwin's basic understanding of the theory of evolution.

What Marx did in the realm of human society and its transformation was on the level of what Darwin did in the realm of the natural sciences, in the realm of biology in particular. And yet you hear all kinds of fools, who present themselves as learned scholars and so on, talking about human society and “democracy this,” and the “elections that,” and “power structures this,” and how supposedly society is shaped by power relations being imposed, rather than understanding the basic dynamics that underlie the development of human society. All these people pontificating and holding forth, ignoring, discounting or distorting everything that Marx has brought forward to enable us to understand the basic dynamics of human society, its historical development and its transformation. It really is like people babbling about human society—you hear it all the time, you can go on any college campus and hear it forever—babbling about human society without mentioning, or ignoring or distorting, Marx; they're in the same sort of category as people who would try to explain the natural world and the development and further transformation of species on the earth without basing themselves on, or even by opposing, Darwin.

This is how important what Marx brought forward actually is. It's like human beings were groping in the darkness, trying to understand why they were in the situation that they were in, and someone came in and shined a powerful searchlight onto the whole picture and revealed all the things that were going on, not just around them, but down at the base that was setting the terms for everything they were experiencing. And, since that time, communism has been further developed. It's a living science. It went through qualitative development when Lenin systematized some new understanding, about imperialism—how capitalism had developed further into a worldwide system—and other dimensions of communism. And Mao brought forward a further leap in the development

of communism: showing, for example, that in socialist society there remains the struggle between different classes—that socialism is not a society where everybody is for socialism and there are no essential conflicts or contradictions, in the economic system, or in the social relations, or in the political system, or in people’s thinking—that in fact socialist society is a dynamic society, in transition, that has to go forward to the complete achievement of communism, together with people throughout the world, or it will be dragged backward to capitalism. And Mao analyzed not only that there continued to be classes and class struggle in socialist society, and most decisively the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and between the socialist road and the capitalist road, but that this assumed a concentrated expression within the communist party itself, the leading force within socialist society. This was not something understood before Mao, or not systematically understood.

So communism has gone through these different leaps in its development. And, back in the day, when people like myself came forward and became communists, we recognized this fundamental dividing line in the communist movement at that time between those people who recognized the importance of what Mao had done—building on Marx and building on Lenin, but taking another leap—versus those people who refused to recognize that or rejected it, even if they called themselves communists, people who looked to places like the Soviet Union or Cuba or Vietnam as a model of what communism should be like, when in fact they were nothing of the kind. I remember, for example, someone wrote an article in opposition to the idea that Mao represented a further leap in communism, and they argued: “Why is everybody putting so much attention on Mao? What about Fidel Castro in Cuba, or what about Le Duan (who was the head of the party in Vietnam after Ho Chi Minh died)? Why aren’t their ideas just as important as Mao’s?” Well, one basic reason. They weren’t correct, they weren’t communist. They weren’t a further development of the science of communism, they were a departure from it that took things away from understanding the world scientifically and being able to transform it in the direction of communism. So we had no trouble with this, no hesitation. We took on all comers: If you’re a communist in the world today, you’re with Mao, you’re a Maoist. If you’re not with Mao, if you’re not a Maoist, you can call yourself a communist from the time you get up til when you brush your teeth at night, but you are not a communist. We went to battle with this. You want to call yourself a communist and talk about Cuba, let’s talk about what’s going on in Cuba. That’s not on the road to communism. You don’t want to get with Mao, let’s talk about why you need to. So we were out there, with a basic scientific certitude. You’re a communist, you’re with Mao. That’s it, baby.

And every week from China they would send a magazine, the *Peking Review* (it wasn’t called Beijing then, it was called Peking). If you can imagine—our standards weren’t so great in those days, in some ways—I actually got this magazine mailed to my home address. That’s not the way we should do things, but that’s the way we did some things back in the day: the *Peking Review* came right to my house addressed to me. I don’t know what the mailman thought of it, but I’d get it every week it, and it had articles about China and the world, what revolutionary struggles were going on in the world,

how they were building a socialist economy in China, how they were dealing with social questions like the oppression of women, what the struggles were inside the Chinese Communist Party, between people who were with Mao and fighting to go forward on the socialist road, going toward communism, and people, even people in high positions, who were revising communism to rationalize going into a capitalist way of doing things—people called revisionists, people in authority taking the capitalist road. There would be this struggle: what are the people in authority taking the capitalist road saying, and why is it wrong; and what are the people with Mao saying, and why do we have to get with that? Every week there would be these articles, and when I knew it was coming, I'd wait anxiously for the mailman to arrive. I'd get my *Peking Review*, I'd rip open the envelope it came in and start reading the *Peking Review*. Every week we looked to the *Peking Review* to give us guidance on how to understand what was happening in the world, what the big questions were, what revolutionary struggles were going on, and what the Maoists in the world were doing about all this.

So we had no trouble with saying, if you want to really be a communist, you gotta be a Maoist. But things keep on developing. That was a long time ago. Many things have happened since then, including the restoration of capitalism in China. Shortly after Mao died in 1976, the revisionists, the people on the capitalist road, though still using the name communism, restored capitalism in China—they seized power and restored capitalism, and viciously put down the revolutionaries who opposed that. Well, work has had to be done to understand that and to keep on grappling with the contradictions we are up against in the world—not with the goal of bringing forward a new stage of communism in some abstract sense, but so we can address the real profound problems and the great needs of actually making the revolution we need to make, in order for people to get on the road of being able to emancipate themselves and get beyond this madness that the masses of people in the world are chained down in. And the fact is that the result of this is that there has been a qualitative leap, a new synthesis, in the development of communism.

To put this in a concentrated way, what is embodied in this new synthesis is a further revolution in human thought—a further revolution which proceeds from the fundamental scientific basis of communism, since its founding by Marx (together with Engels), and is, in an overall sense, within the same fundamental framework, but at the same time involves a qualitative leap in the development of communism. Of course, as I have stressed many times, there will remain the ongoing need, as there is with all sciences, to continue to learn more and further develop communism, through the dialectical back-and-forth between work in the theoretical realm and further developments in the world, including the development of a revolutionary struggle whose ultimate aim is a communist world. But what is crucial to grasp at this point is the reality that *the new synthesis represents and embodies a qualitative resolution of a critical contradiction that has existed within communism in its development up to this point, between its fundamentally scientific method and approach, and aspects of communism which have run counter to this*. This new synthesis has, most decisively, established communism on a firmer and more consistent scientific basis.

So today, two things are true. First: **Humanity, the masses of oppressed humanity, and ultimately humanity as a whole, really does need revolution and communism.** Only through the revolution leading to communism, and the ultimate achievement of a communist world without exploitation and oppression, can all these horrors that people are subjected to in their billions around the globe actually be brought to an end, and can there be the basis for the environment to be dealt with in a way that doesn't further destroy the potential for human life. So that's fundamental. This is a fundamental truth: Only if there are people who actually are communists and are struggling to lead people on the road of making communist revolution—only to the degree that that is happening is there a way out of this madness and is there a means for finally ending the long night to which humanity has been subjected for millennia and millennia. That's one thing that's true.

The other thing that's true is this: **The new synthesis of communism, in terms of method and approach to understanding and transforming human society, and the application of this method and approach to crucial contradictions and problems of revolution, represents a decisive qualitative leap in the development of the science of communism.**

In 1975, it was objectively true that if you were not with Mao and not taking up what Mao had brought forward, you were not a communist.

In 2015, it is objectively true that if you are not with the new synthesis and the leadership that has brought this forward, you can call yourself whatever you want, but you are not a communist, you are not taking up and applying the scientific understanding the masses of people in the world need to get free and to emancipate humanity.

All this speaks to the importance of this new synthesis of communism, and why people should care.

And, from this, the importance of a revolutionary communist vanguard really basing itself on, consistently applying, and contributing to the further development of, this new synthesis should clearly stand out. There is an urgent need for this new synthesis to be taken up, broadly, in this society and in the world as a whole: everywhere people are questioning why things are the way they are, and whether a different world is possible; everywhere people are talking about "revolution" but have no real understanding of what revolution means, no scientific approach to analyzing and dealing with what they are up against and what needs to be done; everywhere people are rising up in rebellion but are hemmed in, let down and left to the mercy of murderous oppressors, or misled onto paths which only reinforce, often with barbaric brutality, the enslaving chains of tradition; everywhere people need a way out of their desperate conditions, but do not see the source of their suffering and the path forward out of the darkness.

At the same time, in order to have a real sense of the content and the significance of the new synthesis, it is important to have a basic understanding of what it is building on—what it is a further synthesis *of*. In the course of this presentation, much of that will be (and, to some degree, already has been) gone into; but all this—both the new synthesis itself and essentials of communist theory that it is proceeding from *and* further synthesizing—all this is something that is very important to continue to get a deeper grounding in. And here, again, the Outline on the new synthesis provides an important foundation and guideline for doing that.

The Basis for Revolution

Here is another statement that concentrates a great deal: The basis for revolution resides in the defining contradictions of this system, which cannot be resolved under this system. We don't, or we shouldn't, proceed from "the way the world is," in a static sense—lacking, once again, an understanding of contradiction and motion—for that will only lead to remaining trapped within "the world as it is." We need to proceed on the basis of grasping the underlying and driving contradictions in any system or process, the change this gives rise to, and the potential this holds for profound radical change if, in fact, it does. This is something which has been repeatedly hammered at, from many different angles, in my talks and writings. This is also something that is spoken to, again in a very compelling way, in the Interview with Ardea Skybreak. But it is something which has—all too much, and all too often—been forgotten, lost sight of, or turned away from, including by many in the movement for revolution, even within the ranks of the Party, which has the responsibility to be the leading core of the revolution that is so desperately needed. This is something that needs to change—now—and it is something we need to grapple with seriously. For now, I'll just leave that as something for people to reflect on—and we will definitely come back to this: why we have to be grounded in a scientific understanding of where the basis for revolution lies, and the fact that it doesn't lie in what people are thinking or doing at any given time, or what your gender studies professor told you, or what you heard from somebody on the street corner last week, but resides in the actual contradictions that define this system and which cannot be resolved under this system.

Epistemology and Morality, Objective Truth and Relativist Nonsense

Now, let's return to the question of epistemology—and more specifically, epistemology and morality. I have made the point—and this is also in *Basics*²⁶—that there is a place where epistemology and morality meet.²⁷ What does that mean? It means that, if you come to understand certain things, then the question poses itself: what do you do about what you've come to understand? Do you follow it, or do you turn away from it, or adulterate it, water it down and change it into something else? These are the places where epistemology and morality meet. And this doesn't happen just once, it happens repeatedly in life and in an ongoing way, for everyone. The challenges repeatedly pose themselves. As you're learning about life and the world, what do you do with what you're learning?

This brings us back to a scientific approach to the truth, especially as this is posed, once again, against wrong ways of approaching the world—and, in particular, let's talk some more about relativism. This is out there in a big way, and it's openly promoted, especially in academia—maybe I've got a “jones” about this, but not without good reason—you get this nonsense that, not only is there no objective reality, but that the mere claim that there is objective reality, and that you can come to know it, is a “totalitarian” concept. If you haven't heard this yet, well, you won't have to wait very long before you do. This is all over the place, in one form or another, but this is particularly so in academia, especially in this form: “To talk about the truth, that's a totalizing concept—it's not leaving room for other people's ideas, it's totalitarianism, it's frightening—that's what led to all the bad problems of the twentieth century, people talking and acting in that way, as if there's objective reality and there's truth that corresponds to objective reality.”

But, to go back to what was said earlier, there is in fact objective reality—and truth is in fact a correct reflection of, or in correspondence with, actual objective reality. That's what truth is. And, yes, it's true, nobody can ever know all of the truth about everything, and we should always be open to the idea that what we understand to be true about any particular thing may not be fully correct, or may even turn out to be essentially wrong. But we are not, and we should not be, agnostics: “Oh, who knows what's true, you can't really tell anything about the real world.” No. We proceed from the real world, we interact with the real world, we test our ideas against the real world, and we draw scientific conclusions from that, based on evidence and based on synthesizing, drawing the patterns in reality that emerge and can be identified from the accumulation of evidence. This is very important for us to insist upon.

Actually, when you think about it, everybody who's a relativist is a relativist until it really matters to them. “I don't believe that anybody can really tell what objective truth is. But, you know, for the last few weeks I haven't been feeling well, so I went to the doctor. And the doctor tells me, ‘I'm gonna run some tests.’ And then they call me back later and say, ‘We ran some tests and it turns out you've got a problem with your kidney.’ Well, who are *you* to say I've got a problem with my kidney?” That's not the way people, even the most diehard relativists, proceed when it really matters to them. Then they all of a sudden discover that there's actually a real world and actually people who understand it and have something to say about what you might do to change it.

This relativism is not a correct way to approach reality or to understand reality, and it does great harm when people insist on it. It is not “totalitarian” to say that there is objective reality, that we can engage it and we can transform it. We can learn about it, and, yes, keep on learning, and keep on refining what we've learned, and maybe even discard some things. But there is an accumulation of knowledge by proceeding in this kind of way, with this kind of method and approach. And you don't, and won't, get anywhere you need to go by denying and opposing this approach to reality and truth.

Here's another example of how people are relativists until it really matters to them. The most relativist person becomes a parent. They have a little kid. The little kid wants to walk across the street, right in the middle of traffic. "Well, that's your reality, little Johnny or little Susie: if you don't think those cars exist, I don't want to force you to believe that they do." No! "Stay here on the sidewalk, you can't walk out in front of those cars, those cars are real. That's true." "Mommy/daddy you're totalitarian."

We have to understand: this is not a way that people can or should actually go through the real world. And we really have to go after this relativism, because it's doing a great deal of harm. It's keeping people from not only engaging and learning about the world, but from acting on all the horrible outrages that are going on. It's paralyzing them, telling them that they can't be certain about anything, or it's not their "place," because of this relativist identity politics. It's somebody else's "place" to do something about that, and how dare you care about and act about something which is "my property," my oppression that belongs to me. I heard about how somebody went on campus with one of the posters showing all the people who've been killed by the police, and someone came up and said, "I don't like that poster, you're making me feel unsafe." Oh, boo-hoo! What about the masses of people in the world, who aren't safe? What about the women who can't go through the world and be safe? What about the masses of people in the inner cities being shot down by the police, being tormented and tortured by just the daily workings of this system every day? What about what's happening with the environment? What about the little children that their parents send from Central America to cross the border by themselves into this country because of the havoc that imperialism is wreaking on their countries, and they find this horrific treatment they get upon coming here? What about all that, while you're trying to carve out a little safe haven for yourself, a little privileged place where you can be safe? How 'bout we get into the real world and talk about what's really going on and what needs to be done? Cut out all this boo-hoo shit, and let's talk about what's really needs to happen to have a kind of world where the masses of people can feel safe and can breathe.

Now, out of all of academia, perhaps the university that should be given the prize as being the center of relativist identity politics bullshit is the University of California-Santa Cruz. It specializes in identity politics, relativist bullshit. And it's interesting that it's chosen as its mascot the banana slug—the Santa Cruz Banana Slugs. As somebody pointed out, that's a perfect icon, a perfect mascot, a perfect representative of the identity politics of UC Santa Cruz, because a banana slug has almost no substance and no backbone.

In *Basics* 4:10²⁸ it's pointed out that if you proceed in this kind of way, with this kind of relativist identity politics, ultimately you're going to be trapped within a world where might makes right, and the people with more power are going to force their version of the world on everybody else—which is what's happening now. Think about it. The police have their narratives. I was watching, believe it or not, Fox News the other day. And they had this retired pig on there, complaining about how Obama sent somebody from the Justice Department to go to the funeral of a "thug," referring to Mike Brown. This is the

narrative of the police, and they right now have a lot more guns and a lot more means for enforcing their narrative over your narrative. And what about the ruling class, with all of its nuclear weapons and everything? Their narrative is that they have the best possible system in the world, and anybody who opposes them is going to bring horrors in the world, and therefore needs to be crushed, unless they give it up. So, if it's a matter of whose narrative is up against who else's narrative—well, then, in the real world, the narrative that's going to prevail is the narrative of the people who have the most power to enforce their narrative. We have to get beyond that. And in order to get beyond that, you have to have an epistemology and an approach to morality that proceeds on the basis of what is actually true: that there is objective reality and that we can come to know it—never perfectly, all at once, but we can accumulate more and more knowledge and apply it to change the world and learn more, even discarding some things we thought were true as we continue to accumulate and strengthen that core knowledge. If we don't proceed in that way, we are going to remain trapped within this horrific world the way it is, and in the immediate, people are going to be paralyzed from rising up to fight back against the abuses and injustices. If you can't really know anything to be true, how can you act with any firmness and determination about anything?

So, in the society at large, but in a particular and concentrated way in relation to the campuses and students, we have to set out to do nothing less than transform the whole atmosphere and culture on campuses and among students as part of building resistance to crimes of this system and, most fundamentally, a revolution to do away with this system and its crimes.

Self and a “Consumerist” Approach to Ideas

Also akin to this is what I call a “consumerist” approach to ideas. It's not an approach of saying, “Do ideas actually correspond to reality?”—but, rather, “Do I like them?” It's like you're shopping for shoes or going to a movie. “Do I like this, or do I not like this?” I read a report where a copy of the film of the Dialogue with Cornel West was sent to someone who's an intellectual, and they wrote back and said, “Well, you know, there's a little too much passion in this for my taste.” I mean, we could spend the rest of our time here (and a long time beyond) talking about what's wrong with that. First of all, it was pointed out to this person: This is not really a matter of taste—people are talking about what's happening to real people in the real world. And it was also pointed out: Your taste, by the way, can change, it can change based on what you understand. This is something we really have to struggle with people about, because you run into this all the time. Here again is epistemology and morality. People find a way to dismiss things that make them uncomfortable, by acting like a consumer. And we have to challenge not only the particularity of what's wrong with the way they respond to a specific thing, but the whole methodology and the whole approach. We have to tell them: “Look, I'm sorry, but that's not an acceptable way to go through the world, that's not an acceptable way to approach life, to decide whether something's to your taste or not. And, frankly, it's rather parasitic, too. You have the privilege to sit there and decide on a basis like that. People who are being shot down in the street, or people whose kids are starving, don't

have the luxury of deciding on that basis. They may have all kinds of wrong ideas, but they don't have the luxury of deciding whether basic things about reality are to their taste or not."

Now it's not that we should jack people up—"you petit bourgeois asshole," or whatever—but we should be struggling with people. This is not an acceptable way to approach life and to approach ideas. Is it true, or not true? If it's true, it should be to your taste—or, if it's not to your taste, you should change it. If there's something about reality that you find distasteful, then you should go about changing that reality—and we'll argue with you, too, about whether you should find it distasteful or not, if we don't agree. But that's the question: Is it true or not, and then what do you do about it? We have to struggle with people, straight up, that this is the way you have to approach the world.

"Who are *you* to say that this is the way we have to approach the world?" Well, we can struggle about that, too. It's like what's said in *Birds and Crocodiles* [*Birds Cannot Give Birth to Crocodiles, But Humanity Can Soar Beyond the Horizon*²⁹]: "Who are you to say?" is the wrong question here. It's not "who are we?"—the question is *what is the reality*. What is the way to understand and engage with reality and change reality? That's the question, not who are you or who are we.

All of this touches a great deal on the question of "self," this solipsism that exists in a very pronounced way in this society. Solipsism is the philosophical notion that the only existence that you can be certain of is your own existence. That's what's called philosophical solipsism. And you see this a lot. Now, to be clear, people—at least most people—don't go around saying, "I'm an advocate of philosophical solipsism." But they act very much like only their own existence is all that matters, and whatever is important to them is what's important. "Maybe something else is important to somebody else, if they exist. But what's important to me is what matters." And, as I pointed out in the Dialogue with Cornel, the "selfie" is kind of a perfect icon for the culture that's being promoted these days. Not that every "selfie" picture is bad. I'm talking about the whole cultural icon and the elevation of the "self" above everything and everyone else. And we have to understand as dialectical materialists—not in a crude way, but as dialectical materialists—how this relates to a society based on commodity production, where everything is a commodity, or if it isn't already a commodity, it's rapidly on its way to being transformed into a commodity.

If you've watched sports, for example, over the decades, it used to just be, "OK, now we're gonna have a time-out." But you can't just have a simple time-out any more, it has to have a commercial tag. Now we're having the Pepsi time-out. Everything is becoming more and more commodified. I mean, it's a commodity system to begin with, but everything is being commodified. And then, of course, the biggest quintessential commodification is the brand—"I want to develop my brand." Developing your brand is the most important thing you could do. This was in an article³⁰ on the revcom.us website: when people were reaching out to some people with some prominence and influence and asking them to come out in support of the April 14th demonstrations

against police brutality and murder and mass incarceration,³¹ one person who's referred to (anonymously) in the article said, well, I don't want to tarnish my brand by being associated with this. The article very correctly said, fuck your brand, my friend—look what's going on with the masses of people.

But think about that mentality!—I don't want to tarnish my brand by being associated with this. This is a commodity society where everything is turned into a commodity, everything is the cash nexus. It even affects the masses of people. I don't know if, or to what degree, this is still a significant phenomenon, but among some women among the basic masses, facing the reality of what life is like and a lot of the—I don't want to use the word “predatory,” because of how that's used to dehumanize the basic masses in particular—but confronted with a lot of ways men have related very badly to women, a lot of the women became very cynical and came up with the phrase: “no romance without finance.” This is the influence of commodity relations and of the system overall. To be clear, it's not a matter of blaming these women. It's the fact that people are living in a horrible society where people are just using and abusing each other in all kinds of ways. That's what this system is working to reduce people to all the time, and that's the outlook that gets generated, out of the spontaneity of the system, as well as being constantly pumped at people, even in seemingly more “benign” or harmless ways: Follow your dreams—but your dreams are always about yourself. It's never, “I have a dream of a different world without exploitation or oppression.” Instead, it's “I'm gonna do my start-up business,” or “I'm gonna become a highly developed academic,” or “I'm gonna become a politician,” or this or that. Everything gets reduced to these kinds of terms. Sometimes it's very crude, and sometimes it may seem a little more lofty, but it's all encased in these commodity relations and driven by these commodity relations.

Here another comment by Lenin shines a really important and brilliant light on things. Lenin talked about how capitalism forces everyone to calculate with the stinginess of a miser. Now think about it: *forces* everyone. You're in competition for a job. You're in competition for a promotion. You're in competition to get admitted to a college. You're in competition for a scholarship. You're in competition with people everywhere you go in this society. Your very livelihood might depend on beating somebody else out for something. So this is the way this system works. Even if people have better inclinations, it constantly forces them to calculate with the stinginess of a miser: what am I getting that is keeping somebody else from getting it? This is how you're forced to think and act under this system, even if you don't want to.

And another thing Lenin said was that capitalism puts *into the hands of individuals* what has been *produced by all of society* (or really, all of the world, which Lenin also understood). In other words, we talked about the socialization of production, and how you don't consume what you produce, but all the stuff that's produced through this whole international network of organizing production ends up in individual commodity exchanges, where everyone, as an individual, has to find a way to get what money they can to buy necessities (or other things they might want). So, along with the private capitalist appropriation of socialized production, you've got all these atomized

individuals in competition with each other.

This is something that will be returned to later, but here what is important to emphasize is the way that relativism and solipsism are very much bound up with all this. And, again, this is bound up with the parasitism of this society, especially for the people in the middle strata who have more privileged positions. They have the luxury, as I was saying earlier, to approach things in this way—to approach ideas like a consumer: “Is that something I like, do I want to consume that idea, or is that something that makes me uncomfortable, or doesn’t interest me? Never mind if it has to do with really big things going on in the world, if it doesn’t interest me, or it isn’t to my liking or my taste, I’ll just leave it alone.”

All this is a reflection of a commodity society, and one which is also highly parasitic. What do we mean by parasitic? Sucking the lifeblood out of other people, like a vampire. Plundering the rest of the world. Preying on the masses of people—yes, tens of millions in this country, but literally billions of people around the world whose exploitation and suffering is the foundation on which the wealth of this society is based, and part of which is parceled out to some of the more privileged people, especially, in this society. It’s not hyperbole to talk about parasitism in this way—vampire-like living off the exploitation of people around the world. This is not something we have made up because it makes the system look bad—it’s the reality of how this system functions. There is plenty of substance to that, which is there for people to dig into.

What Is Your Life Going to Be About?—Raising People’s Sights

All this goes on while, as pointed out in the polemic against Alain Badiou³² in *Demarcations* #1, the system of capitalism-imperialism “hums in the background,” destroying lives and crushing spirits. And people are conditioned—by family, by friends, by society in the larger sense—that the way you should approach life is not to question why things are the way they are, and not to question whether they could be different, but just to find your place within the world as it is, and do the best for yourself and maybe a small circle of people around you (your family and your really close friends), having no sense of the larger forces at work that are shaping things. Let’s face it: that is how most people spontaneously approach things—how they are shaped and conditioned, living under this system, to approach things. The very basic question of what your life is going to be about gets shaped, once again, by the system—its basic relations and dynamics, and the culture that arises on the basis of that. It’s pursue your dreams, it’s how are you going to make your way in this world as it is. As opposed to stepping back and questioning whether the world has to be this way—and, from that perspective, what should your life be about?

Toward the end of my *Memoir*³³ this question is spoken to: What are you going to do with your life? Are you gonna put your snout in the trough and try to scarf up as much as you can, are you just gonna try to do the cutthroat thing and beat everybody else out? Or could you give your life to making a really different, and much better, world? And

people do get drawn toward that, but then once again the system has well-worn channels and ruts to funnel them into—including charities, and so on. These things may do, or may have the orientation of trying to do, some good things, and the people who get drawn to them may have good intentions; but, ultimately and fundamentally, it ends up reinforcing the world as it is. Yet, spontaneously, most people just go along with all this. As I said, people are conditioned by the society at large, and also by their immediate family and friends, that this is the only realistic way to approach the world.

I'm going to talk about this more, a little bit later—what we might call the “George Carlin point.” I don't know if you are familiar with this routine by the comedian George Carlin, where he starts off talking about how certain kinds of parents just let their kids do all kinds of messed up things, and he goes on talking about this for a while, and then he shifts and says: “He's not gonna say something bad about little kids, is he?” And he immediately follows this up with: “Yes, he is!” Well, to give you a preview: “He's not gonna say that youth should rebel against their parents, is he?” “Yes, he is!”

But the basic point is this: We need to fully recognize, and act on, the importance of lifting people's sights, and lofting their “dreams”—bringing to them an awareness and basic understanding of those larger forces at work, encouraging and enabling them to experience how important and uplifting it is to approach the world with the restless curiosity and critical thinking of the scientific method—to question, to concern oneself with and, yes, agonize over the state of the world and the conditions of the masses of humanity, searching for answers to all this, on a scientific basis, and seriously engaging whether revolution and communism is the solution.

To be clear, I'm not saying you just go to people and say, “You know, it's very uplifting to do this,” and they respond, “Oh, I wish somebody had told me that earlier, let me get into it right now.” This is going to be a matter of a tremendous amount of struggle. But struggle that's both down on the ground and very lofty at the same time, that's the point. Because we do need to make all this a powerful force and “pole of attraction” for growing numbers of people. “Jolts” in society, social upheaval and mass resistance, will provide more favorable ground for doing this, and we should seize on every opening this provides, but here again we cannot tail spontaneity and hope for objective developments to do our work for us—we have to wage struggle, in a compelling way, and bring forward an inspiring world outlook and method, morality and meaning to life, embodied in the communist revolution and its goal of emancipating humanity, to wrench people out of the rut, and the pit, into which the workings of this system casts and grinds down people. Without this, masses of people will never come to see the need, or the possibility, for a radical change in society and the world, will never be won to revolution and communism.

II. Socialism and the Advance to Communism: A Radically Different Way the World Could Be, A Road to Real Emancipation

The “4 Alls”

This takes us back to the “4 Alls” that I spoke about earlier. This is based on what Marx wrote in *The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850*,³⁴ where he said that the dictatorship of the proletariat (which we’ll talk about more) is a transition to what the Chinese communists during the Cultural Revolution in China characterized, in a concentrated way, in the formulation the “4 Alls.” To review: Marx said specifically the dictatorship of the proletariat is the transition to the abolition of all class distinctions, of all the production relations on which those class distinctions rest, of all the social relations that correspond to those production relations, and the revolutionization of all the ideas that correspond to those social relations. Now, right away, it should be pretty apparent that not only is there a great deal concentrated in that formulation, but there’s a lot of complexity bound up in it. This is something you’re gonna hear over and over again—complex and complexity. Before I’m done you’ll say, “Can’t we get him to stop saying complexity all the time?!” But reality is complex, and there’s a lot of complexity concentrated in this formulation of the “4 Alls.” Yes, it’s a nice formulation—but it’s also a very complex formulation because there are all kinds of contradictions involved.

There are contradictions within each of these “4 Alls,” and contradictions between all of them. For example, getting rid of class distinctions. The world is full of classes and class struggle. Moving beyond that is a process full of contradiction. You have the struggle of different classes, even as you’re trying to move beyond classes. So you have to correctly handle that contradiction. There’s struggle between different classes and different social forces in society, and—broadly speaking, without being narrow and mechanical—there are the different roles that different classes and social forces play in society. And that changes as well. For example, I’ve made the point that in socialist society the proletariat is not the same as in capitalist society. The proletariat is the main exploited class in capitalist society, but it is not essentially an exploited class in socialist society. And that has some conservatizing influences—people’s situation changes, their lot improves, and maybe they’re a little more comfortable now. So there are lots of contradictions, even just bound up with that, abolishing class distinctions.

Now, here’s another contradiction. This is Marx’s point, and something that relates to what was touched on earlier: You can’t abolish class contradictions if you don’t abolish the economic relations which are the basis for and give rise to those class distinctions. You have a system that is based on commodity production and, more than that, a system in which the essential commodity is labor power, the ability to work—that’s the defining commodity of capitalist society, much as they try to hide it. They talk as if capitalism is just somebody doing a start-up—that’s capitalism. No, capitalism is *exploiting other people*. Capital is the control over and the use of the labor power (the ability to work) of other people. That’s what capital is. Now, think about it, today they’re so crude they

even talk about “human capital.” What does that mean? People and their ideas, as well as their ability to work, that can be harnessed to the machinery of capitalist exploitation. That’s what they mean when they talk about “human capital.” They talk about human beings as “human capital.” That gives you an inkling, a little insight, into the nature of this system and its culture. Marx pointed this out: Capital is not just a thing, it’s a social relation, a social relation in which one group of people owns the means of production, while many others do not; and that second group of people, who do not, have to work for the first group in order to live. They have to create more wealth, more capital, for the capitalists—and, if they don’t, they can’t work, even if their kids can’t eat as a result. So capital is a social relation, it’s not just a thing, not just money, it’s not just machinery. You’re going to have all kinds of technology and machinery in communist society, but it won’t be capital. This is an important thing to understand. So, if you don’t get rid of the relations in which labor power is a commodity, you can’t get rid of class distinctions. And if you don’t get beyond all commodity relations, if you don’t get beyond even the use of money, then you can’t get rid of class distinctions, because as long as you have money, money can be turned into a means to exploit other people. Engels, in talking about this, used a Latin phrase—he said about money: *non olet*, meaning it doesn’t smell. In other words, money doesn’t come with something printed on it that says: “I am now going to be used, as capital, to exploit other people.” It’s just money. But as long as you have money, you can hire other people, you can turn it into capital. So in order to eliminate class distinctions, you have to get beyond all that, you have to get beyond the thing that defines commodity production, which is the law of value.

The law of value was spoken to earlier, in talking about the driving force of anarchy under capitalism, where it was pointed out that the law of value says that the value of any commodity is equal to the amount of socially necessary labor time that goes into producing it. This understanding, and its full implications, was systematized by Marx. Notice that Marx used the phrase “socially necessary,” because people work at different rates and you can’t just take an individual—how an individual works—and make the value equal to that. But, on a societal level, the norm of what it takes (the necessary labor) to produce something corresponds to what its value will be. That’s why in Part 1 of *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*,³⁵ in the polemic against Karl Popper, I answered his claim that the value of things is determined by supply and demand, which is a common thing you hear. I pointed out: Yes, supply and demand influences the price of something, but it doesn’t determine the basic value; that’s why it would be very, very unusual for a candy bar to cost as much as an airplane. The reason is that the amount of labor—the socially necessary labor—that has to go into making an airplane is many, many, many times what it takes to make a candy bar. So the law of value says that the value of things is determined by the social standard of what’s the necessary amount of labor time that has to go into producing something. And this is important: If production is still being determined by the law of value, then you can’t get beyond classes, because you’re still in a society where things are based on commodity relations and there’s always the potential in that situation for labor power itself to be turned into a commodity and for people to be exploited.

And here is something else that is hidden in capitalist society which everyday people don't see, and even a lot of communists don't understand deeply enough. When you exchange commodities, what is actually happening? We do it every day, right? You go to a store and these days you usually don't pull out money, you pull out a credit card, or maybe sometimes you do pay cash. But whatever you do, you pay a certain amount for something. That something is a commodity, which has been produced by people somewhere, probably in various stages. Let's say it's a car: raw materials have to be gathered, it has to go through a bunch of machinery, all that machinery and the raw materials have to be transported, and so does the finished product. There's all the labor that goes into every part of that process, until you have a car waiting for you to buy it. And that's true for commodities in general—I'm just using cars as an example. So what is really happening here, what is most fundamentally happening here? You take this commodity, money, that you have gotten by doing some work—I mean, maybe you did some crime, and that's one way to get money, but, in that case, here's a point Marx made: Even if people get their wealth by plundering other people, there still has to be production underneath it. Somebody had to do the work to make whatever it is that people are plundering. You see? But, if you didn't do crime, then you did some kind of work. That also involves commodity relations, the work you did: you're selling your labor power to some capitalist, and you get back another commodity, money, in exchange for that. Then you take that commodity money and you buy food and clothes, you pay for housing, you get a car if you can do that (or you go on the subway or some kind of rapid transit), and so on. What is actually happening here, at the base of all this, is that different amounts of labor are being exchanged. You are actually engaging in an exchange relation with somebody, in Mexico, or in Bangladesh, or in Honduras, or some other place, who's making the things that you are buying. You're actually engaging in an exchange of labor with them, maybe an unequal one or whatever, but that's what you're doing—you're exchanging labor. At the root of all this, when you tear away all the external layers, what's going on is an exchange of labor. Whatever labor you put in, to get that money, and whatever labor they put in, to make that thing, is being exchanged. But it doesn't get directly exchanged. It's not like you're doing barter with somebody in Honduras or Bangladesh or Pakistan. Things get exchanged through a very complex process that goes through a lot of stages—and, at each important stage of this, there are the capitalists who are appropriating (taking for themselves), as profit, part of what has gotten produced, part of the value that has gotten produced. And in order to get to communism, you have to get all that stuff out of the way—get beyond all that stuff, so that, once again, what you're doing is just exchanging things between people, without all the relations of exploitation which are there at every stage of the process under a system of exploitation.

Now, there's still a lot to be understood and in the future to be worked out concretely about how you would do exchange under communism without money. Are you going to have certificates that entitle you to certain things? Well, then, how do you prevent even those certificates from being turned into capital and the basis to exploit people? You know, in prison you don't have money, but all kinds of things, cigarettes or other things, can become commodities that are used to get an advantage over other people. So a lot of

work is going to have to go on to figure out how you do exchange without re-creating the basis for exploitation. But the point is, if you don't get beyond this system of commodity exchanges, and the law of value which regulates them, then you can never implement the slogan of communism, in any full sense. What is that slogan? "From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs." This means that you're not calculating through money any more. Communist society—you won't have it until people have gotten beyond the idea that they need more than somebody else, just to have more than somebody else. And that has to do with the 4th of the "4 Alls," right?—the revolutionization of all the ideas that go along with social relations of oppression and exploitation. But at the base of all this is the system of production relations, the economic system, the mode of production—and you can see how complex this is.

Now, the point is not to say, "Damn!—this is so complex we'll never deal with it, so why don't we adjourn and go do something else?" No, that's not the point. The point is, you have to understand the fundamentals of what's going on here and, yes, what the complexity is. If we're going to lead this, we have to be grounding ourselves continually in understanding all the contradictions that are involved. Not all at once—you don't understand everything all at once. If you haven't read any political economy, or never had people talk to you about political economy—how the economy actually works and how that relates to the society overall—then you're not going to understand it. But you can learn. I've told this story before: At a certain point, way back in the early 1970s, I decided, "Well, I see now that we can't really do this communism thing if we don't understand any political economy, so I guess I'm gonna have to go read Marx's *Capital*." I wasn't particularly intimidated to begin with. I've been fortunate to have a certain level of education, I know how to read even fairly complicated things. I'm more privileged than a lot of people in that way. So I opened the book, the first volume of *Capital*, and I started reading about commodities and everything—and three or four times I just took the book and threw it across the room: "Goddamn, why can't this motherfucker just write more simply?!" But, you go back to it and you wrestle with it and then, after a while, "Oh, I see, OK." And I talked to other people who'd read more, who knew more about this than I did. Some of them weren't even that good, but they understood some of this stuff, so I was willing to learn. You have to be willing to learn, even from people who aren't necessarily very good, if they have something to teach you. And you work your way through it. Now just to be clear, I'm not saying everybody has to go read *Capital*. There are several volumes, and they're long and, yes, complex. But we have to keep working on understanding the world. If you want to transform it, if you want to get beyond all this nightmare madness, you have to put in the work.

So this "4 Alls" is not just a clever formulation that they came up with during the Cultural Revolution in China. It concentrates a great deal, including the need to uproot and move beyond these different social relations that aren't directly related to the economy—they're *related* to the economy, but they aren't a *direct extension* of the economy—the oppression of different nationalities and peoples, the oppression of women, what we refer to as the mental/manual contradiction, and so on. All these things are bound up with the mode of production, the economic system, even as they

also have a life of their own. They have a reality of their own, which you also have to deal with, in dialectical relation with transforming the economy and transforming people's thinking and moving beyond class distinctions.

So, the point here is that this “4 Alls” formulation captures something very important: It's what we're going for—the ultimate goal, the world we're aiming for—where you can actually implement the slogan, and it really can be real: “From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.” And until we get to the achievement of what's represented by those “4 Alls,” we cannot get to a world that's completely gone beyond exploitation and oppression and the ravishing of the environment. So that is the ultimate goal, what we're aiming for. I'll come back to that later, but what I'm stressing here is that we have to look beneath the surface. When you hear various formulations—the “4 Alls,” “team of scientists,” and so on—yes, these formulations are important, they capture something, it's not like they're bad or insignificant, they're important, they concentrate important things. But we have to dig into them and keep learning about what they concentrate, or else we can't do what we need to do. And everybody has to do this, on whatever level you're able to do it at a given time. Everybody can pitch in, everybody can learn. The reason everybody can learn is because this has to do with real life in the real world. It's not just some up-in-the-air metaphysical blah-blah that's spinning fairy tales that have nothing to do with the real world. But—here it comes again—the real world is complex. The complexity shouldn't scare us, it shouldn't intimidate us; we should recognize it and engage it fully. As I've said before—and this is also a point made in the Interview with Ardea Skybreak—in any phenomenon there's both complexity and simplicity. There's the core of it, what's basic about it, and then there are all the contradictions bound up with it; and you have to grasp the core of it, the sort of simple basic component of it, and then you have to grapple continuously with the complexity of it.

Beyond the Narrow Horizon of Bourgeois Right

This brings me to another very important point: beyond the narrow horizon of bourgeois right—there's another one of those phrases. “Why is he always talking about getting beyond the narrow horizon of bourgeois right? What does that have to do with what we're doing now?” Well, if we don't have a clear understanding of what it is we're aiming for, then we're bound to get pulled down into the terms of whatever we're doing at a given time. And the contradiction is that we do have to do what we're doing at a given time—we do have to fight the power, we do have to unite with people to resist oppression. We can't stand to the side like a bunch of religious dogmatists and say: “Well, you know, that struggle's not gonna do you any good, we need a revolution, so when you come to your senses, come talk to me and I will give you a lecture.” No! We have to mobilize people to struggle against these outrages. This can't be allowed to just go down. What they're doing to people in the world, what they're doing to people right around us—this can't be allowed to go down—people have to fight this, they have to push back, they have to put the ruling class back on its heels. Even in order to make a revolution, this is crucial, as well as for people not to be crushed and demoralized in

immediate terms. What Marx said is true: People cannot rise up for greater things if they're crushed into broken wretches.

And that's a lot of what we see happening to the masses of people—many times they feel like broken wretches. They actually internalize the idea that something's wrong with them, because this is constantly pumped at them. I was talking with somebody recently and they were making the point: Even the thing about god, for oppressed people, if you're constantly going through a society where you feel degraded—and not just externally degraded, but you've internalized this degradation—you feel that you're less than human because you are constantly made to feel this way, there must be something wrong with you or there must be something wrong with the people around you, because look what they're always doing; every time it looks like something good is gonna happen, people start fucking over each other. “There must be something wrong with us.” This is a lot of what people have internalized. It's another crime of the system, that it's made people internalize this. And this comrade made the point: “Look, even the belief in god, if you feel like a broken wretch—not just beaten down, but you feel like something's wrong with you—then maybe you can still have some worth because this god loves you anyway, despite what you are.” There are a lot of powerful pulls like this on masses of people. And when we struggle with people, it's not because we're contemptuous and look down on them; and it's certainly not because we want to take away their sense of worth; it's because we want to enable them to understand that this doesn't have to be. But if we're gonna get out from underneath this, we have to have a scientific approach to reality as it actually is, and as it's full of contradiction and moving and changing.

So this is why these things are so important to get into—because we actually have to be a vanguard for the masses of people. A vanguard doesn't mean you go out and boss the masses of people around; that's not the point at all. It means that you understand the way out of this, and you struggle like hell with people to enable them to see it, so they can fight more consciously and bring forward more and more people to do that. That's the responsibility you take on. That's the responsibility we've taken on, because it's needed—because, on their own, the masses of people are going to be dragged down, dragged down physically and dragged down mentally—and, to use that term, without giving it any kind of religious meaning, dragged down “spiritually”—dragged down by the workings of this system and the way even the masses of people internalize a lot of what this system pumps at them, and a lot of what it forces them to do.

That's the thing about commodity relations. Earlier, I referred to Lenin's point about commodity relations: that capitalism—which is the highest form of, and the generalization of, commodity relations—forces everyone to calculate with the stinginess of a miser. Now, think about that once more. This is what we experience all the time. People will say: “What am I gonna get out of this, is this gonna make any money for me?” And it's not just that people are greedy—of course, there are a lot of greedy people in this society, it's constantly encouraged—but for a lot of people, this is a matter of necessity. “How am I gonna feed my kids? Am I gonna pay this bill so my electricity doesn't get cut off, or am I gonna buy this food? And what food can I buy with this little

money that I got? And, yeah, I watched that program where they told me how to eat healthy, but can I afford to buy those foods that they say are healthy?” All these kinds of questions. People are forced to calculate that way, that’s what this commodity system of capitalism does.

And, to go back to that other important thing Lenin said—that capitalism puts in the hands of individuals what is produced by all of society (in fact, all of the world, and Lenin understood that, too): capitalism puts in the hands of individuals what’s produced by a system—a system of exploitation—that encompasses all of the world. That’s what I was getting at earlier, in talking about exchanges of labor. You don’t make all the things that you use. It’s a whole social process, a socialized process, production that’s a highly internationalized process now. You can go home and look in your closet or whatever—look at your clothes and, if you find any made in America, let me know. And this is true for a lot of things that are consumed. This is an internationalized process. But it ends up putting in the hands of individuals things that are produced by all of society, produced now all over the world. Of course, it’s not that we don’t want individuals to have personal items, that’s not the point. The point is that there’s a socialized process here, and there are capitalists who accumulate capital out of all this socialized production, who then keep it going by using that as the basis to exploit more and more. This is the system we’re living under, and people are not going to spontaneously understand this, because they’re completely caught up in it. Materially and in terms of their thinking, they’re completely caught up in it. As miserable as it is for so many people, as horrific as it is for so many people, they are not going to come to see the essence of this, and the way out of this, on their own.

This is why we talk about getting beyond the narrow horizon of bourgeois right. In the first part of *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, I started off talking about this: After watching the 2003 film, *Revolution: Why It’s Necessary, Why It’s Possible, What It’s All About*, this high school student says he really liked it—“I agree with everything in there, and I really liked the vision of the future society”—but, he went on, “if I invent something, I want to get more for it.” And there we go, we’re off to the races, because, in order for that to be true, you have to have the whole set of relations that you say you don’t like. But people are not going to come to understand that this is all bound up with the system of exploitation, and all those things that are talked about in the “4 Alls,” unless somebody who has been able to get this understanding brings it to them and struggles with them about it. And this question of whether we’re thinking about bourgeois right, or thinking beyond it, is not just a question for the far stages of socialism; it has everything to do with people’s orientation now. If your orientation is “I wanna get more,” then we’re not gonna get anywhere beyond this system. It’s not that everybody’s going to give up every aspect of that before we make a revolution—if we think that, we’ll never have a revolution. There are going to be a lot of people who fight for this revolution who are still going to be caught up in various bourgeois ways of thinking, including the idea that they want to get more. But there has to be a force at the core, a growing force—thousands and ultimately millions—who are moving beyond that way of approaching the world, moving beyond calculations made with the stinginess of a

miser, calculations of bourgeois right. Because bourgeois right, as I pointed out in *Making and Emancipating* Part 1, is a way of thinking—or it is a set of relations as well as ideas—that correspond ultimately to commodity production and commodity relations. And we have to get beyond commodities, in the relations between people and in people’s thinking.

Now, in relation to this, I wanted to quote something from a fairly recent book. It’s from the “Prologue” of this book, *The American Way of Poverty: How the Other Half Still Lives*,³⁶ by Sasha Abramsky, who is sort of a good liberal writing about how there is still a lot of poverty in America. But he feels obliged at the beginning of this book to state the following: “After all, no society in human history has ever successfully banished poverty; and no polity with a modicum of respect for individual liberty has entirely negated the presence of inequality.” Now let’s break this down. First of all, to borrow a phrase from Marx (and maybe at the same time to borrow a phrase from the movie, *Cool Hand Luke*): What we have here is a poverty of philosophy—a poverty of imagination and of understanding. It’s true that nowhere, neither in the Soviet Union nor in China when they were socialist, did they completely abolish poverty. They were starting from situations of very impoverished masses of people, but they made tremendous strides toward abolishing poverty. And, at the end of his life, when Mao was battling—on his deathbed, basically—with these revisionists who have since come to power and restored capitalism in China, that was a big part of the struggle. The revisionists were arguing—and they now have implemented and are celebrating—that if we go the capitalist route, we can elevate sections of the population out of poverty. And they declare now that they’ve raised several hundred million people out of poverty. But what they’ve done in essence is created the most crass and horrible society, the most crude kind of commodity relations, where they have these newborn entrepreneurs—in other words, newborn exploiters (some millionaires, even some billionaires)—but the masses of people are still enmeshed in horrible conditions of poverty, hundreds and hundreds of millions of people, and all the old social relations—prostitution, and all kinds of other horrific things—have come back with a vengeance. What Mao was arguing was this: We have to stay on the socialist road; we have to lift up the entire people, step by step, out of poverty, rather than going for a “get rich quick” thing of making China a powerful modern country and raising up certain parasitic bourgeois strata, and certain privileged petit bourgeois strata, while the masses of people continue to suffer. Unfortunately, the wrong side in that struggle won out. But, before that, with the socialist system, they had made tremendous gains in eliminating poverty, and you can read about that in the special issue of *Revolution*—the Interview with Raymond Lotta³⁷—about the history of communism and the lessons for the future of humanity. It is pointed out there, for example, that when the revolution triumphed in China, around 1950, life expectancy on the average was something like 32 years. That’s how long people lived on the average. And by the time capitalism was restored (or by 1975, just before it was restored), life expectancy in China had doubled to something around 65. And that was pretty near world standards at that time. Coming from this tremendous background and situation of massive poverty, that was a tremendous change, through which a lot of people had been lifted out of dire poverty. So, on the one hand, this guy Abramsky just wipes out this

whole experience, or discounts it.

And then you get to the second part, which is put in language that we should break down a little bit: “no polity with a modicum of respect for individual liberty,” he says—in other words, no society, with even a minimum of respect for individual liberty—has entirely negated the presence of inequality. And the implication of what he’s saying is not just that this hasn’t been done, but that you *shouldn’t* do that—that if you try to eliminate all inequality, you are bound to violate people’s rights, bound to violate civil liberties. In other words, you could only do that by “totalitarian” means—this is, in essence, what he’s saying. And, here again, we see the total lack of what? Of the ability to see beyond the narrow horizon of bourgeois right. To see beyond this to where a society would actually operate on the principle of “From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.” Here’s the thing about communism: It’s not like Alain Badiou, and these opportunists who have taken up a lot of his thinking, argue—it’s not that communism is just the urge to equality. No. Communism involves moving beyond equality. It’s moving beyond where equality is a question. Why? Because we want gross inequality? No. Because when you move to communism, and you get beyond commodity production and exchange and the law of value—and you go according to ability and need, as the slogan says—then you’ve actually gotten to a point where equality doesn’t figure in. Marx pointed out—and this is something that was also brought out in the Cultural Revolution in China—that every equality also involves inequality. For example, if you are working on a job next to me, and you’re a single mother with three kids and I’m just a guy taking care of myself, we get the same wage, but it’s not really equal. It’s equal, but it’s unequal, because you have much greater needs, so the wage you get doesn’t give you equality with me in a real sense, because I don’t have as many people who are dependent on me. And then there’s also the fact that everybody and all their abilities are not equal. This is something that was brought out in the Ardea Skybreak Interview very powerfully. What about the idea that everybody should be equal? And she responds, why do people say such stupid things?! Then she goes on to say, look, everybody doesn’t have the same inclinations, the same strengths, they can’t do all the same things with the same quality, and so on. And I don’t feel badly, she says, if some people can do some things better than me—if somebody is a high level artistic performer and they get up on the concert stage, I don’t think I should be up there trying to match them in what they’re doing.

It’s like that ad—maybe you’ve seen it—where they say, OK today for this symphony performance, instead of having the world class violinist Itzhak Perlman, we’re gonna have Rhea Perlman, the comedian, play the violin. And she comes out and goes arreee-a-reee-reee, making a horrible screeching sound with a violin. No, everybody is not equal in everything. So if you and I are doing the same work, the work we do, what we put in, may not be equal in terms of the quality of our work. So when we get the same wage, it’s equal, but it’s unequal, because you’re actually contributing more with your work, the quality of your work is higher. When you get beyond commodity relations, you deal with need, with people contributing and then getting back on the basis of need—you’ve removed the question of equality and inequality from the picture. You’re just

going according to people's abilities and needs.

So, once again, if you can't see beyond this narrow horizon of commodity relations, then you can't see how you could have a society in which you have no poverty and at the same time there is a flourishing of people's intellectual, cultural and social life, and even the question of rights would have no meaning in the sense in which it does today.

In any case, rights are always a contradictory thing. Rights are always a matter of contradiction—the rights of certain people are always in contradiction with the rights of other people, and rights always have limits on them. Think about this—you have probably heard this, although it's almost always misquoted—you hear people say: "Freedom of speech is not absolute; you can't shout 'fire!' in a crowded theater." See, they usually don't state it quite correctly: You can't shout "fire!" in a crowded theater, *if there is no fire*. But, anyway, that is a limitation on free speech. Now, in this society—here's another contradiction—they always talk as if things are in terms of the individual and individual rights, but fundamentally they're in terms of *social relations*. And that's true of speech, and limitations on speech. Shouting "fire!" in a crowded theater, when there is no fire, does harm *socially*—and, more specifically, it does harm to the interests of the ruling class, it undermines their ability to maintain order and stability and to have people believe that they can run a well-regulated society. Of course, it might also harm individuals who could get trampled in this situation, but that's not the fundamental and essential reason that there is this limitation on free speech. It's the *social effect*—and, more specifically, the way in which this would affect the interests of the ruling class—that is the decisive and determining thing.

To illustrate this further, let's take the example of murder. Why can't you murder someone? Because it's harmful to the individual you murder? No, that's not the essential reason. Of course that's true—it obviously does harm the individual who is murdered—but that's not the fundamental reason. The fundamental reason is because it's adjudged to be harmful to society, adjudged by the people who rule this society to be harmful to the kind of society they're trying to maintain and enforce. At the same time, there are a number of situations in which the ruling class and its political representatives determine that the killing of people is definitely in their interests, and in these situations they not only allow but encourage and even insist that people should be killed: They defend and "legitimize" things like the continual murders, particularly of Black and Latino people, by police; and they not only uphold, but celebrate as "heroic," the mass slaughter carried out by the imperialist military of the U.S.

Or to take another example, one which doesn't involve physical violence: They don't outlaw insulting people at this point. (A lot of people on the Internet should feel grateful for that.) Yet to insult people is clearly injurious—you can really hurt people by insulting them. But it's not considered, by the ruling class of society and its political representatives, to be socially harmful enough—not harmful enough to the interests of that ruling class—that it should be outlawed. Yes, there are civil laws about libel and slander. But everyday insults go on all the time, and there is no civil or criminal law

regulating that. And, if you think about it, you are legally allowed to do all kinds of things to people that are bad for them. If you are a capitalist, you are allowed to exploit them, you're allowed to fire them, or lay them off from their job, and not give a shit if they can't live or feed their kids. That's very bad for them. But it's considered to be societally acceptable, because it conforms to the way the dominant system operates and it conforms to the interests of a dominant class that is deciding what's in the interest of society.

The point is this: If you want to get beyond the situation where such things are decided by a ruling class and its representatives—and where the interests of that ruling class are determined and declared to be the interests of all of society—again, you have to get beyond the “4 Alls,” you have to get beyond commodity relations, you have to get to communism. It's not that, in such a communist future, people won't have any sense of responsibility to society, or to other people; in fact, that will be a much greater motivating factor for people, but it won't be conditioned and shaped by—or, to put it that way, it won't be “filtered through”—class and social relations that embody exploitation and oppression.

All this is very much bound up with another critical insight of Marx's—that, as he put it: Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society, and the culture conditioned thereby. That is another way of saying that rights are determined and limited by the system that dominates in society—the economic system, the mode of production, and the superstructure of politics and laws, as well as ideas and culture, which arise on the basis of, and reinforce, that mode of production. This has everything to do with what is emphasized in *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?*³⁸—that communism means getting beyond democracy. Now, this has been a big point of struggle also in the communist movement. Far too many people who call themselves “communists” want to refashion communism into another form of bourgeois democracy. They aren't seeing beyond the narrow horizon of bourgeois society and bourgeois right to a whole different kind of world. It's very interesting—this book, *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?* was reprinted recently by a publisher in India, and there had to be a struggle because it was raised: “Couldn't we call it *Democracy: Can't We Make It Better?*”—which would do away with the whole point of the book! But, rather than go into that further, I'll raise these questions as things to be dug into as we go forward here, and in an ongoing way: What does getting beyond democracy and beyond equality have to do with Marx's statement that right can never be higher than the economic structure of society, and the culture conditioned thereby? And what does it have to do with getting beyond the narrow horizon of bourgeois right?

Now, again, you can't go up to people and say: “Listen, before we fight the attacks on the right to abortion, and before we raise hell about this pornography, the first thing we have to do is discuss the ‘4 Alls.’ So we're gonna set up some classes, and for the next six months we're gonna discuss this, because it's very complex.” No! We have to fight the power and transform the thinking of the people. We do need to be getting into all these things with people, but again, not in a scholastic way. On the other hand, while we

shouldn't do that, we do have to understand that, for people to actually become conscious of why they are in the situation they're in, and what is the situation for the masses of people in the world—and what is the way forward out of all this—we have to get into all these things with people. But we have to do it in a living way. And this gets back to the point that we have to do the work ourselves. Because if you want to break this down for people, you have to work to really get it, and keep on working to get it more and more deeply. People have questions, and sometimes their questions are really hard, because people do think about life, and when you present things to them, they do have things to say about it, and questions to raise. And this is very important for their emancipation—to understand the basic dynamics of what's going on, to understand concepts like the narrow horizon of bourgeois right, and why and how we have to get beyond it. Again, as you go out to people, when they say, "I can't worry about that, I gotta feed my kids," you can't just respond: "Listen, we just have to get beyond the narrow horizon of bourgeois right." No, obviously that is not how we should respond. But we do have to get into this with people: "Let's get to a world where that question of how you're gonna feed your kids is not a question any more. Why should we be living in a world where anybody has to think about how they're gonna feed children?" We definitely need to get into these things—but we have to do it in a living way.

Socialism as an Economic System and a Political System— And a Transition to Communism

In talking about the radical alternative and the road to communism, it's been pointed out that socialism is three things: It's a radically different socialist economic system; a radically different political system, the dictatorship of the proletariat; and a transition to communism. This is something that comes through very clearly in the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America*. And, once again, what do we run into?—contradiction. This is full of contradiction: Each of these three elements—a radically different economic system, a radically different political system, a transition to communism—each is full of contradiction, and there are contradictions between all three of them. This can come down very concretely, and it has in the history of socialist countries that have existed so far. Being a base area for the world revolution, for example, can come very acutely into contradiction with defending the socialist state from attack, both from within—from exploiters and reactionaries within the socialist state who want to bring back the old system—and from outside, by imperialists and other powerful forces. And any time you get to the point where the seizure of power will come on the agenda, all these contradictions will start posing themselves very sharply. We saw this, for example, in Nepal: These contradictions started posing themselves very acutely when they got near to the threshold of going for the seizure of power. (I'll come back to this, and get into it a little more deeply, later.)

And a radically different economic system—that's full of contradictions. In socialist society, you're still dealing with commodity relations, to a significant degree and for a long time. You still have to take into account the law of value, even while you can't let it be the thing regulating the economy. Now, some people, like anarchists and some

others, don't understand why, if you're going to have a different society, you have to do things like pay a physicist or a doctor more than a factory worker. The reason is that the law of value is still there. What does that mean? There is a certain amount of socially necessary labor that goes into enabling someone to develop the ability to be a doctor or a physicist, which is significantly greater than the amount of labor that goes into being able to work in a factory, or in a warehouse or something like that. This is just a fact. You may restrict that, but if you don't recognize that and you try to pay a physicist or a doctor the same as a factory worker, or somebody working in a hospital as an orderly, let's say, you're going to have real problems with your economy. Let's go back to what I was speaking to earlier: what's happening in these commodity exchanges? Exchanges of labor, ultimately. Well, then if you try to pay a physicist or a doctor the same as a factory worker or an orderly in a hospital, your system is going to get out of whack economically, because you'd be exchanging labor disproportionately—and you actually do have to have a functioning economy. People like anarchists don't think about things like that—they just think that you can do this magically, or essentially by spontaneity. “Let's have the workers in each factory run their own factory”—that's an idea common to anarchists, and some others. Well, then, how are they going to exchange things between factories, by what means are they going to do that? If you try to eliminate money right away, then you run into Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, and we don't want that. In other words, you'd have to force a lot of things, and it won't work—people will rebel against it. So, then, to try to enforce this, you'd have to use all kinds of dictatorship against people who shouldn't be dictated over—this will turn into a bad, a reactionary dictatorship. (I will also have a little more to say about the experience of the so-called, but not really, communists, the Khmer Rouge, in Cambodia a little later.)

So, even in developing a socialist economy, while you're quickly taking ownership of the major means of production—the factories, and the land, and so on—and ultimately all means of production are being taken out of the hands of individuals and transformed into the social property of the society as a whole—which is in line with how they're actually produced, socially—it takes a while to accomplish even that. And even while you do that, there are still for a long period all these commodity relations, there's still the use of money, there are still significant remnants of the old division of labor—in particular the mental/manual contradiction we talk about (some people working with ideas, and other people doing the physical work). Those are major contradictions that you can't eliminate right away, and they are bound up with getting beyond commodity production. You have commodity exchanges between different units of the economy—for example, different sectors of the economy are selling machinery to each other, or parts to each other—and then you have commodity relations in the consumption by individuals of different necessities, personal items, and so on.

Now this is quite different than in capitalist society. I remember when I was in China in 1971, and one of the people in our delegation was someone from the Young Lords Party; we were in a department store and he wanted to get one of those things that was called a Mao jacket, that a lot of the Chinese people wore. He was talking to the clerk working in the store, and he said to her: how much does that cost? And she said five yuan (that is

the Chinese currency). And then, without thinking, he asked her: Is that a fair price? And everybody cracked up. She answered: It's the same price everywhere.

That was the price—you don't have capitalism where different units of capital are competing with each other. That was the price, five yuan. Go down the street to another store, five yuan. So it's different. You have a planned economy that's using the resources for the social good and the needs of the people—both their immediate material needs, but also their intellectual and cultural needs—but you still have commodity relations, you still have to put down five yuan.

So there are all these contradictions in the economic system.

And there are contradictions in the political system. You have the dictatorship of the proletariat. Now, remember in the Skybreak Interview she says: dictatorship of the proletariat, get over it, you're living under a **bourgeois** dictatorship right now—and, by the way, the dictatorship of the proletariat is a very good thing.

The dictatorship of the proletariat means, as set forth in the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic*, that the institutions of society, the political institutions and so on, have to be vehicles for the communist revolution. Well, that's a very good thing. But there are a lot of contradictions bound up with that, too, because, for one thing, what's an appropriate vehicle, or institution, at one stage to advance the revolution becomes outmoded, becomes a drag on that revolution, at another stage. So then you have to transform that institution. Plus, you don't just have the proletariat, you have all these different classes, and you have contradictions among the people who make up the proletariat. When we get to the "parachute point," we'll talk about that—that you have all these different forces, different social classes and strata in socialist society, and you can't do away with them until you've done away with the material basis for them—not by the Khmer Rouge model of smashing everybody down to an equal level, but by *moving beyond the economic and social relations that underlie these class and social differences*. (Again, I will come back to the situation, and real problems, with the Khmer Rouge a little later.)

Then there's the contradiction that you need a vanguard party to exercise the dictatorship of the proletariat, but the party itself can be turned around into its opposite, into a vehicle for restoring capitalism and enforcing the exploitation and oppression of the masses of people. The party doesn't exist in a vacuum. It exists within the larger society and in the context of the class struggle going on in that society; and the influence of the social relations and the economic relations and the ideas that are out in society as a whole exists within the party as well. In some important ways this takes a concentrated expression within the party. Along with this, you have the influence on the party of the larger world, of the international situation, which will likely be, for some time, dominated by imperialists and other exploiters. So, on the one hand, you need the vanguard, but within that vanguard itself you will have intense struggle over whether that vanguard's going to stay on the road of socialism toward the goal of communism, or

whether it's going to be turned around into an instrument that carries out the restoration of capitalism, sometimes in the name of communism. So, again, this is complex. I keep saying complex—and complex should not be a word that frightens us. Complex calls on us to do work, and keep on doing it as we go forward.

But, that's not all of it. Out of these three elements—that is, a new, radically different economic system, a radically different political system, and a transition to communism—the transition to communism is, and has to be, the principal, the main, one. And that's full of contradiction, too, because you do have to have a functioning socialist system—economically, politically, socially, and so on—even as you're moving forward on the communist road and transforming the existing socialist system through ongoing revolutionary struggle. And again, there's a whole world out there, and when socialist countries come into existence here and there, at least for a long period of time it's very likely that most of the world is still going to be ruled by imperialists and other exploiters. And they're not going to like what you're trying to do, to put it mildly. They're going to try to intervene in all kinds of ways—through espionage, through sabotage of your economy, as well as through political intrigue, and through outright military attack, if they can do it. So that's full of contradiction—being a transition to communism is itself full of contradiction, and is acutely in contradiction with these other aspects of what a socialist society is.

Again, the point is not: “Oh, my god, if you'd have told me, back when I first got involved in this, that this was going to involve all these complex problems, I would have gone and done something else.” No—that's not the point. Look, none of us, when we first get involved, understand all this complexity—and maybe that's a good thing! But, nevertheless, we do have to come to terms with it. It's what it is. It's not like there's no resolution to these things, but you're not going to be able lead people through this if you aren't working on really grasping the complexity, the contradictions involved, and then working and struggling to transform this in the direction that it needs to go. That's what this is about. It's not to promote a sense of defeatism—quite the contrary. The more we understand this, the more we have the basis to go to work on it. And there is a material basis, a basis in the real world, to go to work on it. There are a lot of things working against it, but there is also the fundamental fact that, without this revolution, these contradictions can't be resolved in a way that is actually in the interests of the broad masses of humanity. That's what we have fundamentally going for us—but then we have to do the work.

Internationalism

This brings me again to the question of internationalism, because a socialist state really does have to be primarily a base area for the world revolution, for the masses of humanity in fighting to move beyond exploitation and oppression. Now a base area for the world revolution, that's another nice-sounding thing, isn't it? But it's also full of contradiction and difficulty, and we've seen this in the history of the communist movement and socialist states that have existed so far. Both in the Soviet Union and in

China, they came very sharply up against this. And this is no joke. In the late 1960s and early '70s, when China was socialist, it was facing a Soviet Union where capitalism had been restored—the Soviet Union was imperialist itself, and aggressively so. It had a big arsenal of nuclear weapons, and was threatening China, and actually had drawn up plans for the possible use of some tactical nuclear weapons against China, and to carve up China and subordinate China overall to the Soviet Union. So this is a big deal. How do you deal with that? How, specifically, do you deal with that in relation to the class struggle inside the socialist country to keep advancing and transforming the society on the road of socialism, and how do you deal with it in terms of the world as a whole?

Well, they were up against great difficulty, great necessity, but they didn't deal with it all that well. They essentially tried to repeat, mechanically, a policy and an approach which was correct at an earlier stage of the revolution in China, but didn't conform to advancing the revolution at the stage where things were then. To explain this a bit and provide background: In the early stages of the Chinese revolution, in the 1930s, Japan invaded China and its armies occupied a significant part of China. Japan was clearly intending to subordinate China as a whole and reduce it to basically a colony of Japan, and was well on the road to doing so. By the way, here's something for nationalists: When Japan did this, they did it with a big nationalist slogan—Asia for the Asians. That was their slogan—Asia for Asians: get these British imperialists and all these other Westerners out of here—Asia should be for the Asians. And, of course, what they meant was that, since the Japanese were the best Asians and the most developed, why, they should rule Asia with what they called their “co-prosperity sphere.” So, there is something to learn from that, too. I don't want to get too far afield here, but there are things to learn from that—lessons for nationalists in particular, but also more generally. But, in any case, in that period the Chinese Communist Party correctly made the analysis that Japan was the main immediate enemy, and that it was possible, and necessary, to have an alliance with the forces they'd been fighting against up to that point—the political and military forces representing the big capitalists and landlords in China, what was called the Guomindang, the party headed by Chiang Kai-shek, which represented the big capitalists and landlords in China that the communists had been fighting against. They'd been fighting a civil war against the Guomindang for a number of years, but at that point they said, OK, we're going to put that civil war to the side, we're even going to unite with these forces as much as we can, in order to fight to drive Japan out of China. Now, they did have to fight the Guomindang at times, during this period of the united front against Japan, because the Guomindang never gave up on trying to crush the communists—they were actually more interested in fighting the communists than fighting Japan. So that was another complex situation they had to deal with. But, in that situation, Mao was very clear, very explicit: He said, the Guomindang, the Chiang Kai-shek forces, yes they're a ruling force in China, but basically they're beholden to the British and American imperialists, and they're going to do what the British and American imperialists tell them to do, so that's why we can have a united front and join with them to fight Japan, because these imperialists will want them to do that. He was very clear on why they were doing what they were doing and how they needed to go about it. And, in that phase, they actually were able to finally defeat Japan,

in the context of the overall war, World War 2, that was going on; and then they were able to go on and defeat the Guomindang after that, when that came to the fore, once again, as the main contradiction for the revolution to face.

But then, jumping ahead to the period during the 1970s, when China was a socialist state, they tried to apply the same kind of approach—basically putting the Soviet Union in the place of Japan and saying the Soviet Union is the main enemy, the most aggressive imperialist—yes, there are two superpowers, the United States as well as the Soviet Union, but the Soviet Union is the main danger. They were looking at what was the immediate danger to China, which was actually more the Soviet Union than the U.S. at that time. But they tried to generalize that into a strategy for the whole international communist movement and the whole worldwide struggle, and that didn't work, because the Soviet Union was not a greater enemy to the people of the world than the U.S. was. So this was an attempt to mechanically apply something which was correct earlier but did not apply in this later international situation. I can't go into all of this here, but I do think it's important to touch on some of this. This approach led to some very bad things where the Chinese government was promoting big time oppressors and lackeys of imperialism in the Third World as leaders of the people. The Shah of Iran, Haile Selassie in Ethiopia (whom the Rastafarians believe was the Messiah—but, with no apologies to Rastafarians, he was actually a lackey of western imperialism), Marcos in the Philippines who was a brutal dictator sitting on the throne in the Philippines and a puppet of the U.S. imperialists—they brought oppressive rulers like that to China as part of building this united front against the Soviet Union, and they hailed them as great leaders of the Third World, or of their countries, or whatever. Well, this disoriented the whole international communist movement. I remember being in China in 1974 and not making very many friends there, because we went there and we basically said: "What is this, what are you doing? We don't agree with this. You can't present brutal oppressors like this as heroes of the people." Well, you could just feel the temperature in the room go down about 30 degrees. But you have to do what you have to do. Not stupidly—we didn't go there and insult them, we just said, "Look, we don't think this is right, this is doing harm." As I said, we didn't make ourselves many friends in doing this. But that's not the point. The point is you have to have the larger interest in mind.

So this is an illustration, without going on and on, of how complex it can be to handle the contradiction between advancing the world revolution and defending the socialist state, both of which are extremely important. It's no good for the world revolution if you lose a socialist state, as we did with China in the 1970s, on top of losing the Soviet Union, with the restoration of capitalism there in the 1950s. We've been feeling the negative effects of this for decades now, in terms of the relations in the world, in terms of the thinking of the people, in terms of the freedom it's given to the imperialists and reactionaries to just pile on against everything that we're about and everything the masses of people actually need. So this is a very acute contradiction. But you're only going to have a chance—you're only going to have the basis to correctly struggle to find the right resolution of these contradictions—if you have the fundamentally correct understanding of the material and ideological questions and contradictions involved.

This brings me to *Basics* 2:12. In the article, the polemic, by the OCR of Mexico, *Communism or Nationalism?*³⁹ they quote *Basics* 2:12 and go into why it's important. And I just want to touch on this a bit here. *Basics* 2:12 sets out the fundamental basis and key principles that internationalism should be grounded on. And this, too, is something that is worth continually returning to and grappling with: what it says, and what it means, but also how it might apply—or how it does apply—to different situations at different points in the development of things. So here's what it says:

The achievement of [the necessary conditions for communism] must take place on a world scale, through a long and tortuous process of revolutionary transformation in which there will be uneven development, the seizure of power in different countries at different times, and a complex dialectical interplay between the revolutionary struggles and the revolutionization of society in these different countries...[a dialectical relation] in which the world arena is fundamentally and ultimately decisive while the mutually interacting and mutually supporting struggles of the proletarians in different countries constitute the key link in fundamentally changing the world as a whole.

Now, there's a tremendous amount that is concentrated in that. What it's saying is basically that there's a world system, a world system of capitalism-imperialism, and this world system sets the stage overall, including for what happens in particular countries. At the same time, there are obviously different countries, and different countries have their own internal contradictions and struggles, which interact with things going on in other countries, as well as interacting with the situation in the world as a whole.

This statement refers to a long and tortuous process, in other words, a process full of twists and turns. It's not like the idealist notions of Trotskyites and other opportunists who think that you have to have revolution in a whole bunch of countries all at once or you can't build a socialist economy and a socialist society; and you especially have to have socialist revolution in industrially developed countries—in other words, the imperialist countries—or you're doomed, they insist. In fact, it may be in a “backward” country, economically, as it has been so far, where you have an actual breakthrough and make a revolution that takes the road of socialism. But, in any case, you're not going to conquer the whole world all at once. So then, how do you deal with the relations between the breakthroughs you make and the revolutionization of society there, where you've established a socialist state, and the other revolutionary struggles in the world—and how do you do that in the context where you recognize that the overall world situation is what's most determining and setting the objective stage that you're operating on?

This is one of the things—a fundamental point of orientation and method—that was also stressed in the polemic by Raymond Lotta on how anarchy is the principal form of motion and the driving force of capitalist relations: Are you actually going to operate on the basis of, as Lenin put it, a materialist analysis and a materialist estimate of what is

actually going on in the world, and what is actually setting the stage that you're operating on—or are you just going to proceed from a bunch of wishes, essentially? “The masses are oppressed, they're gonna fight back against their oppression, so we're gonna make a revolution.” Yes, of course, the revolutionary struggle of the masses is crucial—that's the whole point of saying that the mutually interacting and mutually supporting struggles of the proletarians in different countries constitute the key link in changing the world. You're not gonna make revolution through the capitalist system just collapsing at some point, and then people saying, “Oh, I guess we need a different society.” It is the struggle of the people that's going to make the breakthroughs—that's the key link, it's the thing you grab ahold of to change the world. But, in turn, if you're not proceeding on the basis of what the actual material conditions are that you're operating within, then you can't do it. Once again, it's a matter of: Are you going to be scientific, materialist and dialectical, or are you just going to proceed subjectively on the basis of wishes and ideas in your head, or romanticism about the masses? “The masses are oppressed, the masses will make revolution, end of the discussion”—well, that's not going to do it.

It was pointed out in the polemic, *Communism or Nationalism?* by the OCR in Mexico: Look at the recent financial and economic crisis that hit in 2007, 2008: that is not something that happened in one country and then spilled over to another, and then another. That crisis was owing to the dynamics of the capitalist system on a world scale. Yes, there were the particularities of different countries and the interactions between what happened in different countries, but this was a crisis brought about by the internal contradictions and dynamics of the capitalist system on a world scale. In that polemic it was also pointed out that something like World War 1—that was not something internal to a particular country that just happened to spill over to other countries. That was the imperialists fighting it out on a world scale—that was what led to that war, and what essentially and principally defined it. All the different countries in the world, just about, became caught up in that war—and this was even more so in World War 2, which took place on an even greater scale. So it's the overall development of things on a world scale that's setting the stage. But there are also, at the same time, the particular contradictions and relations within and between different countries. And then there is the conscious initiative of the communists leading the masses of people on the basis of scientifically analyzing and dealing with all this, which provides the key link, the basis to make breakthroughs, to make revolution.

So, again, I can only touch on this briefly here, but this is something we should be continually going back to, to understand the fundamental and essential dynamics involved, which we have to really grapple with, continuously, to understand them more deeply and understand them as they're changing, in order to be able to correctly lead the masses of people to get out from under this horrific system that causes so much unnecessary suffering.

In this polemic by the OCR of Mexico, which is in *Demarcations* #4, they discuss both the material basis and the ideological basis for internationalism. The material basis being the fact that there's a whole world system and not just a bunch of different

systems within different particular countries, all self-contained, that somehow then interact with each other on the foundation of their essential self-containment. So that's the material basis of internationalism. There's the operation of the system of imperialism on a world scale. It operates economically, and that has real effects on people, sometimes even driving people in the millions from one country all the way to other parts of the world (coming from Nepal, or someplace else, they end up working in Bahrain, in 120 degree weather, dying in the heat). And this world system operates not only economically but also politically and diplomatically. It operates militarily. All that, on a world scale, in an overall and fundamental sense, is setting the stage for what we have to do—setting the stage, as the principal aspect, in dialectical relation with the struggles of various kinds that this gives rise to—and, above all, the revolutionary struggles of the masses of people, especially as they are led by conscious and organized communist forces.

But then the OCR polemic also speaks about the *ideological* basis for internationalism (the ideological basis meaning the way, or method, of thinking). Mao made the point in one of his important philosophical works, “On Contradiction,”⁴⁰ that it is the internal contradictions within a thing that provide the basis for it to change. He gave the example of an egg and a stone: an egg, at the right temperature, can produce a living being, but a stone cannot. Why? Because of the internal contradictions and dynamics within the one and the other. Because of its internal nature, a stone does not have the basis to produce a living being, and no matter how much you heat it up, it's not going to produce one. Mao used this as an example to illustrate that internal contradictions are the basis for change within a thing. And he made the point, using this same example, that the temperature that might be applied to an egg can be the immediate cause of change, it is an external condition which can be a cause of the change, but it's not the fundamental basis for the change. It's like heating up water. The reason water can turn into steam is because of the internal nature of, and the internal contradiction within, water. The heating is the immediate cause of the change, while the internal nature of water is the basis for the change. So this was an important point made by Mao. But, unfortunately, at times he applied this in a kind of one-sided way, beyond the point where it was correct. Let me put it this way: Even while Mao was fundamentally internationalist, there was a tendency in Mao to say that each country has its own internal contradictions and that's the fundamental basis for revolution within that country. He was applying the principle that the internal contradictions are the basis for change—which is a correct and very important principle, and something that was not clearly grasped and acted upon in the communist movement up to that point (it's not that there was no understanding of that, but there was still a lot of unclarity about that). But the problem is that, in the era of capitalist imperialism, internal contradiction applies differently.

This is another one of those complexities—there are different levels of the organization of matter. A country, to put it simply, is one level of the organization of matter—countries and the people in them (and everything else in them) are made up of matter in motion, in many different forms. The world arena, the world as a whole, is another level

of the organization of matter. So, in one sense, or on one level, the internal contradictions within a country are the basis for it to change, but in turn that country is part of a larger whole, the larger world, and it's the internal contradictions of that larger world as a whole which are, in the final analysis, more determining, even of what happens within a particular country.

To illustrate this, an example that's used in this polemic by the OCR of Mexico is the human body, and the different levels of the organization of matter in the human body (this example was used in an article of mine, "Crises in Physics, Crises in Philosophy and Politics,"⁴¹ which is found in *Demarcations* #1, and it was also used in this OCR polemic). The human body is made up of a lot of different cells, and it's made up of different organs—the liver, the kidney, the heart, and so on and so forth. Each of those particular levels of the organization of matter have their own internal contradictions—kidneys have their own internal contradictions, livers have their own internal contradictions, the same with the heart, and so on. But, in turn, they're part of a larger body, and what is happening to that larger body (or the person as a whole) is, in an overall sense, more determining of what happens even to those internal organs than just the internal contradictions of those internal organs themselves. Now, here's the complexity of it, once again: it's not like the internal organs don't affect the body as a whole. If you have contradictions that cause your heart to fail, it's obviously going to affect your whole body. And the same with other organs, like your liver or your kidney. So there is, once again, a contradictory, a dialectical, relation. But overall, the body—the person as a whole—interacting with the larger environment, is the entity that is most determining; the contradictions within that body are mainly what determines what happens to the body as a whole, even though, at a particular time, what's happening to a particular organ of the body—based on its internal contradictions, in interaction with the rest of the body and with the larger environment—can become the concentration point of what's happening to your body as a whole, just like a particular country in the world can become the concentration point of the contradictions in the world.

Now, Stalin made some incorrect statements, and had some problems with his method, but in one of his more correct statements, Stalin said about the Russian revolution of 1917: The reason they were able to break through to make a socialist revolution in Russia at that time, during World War 1, is because the contradictions of the world system became heightened and became very sharply concentrated in Russia at that time. It was those worldwide contradictions, interacting with the particular contradictions within Russia, that led to that becoming a concentration point where a breakthrough was made. And the same basic principle applies now, only even more so, because we have a much more highly developed international system, including economically. One of the things that is also pointed out in that OCR polemic is that a lot of different products that you consume are not made just in one country. Here again is the example of the automobile—different parts are made in different countries, and then the final assembly is in yet another country. And that's related to the whole "information revolution," etc., etc., that has heightened this globalization. It was also pointed out in this OCR polemic that there is a significant aspect of internationalization of services as

well—like, if something goes wrong with your computer, you have to call a call center in India to talk about what’s wrong with your computer. This is another expression of how internationalized things are.

So, our understanding of this—this relation of different levels of the organization of matter, and how the contradictions within those different levels interact with each other—this is the ideological basis for having a correct approach to internationalism. This is a matter of our application of the scientific method, and specifically how we understand the internal/external contradiction. Do we understand it in living terms, where there are different levels of the organization of matter, or do we understand it in static terms, where you just look at a particular part of reality—what are the internal contradictions there—and you conclude that this is bound to be shaping what’s happening within that part of reality? We need to look, yes, at the particularity of the thing in question (a country, for example) but in turn situate that in the larger reality and look at the larger level at which matter is organized, the level of the world system as a whole.

So, again, I would definitely recommend this article, this polemic by the OCR of Mexico, *Communism or Nationalism?* What it’s dealing with is complex—there’s that word again—which means it’s hard. OK. But it’s also very rich, it’s getting into a number of very important questions. And, again, the point is not that everybody has to run out and read everything all at once. I’m emphasizing things that people should be digging into over time, and back and forth with actually engaging in revolutionary work and revolutionary struggle—fighting the power, and at the same time carrying out the struggle to transform the thinking of the people, while continuing to deepen our own basis to be able to do that, both individually but above all collectively. It’s a matter of all of us working together and helping each other in a real sense, including through a lot of struggle, to grasp these things and be able to apply them as we go forward.

Abundance, Revolution, and the Advance to Communism— A Dialectical Materialist Understanding

Next, I want to speak briefly to this question, or contradiction, of abundance and revolution in the transition to communism. This is discussed toward the end of Part 1 of *Birds and Crocodiles*. And I made the point in *Revolution—Nothing Less!*⁴² that, if you just look at the world as a whole, there’s plenty enough technology to meet all the material—and, yes, the cultural—needs of people throughout the world. But we live in a very lopsided world, with massive impoverishment of people all over the world, especially in the Third World. We live in a world dominated by a capitalist-imperialist system and by exploiting classes. And therefore it’s not the case that the material potential to meet the needs of the people can be realized under the present relations that dominate the use of the material conditions of life in today’s world.

So, you can look at the world and say it’s absolutely outrageous that any children are starving in Africa, or anywhere else, or that people are going hungry right down the

block, or that people don't have decent health care, or that they're forced to eat food that's not healthy because they can't afford food that would be more healthy, or they don't even have access to the knowledge to be able to determine what would be more healthy—all those kinds of things—it's absolutely outrageous, it's absolutely unnecessary. But it's not so simple as saying, "OK, let's just wish all the reactionary forces in the world out of the way, and then we'll take all this stuff and do the right thing with it." In order to make use of this potential, and to further increase the potential, you have to have a revolution to overthrow the existing ruling classes and the existing systems, and their economic relations and social relations, so that you can actually marshal and utilize the resources that are there in a way that increasingly meets the needs of the people and provides for future generations, while dealing with the environment in a way that's not just plundering it and making the potential of human life more and more imperiled. So this, again, shows that there's an acute contradiction between the material abundance that objectively is there, and the need for revolution to be able to get to that abundance, and also to increase it, in a way where it can be utilized for the needs of the people—both material needs and broader cultural, social, and intellectual needs, and so on.

You need abundance not just to meet people's needs in a general sense, but you also need sufficient abundance to be able to overcome relations that either are exploitative and oppressive or contain the seeds of exploitation and oppression. For example, take the division of labor in society. In today's world, most people are not working in the intellectual realm, they're not working with ideas. They're doing backbreaking physical labor, if they can find work at all. In order to get beyond that, you not only have to go to work on that contradiction, but you also have to, at the same time, create enough abundance in society, and ultimately in the world as a whole, so that in order to produce and reproduce the material requirements of human life, and to expand the basis for doing this, people only need to work a very few hours of the day doing that. If everybody, or most people in the world, have to spend most of their waking hours doing physical labor, they are not going to be able to have the circumstances or to develop the abilities to be able to engage in all kinds of different realms, like dealing with the politics of society, engaging in culture and intellectual endeavor, and so on, even on a basic level. Among other things, they're just gonna be too damned tired to do it. Plus, they're not going to have the time and the resources. So, even in order to overcome these kinds of oppressive divisions, between people who've had the ability to acquire skills in the intellectual realm and the cultural realm, and people who have to do all the physical labor almost all day long, you not only have to work on transforming that contradiction but you also have to, at the same, increase the abundance of society, and the means for creating more abundance, so that people only have to work a few hours a day carrying out physical labor, and they have many more hours in the day to learn how to do many other things. If you don't do that, you can't overcome these oppressive relations.

And this—I will resist using the word "complex" again (although I guess I just did), but this is another one of those contradictions, or a number of interconnecting contradictions on different levels, that we have to be grappling with. We have to

understand that we do live in a very lopsided world. I'm going to come back to this more fully later: I was reading this book on Africa called *The Looting Machine*⁴³—which has its limitations, but it does do a lot of exposure. It speaks to these grotesque conditions where a handful of rulers in many African countries are in league with—the author just refers to this as corporations and so on, but these local rulers in Africa are in league with foreign capital and imperialism. This handful of corrupt, self-serving ruling elites is amassing literally billions of dollars, in countries which have tremendous material wealth (gold, oil, and other valuable raw materials). Africa is one of the richest continents, if not the richest, in the entire world—materially, in terms of these kinds of raw materials. But the masses of people are living in these absolutely desperate miserable conditions. This is a kind of microcosm, a smaller-scale picture, of the world as a whole. And you really acutely come up against the fact that only by overthrowing the existing system—and going on to overthrow and transform all these relations that are captured in that formulation of the “4 Alls”—only in this way can you, in a real sense, get to that potential to meet the needs of the people and utilize it in a way that really does meet the needs of the people, while also dealing correctly with the very urgent situation with the environment.

This is something we need to really grapple with and, at the same time, we need to do exposure around this—hard-hitting exposure of this lopsidedness in the world and how it's enforced by this existing system. We need to bring out to people, in a compelling way: Look, if you really understand this, if you really see the world as it is, this is another thing that cries out for the radical transformation of the world. But that radical transformation can only happen with a revolution. It's not just a matter of redistribution of the wealth as it now exists, within the system that now exists. You see, sometimes you get these populists—I notice that Bernie Sanders is running for president, and he's running out all this social-democratic economism. He says you have the super rich and they have too much money, there's tremendous income inequality, and we need some redistribution. Well, it's not a matter of redistributing what exists; it's a matter of *transforming the basic relations* in society, and fundamentally in the world as a whole. First of all, within this system there are real limits to how much you could redistribute wealth without undermining the whole system. Because it's not just these greedy people, or these too-powerful corporations, and so on. It's important to understand, when you talk about corporations, billionaires and so on, corporations that control billions and billions of dollars (like Carl Sagan said about stars: BILLIONS AND BILLIONS...but anyway), it's not like they're just sitting on a pile of money. Their money is invested in all kinds of things, and they are in competition with other capitalists who also control billions and billions of dollars. They are all compelled to outdo each other, or they'll be driven under, as I was talking about earlier. If you tax them too heavily, to redistribute some of the wealth, you're actually going to put them at a disadvantage in competition on a worldwide level, and the economic system is going to come unraveled, or go into very deep crisis. So, even in that sense, there's a limit to how much you could redistribute the wealth.

But even more fundamentally, it's not a matter of redistributing what exists—it's a

matter of transforming the world as a whole. Let's say you took all the existing wealth and you redistributed it more or less equally among everybody in the world. Well, pretty soon you'd have the world right back the way it is—the way it is now would come right back, because you haven't transformed any of those things that correspond to the “4 Alls.” You haven't transformed the economic relations and the economic system; you haven't transformed the social relations; you haven't transformed the class relations; you haven't transformed the thinking of the people. Again, we're dealing with a basic point of materialism, dialectical materialism. If human society is going to function, and human beings are going to survive and reproduce, society has to interact with nature, with the rest of natural reality, in one way or another. We're back to: *through which mode of production* will all this be done? With this capitalist-imperialist mode of production, even if you took all that wealth and re-divided it, very quickly you'd have the same situation back, as long as you left all those things that are represented by the “4 Alls” intact and operating as they do now. This is what people don't understand spontaneously. A lot of people can gravitate toward, “Some folks have too much money, let's take some of it away from them and give it to people in need.” Sometimes that may come from a good place, be a positive sentiment. But if you don't understand the deeper dynamics here, the actual contradictions you're dealing with, and the fact that systems operate according to certain fundamental principles that are rooted in their actual contradictions, you're not going to understand the way out of this horrible mess that humanity is in as a result of the system we live under.

The Importance of the “Parachute Point”— Even Now, and Even More With An Actual Revolution

Now, I want to come back to the “parachute point,” which I referred to earlier, and which is discussed in “The Basis, the Goals, and the Methods of the Communist Revolution.”⁴⁴ This involves another set of contradictions that we will have to deal with, and you can see it already today in particular struggles: people unite with you, and then maybe the struggle ebbs and they're all flying off in different directions and want to come up with different programs, and so on—or perhaps the struggle intensifies, and different people and forces want to use it for different programs and, in some cases, to pimp off the struggle. Well, that will be magnified, that will be magnified greatly, with the actual seizure of power and the emergence of a new society. Lenin discussed different conditions for a revolution, particularly in an imperialist country like this one: He said that not only does the ruling class have to be in a really desperate situation, fighting among its own ranks and effectively unable to rule in the way that it's traditionally ruled; and not only do the masses have to be unwilling to live in the way that they're normally subjected to and normally more or less put up with; but also, in order to have a revolutionary situation, the weak, halfhearted and vacillating friends of the revolution have to be politically paralyzed. In other words, the kinds of political programs that are like what you hear now—let's get body cameras for the police, or let's get more Democrats in office to protect the right to abortion, or whatever—all these kinds of reformist schemes and halfhearted efforts have to be discredited, among what? Among *masses* of people, not just among a few. You're dealing with acute contradictions

in a revolutionary situation, and as an important element of what goes into a revolutionary situation, these kinds of reformist programs have to become increasingly exposed and recognized by masses of people as bankrupt and not dealing with the problem. And you do see that, or aspects of that, in the situation today—many times people say to us, “Well I don’t really agree with you, but nobody else is doing anything, so I guess I have to hold my nose and unite with you.” Now, some people are more positive than that, but you even hear it essentially in that form. Well, that kind of thing gets magnified when masses of people recognize that the present system is thoroughly bankrupt and illegitimate and needs to go—or something radical has to happen in society, in any case—and all these other programs have been proven, not just for a handful of people, but for large numbers of people, to be totally unable to deal with what people themselves recognize as the problems that urgently require some kind of solution.

For the vanguard of the revolution—which at such a time has grown from thousands to tens of thousands, perhaps to hundreds of thousands, but it’s still a small part of society as a whole—this situation enables it to rally millions and tens of millions around its banner, to fight for revolution. But then the dust clears, so to speak—you fight through and, whatever the protracted character of the struggle might be, you actually come out the other end having defeated the forces of the old order and having established a new society and a new state—and then all the differences people had with what you represent are not just going to go away all at once. And not recognizing that, or not understanding the full dimensions of that, has been something of a problem in the history of the communist movement. Not that people like Mao didn’t recognize this kind of complexity—to say that would be ridiculous. Mao spoke all the time about these kinds of complexities. Still, in the history of the communist movement overall there’s been something of a tendency to assume that if people are with you at that time when everything comes to a head and the seizure of power can be, and has to be, carried out, then they are going to stay with you all the way through to communism. But that’s not the way it is.

First of all, new contradictions emerge once you get into a new society—which means that people who were with you are then pulled in different directions, because of the way new contradictions have emerged, or old contradictions are assuming new forms. Secondly, there’s the fact that people who rallied to your banner when there seemed to be no other way out, now don’t see things exactly that way. Just because they were with you at the crucial moment, when a revolutionary situation ripened, doesn’t mean they’re gonna stay with it, in a straight line, once the immediate crisis has been resolved, even if it’s been resolved by revolutionary means and the bringing into being of a new society. So, this metaphor of the “parachute” is helpful to make clear that, at the time of a revolutionary crisis and the actual struggle for power, you see the “closing up,” so to speak, of the contradictions, like a parachute when it’s tightly together. People rally tightly around the solid core of the revolution. But then you get into the new society and, like a parachute, things opens back out and all the contradictions assert themselves again, in some old ways and in many new ways as well. Having a scientific grasp of this

is an important part of understanding how you lead a revolution through all these contradictions, both now and in a greatly heightened and magnified way when it comes to the seizure of power and then actually building a new society and making it a base area of the world revolution, above all, while dealing with all the very complex, and at times very acute, contradictions that have to be confronted when you are leading a socialist state.

The Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America—Solid Core with a Lot of Elasticity Based on the Solid Core

I've mentioned a number of times the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America*, and you can see a lot of these contradictions and these principles being taken into account and applied in that *Constitution*. But it's definitely my sense that people have not studied this *Constitution* nearly as carefully as they should, nor returned to it in the way they should; nor have people been using it with other people in the way they should. I'm not saying none of that's happened, but my sense is that this has not happened nearly in the way and on the scale that it should. For that reason and, more fundamentally, because of the importance of what is concentrated in this *Constitution*, I want to examine here some of the ways in which contradictions are dealt with in this *Constitution*, getting into this as a way of both illustrating some important questions of method and principle and spurring people to dig into this *Constitution* and utilize it more fully in building the movement for revolution.

Now, it's been said many times—and this is one of those things like “team of scientists,” and so on, that can become a dead, meaningless phrase—that this *Constitution* is an application of the new synthesis of communism. But, what does that mean, and what are some of the ways in which that stands out? Well, in the most basic sense, the principle of “solid core with a lot of elasticity based on the solid core”⁴⁵ is something that is part of the foundation of this *Constitution*—it runs through the entire *Constitution*, as well as being explicitly mentioned in the *Constitution*.

Let's examine some of the ways in which this principle is applied in this *Constitution*. First of all, there's the relation between the vanguard party and the state. And here's another set of contradictions. This relation shouldn't be understood in a sort of mechanical sense, as if the party itself is the solid core in an organizational sense. Rather, it's what the party represents in a concentrated way—the recognition of what's at the heart of this *Constitution*—that the institutions of socialist society have to be instruments for the advancement of the communist revolution. That's what the party is based on, and that's what gives the party its solid core role. It's all the things that I've been talking about here, in terms of the need to go forward to communism on a world scale, and how that applies in all these different dimensions. It's people who are proceeding from that kind of understanding and orientation, and with that strategic approach. *That* is what the solid core is. It's not identical to the party itself. It should *include* the party, but the party itself is and will be full of contradictions. There will be some people in the party who won't in fact be operating according to that orientation—

not that we're saying that's OK, but that's a fact that has to be recognized and struggled with. And, at any given time, on the other hand, there will be people who are not formally in the party but who will—more or less, or in essential terms—be operating according to those principles.

So, the party and the state are not identical. It's not like the Badiouists⁴⁶ and others like to portray things—it's not “the party-state paradigm” in the sense that the party and the state are the same; it's not that, with this *Constitution*, the state is a direct extension of the party, including institutionally, so to speak. It's more that the party represents a world outlook, a method and approach, a strategic orientation, and a set of policies flowing from that, that it's fighting for in the society, that it's working to win more and more people to, by working through the contradictions that we've been talking about. So, there is a contradiction between the party and the state, they're not identical. And there is a contradiction between the solid core of this whole line—understanding that in broad terms—and the operation of the state. It's not one uniform, monolithic thing, and it's not one linear, straight-line extension where everything the party says is what the state has to do and does. If you read this *Constitution*, you'll see that it's explicitly stated that this is not the way it should work, not the way it will work in accordance with this *Constitution*.

Then there's also the contradiction between the vanguard party and the broader society. This goes back, again, to the “parachute point”: You will have a lot of different forces in socialist society that are operating according to a mixed bag, and sometimes according to principles which are different from, and in some cases even opposed to, the main direction represented by the solid core—this is allowed for in this *Constitution*. At the same time, you have the vanguard, and you have certain core principles that are embodied in the *Constitution*. This *Constitution* is not anything anybody wants to make out of it. There is definitely a solid core to this *Constitution*, in the way things are set forth—first of all, in the way things are set forth in the Preamble to the *Constitution* and the way it says very explicitly that the institutions of this society have to be vehicles for the furtherance of the communist revolution. That's essential to the solid core. This means you can't say, “I'm in accordance with this *Constitution*, but I want to restore capitalism.” Well, let's break that down further. You can say that, because the right to say that is embodied in this *Constitution*; so if you say that, you are abiding by the *Constitution*, in the sense that, with this *Constitution*, you have a right to say that; but that's not what the *Constitution* says is the aim and the purpose of the society. So that's another contradiction. People have a right to say that, but it's not what the solid core is, as embedded and embodied right in the *Constitution*.

This principle of “solid core with a lot of elasticity based on the solid core” applies not only to the state apparatus (the police, the military, the executive, etc.) but to the government overall: with regard to all government institutions, there is both the solid core, as characterized here, and there is the elasticity *on the basis of* the solid core. As the Ardea Skybreak Interview puts it, it is not the case that this is just a big mush, where the elasticity is not based on the solid core and it goes all over the place. At the same

time, once again, it is not all solid core, in the sense that whatever the party decrees will be what happens. As an illustration of this, let's look at how elections are envisioned in this *Constitution*. I don't know how much people have paid attention to this, but a tremendous amount of thought and work went into the exact, the very precise, percentages for voting that are in the beginning of the *Constitution* where it's talking about the legislature on the national level. What was the guiding thinking and what are the guiding principles here? Why does it say, in relation to the proportions of the election process, 20% instead of 60%, or something else? Why were those specific percentages chosen, in talking about the way the national legislature would be elected? The guiding principle—and this is another example of solid core and elasticity on the basis of solid core, and another example of the principle that's sometimes stated as being willing to go to the brink of being drawn and quartered (to the brink of being pulled apart in all directions), even under socialism, and even as you're struggling to take things continually on the communist road—the guiding principle is that these percentages for voting are set up so that if the overwhelming majority of people in the society turned against everything that we were trying to do, they could actually vote to reverse it all. If you examine what's there—and I would be willing to bet that not that many people have approached it this way and really looked at it in this way, but if you examine what's actually there, it's set up so that, if a very large majority of the people decided they didn't want this system any more, they could actually vote it out. But, on the other hand, it would take a lot of people feeling that way.

Why is that done? Just so the petite bourgeoisie would be neutralized, and stop complaining all the time? No. Given that it would take such a large majority to overturn this (to vote out this socialist system), it clearly operates on the basis of the solid core of what this is all about; at the same time, it's also presenting necessity and a challenge to the vanguard—which does represent the solid core in an overall sense, although not just in some organizational sense—it's presenting a challenge to the vanguard by having it set up this way, so that the vanguard can't just act like, "Well, we're in power now, we can do whatever we want, and who cares how we do it and what the masses of people think about it." No, you've actually got to go out and work among the masses and continually win them to this. All this is finely calibrated, in how things are constructed in this *Constitution*, as an expression and a means of handling that contradiction in that way, so that the solid core is maintained, but you're actually willing to go to the brink of being drawn and quartered, particularly if you take a wrong turn, and large numbers of people in society are dissatisfied with you.

And don't think that couldn't happen—even with the people who suffered terribly under the old society. It happens now. Again, I go back to things like what's been happening in Baltimore: people rose up heroically, and now what's going on? The authorities are using the fact that the masses are going at each other, in order to buttress the idea that the police have to use their brutal power to keep order and keep down all the craziness that they blame the masses for getting caught up in. This reminds me of things I'm familiar with from back in the day in Chicago, where I used to live in the 1970s. There was a phenomenon involving some of the big real estate interests in the Chicago area (of

the kind that Obama became all tied in with a little later, but here I'm thinking back to the period of the 1970s, before Obama came along), and when these big real estate interests wanted to "turn a neighborhood" that had been mainly white, and they wanted to get people to flee the neighborhood so they could buy up the houses cheaply and then resell them at a big profit, these real estate interests would work with the police. They had a whole unit within the Chicago police that was responsible for dealing with the gangs—and that had infiltrated the gangs—and they would put out the word through their contacts: If you go over into this neighborhood and create mayhem and havoc, we won't do anything about it. Well, pretty soon, even the white people who weren't coming from such a bad place would get up and leave, sell their property cheaply, because the neighborhood became intolerable; and then Black people were allowed, even encouraged, to buy those homes, but they would be charged a price much higher than what the houses had just sold for. So the real estate interests made a real killing in that way. And there's the thing where the police take people from one gang, or one set, and if they want to get some shit going, they arrest them, or pick them up, and then dump them off in the neighborhood of another gang or another set—and the shit flies. And then, after awhile, it's got its own momentum, the police don't even have to do anything. Well, this is the kind of thing the police still do, not just in places like Chicago but more generally—and they do it especially when the masses rise up.

So, there's all this complexity that you have to deal with, when you're working to build a movement for revolution. And the same kind of thing happens when you have actually made the breakthrough and established a socialist state and you're on the road of building socialism and moving toward communism. There are forces who are not going to like what you're doing. So what are they going to do? They're going to try to sabotage your economy. They're going to try to turn the people against each other, as well as turning them against the socialist state. They may not come out openly and say, "restore capitalism," when that's not popular. But if they can mess things up and create enough chaos, then some people will say, "Well, maybe we do need the old system back, because at least then we had order, at least then things functioned." Again, this kind of thing happens now when people rise up in struggle. And then pretty soon the masses say: "Goddamn, I guess we do need the police, because somebody's gotta keep order here." We have to deal with that contradiction, by the way. That's our responsibility. If they're stirring up this shit, or just on their own the masses are getting caught up in this shit, transforming that situation in a positive direction is our responsibility. We can't be the police among the people—and we certainly can't act like the police of this oppressive bourgeois state—but that's our responsibility, to transform that situation and, through a tremendous amount of struggle, get the masses of people on the road they need to be on. We're never gonna make a revolution if we don't take responsibility for all of this, including dealing with the needs of the masses in this kind of situation. If we don't, then the masses are gonna be pulled toward accepting the idea that, "Maybe we do need the police back in here, much as they've messed us over and brutalized us and killed us, because things are just too crazy without this." If we don't deal with this, then, even when they rise up, the masses are gonna get caught up, once again, in the oppressive order of the system that exists. Now, clearly, this is not easy, and I'm not saying it's

easy—it's very difficult. But we have to apply ourselves and do the work to figure out how to handle these contradictions, even now, because we can't let the system come back at the masses in this way. They come back in all kinds of ways—they come back with overt brutal repression, but they also come back with ways they get the masses turned against each other and starting to doubt themselves: "Maybe we were better off with the police doing this shit, maybe they do have to do this shit they do." Well, transforming that situation is our responsibility.

Imagine, if you get to socialist society—you will have the same kind of contradictions: people trying to sabotage and undermine your economy, and turning the masses against each other. You will have forces out there that are antagonistic to what you're doing—remaining imperialists and other reactionaries in the world, and inside the country itself—and they can be very adept at finding ways to turn the people against you by creating hardships for the people. So then people say, "Look, I like you revolutionaries, but goddamn, at least we could do something to get something to eat in the old society; now you guys, your economy's completely broken down. I'm sorry, but we gotta get you out of there and get somebody in who will at least get us something to eat and a roof over our heads." And, by the way, if there is a socialist revolution, as I've pointed out before, we are responsible then for the needs of the people. I don't mean like social workers, but we are responsible, the vanguard is responsible, for leading the society to meet the needs of the people. And there are lots of forces who will work to turn the people against you on the basis that you are not meeting the people's needs.

Someone raised a criticism of this *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America*, and more generally of our Party's line: Isn't the problem that the socialist revolutions that have taken place so far have been in countries like China, where the people were desperately poor and they needed something to eat, and all their other material needs needed to be immediately taken care of, and that's why they couldn't apply this principle of having a lot of intellectual ferment and dissent? Well, those are real contradictions. But think about *this* country, where you've got all these middle strata, and expectations they have of all these things—like designer coffee by the cup, and so on—all this stuff that they're used to, as part of their daily life, and as a result of the high degree of parasitism that their conditions rest on. And you don't make a revolution and then all the very advanced productive forces that existed before are just there at your disposal in the same way and to the same extent they were before the revolution. There's gonna be a lot of destruction—some of it an inevitable by-product, so to speak, of the struggle, and some of it deliberately carried out by the forces of the old order, even as they're finally going down to defeat. So you're gonna have contradictions from that side, too. You're going to have some people who have been desperately poor and have urgent immediate needs, but you're also going to have people from the middle strata who are used to a certain standard of living, and you have to deal with those contradictions too.

At the time of the Russian revolution, because the German working class had a higher standard of living than the Russian working class when they made the revolution in

Russia, in speaking to an international organization of communists, Lenin said: We may have to tell the workers in Germany that, if they have a revolution there, wages will go down for a while. Many people objected: You can't say that. But Lenin insisted: We gotta say that, because that's the material reality. In order to meet the all-around needs of society, we may not be able to maintain the standard of living that the German workers are used to, because of German imperialism.

These are the kinds of contradictions you have to deal with. For example, in this country there is a section of unionized workers that's used to a relatively high standard of living. Now, they've broken down the unions a great deal in this recent period—it is a very different picture than it was, say, 40 years ago when the unions were more powerful and had much more influence. But, still, these kinds of contradictions involving these middle strata, broadly speaking, will assert themselves in the new, socialist society.

So, all of this is being taken into account with this *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic*, and it is very finely crafted and calibrated to give expression—even, literally, in a numerical sense—to the contradictions that I have been examining.

Or, let's take another example. What does this *Constitution* actually say, and what does it not say, in terms of the New Socialist Republic having troops, and so on, in other countries? I've heard of people saying, in promoting this *Constitution*: "This *Constitution* says that the new socialist state won't have troops in other countries." No, it does not say that. If you read it carefully, what it says is that this state "will not station its forces, nor establish bases, in another country, except in circumstances where this is clearly in accord with the wishes of the masses of people in that country and where such action would actually be a manifestation of the internationalist orientation and other fundamental principles and objectives set forth in this Constitution and would contribute to the advance of revolutionary struggle in the world in accordance with these principles and objectives." Again, this is very finely crafted language—not to be clever, but to deal with actual contradictions. Should we make it a principle that a socialist state would never intervene to assist a revolution in another country, even militarily? I don't think so. Now, if you try to substitute for the masses of people there, and impose your will as a military force of a state from the outside, that's a whole other thing, and that won't lead to a good result. Stalin once said, at the end of World War 2, that wherever any force stations its troops, there it can impose the social system it wants to impose. Well, there was a certain short-term truth to that, but there were a lot of contradictions and problems bound up with that which came very sharply to the fore in Eastern Europe not long after the end of World War 2. We don't have time to go into all that, right now. But, again, these contradictions can be very acute.

There is the principle that you don't treat other countries, and the people in other countries, the way the imperialists do. But, at the same time, you're not gonna make it a principle or an absolute that you would never cross a boundary, never cross a border, to assist a revolution. That would be wrong. That would be against internationalism. So, how you handle that is another, yes, very complex—and at times quite acute—

contradiction.

People should go back and look at the way this is handled in this *Constitution*, because once again it is very carefully worded. Why? Because, if you'll pardon a sort of simplified formulation, it's actually meant to be a blueprint for the society we're aiming for. It's not just meant to be a bunch of good ideas to appeal to people—"Let's say this for that group, and that for that group, so everybody will like us." No, that's not the way we do things. It's actually meant to put forward: these are the methods, principles, guidelines, and policies which should be applied and followed. Now, when we get there, maybe some things will be proven to be in need of change. But right now, it's the very best we can do, and it's actually quite good in grappling with contradictions and presenting methods, principles, and guidelines for how these contradictions should be dealt with. People should really look at it as a living thing that's actually presenting: this is what we're going for.

We should be popularizing this in a very bold way. People often raise the criticism to us: "You always say what you're against—you're very negative, you're against this, you're against that, you always say what you're against—but you don't say what you're for." Well, yes, we do—and guess what, it's not the Democratic Party! But here's what we're for—right here, right in this *Constitution*. A lot of grappling with contradictions went into this *Constitution*. As I said, it wasn't just: "Let's come up with things that will appeal to this group, and things that will appeal to that group." That's not how we proceeded at all. It was a matter of doing the best possible—it was dealing in the best possible way with the contradictions that could be anticipated, and what are the principles and guidelines that should be followed to deal with these contradictions. And some of it is very detailed and very precise. People should grapple with, and people should utilize, this document in that kind of way, with that kind of understanding.

Or let's take another contradiction: Why is the possibility of a draft, for the armed forces of the New Socialist Republic, included in this *Constitution*? Why doesn't it say that you can just rely on people volunteering? Well, it does make the point that people volunteering is the main aspect—the main thing that should be relied on—winning people politically and ideologically. In a discussion I had with someone who grew up in China, they said that when China was a socialist country, people in China—the youth in particular—were just tremendously inspired to join the People's Liberation Army, to defend the socialist state and back up the revolution in the world. People wanted to do this, they wanted to be defenders of the revolution. So there is a lot of that sentiment and orientation that can be relied on. On the other hand, there's a relation between necessity and freedom here, that you're going to be dealing with. Why does it say, in this *Constitution*, that you can't teach creationism in the schools, that the science of evolution is going to be taught as a fact? Why not just leave it up to people to decide, why not see if anybody likes creationism and wants it taught in the schools? No! You have to set certain terms—this point has been repeatedly emphasized, and for good reason—you have to set certain terms. That's the solid core you set—and you actually create necessity for other forces by setting certain terms. And then you struggle things

out on that basis. This point has been illustrated by using the example of the movie, from a few years ago, *Remember the Titans*. In the situation that movie was dealing with, in a city in the South several decades ago, they integrated the schools there, they integrated the football team in what had been essentially an all-white school, and they even replaced the previous white coach with a Black football coach. And then they said: Now, let's deal with the struggle that has to be waged around this. They didn't go to all the white people and say: "Do you want to integrate the school and integrate the football team and, on top of it, have a Black coach for the football team?" Guess what they would have said?

There are all kinds of things like that in this *Constitution*. Why does it talk about socializing ownership of the means of production? Why not just leave it to people to vote how they want the economy to run? Because you have to have a solid core, certain fundamental principles, and you have to set terms and create certain necessity. And we aren't yet at the point—and we won't be at the beginning stage that this *Constitution* is talking about—where you can rely solely on people volunteering for the armed forces if the very existence of your republic is in danger. There's a certain necessity you put on people. Now, if you rely on that, then you're on a slippery slope toward becoming like a bourgeois state, and you're exercising power more and more in that way. But, put it this way: There is a certain value and importance, when you have the freedom to do so, to set certain necessity, to set certain terms, and then struggle things out from that standpoint.

Now, in this regard there's something important to learn from the experience of the struggle in Nepal, which turned out to be a negative experience in the end. Roughly 10 years ago now, as the Nepal Party was approaching and wrestling with the prospect of the seizure of power in the country as a whole, as a result of the people's war they'd been waging, and other struggles going on in that society—as this was becoming an increasingly direct and immediate question, an important point was raised to them when they were making all kinds of appeals to the middle classes there on the basis of bourgeois democracy. What was emphasized was this: You, Nepalese comrades, are facing great necessity, but you should not create unnecessary necessity for yourselves. What was being said was: "Look, you are in a small country, surrounded by two big reactionary countries, India and China, both ruled by powerful bourgeois exploiting classes, and even in the short term you are up against an army, the Nepalese army, that is still more powerful than you are. And there are the U.S. imperialists looming in the picture, too. So, even in terms of going for the seizure of power, as well as trying to restructure the economy and radically transform the society, you have a great deal of difficulty, or necessity, that you have to deal with. And, yes, you do have to win over significant parts of the middle classes in order to complete the revolution, and in order to go forward to a new society. That's the necessity you objectively face. But you should not create unnecessary necessity for yourselves." What was meant by that was: Don't appeal to the middle classes on the basis of bourgeois democracy, because then they're gonna demand that you live up to it. Go to them on the basis that you are making a revolution which is not a bourgeois revolution, not aiming for bourgeois democracy, which is instead a new democratic revolution, led by the proletariat as a transition to

socialism and as part of the world communist revolution, and there is a place for you (people in the middle classes) in that revolution. And then proceed to struggle with them on that basis. In that way, instead of creating unnecessary necessity for yourself, you are creating necessary necessity for the middle classes, by setting the terms on the right basis.

Now, is this just an arbitrary thing, where you can choose to set the terms any way you want? No. They had won the basis to set the terms in this way by what they had done so far with the advance of the revolution. They had a material basis to do this. In the criticism that was raised, it wasn't a matter of, "don't do it this way, do it that way," in the abstract—it was not just a contest of competing ideas, in the abstract. It was: You have established the material basis to put this necessity on the middle classes. Another way to put that is: Here's your solid core toward the middle classes; set the terms on that basis, and on that basis open up the elasticity. Don't go appealing to them on the basis of their bourgeois-democratic prejudices and inclinations, and then try to fight for a solid core—which, unfortunately, is more or less what the Nepalese Party did, and we've seen the results, which are not good.

So this is another point related to why you have a provision for a draft in this *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America*: Yes, you don't want to, and you shouldn't, rely on that strategically, but there's the correct and necessary approach of, on the basis of having state power, creating certain terms. Just like in *Remember the Titans*, you create certain terms, that's your solid core, and then you go forward from there. You do that on the basis of the material conditions that you've brought into being through struggle.

Everything is a matter of transforming necessity into freedom. It's not a matter, it's never a matter, of absolute freedom. This is not anarchism—which after all is essentially idealism and essentially a variant of bourgeois democracy, particularly one characteristic of the petite bourgeoisie, that wants no constraints, wants no limits on its pursuit of whatever it wants to pursue. In the real world, there are always constraints, there are always limits, there are always obstacles that are posed to what any social force wants to do, and it's a question of how you transform necessity into freedom, overcoming obstacles and fighting through contradictions in accordance with what you're aiming for. And we know that it's not just a question of what you're aiming for in the abstract—it's not that we just come up with some ideas of what we'd like the goal to be—we know there is a material basis for this. If there were not a material basis, then you couldn't transform the necessity into freedom on this road of communist revolution, you would be incapable of doing so.

But this is the way we have to understand things: There's never absolute freedom—even under communism, there's not absolute freedom. Let me tell you something. You're living on a fault line, and an earthquake erupts, you do not have absolute freedom! There's a lot of necessity all of a sudden. OK, in a communist world, there are no class distinctions, you have gone beyond all the "4 Alls"—but you have an earthquake. Well,

you've got a lot of necessity! You can think of other things that come from the natural world, or necessity that arises out of the social contradictions. You're always going to have that, including under communism. You never have absolute, unlimited resources at any point. There will always have to be decisions made. Even when you don't have class distinctions, you don't have exploitation, you still have limitations, and decisions that have to be made: what are we gonna do about this, versus what are we gonna do about that. The point has been made that, in socialist society, some people will think, at a given time, that you should build a health clinic, while other people will think you should build a park. They might both be desirable. Which one is correct under the given circumstances, or how do you go about doing one and laying the basis to be able to do the other down the road? All these kinds of contradictions—in socialist society, but in communist society as well, you have to deal with these things. There's never any such thing as absolute freedom, without any limits, any constraints; there's always necessity imposing on you, which you have to figure out how to transform in the direction of freedom in order to gain more initiative—and then you will face new necessity that you have to transform. This is an ongoing and never-ending process.

One of the things that should really be understood about this *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic*, in most fundamental terms, is that this *Constitution* is dealing with a very profound and very difficult contradiction: the contradiction that, on the one hand, humanity really does need revolution and communism; but, on the other hand, not all of humanity wants that all of the time, including in socialist society. So this *Constitution* is set up to provide the basic methods and means to deal with that contradiction. You don't just have a popular vote every few years that is set up in such a way that the result is that one day you have socialism, the next day you go back to capitalism, and then you try to create socialism again—which would be impossible, because then you'd get everything bound up with capitalism back, and once again you'd have to go through everything you had to go through to try to get to the point of overthrowing the capitalist system. And, frankly, nobody's going to support that kind of idiocy. So, at times, a lot of the people may want to be going in a different direction, but you've got the institutional means to keep the socialist system going toward the ultimate goal of communism, unless overwhelmingly the people are against you; but, at the same time, this *Constitution* is constructed in such a way that you have to repeatedly win the masses of people to fight to stay on the socialist road. You need to get to communism, but you're not going to get to communism by putting guns in the backs of the people and force-marching them to communism. You have to continually win them to that, fighting through all the contradictions that get posed, including the ones that the enemies put in your way, or accentuate, in order to turn the people against you.

There are other examples from this *Constitution* that I want to pose later. But what is being discussed here is the recognition of this basic contradiction that this *Constitution* is dealing with, and the methods and principles that are involved in this *Constitution*, which run through this entire *Constitution* but also have to run through everything we do, in leading other people: in leading the party, if that's what our responsibility is; in leading the masses, if that's what our responsibility is; or all of that. Whatever it might

be, the same principles and methods have to be applied and grappled with. And a point that was made in the Interview with Ardea Skybreak, which I really think is important to emphasize, is that it's no good at all, it tells you something is very wrong, if you have a situation where people have been around and part of something for years and decades, and they haven't been advancing. What the hell's going on?! The point's even been made: you couldn't have that in any other institution in society—you'd be fired if you were working for some capitalist and you just kept doing things the same old way and on the same old level—after a while, your ass would be out the door! Well, we don't operate on those principles, but there is a point to be learned, that people should keep on advancing—not so we can make more profit for a handful of people, but quite the opposite—because there are great needs that have to be met in order to build the movement for an actual revolution. Everybody should be advancing, and we should be bringing forward new people all the time.

Emancipators of Humanity

The last thing I want to say under this Part II, about the new society, is the point that's made in the Ajith polemic ("Ajith—A Portrait of the Residue of the Past" in *Demarcations* #4), where it speaks to the fact that this formulation, "emancipators of humanity," is not just a nice sounding phrase, or just a moral declaration—that we should be emancipators of humanity in some abstract moral sense. It's not just that it's better to be an emancipator of humanity than to be out for revenge. Well, yes it is better. But the point—and the point that's made in that polemic against Ajith—is that a tremendous amount of complexity, a tremendous amount of analysis and synthesis of contradictions, is concentrated in this seemingly simple formulation, "emancipators of humanity." Interestingly, and significantly, in the Ajith polemic this actually comes in the section under the heading "'Simple Class Feelings' and Communist Consciousness." This is posed as a contradiction, which it is, objectively, in the real world. In other words, simple class feelings—hatred of oppression, a desire to get out from oppression—that's not the same thing as communist consciousness. People like Ajith argue that, out of the position of the oppressed in society, and their basic class feelings, the consciousness that you need for revolution, for what he conceives of as communist revolution, will more or less spontaneously emerge—or that, in any case, the oppressed have a special ability and a special predisposition, so to speak, to grasp communist consciousness. And the point's made, in this polemic against Ajith, that there's a qualitative difference, and a leap involved, between simple class feelings and actually becoming a conscious emancipator of humanity, having *communist* consciousness. People are oppressed, they have basic feelings as a result. And many people are not so narrow-minded. You'll hear people say: "This has to stop, not just here, but all over the world." People have sentiments that come out of their conditions where they do identify with other oppressed people. And, as emphasized in this polemic, those basic sentiments are something very important that we have to unite with; but we also have to carry on struggle for people to make a leap beyond just simple class feelings, because that's not the same thing as really understanding the world as it is, and as it is moving and changing, and what is the necessary means for moving beyond the world as it is.

There's a vast difference. Everybody who's been through that process of making that leap, or is in the process of making that leap, knows it's a big deal, that it isn't just the same thing as how you feel when you start to recognize how much you're being messed over, or how other people are being messed over, and something's gotta be done about that. That's a very important sentiment, but there's a big leap from that to really, scientifically, understanding the need and the possibility to radically transform the world to emancipate humanity.

The fact that there is a lot of complexity concentrated in this formulation “emancipators of humanity”—that is true in two senses: First of all, it's emancipators of humanity. This was taken partly from Marx's statement, that the proletariat can only emancipate itself by emancipating all of mankind. In other words, you have to transform the whole world. You have to achieve the “4 Alls”—on a world scale—or else the proletariat, as a class, will remain in its exploited condition because, as long as you have this system in effect, as long as those are the fundamental relations and the process of capitalist accumulation constitutes the underlying and fundamental dynamics that sets the stage for things, you're going to have an exploited class of people, of necessity. Only by abolishing all that, throughout the world, achieving the “4 Alls” in that sense on a worldwide scale, can those people who are the exploited class of proletarians actually emancipate themselves. You can't do the one without the other. So there is that dimension, and obviously that includes the whole dimension of internationalism, as I was speaking to earlier, referring to *Basics* 2:12⁴⁷ and related points.

But there's also another dimension, which is the whole question of *what goes into* actually transforming society. In other words, the achievement of the “4 Alls” in that sense—not just in terms of internationalism, but in terms of what goes into really uprooting the basis for exploitation and oppression—let's put it that way. When you talk about emancipators of humanity, that's concentrating everything that goes into carrying out this radical transformation—and, yes, this is posed against just taking revenge. That's one of the important ways in which this formulation was brought forward, the way in which it is directly posed against the idea that this revolution is about taking revenge—taking revenge on the current exploiters, or taking revenge on anybody who's a little bit better off than you are, and so on. This revolution is not about that. It is about getting to a whole different world where all these things that go on now no longer have a basis and can't go on any longer. That's what this is about, and when we say that we are calling on people to be emancipators of humanity, we're calling on them to fight through to achieve all that. So, it's the “4 Alls” in that sense too—to achieve everything that's concentrated in those “4 Alls” is what it means to be an emancipator of humanity. It means to bring into being a whole different world, without all these economic relations of exploitation, without all these class distinctions, without all these social relations of oppression, without all the ideas that arise from and reinforce these relations of exploitation and oppression. All that, as well as the whole international dimension, is concentrated in the formulation, and the call to people, and the struggle with people, to not just be fighting to get rid of a particular form of oppression that might affect you more directly, or the group of people in society that you are most directly a part of and

might be spontaneously more concerned about, but to uproot and move beyond all of this. This world is not a world that anybody should have to live in. And there is a basis to move beyond all of this, but it's a tremendous struggle, and that's what we have to win people to see, and to fight for.

III. The Strategic Approach to An Actual Revolution

First of all, the question poses itself: What is an actual revolution? A lot of people have a lot of misconceptions about this, or throw the word “revolution” around. “Occupy,” that was a revolution. What happened in Egypt, that was a revolution. But they weren’t—those were not revolutions. You could say that, in a certain sense, in Egypt there was a revolution that was aborted, or stopped short. Some abortions are bad. Aborted revolutions are bad. Anyway, what is an actual revolution? You’ll see this statement running continually on revcom.us, where it says:

An actual revolution is a lot more than a protest. An actual revolution requires that millions of people get involved, in an organized way, in a determined fight to dismantle this state apparatus and system and replace it with a completely different state apparatus and system, a whole different way of organizing society, with completely different objectives and ways of life for the people. Fighting the power today has to help build and develop and organize the fight for the whole thing, for an actual revolution. Otherwise we’ll be protesting the same abuses generations from now!

This is profoundly true, and once again there’s a lot that’s concentrated in that paragraph. So let’s get into this whole thing.

One Overall Strategic Approach

I want to begin by talking about what is our strategic approach to an actual revolution, an approach which applies particularly to an imperialist country like this, even as it may have some important application more generally. This strategic approach to revolution is **one overall strategic approach**, with different, distinct but also inter-related, stages. Now, what do I mean by that? I mean that we’re working toward an actual struggle of millions of people to, as that statement says, dismantle this state power, break the hold of this state power over the masses of people, which is enforced through massive violence, and bring into being a different state power and a different system. That’s what this is all aiming toward. And, at any point, in whatever we’re doing, whatever part of a division of labor we might be part of, or whatever particular struggle we’re engaged in—whatever it might be—we should always be proceeding from that orientation, that everything we’re doing has to be building toward that.

That’s different than saying that we’re going for the seizure of power now, which we are not. That’s why I emphasized that these stages are distinct. But they’re also inter-related—they’re part of one overall strategic approach. It’s not like we’re doing political work now, with one strategy, and then, someday in the great distant future, we’ll do something else with a different strategy. There are forms of struggle, there are approaches, and so on, that are appropriate to the particular stage we’re in. But it’s still one overall strategic approach, one overall strategic orientation. Otherwise, it’s not about revolution. Even though these stages are different and distinct, and have their

own particularities, they're still part of one overall strategic approach, and if we wall them off, in some absolute sense, then we're no longer working for revolution—we're just puttering around, doing some things now that really are unconnected to what we need to be doing: working for an actual revolution.

And this gets us to “On the Possibility of Revolution,”⁴⁸ which is another document which is way under-utilized in my definite sense of things: both in terms of whether people study it seriously, and go back to it repeatedly, and whether—in the appropriate ways, and not in inappropriate ways—they popularize what's there, and discuss and struggle over the content of that with people very broadly. If we're not doing that, then, once again, what is it we're doing? With all that we are doing, what do we think we're doing it for? A lot of work went into “On the Possibility.” Why? Because, for some reason, people felt like working hard? No. Because this is a very difficult contradiction—how to actually go for the seizure of power—and we're still far from having a fully developed understanding of how to deal with this. But “On the Possibility of Revolution” is a breakthrough that gives us the *basic principles and means* for going to work on how to do that. It gives us the basic guidelines, the strategic orientation and the foundation to work to further develop our understanding of how to actually fight through to carry out the seizure of power when the conditions have come into being for that. And if this is not what we're aiming to do—what's spoken to in a concentrated way in “On the Possibility”—then we're not really about what we say we're about. There is an important difference between recognizing that this is not what we're doing now—going for the seizure of power—on the one hand, and, on the other hand, recognizing that it is what we're aiming for, and that everything we're doing is laying the groundwork for this, even while it's a separate stage of things from what we're actually doing now.

So, in a real sense, we have to be *working back* from “On the Possibility of Revolution.” And you can't work back from something if you're not deeply grounded in it—that's sort of elementary, as they say. You have to be deeply grounded in this, in order to be working back from it. You have to be going back to it and posing the question, not is this what I'm doing now?—that would be very mechanical, if that's the way you proceeded, and in fact would be very harmful—but am I working in such a way that is leading toward that, and not just me individually, but is everything we are doing overall contributing to getting to the point where that's what can be taken up? Otherwise, once more, we're not working for revolution. And it's not just rhetoric, and certainly not hype, to say that without this revolution, all the things that go on in the world, and all the ways the masses suffer, will just keep going on, generation after generation. That's very true. And it's very important.

Even now, we have to be doing some strategic thinking, and we have to be proceeding in a certain way, flowing from the necessary strategic orientation. For example, if you read what's said about “On the Possibility of Revolution” in Part 2 of *Birds and Crocodiles*, you will see that it's talking about the problem of “encirclement.” It's talking about the very acute contradiction, a very pronounced contradiction of this society, that, on the one hand, you have tens of millions of people among whom, if there were a real

possibility of revolution, many would immediately leap to it, even without fully understanding what it is. Another way to put that is: people for whom daily life really is a living hell, they desperately need, and feel the need, even if in a sort of unformed sense, for a way out of this. But, on the other hand, you have broad sections of society for whom that is not the daily reality. You have an increasingly apartheid society in America, along lines of nationality, but even in terms of social classes. You have an increasingly enclaved, privileged section of the population which is deliberately gating itself and sealing itself off from the rest of society—yes, especially from Black people and Latinos and other oppressed nationalities, but even from lower sections of the white people in this society. This is a very sharp contradiction—how are you going to make a revolution with that?

What's being talked about, in terms of "encirclement and suppression," is that if this revolution jumps off, at a certain point, with people feeling they have no other way out, and they are willing to wage a desperate struggle even against big odds—if that can be limited and contained to just those people who most desperately need it, it is almost certainly going to be crushed, with terrible consequences. So, if that's the case, we have to realize that this is an acute contradiction that we have to be working on—not some time in the future, we have to be working on it right now, and in an ongoing way. I'm going to talk some about this, but we need to keep working on this problem: How do we transform this situation so that, when the time comes, it's not going to be the case that they can easily contain this revolution to those sections of the people that they'd, frankly, just as soon kill off anyway, if you want to get right down on the ground with it. If that were the situation we were faced with, well, we'd have to do the best we could, but it's not the situation we want, and it's not the situation we need in order to have a real chance at winning—and that is the point, after all.

So we have to be thinking about this now. We can't be saying, "Well, when some future time comes, maybe people will have to deal with the problem of how not to have that situation where they just come in and cordon off an area and start bombing the shit out of it—end of the revolution." Just think about that. These people, these imperialists, are absolutely ruthless. There's a point in "On the Possibility" about the utility of force, meaning that they can't necessarily use everything they have in their arsenal. But that doesn't mean that they won't throw a lot at people. Anybody who thinks they're not going to try to just absolutely pulverize any attempt at a real revolution is not thinking seriously. We have to both go to work on that problem at a strategic level, even now, and we have to politically work on those contradictions, now and in an ongoing way. We can't have a lot of people in the middle strata talking, derogatorily and in racist terms, about the inner cities as "Africa this and that"—as if it's a different country, and one they don't like—just to cite one sharp example. We can't have that! I'm going to talk about the roads to transforming that—I'm going to get into that some—but this is an acute contradiction. And if we are not proceeding in a way to have the best possible prospects—not an easy thing, but the best possible chance of winning—then, to go back to that woman in Baltimore, we are giving people a sense of false hope. And that is criminal. That is absolutely criminal. As I have emphasized, there is going to be

sacrifice, on all levels—from the basic masses to the leadership of the whole thing—there are going to be tremendous sacrifices. That’s inevitable—that is inevitable, OK? But we cannot proceed in such a way that we’re not taking this seriously, and that we aren’t struggling now, and struggling in an ongoing way, to create the most favorable conditions, as opposed to very unfavorable ones.

Hastening While Awaiting

Now, this gets to the point about “hastening while awaiting”—which is another one of those things that everybody can repeat, but what does it mean, and does it really have any importance? We got this formulation from Mao. During the war against Japan, which I discussed earlier, Mao talked about how, in resisting—militarily, in that case—Japanese occupation and aggression against China, they didn’t have the basis to go over to the offensive right away, to drive out the Japanese. They had to fight, for a certain period of time, on the defensive; they had to avoid major encounters that could be decisive in terms of the outcome of the whole thing. In that situation, Mao used the formulation: we are hastening while awaiting—awaiting changes in the international situation, in that case. In other words, as World War 2 broke out, there was a whole larger struggle against Japan, or in which Japan was enmeshed—most of all, the inter-imperialist contradiction between Japan, Germany, and Italy, on one side, and the U.S. and Britain (and France, sort of) on the other side. (I say France was sort of involved because it was occupied by Germany and divided in half, and, so it wasn’t able to fight very much for most of the war.) Anyway, without getting into all the details of that, this was what Mao was talking about: waging the war of resistance against Japanese occupation, hastening while awaiting changes in the international situation.

Now, obviously, we have not only adopted but also *adapted* this; we’re not waging a military struggle now, and we’re not awaiting changes in the international situation in the same way they were in China—we’re hastening while awaiting the development of things toward a revolutionary situation, which obviously involves the whole international dimension, for the reasons I was discussing earlier about how the world system is ultimately decisive. But what we mean by this relates to the “three prepares” that we’ve been popularizing—we’re working on preparing the terrain (preparing the ground is another way to say that), preparing the masses of people, and preparing the vanguard—and the hastening part is that, in the context of all the objective contradictions we’re confronting, we’re working to accelerate the development of things toward an actual revolutionary situation. That’s what’s concentrated in that formulation, the “three prepares,” so that if a revolutionary situation, or when a revolutionary situation, does develop, we’re in the best possible position to go for everything at that point. We’re hastening while awaiting. We’re not just awaiting “one fine day” when we can start getting serious about talking to people about revolution, or we can stop just throwing the word around like everybody else and start really “meaning” it, or whatever that might be—which, again, would be criminal.

But, while we’re hastening, we are awaiting. Awaiting is part of the formulation, it’s part

of the contradiction, it's part of the strategy. Why are we awaiting? And what are we awaiting? We're not awaiting Godot. We're not waiting for some *deus ex machina* (some god-like force from outside the contradictions of the material world) to intervene and create, oh finally, a basis for revolution. We're not even looking or waiting for "the great god, the masses" to come and create for us a revolutionary situation—"Oh, when the masses get ready, then everything will be fine; they'll all want a revolution, and they'll all come to us and say, 'Please lead us to make a revolution.'" If you think that's gonna happen, you are in for a big disappointment. You could think: "It's just not fair, we've been out here since 1996 with the National Day of Protest against police brutality and murder, criminalization of a generation and repression. Now a lot of people are talking about police brutality and murder, but everybody's not coming to us and saying, 'Lead us, please,' because we've been out here for 20 years. It's just not fair." Well, tough shit. That's not the way it works, OK. And if you think that is what is going to happen with a revolution—finally everybody's gonna come around and say, "Please lead us, because you've been out here talking about revolution forever"—forget it. So we're not waiting for something like that. But we are awaiting while we're hastening. Why? Maybe this sounds, as they say, counter-intuitive, like it's self-contradictory in a bad sense, but it isn't. Why are we awaiting? **Because we are actually serious about making a revolution.** It's the same principle Mao emphasized in their situation, in the fight against Japan. There were people in China who said, "We gotta go at the Japanese all-out, right now—we can't just carry out actions from a strategically defensive position, we've got to take the offensive." And Mao said, if we do that, we're just gonna be crushed. If you read Mao's military writings about the resistance against Japan, you'll see this over and over again: We cannot take the strategic offensive against Japan right away, we don't have the basis and the forces to do that at this point. If we do that, we're going to be crushed. So, if you're serious about defeating Japan, you have to fight during a whole stage of strategic defensive in order to get to where you can go over to the offensive. And if you try to just lash out and take the offensive right away, you're going to be crushed, because we still have meager and weak forces compared to this powerful juggernaut, which Japan still is.

So, awaiting is part of being serious, if it's combined with hastening. Why don't we just jump off and do a few things that make us feel good now? There's a pull, a temptation, in that direction if you're serious about this. But if we do that, we're not actually serious about making a revolution. If we were to just jump off like that, we would get crushed, with terrible consequences for the revolution, and for the masses of people who in fact desperately need this revolution.

Now look, the point is made in "On the Possibility"—and I want to stress this point because things should not be misinterpreted and vulgarized in a social-pacifistic kind of way (socialist in name but pacifist in content)—if you read "On the Possibility," just like the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic*, it is a very carefully and finely crafted statement, not as some kind of intellectual exercise, but because of all the many different contradictions it's dealing with, including the existence of the enemy, and what that enemy will do if you act foolishly or speak foolishly. And at one point in "On the

Possibility” it emphasizes something that is also in the document “Some Crucial Points of Revolutionary Orientation—In Opposition to Infantile Posturing and Distortion of Revolution”:⁴⁹ If you try to implement a strategy like urban guerilla warfare—attempting to wage armed struggle with the aim of bringing down this system when the conditions do not exist for that—this will be a strategy that can only amount to substituting for the masses of people, because it won’t bring forward, and it won’t be able to bring forward, the masses of people, and you’re just going to be isolated and crushed before you could bring forward the masses of people to be part of such an armed struggle. At the same time, “On the Possibility” makes a point of emphasizing that this is different than the masses of people rising up spontaneously against their oppressors, or defending themselves in a given situation. Anyone with a decent orientation should be able to understand why that is justified. (I’m paraphrasing what’s in the document “On the Possibility of Revolution” where things are stated very precisely, and people can and should study that document carefully.) You can’t use the fact that we can’t go over now to the form of struggle they were using in China in resisting Japan—you can’t use that to say that, whenever masses of people rise up, well, that’s the wrong strategy.

I had a direct experience with this, back in the day. I remember there was a situation in San Francisco, back in the 1960s, where the pigs went into this Black Panther Party office in San Francisco and shot up the office. People from the surrounding neighborhoods—hundreds, even thousands—went out to the streets and rebelled in the face of this; but the Panthers went around and told people to get out of the streets and come to a meeting later. When I talked to Panther leaders and argued with them that this was a bad thing to do, they justified this by saying, “This rebellion was a form of spontaneous struggle, and we’re not for spontaneity.” Well, guess what? Hundreds, even thousands of people were in the streets rebelling—but only 25 people showed up at the meeting. It was meaningless. You don’t do that when masses of people are rising up. You get my point. You don’t do that.

That is different than the important principle that you can’t substitute for the masses of people. If you go out as a force that’s trying to substitute itself for the masses of people, or if you follow a strategy that means you can be easily contained and killed off before you could ever bring forward masses of people into the struggle you’re waging, then you are doing the wrong thing. You have to have the right conditions, the necessary conditions. Look, even for the people who desperately need a revolution, they are not going to support something that’s going to bring down heavy shit against them if they’re not convinced it’s really necessary and something worth sacrificing for. Now, to be clear, this is not a recipe for tailing the masses—it’s an emphasis on being scientific. So, awaiting—again, maybe this sounds, as the phrase goes, counter-intuitive, or ironic—but awaiting is part of being serious, **if it is combined with hastening**. But we have to understand what it means, and what it doesn’t mean, to say that this is not the time to jump off into things. It isn’t—but there’s a difference between us, as a conscious vanguard force, and what the masses spontaneously do; and you better be able to recognize and handle that contradiction correctly, and not in the way that the BPP did in that situation back in the day, because they killed off the struggle of the masses in that

situation. So I want to emphasize that point.

“Oh, you’re just awaiting,” some people might say, in misrepresenting our strategic orientation. No, we’re not just awaiting. We are **hastening** while awaiting, but the awaiting aspect is part of a serious, strategic approach. I’m using an analogy here—for anybody who’s listening, I’m using an analogy, because it is a different road, a different strategy, different forms of struggle, etc.—it’s analogous to why Mao said, we can’t take the offensive right away. We have to strain against the limits of the objective situation and transform it to the greatest degree possible at any point; but if you just try to ignore, or just arbitrarily and willfully step over, the objective conditions, and act as if you have some whole other set of conditions, when you don’t, you’re on the road to being crushed. And that, too, is a betrayal of the masses of people. So the point is to be hastening while awaiting.

I don’t have time to go into all this now, but I do want to refer people, as has been done before, to the first 6 paragraphs of Part 2 of *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*,⁵⁰ where it talks about this very question of hastening while awaiting and what that means, and correctly understanding the relation between what we’re doing and the development of the objective situation—how we work to transform the objective situation as much as we can, as fast as we can, while, at the same time, recognizing that there are larger forces at work. There are the contradictions of the system itself, and there are different class forces—the ruling class and different middle class forces, and so on—who are also trying to change the objective conditions in accordance with how they see their interests. All that’s part of what we’re working on—but working toward a very definite goal: getting to the point where it is possible and right to go all-out for the seizure of power. I won’t go into more detail about that here, because we don’t have time right now, but I would strongly urge people to go back to and grapple with what’s in those 6 paragraphs that begin Part 2 of *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, because it has everything to do with the correct orientation and strategic approach of hastening while awaiting.

I will point to this—an analogy with something said by Lenin that is discussed there, in the beginning of Part 2 of *Making and Emancipating*: Lenin analyzed that in imperialist countries there were certain sections of the working class that got bought off from the spoils of imperialism; and he said, nobody can say exactly where these more bourgeoisified, better-off sections of the working class are going to fall out when the revolution actually comes. Nobody can say exactly, he insisted—we’ll have to see in the actual event. And in those 6 paragraphs, that formulation—“nobody can say exactly”—is used precisely to make the point that you don’t know, when you’re working on things, where it’s all going to lead. That point is also made in the strategy statement (“On the Strategy for Revolution”⁵¹) that you don’t know where the “jolts” in society are going to lead. Uprisings of the masses, for example—you don’t know what mix that might become part of. But what you do know is that you have to be working to push things as far as you can, as fast as you can, toward the goal revolution, and consolidate, to the greatest degree possible, the forces for revolution out of each such situation, so that

you've advanced through it and, as that strategy statement talks about, you're on a higher plane from which then to carry forward further work toward the goal of revolution.

Now, I mentioned earlier that I'm constantly amazed by how things can get twisted into revisionism. You try to use a formulation to help concretize and concentrate things for people, and then it gets turned into something else. It was reported that, in a discussion about this point (nobody can say exactly where things will go when you're working to advance things toward revolution), somebody actually interpreted this to mean: "Well, nobody can say, so that means you just kinda go out and do what you can do, and nobody can really say if it'll lead to anything." No! That's not the point. The point is exactly the opposite. Nobody can say in advance that there are gonna be "x" limits to where things might go. That's the point being emphasized. It is very frustrating, I have to say, how things seem to be re-fashioned into revisionism, far too often—into a recipe for bowing down to the objective conditions—when the whole point is how to work as much as possible to transform the objective conditions, and not to, in advance, or at any point, set arbitrary limits on where it might go. We don't know where everything might go, because there are too many things happening in the world, and we can't calculate perfectly all of that at any given time. You don't know where all these things are going to go. One thing leads to another—interacts with another—leads to another—and maybe it goes certain ways and doesn't go further...and then maybe it does. And that's the point here, that we shouldn't set arbitrary limits on how far things might go at any given time, while we also shouldn't just try to overstep where things are at at any given time. That's another contradiction we have to handle correctly.

Navigating this is very difficult. You know, in Greek mythology you have Scylla, a dangerous rock, and Charybdis, an equally dangerous whirlpool, narrowly set apart, and ships had to navigate through this narrow opening. If you went too far one way, you hit the rocky terrain, you were shipwrecked; if you went too far the other way, you went down in the whirlpool. Well, that's what we have to deal with a lot. I mean, not the one or the other—but neither! In making revolution, you have to navigate these kinds of things all the time, and you're not always going to do it in the best way possible, but we have to strive to handle this in the best way we possibly can, not just individually, but collectively, struggling with each other, in the appropriate ways, through the appropriate channels, in the appropriate spirit, in order to learn how to do this better—learn from our mistakes, but also learn from our advances and build on that.

Moving on, here are some important questions relating to strategy. As I said, I'm not gonna do everything here—all the work—some of it is gonna be in the form of questions for people to think about and grapple with.

There are a couple of paragraphs that appear regularly on revcom.us, which are also found in *BASics* 3:30: "Some Principles for Building A Movement for Revolution." And, again, this is one of those things where the language is very carefully chosen and things are formulated in as precise a way as possible. Here is the first of these two paragraphs:

At every point, we must be searching out the key concentrations of social contradictions and the methods and forms which can strengthen the political consciousness of the masses, as well as their fighting capacity and organization in carrying out political resistance against the crimes of this system; which can increasingly bring the necessity, and the possibility, of a radically different world to life for growing numbers of people; and which can strengthen the understanding and determination of the advanced, revolutionary-minded masses in particular to take up our strategic objectives not merely as far-off and essentially abstract goals (or ideals) but as things to be actively striven for and built toward.

You notice that I'm underlining, emphasizing certain things here. Now, let's go back to the first part of this: "At every point, we must be searching out the key concentrations of social contradictions...." What's meant by that is the kinds of things that are formulated in the "5 Steps" that regularly appear on the revcom.us website. Those are all major concentrations of social contradictions, contradictions that this system cannot resolve, certainly not in the interests of the broad masses of people and ultimately of humanity as a whole. Now, why do I emphasize this? Someone who was criticizing this approach said, "Why do you want to go around looking for, searching out, the key concentrations of big social contradictions? Why don't we do something that will have real meaning to people right away? Why don't we do like the Panthers did and have a Breakfast for Children program and feed people?" Well, in the history of the Black Panther Party, when it took up things like the Breakfast for Children program, it didn't necessarily have to be, but it became in fact, something that was part of going in the direction of reformism. This was part of a trend that was later formulated as a basic line—"survival pending revolution"—meaning that what you are trying to do is meet the needs of the people under this system while you are just passively waiting for one day when you can have a revolution. But there are two things wrong with that, two very big things. One, you cannot meet the needs of the people under this system; if you could, then why would you work for a revolution, with everything that goes into that? You cannot meet the needs of the people under this system. It's not that you should pay no attention to the needs of the people. But you're not going to be able to meet the needs of the masses of people who are exploited and oppressed under this system, even their very basic material needs for food, shelter and so on. And second of all, by trying to do that, you're burrowing in, putting your head down and burying yourself in the present conditions, and you're giving up on trying to build for a revolution. So what's being emphasized here, in these two paragraphs ("Some Principles for Building a Movement for Revolution"), in opposition to that kind of reformist approach, is the importance of looking for the big contradictions in society around which people can be moved and which get to the deep fault lines of the system—like fault lines for an earthquake—the deep contradictions which lie at the very base of this system which, if people move around them, begin to deepen the cracks in the whole system and create more favorable conditions to actually bring the system down and replace it with something much better. So that's why it says we must be searching out the key concentrations of social

contradictions.

And then the second paragraph says this:

The objective and orientation must be to carry out work which, together with the development of the objective situation, can transform the political terrain, so that the legitimacy of the established order, and the right and ability of the ruling class to rule, is called into question, in an acute and active sense, throughout society [in other words, not just for a handful, but for masses of people broadly in society]; so that resistance to this system becomes increasingly broad, deep and determined; so that the “pole” and the organized vanguard force of revolutionary communism is greatly strengthened; and so that, at the decisive time, this advanced force is able to lead the struggle of millions, and tens of millions, to make revolution.

Notice that it doesn’t say, “wait for the development of the objective situation.” It says, “carry out work which, together with the development of the objective situation...”—in other words, together with things that are happening that are bigger than what we can affect at any given time through the work and struggle we are carrying out. We’re working on things, affecting as much as we can, but there are also bigger things happening that are beyond what we can affect at any given time. So we carry out work which, together with the development of the objective situation, hastens the development of things toward a revolutionary situation.

Now, I’ve said this many times already, in speaking to important points that are being discussed, but it’s worth saying again in relation to these two paragraphs: a tremendous amount is concentrated in this statement, which appears regularly on revcom.us and is also found in *BASics* 3:30. So this, in its various parts and as a whole, is something that should be gone back to repeatedly as both a guide and a measure of how—or even whether—we, in our particular responsibilities and as a whole, are really working to build toward an actual revolution.

And this, obviously, is closely related to the more elaborated statement put out by the Party, “On the Strategy for Revolution.” So, in relation to this, here are some more questions:

Thinking about what this statement (“On the Strategy for Revolution”) says about hastening while awaiting, and in particular “jolts” in society (and the world), how does this relate, on the one hand, to the 6 paragraphs at the beginning of Part 2 of *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, which I touched on here, and how does it relate to what is said in what I just read, “Some Principles for Building A Movement for Revolution”?

To what degree, in how you are working to contribute to the revolution, do you continually go back to this strategy statement (as well as “Some Principles for Building A

Movement for Revolution”) as a guide and measure, and what is your sense of this in terms of how this is approached more generally by people in and around the Party and the movement for revolution?

Which brings me to the next point, and some more questions. “Fight the Power, and Transform the People, for Revolution”—this is a formulation that is pivotal to the Party’s strategic approach to revolution, and is popularized through the work of the Party. How do we understand the dialectical, the contradictory, relations in this—the contradictions between the two aspects of this (fight the power, and transform the people) and, in turn, how all this relates to preparing the basis for revolution?

These are some questions to think deeply about and grapple with.

Forces For Revolution

Let’s dig further into the strategic approach to revolution. What are the main forces for revolution, and what are other groups in society where large numbers of people have to be won either to be actively involved, or to be supportive, or at least to have a stance of “friendly neutrality” toward the revolution (in other words, at least not opposing it)? Obviously, this relates to the point I was emphasizing before about not being encircled, surrounded, and crushed. What are key contradictions that have to be confronted—where necessity has to be transformed into freedom and initiative for the revolutionary forces, in significant ways—to create the basis to go all-out with a real chance of winning?

First, it is important to recognize that revolution can not and will not be made by just spreading the idea of revolution around, and perhaps getting some positive responses. (Hey, thumbs up on Facebook!...Tweet out a message in favor of revolution!) Yes, it is very important to propagate the need for revolution, in a living and compelling way; but here is a point that needs to be emphasized: **Accumulating organized forces for revolution** is, and must be, a key objective in building toward an actual revolution; and whether or not real advances are continually being made in accumulating such organized forces is a key measure of progress—or lack of progress—in building the movement for an actual revolution. Here we can take something from Marx and adapt it to the current point: Accumulate, Accumulate, Accumulate!—Accumulate more and more capital!—that, said Marx, is the Moses and prophets for the bourgeois. Well, we can say for the proletarian revolution: Accumulate, Accumulate, Accumulate!—Accumulate organized forces for this revolution!—that must be a crucial commandment and guide!

And it’s not just accumulate over here, off in some corner. We could put it this way: It’s accumulate, impact; accumulate further, impact more; accumulate further...and on and on—even while taking into account the larger picture of what’s happening out in the world at large, as is pointed to at the beginning of Part 2 of *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*. What do I mean by accumulate, impact? I mean that when

you have organized forces, you can have a magnified impact on political situations and on the political terrain overall. To just take an important but relatively small-scale example, compared to the society as a whole, imagine if, in these upsurges in Ferguson or in Baltimore, you had an organized force of revolutionary communists of even a hundred people who were able to come on the scene, putting forward that program and organizing people around that program in the midst of that upsurge—think of the way that you could change all the dynamics in that situation. Whereas, if you have a few people there, who are even doing very good work, your ability to impact that situation is gonna be so much more limited. Now, you still have to try to impact it to the maximum degree—and, to do that, one of the things you have to do is to get very good at agitation, which is something we really need to strengthen and develop. But imagine if you could have a major impact in situations like this.

I was watching this thing on CNN when Don Lemon was out in the street interviewing somebody in the aftermath of the massacre of Black people in that church in South Carolina. Now, someone portrayed Don Lemon this way, and I think this really captures something about the role he plays: “I’m Don Lemon—I’m not really a Black man, but sometimes I play one on TV.” That gets to an important aspect of the role he plays as a puppet for the powers-that-be. But, in any case, Don Lemon was out interviewing somebody, playing his usual Uncle Tom role, and this Black woman came up behind him and started yelling, and they were live so it was hard for them to cut away, it took them a while to cut away. She started yelling, “Talk about the anger, Don. Don’t talk about the forgiveness, talk about the anger, talk about the anger, Don. Obama’s an Uncle Tom, too, Don. Talk about how Obama’s an Uncle Tom, Don. Talk about the anger. Are you talking about the anger, Don? Don, you’re an Uncle Tom.” Now, this is one woman standing behind him. Imagine if you had a hundred people, not saying exactly what that woman was saying but even more impacting the situation with compelling agitation proceeding from a revolutionary communist understanding. Then it changes everything. It changes the whole terrain—even with that number of organized forces, you’re changing the whole terrain. And then every force in society has to react differently.

Or think about this: Every time the masses rise up now, you have this situation where—here they come again—these “community leaders,” which is an updated version of what the ruling class and its mouthpieces used to call “Responsible Negro Leaders.” They are mobilized by the ruling class: religious figures of various kinds (not all of them, but too many of them), so-called community leaders, and others, including some who claim to be on the side of the people—they come out there in the situation where the people are angry, they’re in the street and they’re confronting the police, and these forces form a line, linking arms together, and they *face the people*. Now imagine if you had a force of even 30 people in that situation that came out there and said, “You motherfuckers are **facing the wrong way!** If you’re supposedly standing with the people, you should be forming a line opposing the **pigs**. Those are the ones harming the people. Turn around and face down the pigs!” You change the whole terms—and then the Don Lemons really have to “go to commercial!” You are affecting the terrain by having organized forces united around a revolutionary line. Even in a situation like that, it goes out to the world,

especially in this age of the internet. It goes all over the place. And then people do want to know: *Who are* those forces that did that? Who are those forces that stood with the people and stood between the police and the people, **facing the police and not allowing the police to attack the people?** Who are those people who, while they were doing this, said, “We’re doing this for revolution, to get rid of this brutality and murder, and all the other shit that people are going through in this country and around the world”? See, when you have organized forces moving like that, then you seriously impact the situation, and then you draw more forces. It’s not that they all join up with you right away, or that you should bring them fully into the ranks of revolution right away, before they even have a chance to get a basic understanding of what this revolution is all about. There’s work and struggle that has to go on. But you’re able to get this dynamic going where you’re growing, you’re wielding your organized forces for revolution in a way to significantly impact society and drawing people to you, and through struggle accumulating more organized forces...and then you are able to do more to affect the situation, once again through a lot of struggle. This is the dynamic we have to advance while, once again, not narrowing our sights to just that dynamic, but looking at the whole world and how we affect the whole world toward the goal of revolution. But this is why we have to be seriously working to accumulate organized forces for revolution and to wield those forces to impact the terrain, and accumulate and impact more, while not approaching that in a narrow and linear way (as if everything will just go forward, from advance to advance, in a simple straight line, directly out of what we’re doing).

This is the correct basis for the point that’s made, and for correctly understanding the point that’s made, in “On the Strategy for Revolution,” about the “thousands” and their relation to the “millions.” It’s not just some vague notion of “thousands of people” who sort of go “thumbs up” on the idea of revolution (or even are very enthusiastic about it). If you’re talking about leading millions, you need an organized force of thousands of people, a growing number of people, in the thousands, who are oriented, organized, trained and led to be an actual revolutionary force and pole of attraction—not some vague bunch of electrons floating around with no real solid core.

Separation of the Communist Movement from the Labor Movement, Driving Forces for Revolution

With this understanding and orientation, let’s look further at the question of forces for, and the strategic approach to, this revolution. First of all—briefly, but importantly—on the bedrock and driving forces. In the Outline on the new synthesis of communism, one of the components of this new synthesis that’s pointed to is the separation of the communist movement from the labor movement. This is a very important point.

In early Marxism, there was a more or less direct identification of the organized working class in large-scale production, and an increasingly unionized working class, as the main base and backbone force for a revolution, or for socialism (whatever people’s idea was of that). And you still find these various opportunists groups, Trotskyites and others, who

all the time want to talk about the labor movement, and the trade unions as somehow the basis for socialism. Now, I don't have time to go into everything about this, but it's important to recognize—and this has been pointed out in different writings and talks of mine—that, over time, there has been an increasing separation of the communist movement from the labor movement. Not to say that the proletariat, or the working class, that's employed, is not an important part of the proletarian revolution. That's not the point; the point is that it's not out of the dynamics of the trade unions, or even the workers in large-scale production, that the driving forces, and the main fighting forces, for revolution are going to come.

Now, if we look at this historically, we see that in the Chinese revolution Mao had to go directly up against this, because in the revolution in Russia, the first successful socialist revolution in history (leaving aside the short-lived and quickly crushed Paris Commune in 1871), even though Russia was a country largely made up of peasants (small farmers), there was a newly developing proletariat in the urban areas, and the Russian communists (the Bolsheviks, as they were called) did base the uprising, which kicked off the revolution in Russia, mainly in the urban areas among the workers in the factories, as well as some of the soldiers and sailors that were in the armed forces of the Russian government, but came over to revolution. But then this problem came more sharply to the fore: This was a largely peasant country and, unfortunately, the Bolsheviks hadn't done much work among the peasantry, they didn't really know much about the peasantry when the revolution started up. This posed some acute contradictions for them. That's not to say that the way they proceeded wasn't correct for the situation they were in, but this did involve some real problems. And then, when it came to the Chinese revolution, the communists there tried to carry out the revolution, at first, on the basis of the Russian revolutionary model, and they got crushed. They tried to have uprisings of the workers in the urban areas of China, when these workers made up a tiny percentage of the population. Well, that whole attempt was drowned in blood. This was in the 1920s. But it was out of that bitter experience that Mao came to a very important strategic understanding about the revolution in China: not only is this a majority peasant country, he said, but where we can actually get the struggle going, and not be crushed immediately—because the ruling powers don't allow any kind of serious opposition—is in the countryside, among the peasants, where, for a number of reasons, the reach of the government and the forces of repression of the government are weaker. He showed how they could build the revolutionary struggle based in the countryside—wage a revolutionary war there, relying mainly on the masses of peasants—and surround the cities; and then, eventually, take the cities militarily on the basis of having waged a protracted people's war in the countryside.

Of course, everybody in the communist movement, or among the so-called socialists, didn't stand up and go, "Hey, hey, what a great innovator! What a brilliant thinker that Mao is, what a tremendous strategist!" The Trotskyites, for example, insisted that this was a fake revolution. They argued that, since the peasantry constituted a petit bourgeois force—which a lot of them did, they were small owners in the agricultural sphere—therefore, these Trotskyites and others argued, this was not a real proletarian

revolution. And they actually opposed it—in many cases, they actually went over to the side of the counter-revolution, because they insisted this wasn't a real socialist revolution and, they claimed, it was wrecking the prospect of making a real socialist change. Even within the Chinese Communist Party—I don't have time to go into all of this now, but there was tremendous struggle, and Mao was largely isolated and essentially put under house arrest by the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party for about a year, around 1930, because the central leadership of the Party at that time still was trying to cling to the Russian model, and denounced what Mao was doing as some sort of renegade action on his part, which was going to lead to disaster. So, it was necessary to fight that through. But there you see a separation—in that circumstance, and that particular road of revolution, there was a definite separation of the communist movement from the labor movement.

Now, in a qualitatively different way—not with the same particular strategic approach, not with the same forms of struggle: we're not waging a protracted people's war, right from the beginning, as Mao led people to do in China, that's not what we're doing now, but in a different way, because of different material conditions—the same fundamental principles apply in this country. As noted earlier, Lenin pointed out that, with the development of capitalism into capitalist imperialism, you had what he called a split in the working class. You had a section that became somewhat bought off and bourgeoisified as a result of being bribed, as he put it, with the spoils of imperialist plunder in the colonial areas. And then you had what he referred to as the lower and deeper sections of the proletariat—a truly impoverished and severely exploited lower and deeper section of the proletariat—which was the social basis for a revolution that would lead to socialism, with the ultimate goal of communism. That understanding implied some separation of the communist movement from the traditional labor movement. But in a country like this one, owing to the actual material conditions and contradictions, this separation is, of necessity, even more pronounced. This is a society which is highly parasitic. As I spoke to earlier, you have broad sections of the middle classes, broadly speaking, including bourgeoisified workers, that derive real spoils from the international plunder and exploitation by imperialism. On the other hand, you not only have people in the lower and deeper sections of the proletariat, you also have people, many people, who have become somewhat de-proletarianized, technically speaking. What do I mean by de-proletarianized? There are millions of people, particularly in the inner cities, some of whom may work, at least at times, but many of whom are more or less permanently locked out of working at this stage of things, because of the way imperialism has developed. Look again at Baltimore—there used to be all these industrial jobs in that city. Yes, as Carl Dix has pointed out,⁵² if you were employed there, and you were Black, you worked in the shit jobs and you never got out of that situation. But there was industrial labor there on a big scale. All that is closing down, or has closed down. Or you can talk about Gary, Indiana, which at one point had the largest steel plant in the entire world, if I remember correctly, employing tens of thousands of people. Now, it's completely closed down, and Gary is like a ghost town. You have masses of people there, many of whom were formerly employed proletarians (or their parents or grandparents were employed proletarians) and now they are in a

situation where they sometimes are able to work, perhaps, but a lot of times they are not able to work. But they are a social force whose fundamental needs and interests can only be met through the proletarian revolution. They are a social force that has a lot of pulls on them in contradictory directions, because of the conditions of existence into which they've been forced, including pulls that lead away from the proletarian revolution in the short term; but they are in a fundamental situation of desperate conditions which, once again, can only be resolved and transformed through the proletarian revolution—understanding that not in some sort of “labor movement” sense, but as a struggle to overthrow capitalism and move on to a communist world, ultimately.

So here, there is a very significant separation of the communist movement from the traditional labor movement. Lenin once said that the living soul of Marxism is the concrete analysis of concrete conditions. Now, I have to say that this is one of those phrases, or formulations, that probably should be ranked very high up among the misused statements of Marxism. But it happens to be true, if correctly understood and applied. If you're looking at forces for revolution, and what are the contradictions that give rise to the actual basis for revolution, you do have to analyze the conditions concretely: what are the actual social relations in the society, and what are the social forces that meet—to put it this way—two basic criteria: 1) their most fundamental needs and interests can only be met by a communist revolution, a proletarian revolution in that sense; and 2) they are desperately in need of this revolution. That's where you have to look, with all the contradictions involved.

Among the peasants in China, there were all these contradictions that the communists had to deal with. You never get a bunch of people who are perfectly suited to the proletarian revolution! As Mao said, when he wanted to start up the people's war there in China, he went to what he called the “brave elements.” He said, I went to the people who were willing to fight and die. We are familiar with people like this, right? They fight and die for bullshit all the time. But Mao said, when I wanted to start the people's war, I went to people who weren't afraid to fight and die—and there were all kinds of contradictions, all kinds of problems. But that's where he went, because you have to start with people who are willing to do what needs to be done.

Well, I'm not saying that can be directly applied or is directly transferable to here, I'm just making the point that you can't be rigid and dogmatic. You have to think about the actual contradictions and work on those contradictions, creatively but scientifically—creatively, on the basis of science. So, for example, when they started up a peasant-based armed struggle in China, you can imagine what it was like leading those brave elements with a communist line. Everything was not perfect. There was a lot of struggle within the ranks of the revolution. It's not a matter of coming down on the masses, that's just the way it is. The existing system impacts and influences people, creates certain tendencies among them. What are you gonna do with that: hold your nose, or go to work on these things? That's the question. So, they went to the peasantry, and they got all kinds of tendencies that were problems. One of the most pronounced of these was what Mao referred to as the “roving rebel band” tendency. In other words, instead of

being a disciplined force, fighting for an actual revolution and carrying out policies that were appropriate to the particular conditions at the time, you had this tendency of people who just wanted to be out kind of roving around the countryside, fighting the enemy but also somewhat plundering the people. That's why, if you look at those rules of attention and points of discipline that they had for the people's army in China,⁵³ they didn't come up with those just because they sounded good, or with the notion that, maybe if we have good principles, people will think we're good people. No, they wrote them because, in many cases, people weren't doing the right thing. They had a lot of very poor people, poor peasants, who wanted to go grab up everything they could, even when they were fighting in the revolutionary ranks, because they were poor and desperate, not because they were greedy in some abstract sense.

So there are all these contradictions. You don't get a ready-made stereotype of a perfect proletarian revolution—you'll never get that—and if you wait for that, you will be waiting for some god that will never come. You have to analyze the actual social contradictions, the social forces, and then go to work on fighting through to lead people in the way that takes things in the direction of an actual resolution of the contradictions which is in the fundamental interests of the people. Now, in this society, you do have a lot of desperate people out there who do meet those two criteria that I mentioned, just a little while ago; but they've also got a lot of pulls on them, in a lot of different ways, and the system works on them. For example, you get an uprising in response to the police murdering someone, and you get a temporary gang truce, and then, boom!—maybe all it takes is one or two scores to settle, and then you've got that whole bad dynamic going again: “We gotta settle this score—you killed my cousin, or whatever”—this and that, back and forth. This is what we have to take responsibility for transforming—working and struggling to get people out of that and into the revolution. Nobody else is taking responsibility, nobody else can take responsibility, for leading this where it needs to go, in order for these masses, and the broad masses of the oppressed, to actually get emancipated. That's our responsibility. We can't overstep what we can do at any given time, and try to act like we can lead everything and do everything all at once, but this is our responsibility, in a fundamental sense and from the strategic standpoint, and we have to work to be able to influence and lead things as much as possible at any given point. We can't think that this is somehow somebody else's responsibility.

National Liberation and Proletarian Revolution

And then there's another strategic dimensions to things, which was also referred to in the Outline on the new synthesis: the relation between the national question and the proletarian revolution in the U.S.—the struggle of Black people and other oppressed peoples in the U.S. and the overall proletarian revolution, and the relation between those things. Now, I have to say that I've been continuing to read more about slavery, and I'm repeatedly struck by the fact that, to put it that way, *BASics* 1:1⁵⁴ sounds smarter and smarter the more I read about slavery in this country! I read that book by Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*, and there's another book, *The Empire of Cotton*,⁵⁵ by Sven Beckert, who makes a statement that's very similar to *BASics* 1:1. He

says that it was on the basis of cotton, which means on the backs of slaves, that America built its economy. And he demonstrates how that's so. This is reality. This is not just something we say to sound smart or to have a strong indictment of this system, or whatever—this is the actual reality of this country and its history, which has direct effects right down to today.

And what is still operating in this country as a very important contradiction is something that was pointed out two centuries ago by a French visitor to the U.S. who studied what was going on in this country, Alexis de Tocqueville. He was actually a conservative in the context of France, but he had some interesting observations and insights about the U.S. While he praised the American political system, he also talked about what we might call the “money grubbiness” of Americans (although he didn't use that particular phrase). In America, he said, everybody wants to know what any idea has to do with making money right away. So he had some insights about America and Americans. But his most important and strategically significant insight was his observation that in America, as he saw it, they have a really good system going there, but there's just one thing that could cause it all to come undone, and that's *the question of slavery*. He actually pinpointed what remains a very crucial contradiction in this country, this contradiction that's existed from the time of slavery down to today—this contradiction which cannot be resolved under this system, in a way that would put an end to oppression of Black people, and can only be resolved through a revolution which *puts an end to this system* and replaces it with a radically different system, on the road to abolishing all exploitation and oppression. This has everything to do with the following statement of mine that continually appears now on revcom.us:

There is the potential for something of unprecedented beauty to arise out of unspeakable ugliness: Black people playing a crucial role in putting an end, at long last, to this system which has, for so long, not just exploited but dehumanized, terrorized and tormented them in a thousand ways—putting an end to this in the only way it can be done—by fighting to emancipate humanity, to put an end to the long night in which human society has been divided into masters and slaves, and the masses of humanity have been lashed, beaten, raped, slaughtered, shackled and shrouded in ignorance and misery.

And, along with the role of Black people, as a pivotal and potentially very powerful force for the revolution that is needed, there is the oppression of large numbers of people of other nationalities, including millions of immigrants, who have a potentially very important role in this revolution as well. At the same time, there are a number of contradictions among and between these different sections of oppressed people—some of which are acutely posed now—and once again it is our responsibility to lead people to struggle through these contradictions, to forge unity on the basis of their common, and fundamental, interests, and to fully realize and give life to their potential as makers of revolution and emancipators of humanity.

The Strategic Importance of the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women

The oppression of women, and the fight for their emancipation, has to be recognized, in its full dimensions, as a strategic question—both within this country and in the world as a whole—something which can and must play a crucial role in the overall fight to uproot all oppression and exploitation and emancipate all of humanity. This is spoken to in *BASics* 3:22,⁵⁶ and it's elaborated on more fully in *Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution* Part 3,⁵⁷ where the point is made that one of the things that stands out in the world today is the way in which the contradictions that are bound up with the oppression of women are becoming more and more pronounced and acute. Part of this is owing to changes in the way in which globalized imperialism operates. Let's put it this way: The exploitation of the proletariat in many parts of the world is, to a very significant degree, the exploitation of women. That's not entirely the case, but it's very significantly so.

That is one objective factor which is clashing against some of the traditional forms of the oppression of women. With regard to these fundamentalist religious forces in the world, they are, at their very core, reactionary, murderous *patriarchal* forces—if one thing defines them, above all it is that—and one of the reasons this reactionary fundamentalism has become such a major phenomenon is this dramatic change in conditions, with so many women out in the world more, and being exploited as proletarians as a significant part of this. There has been the uprooting of much of the peasantry in many countries throughout the Third World—the hurtling of people into urban shantytowns. Here, again, what's emphasized in those 6 paragraphs at the beginning of Part 2 of *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity* comes into play: You can't know all that will result from all the different things happening in the world, including what comes about as a result of the workings of the system, and what other class forces are doing—you can't anticipate fully all the changes this might lead to—but you do have to work on all that, including what these other class forces are trying to do in working on the situation. Even the creation of larger middle class forces in many of these Third World countries—whether it's China, India, or elsewhere, even in many African countries that are so plundered by imperialism, you still have a significant development of middle classes in a way that you didn't have a few decades ago—even that kind of development is itself contradictory. On the one hand, it causes a problem for the communist revolution. The middle classes, we have to win them over, at least to a significant degree, but goddamn, it can be a real problem in the short run! You get my point—you get the spirit in which I'm saying that. In any case, this phenomenon of significantly increased middle strata in many Third World countries is contradictory, not only in a general sense but also specifically in regard to the woman question, because you have many more educated women, for example, in the middle strata, and this is sharply clashing up against a lot of traditional ways in which women are oppressed. One of the reasons why you have horrific things like these mass rapes in India and other outrages is because of these changes that are undermining and challenging a lot of the traditional forms of oppression, including specifically patriarchal oppression. But there hasn't been any kind of revolutionary transformation. So this

leads to a very explosive, a very volatile, situation, which gives rise in the short run to many horrific things.

And then you can look within this country: It has been pointed out that, with the changing nature of the economy, along with large numbers of women working in lower tier, lower paid jobs, you have a lot more women professionals, a lot more women in the middle class generally who are themselves working, many more women college graduates, and so on. Things like this are vastly different than a few decades ago. And this, too, has its very contradictory effects—all this personal empowerment, and “let me start up my entrepreneurial thing, or let me get into a business executive position and learn how to be just as cutthroat as the men,” on the one side. But, on the other side, this is clashing up against the traditional relations, and in this country, too, it is calling forth, or is a major factor in calling forth, all this fundamentalist madness, in this case *Christian* Fascist fundamentalism. For example, the whole assault on the right to abortion. And speaking of this, there is something we really should emphasize: These dark ages fanatics are not just going after abortion, they are moving very directly now in opposition to birth control as well. As kind of an aside, but an important one, this really illustrates what’s actually involved here. This point has been made before, but I want to really drive it home, that this opposition to birth control, as well as abortion, sharply illustrates how much this is about the *subjugation of women* and treating them as breeding machines, as well as sex objects, and how it’s not at all about “the killing of babies.”

But, to return to the main point here, the contradictions between significant social changes affecting women in particular, up against traditional expressions of the oppression of women, are assuming acute expression; and this question—of the oppression, and the struggle for the emancipation, of women—is objectively posing itself in a much more pronounced way. It needs to be taken up on a much greater scale, as a major part of the proletarian revolution—as an important fight in its own right, but also, in a fundamental sense, as a crucial part of the revolution whose ultimate goal is a communist world without any form of oppression or exploitation.

Look at the treatment of women around the world and in this country. You cannot live in this country without being constantly assaulted with the degradation of women. Along with the widespread sexual assault and sexual degradation of women, as well as attacks on something as basic as their right to determine when, or even whether, to have children, think about child-rearing. With the changes that have taken place, where a large number of births in this country involve single women, it’s obvious who’s taking responsibility for the child-rearing in those situations. And within families with a husband and wife, it is still overwhelmingly the women who are taking care of the children and the household, while many of them are also working outside the home. This is not just a superficial phenomenon—or just a “relic” of past relations in the family; it is linked to, and in an overall sense a part of, deeply-rooted patriarchal relations, which—going back to the point about the mode of production—are rooted in relations of commodity production and exchange, where the exploitation of the

commodity labor power is the means for accumulating capital, in competition with other capitals. All this is not incidental to this system—it cannot be abolished by reforms within this system or by getting more “enlightened people” in positions of authority. A scientific analysis, digging into the fundamental relations and dynamics of this system, will powerfully illustrate why it is not possible to abolish the oppression of women under this system.

A couple of thought experiments, as they say, can help drive home this fundamental point. Could you abolish the traditional family under this system? And if you abolished that family, how would you deal with things like the inheritance of private property? Or how would you end the oppression of women under this system while maintaining the family? These are questions for us to grapple with ourselves, but also to pose to other people. If you’re going to be serious about ending this oppression, let’s talk just about whether you could do those things under this system. The truth is, you cannot. But, again, rather than just saying that and affirming it like religious dogma, we need to do the work to really get into why that is so, in order to have the necessary grounding ourselves to be able to win many more people to that understanding, as a crucial part of bringing them forward to the overall revolution we need.

There is not going to be any communist revolution which tries to sidestep this question or puts it into a secondary, subordinate place. This must be recognized, not just out of moral conviction—although that, too—but out of strategic considerations. It obviously shouldn’t be a goal to have a revolution without the emancipation of women being a prominent aspect of that revolution, but in any case it isn’t possible—you’re not going to be able to get seriously on the road of a communist revolution, without this figuring prominently into everything you’re doing.

And, again, we don’t go by populism or by superficial phenomena. We don’t go by what most people are doing or thinking at any given time. We go by looking to and analyzing the more deeply rooted contradictions at the base of this system, of which the oppression of women is a very, very profound one. Right now there is not nearly the mass motion and struggle around this contradiction that there needs to be. But that does not mean that it’s not a deep-seated contradiction. It means that there are other contradictions involved that also have to be struggled through to bring forward the kind of mass struggle around this that there needs to be, and to link it with the overall revolutionary struggle whose ultimate goal is communism. And this is strategically very favorable. It’s bound up with a lot of contradictions which have aspects that are unfavorable in the short run, but in an overall sense, and strategically, this is very favorable. If you want to talk about a group in society whose fundamental need to be able to breathe, and to live as human beings, cannot be met other than through the communist revolution, there’s no group for whom that’s more true than the masses of women.

The United Front under the Leadership of the Proletariat

We have based ourselves on the strategic orientation of United Front under the Leadership of the Proletariat, and it is important to say that this remains the correct strategic orientation—even though the proletariat isn’t going to make the revolution, and even though the middle classes give us a big headache! In light of what I have spoken to so far, I think you can understand that statement in the sense and in the spirit in which it is made. The revolution that is needed will not come about through some kind of struggle of “class against class”—“the working class fighting back against the capitalist class”—in some narrow sense. The revolution that is needed is one that represents and embodies the interests of the proletariat in the largest sense—putting an end to all exploitation and oppression—and, proceeding in accordance with that orientation, it must unite broadly all those who suffer exploitation and oppression, all those who are outraged by this exploitation and oppression. Again, it’s not that employed workers and their struggle are irrelevant or unimportant. Look, for example, at the strikes and demonstrations at places like McDonald’s and Walmart. These are actually among lower tier workers, and they are in fact important. We do need to relate to them—work to have them become part of the movement for revolution, or to bring growing numbers of the masses who are involved in these struggles closer to and into the ranks of this revolution. But that’s not the strategic basis on which the revolution can be, and is going to be, made. Here again is the point on the separation of the communist movement from the labor movement. At the same time, as I spoke to earlier, there are broad strata in society that have to be won, to active involvement, or to support, or at least to friendly neutrality, if we’re not going to fail and be crushed in the attempt at revolution. And, as for the most bedrock forces, the driving forces and main fighting forces for this revolution—which do number in the millions and tens of millions potentially—if they’re not organized into a revolutionary force and led by a correct strategy, even if they find themselves desperately rising up, but they are without support from large numbers of people from other parts of society, they will just be millions of people who are crushed and pulverized. So we have to understand that, as Lenin once put it, we have to go among all sections of the people in building this proletarian revolution—and not just go among those we can more readily identify as more urgently needing, or more fundamentally needing, this revolution. Again referring to a formulation by Lenin, we have to be, not trade union secretaries of the reformist struggle for better conditions under this system, but “tribunes of the people”—going among all sections of society, exposing the system and bringing out, in a living, scientific way, the need for revolution and what that revolution is aiming for. Otherwise, what we’re looking forward to is the continuation of what *is*, presently, and the further development of what *is* presently, which right now is very unfavorable, a very unfavorable social and political polarization.

You have all these reactionary forces tied in with powerful sections of the ruling class; they show up as “Oath Keepers” in places like Ferguson, arming themselves as potential forces of suppression of the uprising of the oppressed masses. They’re in Texas and Arizona, chasing down immigrants and carrying out other reactionary actions. They’re

in other parts of the country as well. And these forces, if there were any attempt at revolution, would be organized forces, and actually armed forces, working hand-in-hand with the state, to crush this revolution. When it comes down to the struggle for the seizure of power, as is pointed out in Part 2 of *Birds and Crocodiles*, there will be a struggle, a civil war, between two sections of the people—this will almost certainly be a significant part of the struggle for the seizure of power. We shouldn't think that it is just going to come down to the masses of people against the state. There are gonna be these reactionary forces in the field. But, on the other hand, we shouldn't acquiesce to and consign ourselves to an unfavorable polarization. We need to be working, as we've said many times, on repolarizing as much as possible—winning as much as possible of the middle strata (and other forces which are not the bedrock basis for this revolution) to active involvement, to support, or at least to friendly neutrality toward this revolution.

Here is a point that's been made before: You have this kind of pyramid, with the ruling class at the top, and on one side of this are openly reactionary and fascistic forces, like all those clowns—and worse than clowns—competing even now for the Republican nomination. Jesus Christ! Donald Trump, 75% of the news these days is about Donald Trump. But there's a reason for that. Not just one section of the ruling class, but the ruling class as a whole feels it's important to have this atmosphere of anti-immigrant hysteria, and other reactionary fascistic kinds of programs, put forward as part of "legitimate political discourse." And the more openly reactionary and fascist section of the ruling class, on one side at the top of this pyramid, is very aggressively pushing its program, while the other side is continually conciliating with that—and even when they fight back, they mainly fight back to conciliate and compromise more. Then you go down the two sides of the pyramid, and you get the different social bases in society: you get those forces in society that more spontaneously gravitate toward the ruling class programs and policies that are promoted as "liberal" or "progressive"; and, on the other side, you have those who more spontaneously gravitate toward openly reactionary fascistic-type programs and policies. Well, we have to repolarize this to a very great degree—and we not only have to win over large numbers of those who are presently "under the wing" of the section of the ruling class presenting itself as "liberal," or "progressive" (as embodied, more or less, in the Democratic Party); we also have to win over, or politically neutralize, as much as possible, those who now look to the section of the ruling class that is more openly reactionary and fascistic (as represented by the core of the Republican Party). It is important to be clear on this: There are decisive and deep-going contradictions around which there are very real differences within the ruling class, in terms of how to deal with those contradictions—and the sharpening of those differences, to the point where it becomes increasingly difficult for the ruling class as a whole to maintain relative unity in its ranks and continue ruling in a way that maintains the "normal functioning" of its system, is one of the key elements in the development of a revolutionary situation—but the coming civil war is not going to take shape in terms of the "liberal section" of the ruling class waging some kind of all-out fight against the fascist section of the ruling class. That's not how it's gonna go—and that's not the situation, and the polarization, that we want and need. The alignment in society has to be radically transformed—winning growing numbers of people, not just among the basic

masses but more broadly as well, away from a position of subordination and “allegiance” to one or another section of the ruling class and to the system that this ruling class as a whole represents and enforces.

These things are—here comes that word again—complex. An actual revolution might involve a significant element of fighting against attempts to undermine or to eliminate certain aspects of bourgeois-democratic rights (things like the right to protest); and we, as scientific communists, have to know not only how to correctly wage but to lead that aspect of the fight, without allowing it to be, or to remain, on the terms of bourgeois democracy (just preserving the bourgeois system with the rights you’re supposed to have under this system). In the book *Democracy: Can’t We Do Better Than That?* the point is made that the contradiction between the professions of bourgeois democracy and the reality of what it means to live under what is in fact the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie—that contradiction is a constant source of two things: a constant source of struggle, of resistance and rebellion, against the way in which the ruling class and its state constantly trample on supposed rights under this system; and, at the same time, a constant source of regenerating illusions (“If we could just have our rights, if everybody could just be treated equally,” and so on and so forth). Well, we have to know how to handle that contradiction in a way that doesn’t reinforce bourgeois democracy—which is, in reality and in essence, bourgeois *dictatorship*—but instead leads toward the overthrow of the bourgeois (capitalist) system that this dictatorship maintains and enforces. Here enters in another important point from Lenin, which we have to grasp firmly: Lenin emphasized that a socialist revolution is not made in a simpleminded way where one army lines up somewhere and says, “we’re for socialism,” and another army lines up and says, “we’re for imperialism.” Nothing that simpleminded will ever lead to a revolution. There is, and will be, all kinds of complexity in the field, including forces who are all over the map and going this way and that.

Now, speaking of maps, this relates to the point I’ve made before, using the metaphor of a multi-colored and multi-layered map—although I don’t know if people have understood that metaphor, and what it’s getting at, correctly. That metaphor is speaking to social contradictions and contradictory social phenomena and trends. What it’s getting at is that there are different ways that people in society can be identified and “categorized”—for example, population by gender, population by “race,” population by income and social status, identification of people according to whether they hold different beliefs, and so on—and these things both overlap and separate people out. For example, you have in the middle strata, or particularly in the educated middle strata, a growing move toward secularism. A lot of atheists are coming out of the closet these days. And this growing phenomenon of secularism among educated middle strata is definitely a positive development. But, they have a lot of shit that keeps them away from the revolution. You can think of what is represented by that skeptic Michael Shermer, to whom I referred to earlier—on the one hand, opposition to religious obscurantism and a fairly passionate advocacy of critical thinking and rational thought, but on the other hand a striking blindness regarding the actual reality of capitalism and its consequences, and what can only be described as a kind of shamefaced apology for the horrors that are embodied in

the history of this country and the development of capitalism here, including the reality and role of slavery in all this. And, at the same time, among this section of the middle class in particular, there is at this point all the relativism, as well as anti-communism, with which we are all too familiar. This is very sharply dissected in the Interview with Ardea Skybreak, where she speaks about the contradictory attitudes that are common among these people: Well, we kinda want radical change, but, uhhhh, we kinda don't. But there is this positive development toward secularism, as well as some other positive sentiments and inclinations among these strata.

Then you've got the people who are the real bedrock base for this revolution, and who most desperately need this revolution, but who are, more than ever right now, steeped and mired in a lot of religious obscurantism.

So, if you have a simpleminded approach, you're never going to get anywhere. All you can do is add up the negative parts: We can't get to the middle strata because they're all caught up in this, "Eh, we kinda do, but, eh, we kinda don't; oh, and my life's not so bad, personally, if you don't mind my saying so, and even if you do"; and, on the other hand, you have masses who are, yes, terribly oppressed, but they're overwhelmingly caught up in religion right now, and this is a real chain on them. You could look at that and conclude that we're never gonna get anywhere. But if you are being scientific—if you are applying dialectical materialism, in a living way—you recognize that these are contradictions we're faced with, and the question is: How are we going to work on them, in which direction are we working on these contradictions? How do we carry out work and struggle so that, as Mao put it, we mobilize all positive factors? Not by making them up in our imaginations—or by trying to "add up" the positive elements in a linear and mechanical way, while ignoring the negative side of things—but by working on the actual contradictions with an approach that, yes, unites with and builds on the positive aspects, and at the same time transforms and repolarizes people, and *in that way* combines all positive factors. These are all the kinds of things you have to deal with if you actually want to get out from this horror show that masses of people are forced to live under, day after day, generation after generation.

Now, I referred to this earlier, and it's a very marked feature of the society right now—the fact that today, as compared to, say, 50 years ago, this society is much more rigidly divided into different strata and much more enclaved. In other words, there is a widening and hardening of class and social divisions, not just along "racial lines," or in terms of national oppression, but also more broadly in terms of different social groups in society. There's an interesting book in this regard called *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*,⁵⁸ by Robert D. Putnam. He goes into various dimensions of how different things are now than they were 50 years ago or so. He talks about a city he grew up in, which is on Lake Erie in Ohio. It used to be that there were differences among people there—there were a few Black people in the town, but there were also class differences among the majority white people—but, even with these differences, the people intermingled more. They went to the same schools, they even socially hung out together. Now, he says, there's a strip of land that's miles long, along the lake, and these

nouveau riche-type people, from the high-tech industries, and so on, live there in gated communities. And then you have a lot of people, mainly white people in this case, living in miserable conditions, maybe only a mile away. This is another phenomenon which, strategically, is favorable but poses a lot of contradictions in the short run. One of the reasons it's strategically favorable is suggested by the subtitle of this book, *The American Dream in Crisis*, because the "American Dream" is what we could call a "cohering myth" of this society, an ideological glue that holds it together, and a key prop for the legitimacy of this system in this country. In other words, the idea that if you work hard, you can make it, or at least your kids will do better than you did. And, for a lot of people now, including a lot of white people, that's not true any more. How many people who are 30 years old, or even older, are living at home now? Who the hell ever heard of that before?! When I was growing up, nobody wanted to live at home when they were in their 30s—not even their 20s! But this is a significant social phenomenon now. If you look back to the period coming off of World War 2, at least for many white people, even if you were in the working class, you could make a jump into the middle class by going to college. A lot of people went, in one leap, into a fairly significant middle class position off of going to college. That is not what's going on now, on anything like the same scale, and that's significant. There's about a quarter to a third of the population that's doing very well, economically, is even very well off compared to earlier periods. But there are large sections of people for whom wages and earnings have stagnated, and they even find it difficult to get a job a lot of times. This is a phenomenon we should understand more deeply. But it is really important, from the strategic standpoint, the degree to which the "American Dream" loses its grip, ceases to be quite such a powerful force as a cohering myth and a prop for the legitimacy of the whole system.

Now, once again, this relates to what is being gotten at, with the metaphor of the multi-layered, multi-colored map—understanding that, again, to refer to contradictory trends among different sections of the people, as well as in society overall. There are definitely negative aspects that go along with this undermining of the "American Dream." In some expressions, it drives people into openly reactionary and fascist-type positions and organizations, while in some other cases it just leads people into demoralized ways of life. One expression of that is the growing phenomenon of people, including people throughout rural areas and in small towns, addicted to drugs like oxycontin—pain-killing drugs—and then going on to heroin. But, at the same time, there are positive factors which we should also recognize and work on, from a strategic standpoint, toward revolution. It's all to the good, strategically, if the "American Dream" myth is undermined. It doesn't immediately produce all positive results by any means; but, strategically, it's a favorable factor, and one we have to actively work on, in moving things toward revolution.

Youth, Students and the Intelligentsia

In this connection, we have to recognize the important potential role of youth. It's true that, right now, a lot of the youth are not in a very good place—or it's hard to tell what place they're in, because you can't get their faces out of their phones! Nonetheless, it's

not the case that they never think about anything bigger than their apps. In any case, they still have the qualities of youth. And, in a minute, I'm going to come back to the George Carlin point that I referred to earlier. There is definitely a struggle to be waged with youth, and the potential for something positive to come out of this, because youth are at that crossroads in life where the question of what your life is going to be about does pose itself, objectively, and many do wrestle with that question. But right now, as I spoke to earlier, even the better parts of this are mainly funneled and channeled into making your way within the world as it is, or giving up on doing so. So there is a big struggle to be waged with these youth—to inspire them, but also to rupture them out of the pit and the rut into which they're cast and maintained. And—here comes the George Carlin point: He's not gonna say that the youth should turn against their parents, the way they did in the 1960s, is he? Well, yes, he is. But the way youth turned against their parents in the 1960s was not just to consign their parents to the garbage dump, as hopelessly backward and reactionary. It was to **break** with the way the parents were conditioning them to just go along with the way things were, and it involved struggling like hell with your parents about these big questions in the world, and to try—not without any success—to win them over to a significant degree, the parents and the older generation. Of course, we do have to recognize that things now are not exactly the same—things are not posed the same way, and they're not spontaneously nearly as favorable as the coming together of things, the conjuncture, that turned into the '60s movement—but I still think there is a question of the role of youth here, because youth are not so riveted into the way things are—and we have to think creatively and work creatively to find the ways to bring that forward, to bring forward the positive elements in that and to further develop them.

Speaking about parents today, particularly parents in the middle strata, there's another thing you never had back in the day—at least not on anything like the scale on which it exists now—this phenomenon called “helicopter parents,” hovering all around the affairs of their kids, even when they go off to college. You hear all these professors complaining because, if the professors have the nerve to give the kid a B+ instead of an A, the parents contact them and complain about the grade they gave their kid. This kind of shit has got to go: What kind of self-respecting youth wants to have “helicopter parents” hovering around?

This is going to involve a lot of struggle—it's not going to happen just because youth are youth. The youth, too, are shaped by the larger things going on in the world at any given time, and some of the youth, in certain periods, can be quite bad. So, it's not some kind of romantic idea about youth, but I do think there's still that contradiction of being at that crossroads of life, objectively, and that is something we have to think about, and work on, from a strategic standpoint.

And, within the broader category of youth, there is the particularity of students, including students at the more elite colleges. There is a reason why, historically, whenever there's been any kind of radical movement in society, or revolutionary movement, students have been a significant part of and played a significant role in that.

But my sense is that we have not put ourselves, in the way we need to, to figuring out, and carrying out, a systematic approach to bringing forward a radical student movement and a real revolutionary and communist current within that. We have not applied ourselves, the way we need to, to dealing with the contradictions involved in that. There are the qualities of youth, and the qualities of students—wanting to search out things for themselves, not wanting to be told what to think, and so on—there are all those kinds of things, which are not entirely negative by any means, even with all this relativist nonsense going on. From a strategic standpoint, we certainly shouldn't have an attitude that critical thinking, even when it's turned against us—that is, even when it leads to hard questions about what we are setting out to do—is negative in its main aspect. But we also shouldn't tail this. We have to know how to work on these things. As a movement, as a party, we have to develop a more systematic approach to this. You can't go from no radical student movement to a mass radical student movement in one week or one month—although it does need to be emphasized that there are situations when a great deal needs to be, and can be, achieved in a short, telescoped period of time, with systematic work. In fact, this is one of those times, and we have to put ourselves to it. We have to develop concretely, and actually implement, a way of going to work on this, because I will say again that there will never be a revolution without a significant component of a radical student movement, within which the pole of revolution and communism is a significant and growing force: both a force of attraction and also a force that's contending within that student movement, as well as in the broader society, fighting to win people to communist revolution. I'm going to talk about this some more when I get to the question of leadership, but people who work in the realm of ideas and who propagate ideas in various ways have a disproportionate influence—an influence greater than their numbers—in terms of how they can affect society. This is something that can be wielded on behalf of one program or another—ultimately one class and one system or another. And we have to go to work on developing a force that's actively wielding this ability and this influence for the revolution we need.

What goes along with that, as much as we can sardonically laugh about our frustration with how things are now with academia and the intelligentsia—all the petit bourgeois predispositions, predilections, and everything that drives you crazy, the individualism and relativism, and all the rest of it with the intelligentsia—we cannot fail to recognize both the need and the importance of what's been referred to as the “transfer of allegiance” of a significant section of the intelligentsia, understanding that to include people in the arts as well as people in academia, and others. What does that mean, the “transfer of allegiance”? It means that, instead of going along with—and doing things that, at least objectively, serve to reinforce—the existing system, people come over to the side of revolution and communism and wield their intellectual and artistic abilities to influence people in that direction and contend through polemics and in other ways against lines that actually serve the existing system. So you need this “transfer of allegiance.” You need it among the intelligentsia broadly. And you need ferment in the arts—with, again, a radical and communist pole contending within that. Even as the current situation can be very frustrating in this regard, for the reasons I have referred to, we have to have a systematic approach to this, guided by an overall strategic orientation.

Not that we're going to win over all the artists, or all the academics and people in the intelligentsia as a whole, by any means, in the short run. But there does need to be work, to actually bring around to the position of revolution and communism, a significant section of the intelligentsia, broadly understood, even if this is quantitatively a small percentage at this point. Yes, we know—we have heard from these people all this stuff like, “You have some good things to say, but I really don't like the way you make so much out of one person all the time.” Well, we have to take that on, straight up, in a compelling way. And we have to work through these contradictions: What is this about, what is going on in the world, and what is people's responsibility in relation to that?

This goes back to a point I made in *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy*⁵⁹ about Bob Dylan—back in the day, not so much now. I made the point: Look, if we had tried to sit down with Bob Dylan and tell him everything about what he should do with his art, it would have turned out very badly. Not only because of his individualist streak, but for larger reasons. But, if we had been in a position to sit down and talk and struggle about the world, that might have led to some very positive things. And some people were struggling with him, by the way—people in Progressive Labor (PL), people in the CP (Communist Party)—they were doing a lot of work with him, a lot of very bad work with bad lines. And, along with his own individualism, that contributed a lot to the sour place he ended up in, becoming cynical very quickly, writing the song “My Back Pages” which is almost explicitly an anti-communist song.

I don't want to get off into all that right now, but the point is that we should be engaging and struggling, in a good way, with people, first and fundamentally, about the world. “OK, let's talk about the world.” We don't do this enough: “What do you think about what's going on in the world? Do you see problems in the world? What do you think the problems are? What do you think they stem from? What do you think the answer to that is?” “Well, I don't know.” “Well, then, let's talk about it.” Now, if people want to discuss their particular approach to art, or something like that, of course we should do that; but we should have a very broad approach to this, as opposed to a narrow one and an instrumentalist one—just trying to get people to be an instrument of what we are doing at any given time, just trying to get them to do things without discussing the bigger questions with them. We should be struggling with people about the world. I remember when I met with one artist a number of years ago, and we had talked about a lot of things—including the point I made about James Brown in the Dialogue (we found we both had that same position on James Brown, going way back, so that was a good thing: “Don't come around, James, with all that ‘I'm Black and I'm proud’ bullshit, we know what you've been doing all this time, fronting for the powers-that-be”). Anyway, after we talked about that for awhile, then this artist said, very sincerely: “You know, I'd really like to produce a great work.” And I responded, “Well, that's not really something I set out to do, to produce great works; I just set out to meet great needs.”

I think this is the kind of thing we should be talking about with artists, as well as people more generally. There are a lot of great needs in the world, needs of humanity, to put it in broad terms. Not that everything you do in the realm of art has to have some direct

political point, or something; but, in an overall sense, we should struggle with people over what are the problems in the world, what are the needs of the masses of people, and how do you contribute to doing something about that. And, of course, we should struggle with people that they should be won to communism, and they should stop talking so much about how they don't like it when we put forward one person, Bob Avakian, as the leader we need, and instead actually go about familiarizing themselves in a serious way with what BA is about, what he has brought forward, and what that means for the masses of humanity. That should be part of an overall process, because we do have to win over growing numbers of people in the arts, and in the intelligentsia broadly, to revolution and communism. This is important in two senses: 1) it's important that in the realm of art there be people producing works which actually are doing what I'm talking about, including some which explicitly come from a communist standpoint, although not only that; and 2) people in the intelligentsia can do a lot of good and important work. I referred to this book *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*. Now the author of that book is not a communist, by any stretch of the imagination, and he is discussing things fully within the framework of the existing system; but people who have been able to develop intellectual skills can do a lot of good and important things, and we need them to do that. We need to have a very broad embrace, very wide arms, on the basis of being firmly grounded in the necessary solid core.

Struggling Against Petit Bourgeois Modes of Thinking, While Maintaining the Correct Strategic Orientation

While, in everything we do, we need to unite as broadly as possible—proceeding in a way that gives expression to a broadness of mind and generosity of spirit—there is, at the same time, the need to struggle against and ideologically combat not only the direct and indirect influence of the ruling bourgeoisie itself, but also, very importantly, the influence of lines and programs that are, in a broad sense, representative of the middle strata (the petite bourgeoisie). Another way to put this is that a lot of what we'll be doing, particularly in the ideological realm, will be waging class struggle which is not directly against the bourgeoisie, but against ideas which are representative of the petite bourgeoisie but keep people chained to the current system and the rule of the bourgeoisie. This is something Engels pointed out a long time ago. He said, Marx and I spent very little time struggling with direct representatives of the bourgeoisie. Most of our struggles were carried out, he said, with people—phony socialists and other opportunists—who were speaking not in the name of the bourgeoisie, but in the name of other sections of society, even at times in the name of the proletariat, in the name of socialism, and so on.

This will be true in general—that, in order to win people to a correct understanding of the world, a lot of your time and effort has to go into waging struggle against ideas that are more representative of, will more find their home among, sections of the middle strata, rather than the ruling class—even though, ultimately, they keep people chained to this system and to the rule of the bourgeoisie.

And here's the tricky part again: We have to develop our ability to do this, and do it in a good way, while not letting go of, not losing sight of, but in fact maintaining, the strategic orientation of winning over as much of the middle strata as possible, both in more immediate and particular struggles but, above all and fundamentally, in terms of the whole revolutionary process—maintaining and applying the strategic revolutionary orientation of United Front under the Leadership of the Proletariat.

The “Two Maximizings”

Part of this strategy is embodied in the formulation: the “two maximizings.” This refers, in basic terms, to maximizing resistance and the development of a revolutionary movement and organized revolutionary forces among the basic masses, and among the middle strata. This goes back to the strategic point about the encirclement. But, in more immediate terms, the fact is that you are not going to bring forward masses of people in the struggle against this system, including those most desperately oppressed and in need of revolution, if it's a self-contained thing—contained just to them—if they feel that the rest of society is lined up against them, not just that the powers-that-be are against them, but all the other sections of society are against them as well. And on the positive side, to the degree that people come forward from among the middle strata to join with the basic masses, as we've seen happening recently, it both is heartening to the basic masses in the immediate sense, but also gives them a sense that maybe bigger change could be possible. I was thinking about this in looking at the revcom.us website recently when it posted responses of different people to that statement I read earlier about something of unprecedented beauty arising out of unspeakable ugliness and the role of Black people in relation to making revolution. One young Black guy was quoted as saying, “I agree with this—it is really heavy. It has all the ugliness right there, and it says that can bring out the beauty. I think something beautiful I've seen is more white people backing up Black people. That is beautiful.... We do need a revolution, but how?” This is the kind of thing that not only heartens people but gets them to thinking about the possibility of really big change. But that's never going to fully develop, in the way it needs to, if the people who are kept on the bottom of society are isolated among themselves, no matter how heroically they stand up and struggle. At the same time, from an overall strategic perspective, middle strata people, or as many of them as possible, have to be won, not only to be supportive of things in a general sense, but to be part of the movement for revolution and, in more immediate terms, part of important resistance against the crimes of this system. And, besides just having these two sections of the people in motion, we need to develop the “positive synergy,” so to speak—the positive back and forth dialectical reinforcement—between these two sections, the ways in which they positively reinforce each other and give each other a sense of strength and a sense of the larger picture and the basic relations: we need to maximize that, as well.

A lot of opportunists who look at oppression, and the struggle against oppression, as a cottage industry (or, in the parlance of the times, as a start-up business), get very upset when people from other strata, or other social groupings, encroach upon their territory, as they see it: “This is our struggle, you have nothing to do with this and no right to say

anything about it!” But the masses of people, who don’t have capital invested in their own oppression, are very heartened when they see people involved from other strata. They know that this means something significant. They want more people like that involved. They don’t want people coming in and ordering them around—acting like they’re idiots who don’t know anything and telling them what to do in that kind of way. But they do want people—more and more people—to join in, because they have a basic understanding, even if not a fully developed scientific understanding, that the more that’s the case, the more favorable things are going to be, even in fighting against their immediate oppression, and all the more so as they get a broader and deeper strategic perspective.

So this is a very important principle, these “two maximizings”—getting these two sections of people in motion, and mutually supporting and mutually reinforcing each other. Here again is Mao’s formulation: mobilizing all positive factors, and mobilizing as well the positive interaction, even with all the contradictions that are involved in all this.

The “5 Stops”

Here I want to talk about the “5 Stops” that appear regularly now on the revcom.us website. This is not just, “Oh, here are 5 good things to talk about, or 5 things that are wrong in society,” in some general sense. This is a strategic formulation. If you go back to “Some Principles for Building A Movement for Revolution,” these “5 Stops” represent concentrations of major social contradictions; and they are contradictions which are not resolvable under this system. Think about this: The genocidal persecution of Black and Brown people, police brutality and murder and mass incarceration; the oppression of women, and oppression based on gender and sexual orientation; what’s happening to the environment; the hounding and terrorizing of immigrants; and the wars of occupation and crimes against humanity being carried out under the domination of this system— all these are major concentrations of social contradictions, contradictions which are not resolvable under this system, certainly not in a way that would be in the interests of the masses of people, or ultimately humanity as a whole. So that’s the point: They represent concentrations of major social contradictions, and they are contradictions that this system cannot resolve in the interests of the masses of people—both things are very important, they have strategic implications. It’s not just, “Oh, they’re concentrations of social contradictions— isn’t that interesting?” But because they are, and as a reflection of the fact that they are, concentrations of major social contradictions, they speak to what a lot of people are concerned about in one way or another, or to one degree or another. Not everybody is concerned about all 5 of them, but probably everybody is concerned about at least one of them, and some people are probably concerned about all of them. (It’s kind of like that Lincoln statement—or was it Bob Dylan?: You can fool some of the people all of the time; you can fool all of the people some of the time; but you can’t fool all of the people all of the time. Sorry, I couldn’t resist that detour!) Anyway, this is the point: These “5 Stops” speak to things that, in one way or another, to one degree or another, people are concerned about, because they are concentrations of major social contradictions.

Way back in the days of the RU (Revolutionary Union), we used to have this formulation: develop fighters on one front into fighters on all fronts. And we should go further and say: strategically develop them into fighters for the whole thing. But there is an important point to this: People get drawn into motion by their concern about one thing or another, but people are not closed-minded—everybody's not closed-minded and narrow-minded. Many people don't say, "Oh, this is my issue, I don't care about that other stuff"—not everybody thinks like that, even though some opportunists do. In fact, a lot of people don't think like that. As they learn about other things, many people get interested, they develop a broader vision, as they come in contact with people who bring this to them. This is an important part of why I have been giving emphasis to Lenin's point about going among all sections of the people. There is the "apartheidization" of this society, but we can't accept that. We have to knock that down. We have to send parents whose kids have been killed by the police onto the college campuses to talk to students: "This is the reality of what goes on out here." It's not that most students, when they hear about that, don't care. But right now, for the most part, they don't know anything about it. And, look, I hate to say it, but a lot of them have had their thinking conditioned not only by the ruling class in a general sense, but also by other people. I'm sorry, but since the 1980s, there have been more than a few Reaganites running around among the basic masses, people whose outlook is very similar to Ronald Reagan, in terms of an overwhelming focus on just getting rich, in ruthless competition with other people. You see it in hip-hop—"get rich or die trying"—all this kind of crap. Now, of course, that is not all there is to hip-hop; but that kind of culture has been promoted by the ruling class, because it serves their interests. And it's had an effect, not just on the basic masses, but on a lot of these middle strata people: their view of the basic masses is, to a significant degree, influenced by and filtered through that culture. They don't know the basic people, but what they know, or think they know, is filtered through that culture. So this is something we have to combat, bringing to people an understanding of the actual relations in society and how this affects people.

We have to go among all sections of the people. Through work and struggle with people, we have to enable them to develop from people concerned about, and fighting on, one front into fighters on all fronts—and, fundamentally, fighters for the whole thing, to get rid of this, all these "5 Stops," and everything that's concentrated there in terms of the whole system which gives rise to this repeatedly, spews it forth like a sewer backing up.

So this has strategic importance, these "5 Stops." People should understand how this relates to our strategic orientation of United Front under the Leadership of the Proletariat, because it's not just a question of different interest groups: "Oh, you are interested in this, and you over there are interested in that, and somehow we can sort of add that all up"—"intersectionalism" that will somehow add up to a proletarian revolution. No. There needs to be the solid core running through all this. But these "5 Stops" are areas of concern for people and, if you want to use a somewhat homely phrase (or metaphor), they are on-ramps for people to get involved with the struggle, and to connect with people who are concerned about many different things, as well as people

who are concerned about the whole thing. I'm not sure to what degree these "5 Stops" have really been understood in the way they should be. Why is it we keep having them on the website so prominently? People should think about that: What are the strategic implications of that?

The Two Mainstays

And then we have what the Party has identified as the "two mainstays" of its overall work to build a movement for revolution, and the Party as its leading core. What do we mean by "mainstays"? We mean the basic things that are the ongoing foundation for all the work we do, the foundation on which we carry out our overall work to build for an actual revolution. There is the first mainstay, the leading edge of our overall work: the promotion and popularization of the new synthesis of communism and the leadership of Bob Avakian (BA). This now takes a concentrated form in the BA Everywhere campaign, [60](#) a campaign of massive fund-raising to project the new synthesis of communism and the leadership of BA broadly, with major impact in all parts of society.

In the Interview with Ardea Skybreak, the importance of the promotion and popularization of the new synthesis of communism and the leadership of BA, as concentrated now in the BA Everywhere campaign, is emphasized. And here are some more questions: How should we understand the importance of this—the BA Everywhere campaign, and beyond that this first mainstay as a whole—the importance of this overall in building a movement for revolution, with the Party as its leading core, the importance in terms of carrying out the strategic orientation of United Front under the Leadership of the Proletariat? And what does this have to do specifically with the aspect of Leadership of the Proletariat? Why is this one of the "two mainstays"—why, in fact, do we say that this is, that it must be, the leading edge of our overall work to build the movement for revolution and the Party as its leading core?

In this connection, I want to talk about some formulations that we've developed in relation to this mainstay and the work around it. The first is what we call the role of Huxleys. When Darwin came forward with the theory of evolution, as you can imagine, it was very controversial. In fact, Darwin held off, for some time, in actually publishing *The Origin of Species* because he not only wanted to work things through and get everything right, but also because he knew that a shit storm would come when he put this out, that he would be attacked by all kinds of religious forces and other people who were upholders of tradition. For a number of reasons, Darwin himself, while he was prepared for that, was not in the best position to go out broadly in society and fight for what was represented by what he'd brought forward. But this guy Thomas Huxley, who was a scientist himself, recognized the importance of what Darwin had done, what a breakthrough it was, what a revolution it was in human understanding. So Huxley said, I'm gonna go out and fight for this, I'm gonna go everywhere. He went among the intelligentsia, he went among the poor people in London—he went everywhere, and explained to people what this theory of evolution was and why it was so important. And he was not ashamed to call himself—in fact, he very boldly called himself—Darwin's

bulldog, taking on all comers who attacked the theory of evolution.

Analogously, we have people whose role is to be out in the world, propagating and fighting for this new synthesis and the leadership that has brought forward this new synthesis, acting as pit bulls in fighting for this. We know that this is controversial. It's going up against a lot of things that people are invested in—people who want to play around the edges of the system but keep everything going the way it is, in fundamental terms—with attitudes like: “Well, we kind of want some kind of changes, but uhhhh, not too much”; or “this is our turf here, we're pursuing our petty interests by pimping off the oppression of people and the fact that people are rising up against it, so we don't want you to bring that stuff in here that might do away with all this, because then what's gonna happen with the capital we've invested in this?” Our Huxleys have to take on the responsibility to go everywhere, propagating and fighting for the new synthesis and the leadership that has brought forward this new synthesis, not only in order to take on the petty opportunist attacks on this, but for the more positive reason that people really need to know that there is a science that has been further developed through this new synthesis of communism that people can take hold of and fight consciously to achieve their own emancipation, and the emancipation of people everywhere, and advance to a whole new world and a whole new future for humanity.

The other formulation—which speaks to the role of people far beyond just these relatively few Huxleys who are focusing on this, in this kind of concentrated way—is drawn from the Chinese revolution and in particular the Cultural Revolution in socialist China. And that is the role of what they called “barefoot doctors.” Before the revolution triumphed in China in 1949, the masses of people, particularly the great majority of people in the countryside in China, did not have access to any kind of health care, even basic health care. So, along with developing more doctors, they also trained millions of people who were called barefoot doctors, people from among the peasants who were trained, not in very sophisticated, elaborate medicine that takes a long time to learn (like, say, brain surgery) but in the very basic elements of health care. And then these barefoot doctors were dispatched throughout the countryside to, for the first time, bring basic health care to the masses of people. Using that as kind of an analogy, or metaphor, what we're saying is that, in addition to the Huxleys, there needs to be a larger, and growing, force that is popularizing, and fighting to win people to take up—or at least win people to seriously engage—the new synthesis of communism and the leadership that has brought forward this new synthesis. There is the need for the Party overall and, more broadly, people in the movement for revolution around the Party, to be barefoot doctors in this sense. And let me emphasize this: Not only is the Ardea Skybreak Interview important in an overall sense, and something people should repeatedly go back to for what they can learn from it overall, but it also is a model of carrying out—compellingly, boldly and with substance—the role of Huxleys in particular, but also the role of barefoot doctors.

So that's on the first mainstay, the leading edge of our overall revolutionary work. And then there's the other mainstay, the pivotal role of the website, *revcom.us*, and the newspaper, *Revolution*. Here, another important statement by Lenin deserves serious

reflection: He said that, in the revolutionary movement in Russia, the role of the newspaper (and today this involves the website in particular, as well as the print newspaper) constituted the better part of preparation for the eventual insurrection (the struggle to seize power). So, here are some more questions: Why is the website/newspaper one of the “two mainstays” of our revolutionary work? What is said on the website about this? What does it mean to wield this pivotal instrument for revolution in line with this understanding of its role, as that is put forward on the website?

In this connection, I want to speak briefly about the importance of agitation and propaganda, which is something the website puts forward in a concentrated way—puts it out to the world, especially these days given the role of the internet. Lenin talked about agitation and propaganda, what they have in common and how they are different. What they have in common is that they both involve exposure of the system and bringing out to people the need to overthrow the system and move beyond it. Propaganda, Lenin explained, does this in a more complex way. It might take a number of different contradictions and show how they interconnect and are all rooted in the same system and, therefore, to get rid of these things, you have to overthrow and move beyond this system.

Agitation, Lenin explained, speaks essentially to one contradiction and deals with it in a very sharp way. And especially with agitation, Lenin emphasized, it is very important to, as he put it, catch the enemy (the ruling class) red-handed: when there is yet another murder by police, or another one of the crimes against humanity committed by the imperialist military in the course of their endless wars, or they’re exposed torturing people—whenever these outrages, and countless others, happen—you have to be able to jump on it, quickly, and bring out the essence of what it shows about the system, without going, right then, into all the complex relations that might interconnect with that on different levels, which is the role of propaganda. Lenin made the point that, through powerful propaganda, but especially through sharp and penetrating agitation, you can move people even more powerfully than you can through direct calls on them to act (although such calls to act also play an important role). With a really skilled core of agitators, you can influence the direction of mass movements and mass struggles way out of proportion to the number of people that you have at any given time. So this is something that really needs to be worked on, in a concentrated way.

Let me give an example of what I mean by agitation. In a church in South Carolina, in delivering what was supposed to be a eulogy for Black people murdered there by a white supremacist, Obama actually had the nerve to say that the murder of these Black people was part of God’s plan. Right at the funeral, when loved ones of people murdered are sitting there. And the truth is that many people were swayed by this sickening speech by Obama. So, this obviously needed to be sharply penetrated and exposed, in a timely way. In situations like this, we need to have something up on our website within a few hours: “Look at this. What kind of system has, as its head, somebody who actually says that the murder of these people was part of some plan by God? And what kind of God is that who

would have a ‘plan’ like that?!” Boom! And then, you could go on after that and, through propaganda, draw out different connections, showing how this relates to the whole history of the oppression of Black people and the nature of this system. But, boom!—you go after something like this right away and pose things sharply: What a crime, on top of a crime, for the president to go there and say: “This is part of God’s plan. Your loved ones who were slaughtered, that was God doing that with his greater plan.” That should have been called out, boom!—like that. We can’t let them get away with outrages like this. We have to catch them red-handed when the ugliness of their system is sitting out like that for everyone to see, but people are blinded by the way they’ve been indoctrinated and shaped by the system. We have to cut through that, like a sharp knife, and bring out what the real relations are. And I can guarantee that, if there had been a few good agitators in that church at that time, who’d gotten up and done just that, with really sharp agitation, you would have had a really good shit storm in that church. Not everybody would have liked it, but it would have caused a really great ripple throughout the whole thing, throughout the country, throughout the whole world. We have to be able to move to do that kind of thing quickly.

If you go into the Bob Avakian portal on the revcom.us website, where there is a bibliography of my works, you will find in that bibliography “Putting Forward Our Line—In a Bold, Moving, Compelling Way.”⁶¹ It is about agitation and propaganda, and one of the important points it makes, which I want to stress here, is that in doing agitation especially, but also propaganda—in general in exposing the system and showing why it can’t be reformed, and needs to be overthrown—we really have to start not from *definitions* or abstract things that we just play around with in our heads, but instead we need to proceed *from real life* and draw out the real relations of things. As part of illustrating this point, an example—a very negative example—is cited, drawing from when I was in China in 1974. I was in the northern part of China near the border with North Korea, and we were having a meeting late in the afternoon. And China at that time was still coming from being a very poor country, so they didn’t have heat all the time, even in the guest houses where they put up people who came from other countries. They only had the heat on for a few hours a day, in order to save electricity for the country as a whole. So I was really cold—it’s cold up there in that part of China at that time of the year (it was in the fall). They gave each of us a padded cotton jacket, and I put that on, but I was still cold. I crawled under the covers of the bed in the guest room, and I was looking for some way to distract myself from being so cold, until the time when we would go to the meeting place, where there would be some heat. Well, there was a shortwave radio there, so I put on the shortwave radio and searched for an English language broadcast, and finally I found one, a news report from North Korea. I listened to this for a few minutes, and by then I was cracking up. Here’s more or less how this news report went:

Comrades. I’m very happy to report that a most important meeting has just been held of the National Front for the Unification of the Fatherland. Present at the meeting were so-and-so, General Secretary of the National Front for the Unification of the Fatherland; also comrade so-and-so, First Vice Chairman of the National Front for the Unification of the Fatherland. Also in attendance were

comrades so-and-so and so-and-so, Second and Third Vice Chairmen of the National Front for the Unification of the Fatherland. At this meeting, comrade so-and-so, General Secretary of the National Front for the Unification of the Fatherland gave a most important speech. In this speech, comrade so-and-so, General Secretary of the National Front for the Unification of the Fatherland, emphasized that the unification of the fatherland is very important.

It went on and on like this, and I was doing what you're doing—laughing—I literally fell out of the bed laughing. But there was also something very disturbing about it. Now, North Korea is not really a socialist country at all—it's more like some sort of feudal monarchy with the Kim family in succession ruling over it. But it's portrayed and portrays itself as a communist country. Well, this is a very good example of how not to do propaganda and agitation.

Again, this negative example is cited in “Putting Forward Our Line—In a Bold, Moving, Compelling Way,” to emphasize that we have to *start from reality* in doing propaganda and agitation—giving people a living sense of what the continuing crimes of the system are, what they are rooted in and flow from, how they connect up to other things, and what is the solution to all this. We have to sharpen our ability to do propaganda, but especially agitation; we need to develop, one after another, cores of people who can go in the midst of mass struggles, and other key situations, and turn the whole thing in the right direction through very sharp exposure, catching the enemy red-handed and, metaphorically speaking, drawing the blood of the enemy by exposing their real nature and how it comes out in the real world.

Now, in moving toward concluding this Part III, I want to return to “On the Possibility of Revolution,” in light of everything that's been spoken to so far. As is pointed out in Part 2 of *Birds and Crocodiles*, there is a need for continual grappling with the strategic problem of how we would actually carry out the struggle for the seizure of power—and, more specifically, the problem that I've been repeatedly, and for good reason, hammering on: the problem of “breaking out of the encirclement,” of the areas where the most bedrock and driving forces for revolution will be concentrated, particularly in the inner cities. Related to that is the problem of counter-insurgency against the masses, even before there is an insurgency, or even in the early stages of an insurgency. This, again, is what we have seen happening with what they're doing in places like Baltimore: “Oh, the masses rose up, well we had to indict some pigs for murdering somebody, which we don't usually do, so now there's this big crime wave, and we gotta bring the police back in full-force and come down even harder on the masses.” This is all part of a counter-insurgency by the ruling forces when there's just a beginning of an uprising by the people, before there's an all-out struggle for revolution. The powers-that-be are not just trying to put down the immediate struggle; they are thinking strategically, from their side, putting in place things that they can see they will need if the struggle breaks all out of bounds and becomes much more full-blown, and especially if it links up with the revolutionary communist forces. That's one of their worst nightmares, and for very good reasons: If these Black and Latino masses, concentrated in the inner cities and among the

immigrants, link up with communists bringing them a scientific understanding of what the problem is, and what the solution is, that will become a tremendously powerful force that will be very difficult for them to contain, and very difficult for them to keep from spreading its impact and influence throughout society, seriously undermining their system and its standing in the world at large. Related to that, we can see that they are working consciously on their counter-insurgency against the masses, even before there is a revolutionary situation. They are not sitting around waiting for when this becomes full-blown, or waiting for the time when the spontaneous outpouring and upsurge of these basic masses links up with people bringing a scientific understanding and a disciplined revolutionary organization to that. Everything related to what is characterized as the “militarization of the police”—this is not just to keep the people down now, although it is that. It is also conscious preparation. Because, on some level, even though they do not have a scientific understanding of this, in a very basic way those who are the representatives and operatives of the ruling class know that they have no solution for the miserable conditions of these millions and tens of millions of people they have concentrated right in the very heart of their empire. If we allow that to go on unopposed, along with the “apartheidization” in society, then this problem of the bedrock forces for the revolution being encircled, suppressed, crushed and pulverized, becomes all the more acute, even in the short run, but especially in strategic terms.

Now, along with what’s spoken to in “On the Possibility” and in Part 2 of *Birds and Crocodiles*, there is a basic analysis that should serve as a strategic guideline: When it comes to the actual struggle for the seizure of power—when people are, in their millions, fighting all-out for the seizure of power—at the beginning of this, the side of the imperialists (of the ruling class and reactionary forces in their camp) would likely still be very powerful in military terms, although weak, and in crisis, politically; while the side of the revolutionary people would be weak, at the beginning, in military terms, but strong, and on the rise, and having a great deal of initiative, politically, which then would have to be transformed into initiative militarily. So, in terms of the overall implications of that, proceeding from that strategic analysis, what would then be required would be to work to transform the situation to where the other side becomes increasingly weak, militarily, and eventually isolated and finally defeated, while the side of the revolutionary people gains more and more strength, in terms of its fighting capacity, without, at any given time, overstepping the bounds of what it’s capable of doing, without engaging prematurely in battles which would be decisive in determining the whole outcome of the struggle—and which, if engaged in prematurely, would almost certainly be lost by the revolutionary side. So, in an overall sense, it would be a matter of pitting strategic strength against strategic strength; but also, at any given point, and all along the way, pitting strength, including strategic strength, on the revolutionary side, against weakness on the other side—pitting political strength, and what that can translate into at a given time, against the political weakness of the other side and how that can be taken advantage of, in what would then be an actual military struggle for the seizure of power.

To explain this a little further, we can make a comparison to an approach Mao developed in the people’s war in China. This was concentrated in the formula: in strategy, one

against ten; in tactics, ten against one. Now, what he meant by that was that, at the initial stages of the people's war, the forces of the government, the forces of the old order, were much stronger than the revolutionary forces—not only much more heavily armed, but also much bigger, with many more soldiers—something like ten times as many. So, Mao said, in terms of our strategic situation starting out, they are ten times stronger than we are; but, in every fight we wage, we must take the initiative to shape things and to engage in battle where we have the advantage in the exact opposite ratio—where we, in a particular engagement, are ten times stronger than the other side. In other words: only fight a small part of their overall force, at any given time, don't try to take on the whole thing all at once.

So, these are things that need to be thought about and grappled with—it's not what we're doing now (whoever's listening)—but it is necessary to be carrying out preparation mentally, if you will: developing theory and strategic doctrine that could be applied when there are the necessary conditions—when the system is in deep crisis and there are millions of people who are ready to fight, all-out, and are willing to put everything on the line for that. So, this is something we have to be thinking about, even now. We can't have the idea that, Oh, some fine day we'll start thinking about how we're gonna actually go about the seizure of power—because, if we do that, then in fact we've given up on the goal of seizing power. This is something I've been emphasizing, over and over again, and for very good reason. It is something that can't be emphasized too many times. We have to be serious about this, and we have to approach all of it strategically and do the work that has to be done in the right way, and not in the wrong way, so we don't set ourselves up to be pulverized, but we do give the masses of people a real chance to go at it and win.

Internationalism—Revolutionary Defeatism

What do I mean by revolutionary defeatism, and why is it so important? Revolutionary defeatism means that you oppose the actions of your own government and ruling class in carrying out their wars, which are wars for empire. It means that you welcome any setbacks they suffer in those wars, because that weakens their oppressive hold over masses of people, here and in the world more generally. Now, we do have to recognize that we have a different situation than back in the day with the war in Vietnam. In those days, the National Liberation Front (NLF) in Vietnam was a revolutionary organization of the people in South Vietnam who were waging the fight, along with the government and people in North Vietnam, against the U.S. imperialists. And the leader of that struggle, until he died in the late 1960s, was Ho Chi Minh, who called himself a communist but was actually more of a revolutionary nationalist. Beginning soon after the end of World War 2, Ho Chi Minh led the armed struggle of the Vietnamese people to drive out the French, who had colonized Vietnam, and then to drive out the Americans, who, beginning in the 1950s, attempted to replace the French as the colonial master of Vietnam. Now, back in those days we used to go to demonstrations and people would march through the streets chanting, “Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, NLF is gonna win.” It felt very good, and it was right to do it. It was right to be on the side of the Vietnamese people and Ho Chi Minh leading them. It wasn't just that you wanted your government to lose

the unjust war it was waging, you could actually be on the side of the people fighting against your government, because those people represented a righteous cause, they represented a real struggle against imperialism. They weren't going around attacking civilians. They were fighting against the military of U.S. imperialism that had invaded their country and was bombing it massively. So, in those days, you could actually be with the people fighting against the U.S. government, the U.S. imperialists.

Today, unfortunately, the situation is different and not as favorable in the short run. Nobody coming from a decent place should want to root for these reactionary Islamist Jihadists who are in fact also enforcers of brutally oppressive relations—particularly, but not only, horrific patriarchal relations—and who, in the service of that, carry out all kinds of depraved slaughter of ordinary civilians. So you cannot, if you're coming from the right place, identify in any way with these forces and support them. Now, there are some people around the world who call themselves leftists or even communists or Maoists, people like this guy Ajith, who try to put a pretty face on these Islamic fundamentalist Jihadists and insist that they are anti-imperialists, that they're waging an anti-imperialist struggle. But the fact is that, while they may fight against the U.S., they do not represent a positive, progressive, let alone a revolutionary force; and where they have succeeded in exercising power, their rule is brutally oppressive. That has been shown repeatedly in the real world. In your mind, you can try to make these people into something other than what they are, but that can only do a great deal of harm, because in the real world they are not a positive force, even while, coming from where they're coming from, they're opposing U.S. imperialism, to some degree, although not in any thoroughgoing way and not toward any positive end.

This makes for a difficult situation because, especially given how parasitic U.S. society is—where significant sections of the people, particularly among the middle strata, receive some share of the spoils from imperialist domination and plunder in the world—when the U.S. government is able to point to the continuing atrocities carried out by these Islamic fundamentalists, this reinforces the tendency for people to side with, or at least not to seriously oppose, their own country and government in the wars it is waging against these Islamic fundamentalists. It makes it easier for people to go along with what is, and take the position: “I don't really like these wars, but look at these other people; we have to do something about groups like ISIS.” Never mind the fact that Saudi Arabia, a big ally of the U.S., beheads a lot more people than ISIS does, and embodies and enforces all kinds of horrendous oppression, against women and others. But still, people can say, “Well, look at these people, like ISIS.” This makes it easier for people not to do the hard thing of going up against their own government in the wars it is waging.

Yes, it is true: the Islamic fundamentalists who are opposing these imperialists are no good, they don't pose a positive alternative. But that does not make the wars of empire being fought by this government *just* wars. This situation has gone on way too long and needs to be frontally and deeply challenged. These are wars *for empire*. These are *unjust* wars. They are carried out with massive means of destruction, killing civilians in the hundreds of thousands, torturing people in the service of these wars. This should be

opposed and opposed strongly. It is not acceptable that people just take the stand, “Yes, I wish those wars would be over with, but we gotta do something about these Islamic fundamentalists.” It is crucial that people come to see what the nature of these wars being waged by their government actually is, and why these wars have to be actively opposed; and even if you can’t, and shouldn’t, support the other side, you still have to have the basic approach of welcoming the defeat of your own government in the wars it is waging. The defeat of these imperialists should be welcomed because, number one, their wars are unjust, even if the people opposing them are also unjust. And, two, every such defeat weakens this system and its ruling class and brings closer the time when people can actually bring it down and bring something liberating into being in its place.

Now, if you think back to around 2002-2003, with the Bush regime in power, as the core of the ruling class, when they invaded Iraq there was massive opposition to that invasion, for a short period of time. In fact, in terms of numbers, there were more people in that period demonstrating against the invasion of Iraq than there were people protesting against the Vietnam war, except for a few very high points of mass opposition to that war. But, unlike the situation with the Vietnam war—where people learned more and more about the nature of this system and came to see their own country and their own government as imperialists, however they understood that, and came to view the violence that this government was waging in wars like Vietnam as totally illegitimate—the opposition to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was much more superficial. It didn’t last as long because it didn’t go as deep. And there was a lot of what I call “Bill Maher-ism” in this opposition. Now, if you watched Bill Maher on TV at the time of that invasion of Iraq, you heard him put forward this basic position: It is a mistake to go into Iraq. We should be going after the actual terrorists—we should be going harder into Afghanistan, we should be going more after these Islamic fundamentalists. Iraq really has nothing to do with what happened on 9/11 (September 11, 2001). It’s wrong to be sending our forces into Iraq, instead of sending them where they need to go.

That kind of stand did contribute to people opposing that particular invasion of Iraq. And think about the mess they made by going into Iraq. Now, I don’t usually find myself in agreement with someone like Rand Paul, a reactionary Republican, but I do have to say I agree with his assessment on this point. He has said: Look what’s happened. We went into Iraq, and what did we get? ISIS. We went into Libya and got rid of Qaddafi in Libya, what did we get? More Islamic fundamentalists. Now we’re trying to bring down Assad in Syria. What are we getting? ISIS, more Islamic fundamentalists.

While of course coming from a completely different—and fundamentally opposed—orientation, I do have to say that, in terms of analyzing the problems these invasions, etc., have caused for the imperialists, Rand Paul has a point. But, among other things what this reflects, on a deeper level, is that these imperialists don’t actually understand their own system. They invaded Iraq, thinking they were going to be able to keep everything under their control, and now it’s become one big mess—including, in a big way, for *them*. But a big problem *we* have is that this is a very parasitic society—and the ruling class has very consciously moved with that basic reality in mind in waging these

wars. Back in the days of Vietnam, there was a draft—not like the draft in the New Socialist Republic in North America—this was a draft that forced you to go into the imperialist army and fight on their behalf. Now, it is not the case, although it is frequently said, that the reason there was so much opposition to the Vietnam war is because people were afraid of being drafted and forced to fight in that war. People opposed that war on political grounds and moral grounds as an unjust, illegitimate and immoral war—masses of people, millions and millions of people, in this country, came to that position. But the fact that there was a draft did figure into the situation. If you were a college student you got a deferment—you didn't have to go into the military, as long as you were in college. And a lot of people stayed in college a lo-o-o-n-n-n-n-g time ("Oh, I think I'll go to graduate school!"). People without deferments did all kinds of things to get out of the draft. In those days they wouldn't allow gay people in the military, so people would pretend to be gay when they went to the draft board. Or people actually shot themselves in the foot, so they'd be disabled and couldn't be drafted. This is how much people opposed this war, which had never happened before, on that kind of scale, in the history of wars waged by the U.S. government. That's how broad and how deep the opposition was.

But the ruling class learned from this. And what they determined is that, instead of drafting people, they'll have a "volunteer" army, relying largely on the fact that, economically, many people don't have many options, so they can be induced to volunteer. And, of course, they have carried out repeated propaganda campaigns to make people think it is honorable, and even glorious, to be in this imperialist military. So now you have this situation where a lot of poor people, particularly in rural white areas, as well as the inner cities, feel the compulsion to go in the military, or some people get revved up with all this patriotic American chauvinism, and they go into the military. But most people in this country can avoid that, at least at this point. And this is very consciously approached by the ruling class. They don't want a situation where people, in their broad ranks throughout society, have to consider whether they want to fight in these wars or not. So now you have a situation where the ROTC comes back on the college campuses, and nobody's opposing it. During the Vietnam war, ROTCs were driven off many campuses by the anti-war movement. Masses of students took the stand: get that imperialist military off campus, out of the university. But now, they've brought the ROTC back. And you've got all these veterans, many of whom have done two, three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, who are coming back and getting government funds to go to college. All this has exerted a significant negative influence on the campuses. And, on the commercial airplanes, it's: "Make way for our wounded warriors and our soldiers to come on first, thank you for your service." This is not being opposed the way it should be, because not enough struggle has been carried out, in a consistent way, to confront people with the actual nature of these wars, the nature and role of the imperialist military that is carrying out these wars, and the nature of the system on behalf of which these wars are waged.

In this connection, I have to say that it is very striking that in looking at what have been the responses to the Ardea Skybreak Interview, there is the glaring fact that, almost

literally, no one has commented on, and expressed strong agreement with, the part of that Interview where she emphatically states her opposition to national chauvinism and jingoism, in particular the idea that, somehow, Americans are more important than other people, where she expresses her disgust with things like the national anthem and the Pledge of Allegiance and calls on people, especially people viciously oppressed under this system, to think about what it is they are saluting, and why they are saluting the symbols of the system that is oppressing them. The lack of response to this—the lack of passionate agreement with this—is in fact quite disturbing, because without this kind of righteous outrage and hatred for these symbols, and the allegiance they express for this murderous system of U.S. imperialism, there can never be any sustained powerful resistance to the crimes of this system, let alone an actual revolution to put an end to it and its towering crimes. So, this is something to seriously reflect on—and move to change, beginning right now.

Internationalism and an International Dimension

In addition to what has been said about how, when it comes down to the struggle for the seizure of power, there will be aspects of a civil war between two sections of the people—and in addition to what has been emphasized about the need to deal with the problem of encirclement, suppression and pulverization—another dimension of this that has to be taken into consideration is that this will not only be a struggle that must be internationalist in its basic orientation, but it is also likely to have a significant aspect of being international. The point has been made that the borders of this country are anything but sacred to us. If you look at the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic*, specifically in regard to what is now the Southwest of the U.S., you can see that it is taking account of the close interconnection—historically, in the present time, and looking to the future—between what goes on in (what is now) the U.S., and what goes on to the south. And, given that, when it comes down to it, there would almost certainly be, in significant measure, the interconnection and interpenetration of revolutionary struggle in (what is now) the U.S. and revolutionary struggle to the south, strategic thinking and work needs to be carried out, in terms of the international dimension of this.

Internationalism—Bringing Forward Another Way

This is another important aspect of our internationalist responsibilities. We have to look soberly and scientifically at the current configuration, or alignment, of things in the world, and in particular what we have identified as the “two outmodeds”⁶²—on the one hand, imperialism, and on the other hand, reactionary Islamic fundamentalist Jihadism—and the way these two forces actually do reinforce each other, even while opposing each other, with the very negative effect this exerts in the world. This is a situation where the more the imperialists do what they do, the more they create fertile ground for Islamic fundamentalism. There have even been cases where, in countries like Lebanon, people who for a long time had been secularists, have declared themselves Islamicists, in order to fight against Israel and the U.S. imperialists behind Israel. This is not a unique phenomenon. So, on the one hand, you have that kind of terrible effect; and

then, as the other side of this dynamic, the more that these reactionary Islamic fundamentalists do what they do, the more it makes other people rally to the side of the imperialists—they look at this and say, you can't have anything to do with, you can't support, something horrific like this, carrying out all these crimes: forcing women to be slaves, slaughtering people of other religions, or people they regard as "heretical" Muslims, and so on. This is a deadly dynamic, where each of these outmodeds reinforces the other, and it keeps going around in a vicious cycle.

When you look at that, you see the great importance of breaking through this in the world as a whole—bringing forward another way—bringing forward revolution on the communist road, as a **radical emancipatory alternative** to that dynamic—to both of these outmodeds. Even while this is far from all of our internationalist responsibilities, it is a major part of our internationalist responsibilities. To give this a living expression, imagine if there were a force of people coming forward in the hundreds of thousands in this country who were taking a stand against the wars being carried out by the government of this country—making clear that they were not in favor of Islamic fundamentalism, but putting their emphasis on opposing the wars of their own government, of U.S. imperialism. Imagine the effect it would have in the world if, instead of people here either passively going along with, or even actively supporting, these wars carried out by their government in the name of fighting Islamic fundamentalism, there were thousands, tens and hundreds of thousands, actively mobilizing to oppose these wars. Think of the message that would send to people around the world and the way it would enable them to see that what the government of the U.S. does and represents is not what the *people* of this country stand for, and that there's a different way than rallying to Islamic fundamentalist Jihadism that people can oppose what the government of this country is doing. That is a very important part of our internationalism. I'm not saying we can bring that forth just because we want it, or out of nothing, but it's something we have to have a strategic orientation of working toward.

And just think about this. While this, too, is not all of our internationalist responsibilities, actually making a revolution in this country, and even moving significantly toward that revolution, has a **tremendously positive potential role** in terms of **repolarizing masses of people all around the world**. But, having said that, let me make this clear right away: When I speak of the impact of even moving significantly toward such a revolution, this must **not** be taken as a recipe for stopping short of revolution—for adopting in effect the revisionist orientation of "the movement is everything, the final aim nothing." No! Our firm orientation, and all of our work, must be based on the understanding that, as it's put in *Basics* 3:1: "*We need a revolution. Anything else, in the final analysis, is bullshit.*" Now, notice it says "*in the final analysis*"—it doesn't say that every struggle short of revolution is no good. In fact, it goes on to make the point that it is important to unite with people in many struggles that, in themselves, are short of revolution, while making clear that *we* need to do so with the orientation of building toward the revolution that is needed. It is really, profoundly true that nothing short of revolution can put an end to the deep-seated contradictions of this system, and the outrages this continually gives rise to. But, with that orientation, and

proceeding on that basis, making real advances toward that revolution can have a major and very powerful impact in the world, in a very positive way.

The emergence of a really powerful movement aiming toward revolution in this country: think of the effect of that throughout the world. “What? A revolution in the United States? People actually going for the overthrow of this imperialism?” That would change, almost overnight, the way a lot of people think about what is possible, and desirable. It would have a major impact in the world, contributing very greatly to the positive repolarization that is urgently needed. And that, in turn, would strengthen the basis for actually making revolution here—which, in turn again, would obviously create much more favorable conditions in the world.

A number of people have commented—including some of these fundamentalists themselves—that, a few decades ago, many of these Islamic fundamentalists would have been Maoists. This is something interesting and important to think about. Why are they now not Maoists, and instead are Islamic fundamentalists? Because of what has happened in China, with the restoration of capitalism there and what China has become, because of the way things have gone in the world overall, with the effects of imperialism, and so on, many of these people have turned to a fundamentalist Jihadist ideology and program as a very misguided way of opposing imperialism, or at least some of the crimes carried out by western imperialism. But this is not just misguided—it is not just a wrong way to oppose things—it is an outright and thoroughly reactionary ideology, program, and course of action. Let’s face it—it is also a way that doesn’t require you to break with patriarchy, to say the least. It doesn’t require you to break with a lot of traditional ways of thinking and acting; in fact, it reinforces a lot of these highly obscurantist and oppressive traditions. So it’s “easier,” for a lot of people, especially for males, but not only for them. You can go along with a lot of the spontaneity and a lot of tradition’s chains, even where you are the direct victim of this. Think about it: In very immediate terms, say inside a family, women often play a significant role in enforcing the patriarchal relations, not only because they are forced, and often terrorized, into doing this, but because they themselves have been caught up in the chains of these traditional relations, and they often don’t see a way they can have a meaningful life other than by going along with, or even serving to reinforce, this. Tradition’s chains—they don’t just oppress and enslave people physically; they also chain people, including masses of women, ideologically. This is something we have to recognize; and we have to wage compelling struggle around this, ideologically, as well as politically and practically.

On the positive side—or in terms of positive potential—think about the implications of turning that statement on its head: A few decades ago, many of these Islamic fundamentalist Jihadists would have been Maoists. Well, just imagine if there is a communist movement that’s gaining strength, really moving toward an actual revolution in this country, as well as making important advances in other parts of the world: think about the potential, through struggle, for that to repolarize—or to contribute significantly to the repolarization of—masses of people, not just in this country, but in the world as a whole, in a much more favorable way. This is also an important part of our

internationalist orientation and our internationalist responsibility. We have to make revolution here because we need a revolution here, but we also have to contribute, in the greatest way we can, to the world revolution and the struggle for communism. And one of the important dimensions of that is making revolution here, which will have tremendous positive repercussions, especially as this is done on the basis of internationalism, in terms of orientation and in terms of political work and struggle. We should have this constantly in mind as an important part of our fundamental orientation and sense of responsibility.

Popularizing the Strategy

This is something that also needs to be strongly emphasized: *popularizing* the strategy for revolution is an important part of *carrying out* that strategy. To be clear, I don't mean popularizing this in all the details in which it's been discussed here; but, in basic terms, popularizing that there is such a strategy, and what this strategy is, among masses of people of all different strata, is a very important part of carrying out that strategy. If we think we should just proceed according to some sort of "temple of secret knowledge," as it's been put—we have this "great strategy" we're carrying out, but we don't think the masses of people need to know about it—then we're not actually carrying out that strategy. Think about it: One of the first things masses bring up is, "How are you actually gonna do this? How you gonna deal with this? How you gonna deal with that?" Yes, sometimes this kind of thing just gets raised as an excuse for not getting involved. But many, many times these are very serious questions that people have. So that, in kind of a negative sense, makes the point: If you don't put this strategy out there, you're really cheating the masses of people, you're not really giving them the way to be part of this revolution, because they won't have a sense that you know what the hell you're doing, that you're proceeding according to a strategy that has a basis in the real world to go somewhere.

And on the positive side, the more that people do get a sense of that, the more they can be drawn toward this revolution, because they can see that there is actually a strategic approach and plan for how to go about this. Not that everything's been solved, and it's all been worked out—there's a great deal more work to be done—but it's very important that there is an actual strategy, and that people are systematically proceeding on the basis of that strategy. Masses of people need to know about that in order to become part of it, and to contribute to applying and, yes, further developing that strategy. So this is a very important point that I think is also overlooked a lot: We don't talk to the masses the way we should about how we're proceeding to actually build a movement for revolution and preparing, in the appropriate ways now, to carry out an actual revolution. And if we don't do that, then once again we're not serious. We can say all we want, "We ARE building a movement for revolution"—but if we don't popularize the strategy for this revolution, then we are not doing that.

Fundamental Orientation

Now, as a final thought on this overall point of strategy. The orientation and approach in all of this must be one of going to people, particularly among those who most desperately need this revolution, but more broadly as well—among students and among other sections of the people—not in some “aimless way,” lacking any strategic purpose and “revolutionary urgency,” just awaiting passively, and without passion, for “one fine day” when the prospect of revolution will somehow “magically” become “real,” but, instead, working with, and being alive with, the very clear orientation and message: We ARE building a movement for revolution, for an actual revolution, and we ARE building the Party as its leading core; and in this way, to call on, work with, and work to organize, growing numbers of people to become part of this, while giving them a living sense of the larger picture, the strategic thinking and approach and the leadership that is giving shape and direction to this process overall, not just in one small corner but in the whole society and with the whole world in view and in mind—to push forward the “three prepares” (prepare the ground, prepare the people, and prepare the vanguard), really getting ready for the time when millions can be led to fight, all-out, for the seizure of power, with a real chance of winning, to clear the ground of this outmoded, illegitimate, rotten, bankrupt, and murderous system, and open the way to a radically different and emancipating society and world.

IV. The Leadership We Need

The Decisive Role of Leadership

Let's start with a very basic point: Leadership is decisive. As Mao put it, where there is oppression there will be resistance: the masses of oppressed people will repeatedly rise up and fight back against their oppression. But where that struggle ends up, and whether it can be taken all the way to an emancipating revolution, a new society and ultimately a new world, without exploitation and oppression and all the suffering and destruction that goes along with that, depends on leadership—on the line, the worldview, the method and approach, the strategy and program of the force which gains the leadership in the struggle against oppression.

Notice that I said “the force *which gains the leadership*.” Why did I put it this way—and what is the importance of this? Well, one of the things this is emphasizing is that there is always going to be a struggle over who's in the leading position, and therefore where things are being led. It's not a matter of things falling into anyone's lap—unless it's the ruling class, or other forces that will have spontaneity going for them and will lead things in the wrong direction—but especially if the leadership the masses actually need, to make the revolution they need, is really going to gain the leading position, it's going to be a process of, yes, complex, and at times very fierce, struggle. Once again, if we think it's just a matter that eventually the masses will see the need for a revolution and they'll come seeking us out and ask us to lead them—well, we'll be in for a very bad surprise! Even to the degree that something like that might happen, we wouldn't be able to handle it correctly, if that's our orientation and approach. There has to be a fight—this goes back to the point a little while ago, that much of the struggle we carry out, particularly in the ideological realm, is struggle against other lines and programs which do not directly flow from and represent the ruling class but are more representative of intermediate strata, but which, nonetheless, lead people back into, or keep them chained within, the killing confines and dynamics of this system.

Now, I mentioned earlier the book *The Looting Machine*. The full title is *The Looting Machine: Warlords, Oligarchs, Corporations, Smugglers, and the Theft of Africa's Wealth*. The author, Tom Burgis, starts off the first chapter of the book speaking about Chicala, which is a shantytown slum in Luanda, the capital city of Angola; and he talks about how there isn't much that is in the wall separating Chicala from the rest of the city, other than a lot of sewage, as well as fear. This called to mind something I wrote earlier about the piles of garbage and human waste that little children in Luanda and other parts of Angola are playing amidst, while a few miles away there are tall buildings serving as glittering monuments to the power of the wealthy. You see this now in China, in Shanghai and other cities, but even in Luanda and places like that—these glittering skyscrapers, symbols of this vast wealth in a very few hands. And Angola is a particularly poignant example, because the ruling force now in Angola is what proceeded from the Movement for the Liberation of Angola (the MPLA), which was the nationalist force leading the struggle against Portuguese colonialism, which dominated Angola, and then a

civil war against forces backed by apartheid South Africa and the U.S. This was fought out for decades in Angola. The clique now ruling in Angola came directly out of that—the heads of the country now were the leaders of the MPLA, and those who have succeeded them. Burgis makes the point that the daughter of the leader of the MPLA—Isabel dos Santos—is the first female billionaire in Africa. Isn't that a shining example of "empowerment"?! You can just hear minions and mouthpieces of the system celebrating this—a female billionaire in Africa—while you get this vivid picture of the literal garbage and waste that the masses of people are living in, surrounding these glittering symbols of all this wealth that has, in a real sense, been looted from these countries and from the masses of people.

In reading this, you could think about—and a lot of people would think about—what a tragedy this is, what a horrible situation, what terrible corruption. Some would note the role of multinational corporations in all this, and talk about how the corporations have way too much power, and these days perhaps a few might talk about imperialism, in some general sense. Now, all that might be in the right direction and with the right spirit, but what struck me immediately, as I got into reading this book—and what struck me repeatedly in reading it—is how this screams out the need for an actual socialist transformation of these societies. Again, it's back to the mode of production point, and the compelling reality that if you don't have a leadership that bases itself on a scientific understanding of all this, you are going to end up in a terrible situation, despite the struggle and sacrifice of masses of people, including the struggle and sacrifices of the forces leading them. In other words, the leadership in these places like Angola, they end up saying things like, "We learned that money is power—if you don't have money, you can't do anything." So, just like the revisionists in China, who took China back down the capitalist road while still pretending to be communists in some vague sense, these forces in places like Angola go about accumulating wealth through capitalist means, with the claim that this somehow benefits the masses of people. In China they literally had the slogan, "To Get Rich is Glorious"—they replaced the slogan during the time of Mao, "Serve the People," with the slogan "To Get Rich is Glorious." I remember hearing a story about one of the party cadre in China after the revisionist coup happened and they put away the slogan of "Serve the People" and the orientation of serving the people by advancing the revolution, and started talking about how everybody should try to get rich, because that would be for the benefit of the country. And one of these Chinese Communist Party cadre, now under this revisionist leadership that was promoting this bourgeois line, actually said to another party cadre: "Well, you know, we used to talk about serve the people; but aren't *I* a people?" So you can see how the ideological corruption sets in when the dominant line is changed in this way and is being pumped at people, even people who definitely once knew better. They get caught up in this idea that if we all go out for ourselves, we'll make a lot of money and then we can do something good for the masses of poor people. So this slogan, "To Get Rich is Glorious," was supposed to inspire people to make a lot of money, and that would develop the economy and help the people. And in reading *The Looting Machine* you see this rationalization repeated by the heads of government in these different African countries: Well, if we amass a lot of wealth, then we can do something for the people.

Now, again, many of these people fought under very difficult conditions for decades. They were up against apartheid South Africa, which was a very powerful country at the time, and was being backed up by the U.S., even as the ruling class of the U.S. put up some pretense of opposing apartheid. Going up against that, the MPLA in Angola relied somewhat on the Soviet Union, which was a real problem, but they waged a lot of self-sacrificing struggle. Why did things end up this way? Well, there were major shifts in the world and world relations, including the fact that the Soviet Union as such collapsed and its empire went out of existence in its previous form, with Soviet social-imperialism (socialism in name but imperialism in fact) being replaced by an openly capitalist-imperialist Russia, and China now on the road of capitalism. All this was disorienting, and all the more so because people weren't scientific enough. Forces like the MPLA were eclectic—their viewpoint was a mishmash of nationalism and some aspects of communism, it was not a consistently scientific communist approach. And so, when these new conditions hit, what did they end up doing? They became *nouveau bourgeois* exploiters, and at the same time accomplices (and basically appendages) of imperialism, accumulating tremendous wealth for themselves, on the backs of the masses of people.

Here we get back to a point that was made, toward the beginning of this presentation, on the base and the superstructure—the economic system, the mode of production, and how it sets the terms for things in society overall, and how, in turn, the superstructure that arises on that economic base serves to reinforce it. In other words, the political and ideological superstructure—the political system, the laws, the culture, the ideas that dominate in the society—have to be in accordance with that mode of production, or the society can't function. So if you go down the road of saying we're gonna use capitalist means to get a lot of wealth, if that's the mode of production that's operating, then you have to have a superstructure of laws, political institutions, culture and ideology, and so on, that goes along with and enforces that capitalist system, even if you once had a different set of ideas.

Think about this specifically in terms of the culture and the ideology. I talked about this earlier, the idea that the bourgeoisie always promotes—that the great thing about bourgeois society, the major change it brought about, was elevating the individual to the prime place in society, putting forward the sanctity of the individual and the importance of individual rights. I discussed how that's a complete farce and completely in conflict with how bourgeois society actually operates—by exploiting masses of people and crushing and pulverizing literally billions of people around the world. But the idea of individualism is very much in keeping with and very much serves the bourgeois exploitative mode of production. The idea that everybody should be out for themselves is reinforced by the fact that you are in competition with everybody else—for jobs, for promotions, for scholarships, for admission to college, for whatever it might be. So that is encouraged and fostered by the mode of production, by how the economic system works and how it affects people. And then, in the superstructure, it is reinforced with the idea that the most important thing is the “self”—the “self” is the center of everything. No matter what else is going on in the world, the most important thing, the thing that you

should be concerned about, above all, is yourself. That's the only way you can go through the world. This is constantly pumped at people, and it constantly gets reinforced even when people try to break with it. It requires a tremendous struggle to get out of the framework that, when everything is said and done, "I am the most important thing in the world." And, besides the way in which this goes along with the bourgeois notion that the striving for individual acquisition/private accumulation of wealth is the most legitimate and productive motive force in social development, it conforms to the interests of the ruling class because, if you have a society where everyone is thinking that way, you're never going to be able to bring about any kind of significant social transformation. You're going to remain stuck within a system where people are being exploited and oppressed, but everybody is out for themselves in competition with everybody else.

Now, imagine if you had a radically different superstructure—if you had art and culture, widely and consistently disseminated over the TV, the internet, and so on, promoting the idea that people should think first and foremost about the greater good of the people in the world as a whole, instead of themselves. That would definitely undermine the way this system works. Or take another example of how the superstructure has to relate to the base. If you look at ads on TV or watch the news on TV, they're always promoting these entrepreneurs, people who start up little businesses; there are ads for getting business cards so you can more effectively advertise your business; and "Oh, I have this little clever idea about making muffins, so I started a business"; and on and on and on. Now imagine if, instead of that, they continually told people the truth: "It's not that often that a small business becomes a big money-making enterprise; a high percentage of small businesses fail, sooner or later, and many of them fail quickly; so forget it, don't get all caught up in the mythology of business entrepreneurship." Imagine if, every time you turned on the TV, you heard that kind of message! Well, that would not serve the functioning of this system. They want people to think that everybody can succeed in business, if they try hard and have the right initiative. In reality, of course, only a small number of people can actually be big-time capitalists, but it's very good for the big capitalists, and for the system overall, if everybody thinks they might have a chance to do it. So, if you had a whole set of ideas being promoted that were actually telling people the truth about this, it would completely undermine that.

Or what if program after program on television, and everything you saw through the internet, were telling people: "Look, let's be honest with ourselves. The reason this country is so wealthy and powerful is not because there have been a bunch of people who innovated a lot of things. It's because we brought millions of people from Africa in chains and drove them viciously to produce wealth, while we killed off large sections of the indigenous population and stole their land; through a war of aggression we seized half of Mexico's territory and extended the slave system into large parts of that territory; we grabbed up places like the Philippines and Puerto Rico as colonies as we moved to dominate more and more of the world; and now we're plundering throughout the world, especially the Third World, ruthlessly shackling large swaths of humanity to our juggernaut of exploitation, threatening and unleashing massive slaughter and destruction to enforce all this. That's really why we're so wealthy and powerful." Well,

you'd get some assholes who'd say, "Okay, good, as long as I get mine." But a lot of people would say, "Wait a minute—that's how all this has come about? What's going on here? I don't want to live in a world where that's what we're doing." So you can't have ideas dominating in the superstructure, in the culture, in the media and so on, that are completely out of keeping with the functioning of the underlying economic system and the interests and needs of the ruling class of that system—which is, in a real sense, as Marx put it, the personification of the exploitative dynamics of that system.

This is what has happened with the restoration of capitalism in China, and with what the ruling elites in countries like Angola are doing. If you're going to go down the capitalist road and use the capitalist mode of production as the basis economically for your society and your means of accumulating wealth, then you've got to promote the ideas that go along with that—such as the idea that if a few of us make a lot of money, then we can do something good for the masses of people, even as we're brutally exploiting and oppressing the masses of people and collaborating with capitalist exploiters in other countries. (And these days China is playing a big role in plundering Africa and exploiting the people there.) So you see that what your economic system is, is going to set the terms for what kind of political structure, but also what kind of ideas, gets instituted and promoted to reinforce that economic system.

Only with a vanguard that has a scientific approach and understands that you have to transform the mode of production, fundamentally, and, along with it, all the other aspects of those "4 Alls," could you correctly deal with this howling contradiction, of tremendous natural wealth in these countries on the one hand and, on the other hand, the terrible situation for the people, where, even while a small handful become incredibly rich and certain other strata are elevated to privileged middle class positions, the masses of people are chained in poverty and misery. It goes back to this basic point: There is all this tremendous wealth, but if you have a mode of production that relies upon capitalist accumulation—in this case, local capitalists in league with the international capital of the imperialist system—there's no way that the tremendous natural wealth is going to be utilized for the benefit of the masses of people, and above all their need to be freed from exploitation and the poverty and misery that flows from that.

The Looting Machine goes through a number of different countries, and this same fundamental point strikes you over and over. And, again, Angola is a particularly acute and particularly poignant case of this, because of the whole anti-colonial struggle there. It isn't like you're dealing with people who have just been corrupt lackeys and puppets of imperialism all along—and that makes it all the more painful to see this acute contradiction between the natural wealth, and the wealth of a small number, and, on the other side, the miserable conditions of the masses of people. But, of course, that's not what spontaneously a lot of people would get out of reading a book like this. What they would likely conclude instead is, "You see, revolutions, they all go bad, people who lead revolutions become powerful and become corrupt—power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely," all the spontaneous bourgeois-inspired thinking that people are conditioned to fall into—when the real and profound lesson is exactly the opposite of

that, and it's staring you in the face, if you have the eyes, that is, the scientific method and approach, to see it. This is a very important lesson, that life is constantly teaching us, once you have a scientific, dialectical materialist approach to reality. Without it, of course, you're left to draw all the wrong conclusions, all the wrong lessons from what happens over and over again to the masses of people.

Here's another striking example: El Salvador. This is a country where, in the 1980s, there were revolutionary forces fighting against regimes kept in power by the U.S.—but revolutionary forces which weren't all the way revolutionary. They were essentially revisionist forces, with a somewhat communist outer appearance but with a program that amounted to trying to change things within the existing framework, and not carry out a thoroughgoing revolution. Nevertheless, they fought, and sacrificed greatly, in fighting against these regimes—terrible, murderous regimes—that were imposed by the U.S. And then came the collapse of the Soviet Union, whose support these forces in El Salvador were counting on, and then Cuba was able to give less support to these forces, because Cuba itself had been relying on the Soviet Union. So the movement in El Salvador gave up the pretense of revolution, abandoned any element of armed struggle, and folded itself into the existing ruling structure, becoming a political party operating within the existing system of elections and the framework of the existing system overall. And meanwhile, what was happening? During the course of this war that was going on in El Salvador in the 1980s, and because of the desperate conditions of the masses there, a lot of people fled north, ending up in Mexico, or even coming all the way to the U.S. and settling in the urban areas. Well, they ran into the conditions that immigrants face in this country—a lot of them undocumented, being forced into the shadows. And a lot of the youth grew up in the inner city conditions and adopted the inner city culture, which was strongly influenced by gang life. So you had a lot of these youth from El Salvador whose families were forced out because of what imperialism and the regimes that imperialism had imposed on their country were doing to the people there. They came to the U.S., they found themselves trapped in the conditions of many immigrants here, and a lot of the youth went into the gangs. And then what happened? At a certain point, a lot of these immigrants, including many of the youth, were forced out from the U.S.—forced to go back to El Salvador, back into conditions that remained ones of desperation for the masses of people. And many of the youth took the gang culture and gang structures they'd become part of, as a result of being in urban areas in the U.S., and set that up in El Salvador. Terrible gang wars began to take place in El Salvador on a scale that had never happened there before.

So you see the workings of imperialism here, but you also see what happens when you have a force, as you had in El Salvador in the 1980s, that fights against the existing oppressive system, but doesn't really base itself on a thoroughgoing scientific revolutionary communist approach, and ends up compromising with that system. You get this horrible mix of conditions—the youth slaughtering each other, and the people generally in the slums of El Salvador being caught up in these terrible conflicts among the gangs, adding a further murderous element to the oppressive conditions imposed by the system overall.

All this emphasizes once more the point that really needs to come through in all this: Without a real communist leadership, the masses of people will always be subjected to horror after horror after horror, even if the particular forms of that might change in one way or another.

A Leading Core of Intellectuals—and the Contradictions Bound Up with This

This puts in the proper perspective the absolute necessity, and the crucial role, of a revolutionary communist vanguard party. At the same time, we do need to clearly recognize and confront the contradictions bound up with this. I touched on this somewhat before, but I want to come back to it and go into it from some different angles. In *Ruminations and Wranglings*, I examined the role of intellectuals as a leading core of the Party and the revolution—the political and literary representatives of the proletariat, in the fundamental sense—and the contradictions involved with this. I pointed out that this applies, regardless of where the people come from who make up this leading core, as intellectuals. Whatever their background is, the same basic contradictions apply.

To put it very simply, what do I mean by intellectuals? Not necessarily somebody with a Ph.D. or some specialized formal education. I mean people who have developed the ability to work with ideas and grapple with theory systematically, if not always correctly. Now, let me get into that “if not always correctly” point a little bit. It’s not just a matter of reading and studying theory. It’s a matter of correctly dealing with theory in relation to the real world, and going back and forth between theory and the practice of implementing that theory to change the world, and drawing the lessons from that, as well as drawing lessons from life more broadly. If you set out, like the forces in El Salvador, or Angola, or Cuba, on the wrong basis, you will draw the wrong lessons and your theory will not be in accord with actual reality and the way it needs to be transformed in order to emancipate people. I think of what Mao said one time about the big socialist of Lenin’s time, Kautsky. He was a reformist socialist, but he was the big shot in the socialist movement in Lenin’s time, until the Russian revolution. The party headed by Kautsky in Germany was the biggest socialist party in the world: it had millions of supporters, it had seats in the Parliament of Germany, it had leading positions in a lot of trade unions. Well, in his typically provocative “Maoesque” way, Mao said: Reading and studying theory is important, but it’s not just a matter of reading. With people like Kautsky, the more they read, the stupider they get.

This gets to a very basic point: What method and approach are you applying when you’re grappling with theory? Is it scientific, or is it some other kind of method and approach?

It’s worth getting into this further here. Spontaneously, among the masses of people, there is both a lot of respect, even exaggerated respect, for intellectuals, and a lot of resentment toward them, at one and the same time. But, given where we are, right now, in the actual development of human society—not in any sense of how things were bound to go, but where things have actually developed to—it’s a simple fact that the leading core

of the revolution that is needed is going to be, of necessity, people who have developed intellectual skills and abilities. You cannot lead a revolution just on revenge—we're back to the Ajith polemic—you cannot just go on simple class feelings, just on a hatred for oppression, or a sense of resentment toward those a little better off. And you cannot do it with an anti-intellectual attitude. The theory that we need to lead this revolution has to deal with very complex reality, and it takes work and struggle to develop the ability to grapple with theory on that level. Now, again, this applies regardless of where the people come from who make up the leading core. We know of the phenomenon of people who come out of very hard conditions who, for a combination of reasons, have been able to develop into advanced intellectuals. We've cited the example of our comrade, whom we lost, Wayne Webb (Clyde Young), who came out of prison—he didn't come out of a university with the privilege of having a highly developed education there, he came out of a hard life and out of prison, but he turned himself into a prison intellectual, and into a revolutionary and a communist. That was a great thing, a very inspiring thing, but it's not an exceptional thing. Well, it's exceptional in one sense, but it's not exceptional in the sense that only one or two people can do that. But, again, it takes work. It's very hard to develop yourself as an intellectual in prison—that should be obvious. The conditions are not very conducive to that, to say the least. There's a lot pushing in the opposite direction. So, to fight through and do that is a real achievement—and especially to do it for the emancipation of humanity is something very precious—but it's not something that only one or a few people can do. In fact, others have done or are doing this, and we need many more people to do it.

But it is also necessary to understand that, once you do that, you are different than you were before. It doesn't mean that you've forgotten everything you've learned through your life experience, or that you've turned into some kind of intellectual snob—unless you have. That's been known to happen, too. But, in any case, you still have all that life experience, yet you're not the same. And, mainly, that's a positive thing: You've become an emancipator of humanity, you've become a revolutionary intellectual, capable of grappling with these complex ideas, and leading other people to do so. But, whether you come out of prison, wherever you come from (I sound like Peter Tosh now: “don't care where you come from”...but anyway) whether you come out of prison, whether you come out of the housing projects, whether you come from somewhere on the border of Mexico, or from Mexico, or from Guatemala, or whether you are a South Asian refugee—whatever background you have and wherever you come from—if you develop these skills and abilities, you are different than you were before. You have become an intellectual—and that's not a dirty word. Wherever they come from, intellectuals who actually take up the cause of the emancipation of humanity, and the communist outlook and method that's necessary to lead to that emancipation, are tremendously precious. We should never have a narrow-minded philistine attitude of looking down on, devaluing and denigrating, intellectual development, or people who have that development, unless they're using it for purposes that are against the interests of the masses of people. And even then, we should struggle with them, at least for awhile, to see if we can win them away from that. But we should have a real, scientific appreciation for the importance of intellectual development. We should nurture it and develop it among people from everywhere.

At the same time, there are real contradictions bound up with this. You have to deal in the realm of ideas and a lot of theoretical abstraction in order to be able to develop line and policy to lead the revolution, in order to deal with all the complex contradictions that I've been talking about and that we confront out there in the world, so to speak. And, when you get into the position of having those abilities and skills, and dealing on that level with the realm of ideas, there is a pull away from what it needs to be put to the service of. It is a very strong pull, if you think about what I said earlier—living in a society where you're constantly told that “self” is the most important thing and whatever skills you develop you should use for yourself, first and above all. It's a pull on everybody. It's not just people who have a fancy education, in a formal sense—a university degree or a Ph.D., or whatever. There is a crucial role for communist intellectuals and communist statesmen, if you want to use that term, in actually developing the struggle that can lead to the revolution we need. You need to be able to deal not only with contradictions in the abstract—at a high level of theoretical abstraction—you also need to be able to deal with people, and the contradictions as they express themselves in and through real-live people. The process of revolution is not a process of turning on a machine. Revolution is made by people. To deal with all this takes solid core and elasticity. It takes firmness and flexibility (or, with regard to flexibility, what is described by the French word *souplesse*) to be able to handle these things in a way that's neither giving up on the whole thing nor, on the other hand, rigid and inflexible, dogmatic and doctrinaire.

Another Kind of “Pyramid”

I've spoken earlier about the “pyramid point”—the pyramid with the ruling class at the top, the contention among the different forces within the ruling class at the top, and how this relates to contradiction and struggle in the larger society, and world. But, in talking with people sometimes, I've also made a point about *another kind* of “pyramid.” I got to thinking about this when Nixon went to China in the 1970s and met with Mao, as well as others in the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. And, even more than Nixon, I was thinking about Henry Kissinger, who conceives of himself as more of an intellectual than Nixon, who liked to think of himself and present himself as more of a practical politician, or even a regular man of the people. But anyway, Kissinger was Nixon's “right hand man,” particularly on foreign policy, and he traveled with Nixon when Nixon went to China in the early 1970s. Kissinger sat down and talked with Mao in Mao's study, surrounded by all these books, and they had all these philosophical discussions—here was Mao engaging in all these philosophical discussions with Henry Kissinger, a representative of U.S. imperialism. And, in reflecting on this, I've wrestled with this: Besides the problems with the “opening to the West” on the part of Mao and the Chinese Communist Party—the whole policy bound up with this “opening,” and the very real problems I mentioned earlier about the way they promoted the Shah of Iran, and other oppressive rulers, as part of an anti-Soviet united front—putting the problems with that aside, the fact is that, as a leader of a revolutionary movement, or as part of a vanguard of the revolution (whether you're a leader of the vanguard or just a “regular member” of the vanguard), and then as a leader of a new socialist society and state, you are going to be in

situations where you are representing the proletariat, in the largest sense, in interacting with people who are coming from different places and, at least objectively, are representatives of different classes. Think about it: Even in building struggles now, isn't there a significant aspect of diplomacy that gets involved, where, if you're building broad movements, you have to meet with lots of different forces and you have to have unity, as well as struggle? A lot of times, there needs to be a lot of struggle, but you still have to strive for unity on a certain level. For example, if you're gonna take up the battle around mass incarceration, you have to unite with a lot of forces who are coming from a lot of different places, and there is a bundle of contradictions, some aspects of which may not be very good at all. And here's where this statesman role and having a certain amount of diplomacy comes in. So, whether you become a head of a socialist state and you find yourself having to meet with someone like Henry Kissinger, or not, you will at times find yourself in this position where you're meeting, sort of "up here" (up above the reality of daily life and struggle, so to speak), engaging with these representatives of different classes.

So this is the other "pyramid point": You are representing masses of people, exploited and oppressed masses of the whole world—that's the grounding underneath you. I mean this not in a sense of tailing the masses, but that's what you're standing on, in a scientific sense, the interests of the broad masses of people in the world. But then, you get "up there," where you meet with these people—you sit in a room, you go out to coffee, whatever you do—you're engaging with somebody who, at least objectively, represents some other class; and, as somebody who's a leader and has developed certain intellectual abilities, you can get into all kinds of discussions about all kinds of questions with people—and it's not necessarily bad to do so. Overall, it is good to do so. But you can feel a certain pull to lose sight of what you're standing on and what you represent when you're doing this—you can get kind of pulled into this realm that seems to be somehow above the fray. It may be literally out of the fray at a given moment (that is, not immediately in the midst of a struggle), but it appears to be above the struggle of classes, appears to be above the fundamental conflicts that are going on. Well, this can exert a pull on you to forget what it is you represent and what has to guide everything you do. So, this is a different kind of "pyramid" contradiction.

I have to say, I felt this very acutely in the Dialogue with Cornel West. You can't have a narrow philistine attitude, a dismissive attitude, toward people who hold religious beliefs, for example—and this makes it very complicated. In that Dialogue I did my very best to be really scientific and all-sided in dealing with something like the ideas of the Black theologian James Cone. I emphasized that I didn't want to oversimplify this, that it's not simple. I went into the complexity and the contradictions involved in the ideas he puts forward, and I didn't present it as all negative, because that would not have been correct, would not have corresponded to reality. And then, after the Dialogue, he attacks what I did in the Dialogue. You end up being attacked because you criticize and bring to light the limitations and wrong directions that some of these ideas represent. But that is not the end of the story—you still have to persevere in carrying out the approach of unity-struggle-unity, so long as there is an objective basis for that approach. This is a matter of

principle and of strategic orientation.

In situations like this, dealing with people with whom there is a basis for unity, as well as some significant differences, you do have to extend the hand of unity, and it isn't just a mechanical process. Now, if you want to use that term, this process is not "devoid of social content," or class content, but there is the human aspect to this, too. You're dealing with real human beings. You're not a machine, and you're not dealing with machines.

So, you can get caught up in all that, and it can pull on you. You can do two things wrong. First, you can refuse to do this—refuse to engage with people with whom you may have significant differences—and then there's not going to be a revolution. This relates to an important point from Lenin. He said, even for the basic masses, everyone who makes a revolution with the orientation that *they* had their chance to go at it, now it's *my* turn—everyone who approaches it like that, is making revolution with the outlook of the petite bourgeoisie. And such people will never be able to lead things where they need to go. Well, there are a lot of people who spontaneously are inclined that way, and get pulled that way. But if we go about things that way, we won't get where we need to go. This may be somewhat difficult to understand, but I think it's an extremely important point: If you hold your nose and refuse to engage with anyone who disagrees with you, or whom you can recognize as representing some other class, we are never going to have a revolution.

The other mistake you can make—on the other side, so to speak—is this: If you do what you need to do, in all its dimensions, with all the complexity involved, you are going to find yourself pulled away from the orientation you need to maintain—pulled toward "we're all just good people here." "Hail fellow, well met," as they say in Shakespeare—we're all good people here, we all want good things. But, the fact is, we don't all want all the same things. We may want some of the same things, but there are a lot of things that are not the same, a lot of things that are different, about what we want, what we're striving for. And there has been this whole wrong approach of working with people by "meeting them halfway," instead of applying solid core and elasticity based on the solid core—wide arms but based on the solid core. This is the point that needs to be driven home: remaining continually grounded in that solid core of what this needs to be all about, and what it needs to be aiming toward.

This goes back to what I began with: being grounded in *for whom and for what*—in the largest sense, not in a narrow sense of tailing the masses, but what are the fundamental interests of the masses of people of the world, and what's necessary to actually realize those interests. There's a constant pull and a constant struggle, if you're playing this kind of a role—on whatever level, and in whatever capacity—the tendency to get pulled away from that solid core and to forget what it is you have to represent and fight for. Or, on the other hand, the tendency to do that in a narrow and a rigid and a dogmatic way, which doesn't reach out and embrace people broadly and bring them into the process, while not giving up the solid core. So this is a tricky, a difficult contradiction, and the more you do this, the more you feel the acuteness of this: Acting in the role of a politician, in a good sense—or statesman, in a good sense—for the communist revolution, is a necessity, or we

won't have this revolution; but this will exert contradictory pulls on you, and you can get in this rarified atmosphere and forget what it is that this has to be all about.

In connection with this, one of the things we have to think about is why are so many people, including so many communists, pulled so often toward compromising their basic principles, toward just trying to go along with the way things are, and attempting to fit what we're supposed to be about into the way things are, rather than struggling to change things. Why are people so afraid of being far out in front of where most people are at? Well, you can understand the pull, because you don't want to be isolated. But the fact is, if what we are doing and what we are fighting for is not vastly different than where most people are at, it's not any good. As the revolutionaries in China emphasized, particularly during the course of the Cultural Revolution there, **Going against the tide, when the tide is wrong, is a communist principle.**

The fact is that, where most people are at now, is not where people need to be. Where most people are at is shaped and conditioned by how this society, how this system, is working on them. So if we want to lead people where things need to go, there's gonna be that tension, that contradiction, that we have to be out in front, fighting with people that this is where they need to go, while many things are pulling on them another way and you stand out as being different. But being different in that way is very good and very important, as long as you work and struggle to bring more people forward along the same path. Being radically different than the rest of society is what we need to be—including being radically different than the so-called “movement,” because that “movement” isn't about anything that's going to lead to what people really need, and in many ways is actually working against that. That's not true for all of it; but, in terms of the organized “movement,” it's true for a lot of it.

I was thinking about this in these terms: Which “M” should we base ourselves on—the “movement” or materialism, dialectical materialism? We need to base ourselves on materialism, dialectical materialism, what the application of that shows to be the fundamental need—not where most people are at, at a given point, but what a scientific dialectical materialist analysis shows us is the need and the basis for transforming things. Earlier, in talking about revolutionary defeatism, I noted that I was struck by the fact that, in hearing reports and in reading things that people have written, on the basis of reading the Interview with Ardea Skybreak, as far as I know, no one commented on the section in that Interview where she speaks passionately about hating the national anthem, hating the pledge of allegiance, hating the flag and people saluting the flag. I expected that a lot of people would say, “Wow, me, too—I'm really glad to hear somebody say that!” And the fact that this didn't happen—that people commented about a lot of things that struck them in that Interview, things they learned a lot from, but there was a glaring lack of commenting on, expressing agreement with, this part of the Interview—raised the question, particularly in terms of revolutionary defeatism: Is this another case where people don't want to be standing out? Do people not want to be out there, opposing this “thank you for your service,” and hand over your heart, saluting the flag?

Skybreak points out: It's terrible, you go to a sporting event, or some other event, and they play the national anthem, and these basic youth—not all of them, but way too many of them—stand up and put their hand over their heart. Maybe they even join in singing about “the land of the free and the home of the brave.” For god's sake (if you'll pardon the expression), here's this system that's crushing them, has enslaved them, exploited them, oppressed them and people all over the world, and they've got their hand over their heart, singing along about “the land of the free and the home of the brave.” And we don't hate that? We don't see what a terrible thing that is, how much harm that's doing to the masses of people, that they're told that this is the way to be respectable and make your way in the world and you should be loyal and patriotic toward your country that's brutally oppressing you and people all over the world? We don't think we should stand up against that? I'll tell you one thing: If even a couple of people went to an event like that, sat among basic masses of people and called that shit out when it started to happen, a lot of good things would get turned loose: a lot of good struggle and a lot of sentiments that are just barely beneath the surface. More than a few people would say, “Yeah, what the hell am I doing, anyway?” We have the responsibility to do this.

Once again, we need to clearly understand that masses of people are never going to come to the place of seeing the need to overthrow this system, and bring into being a radically different system, if they don't learn about and act on the real nature of the system they live under and the government and ruling class that presides over it, and what it does to people all around the world, as well as to themselves. So this struck me in a negative way, that people weren't commenting on this. We should be out there challenging this shit. We used to have that shirt—I think it's still around—the T-shirt which has, on one side, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, from the 1968 Olympics, when the national anthem was played and they raised their fists in the air with their heads down, as an act of protest and rebellion. For that, they were thrown out of the Olympics, and their entire lives were conditioned in a very negative way because of that stand they took. These were world-class athletes, but they weren't being built up into doing commercials for Pepsi, and Wheaties, and so on and so forth. They had to scramble to find any kind of a job after that. But they took this stand, a defiant and heroic stand. (I also noticed, by the way, that recently on the revcom.us website, there was an article celebrating the white sprinter from Australia, who supported what they were doing, which was another important thing.⁶³ It was important to bring out the role of that person, because he did stand with them—he didn't pre-empt what they were doing, he didn't put himself in the middle of it, but he stood with them and defended what they did.) Anyway, we have had that T-shirt and, along with that picture of Tommie Smith and John Carlos, it said: “We need a lot more of this.” And then, on the back, there is an athlete down on one knee pointing towards the sky in that all-too-familiar religious posture, and the caption says: “Not this!” Well, we need a lot more of “this”—the kind of stand taken by Tommie Smith and John Carlos—and not this (the slavish posture of down on your knees, praying and giving praise to some non-existent god).

But to return to intellectuals, and their relation to revolution, another contradiction bound up with the role of intellectuals as, in Marx's formulation, the political and literary

representatives of a class, is that in every revolution that has taken place so far, the political and literary representatives of a class are different than that class itself. This has been true in the bourgeois revolution, and not just in the proletarian revolution. Here we get to another important point of Marx's, about the shopkeeper and the democratic intellectual: Marx points out that, in terms of how they approach the world, in their daily lives, they may be as far apart as heaven and earth; but the democratic intellectuals, much as they may philosophize in lofty realms and talk about the rights of the people and so on, do not, in the world of ideas, get beyond the limits of bourgeois right, any more than the shopkeeper gets beyond this in the realm of practical everyday activity. This same basic principle applies when such intellectuals lead a bourgeois revolution: They are different than the actual class of capitalists that they objectively represent, even as they remain within the same realm, within the same limits of bourgeois relations and the rights that correspond to that.

But this contradiction—between intellectuals and the class they lead in making revolution—becomes much more acute when it comes to the proletarian revolution. In the bourgeois revolution, the masses fight and die, and an exploiting class comes to power, if that revolution is successful—an exploiting class led by its intellectuals, its political and literary representatives. In the proletarian revolution it has to be different—but it isn't automatically different. So here's a very sharp contradiction: This revolution, too, is led by people who are different than the masses of people they are leading, even if some of them came, originally, from among those masses. That was my point earlier—they are different. They have developed these intellectual capacities—here again is that other “pyramid point”: you can use those capacities you have developed for one class or another. You can go over to using them for the capitalist system, even if you didn't start out intending to do that. That's one of the things about intellectuals: As I pointed out in *Ruminations and Wranglings*, they can detach themselves, so to speak, from one class and attach themselves to another class, even though their position in society corresponds, more or less, to that of the petite bourgeoisie, the middle class. In other words, they can take up the cause of one class or another, and use the same intellectual skills, more or less—not the same science, but the same basic intellectual skills—on behalf of one class or another.

In the bourgeois revolution, it doesn't matter that an exploiting class comes to power, and it doesn't matter that the intellectuals who lead it are in the service, ultimately, of that exploiting class. I'm being deliberately provocative here. By saying “it doesn't matter,” what I mean is this: *that's the nature* of the bourgeois revolution. I don't literally mean it doesn't matter—actually it matters a great deal—but that's the nature of the bourgeois revolution. The proletarian revolution, however, has a whole different character and aim. The proletarian revolution has to lead to the end of exploitation, as its ultimate goal, the end of all oppression. But it still, for a long time, requires a group, even if it's a growing group, of intellectuals to lead it; and those intellectuals can detach themselves from the proletarian cause and go over to the cause of the *bourgeoisie*—not just as an act of willfulness—they consciously decide to betray the revolution—but mainly because the material contradictions in the world still provide the basis for the capitalist

road to be taken, instead of the socialist road leading to communism. And this will be true for a long time, even in socialist society. So, as opposed to the bourgeois revolution, it matters a great deal whether this revolution, the proletarian revolution, ends up bringing to power (or bringing back to power), a group of exploiters, or proceeds on the road of communism, with the goal of doing away with all systems and relations of exploitation and oppression.

These are some of the contradictions that have to be confronted, if you're going to play a leading role, at various levels, in a revolution. It doesn't matter where you start out: The more you develop and the more responsibility you have, the more these contradictions are going to be part of what you have to deal with, in your own role but beyond that in the larger world, because this is not just a matter of individuals, it's a social phenomenon—it has to do with the conditions that still exist, and will exist for a long time, even after you've overthrown capitalism, even after you establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and embark on the socialist road. It's going to be a constant struggle for the leadership to stay on the socialist road, and to bring forward more and more people to be leaders on that road, and not some other.

I remember when the coup happened in China in 1976. For those of you who have read my *Memoir*, you know that one of my “mentors” (if you want to use that phrase) was someone named Leibel Bergman—he was the one who introduced me to communism. Of course, I knew about communism, but he really brought me into a communist orientation. At the same time, he was strongly influenced by revisionism—meaning ideas and programs that are put forward in the name of communism or socialism but actually cut, or revise, the revolutionary heart out of it and keep things within the framework and confines of capitalist relations and capitalist political rule. So he was, on the one hand, a communist who introduced me to communism in a systematic way, but also strongly influenced by revisionism. He'd lived through the period when the Soviet Union was socialist, in the 1920s, '30s and '40s, and into the early 1950s, but then in the mid 1950s the Soviet Union was taken back down the road of capitalist restoration. And then, when the same thing was happening again in China in the late 1970s, that merged with some other weaknesses of Leibel's, and he just couldn't deal with the reality of yet another capitalist restoration in what had been a socialist country. I remember when I said to him, “Man, what's happening in China is a revisionist coup, people who are taking things back to capitalism have seized power there, we gotta come out against this.” He angrily replied, “There you go again, telling everybody what to do—now you think you gotta tell the Chinese people what's good for them.” And I answered, “Yeah, that's what we're supposed to do. That's what Mao said. Mao said, ‘If in the future revisionists come to power in China, the communists in the world should unite with the 90 percent of the Chinese people whose interests are against revisionism, and work with them to overthrow the revisionists.’ So that's what we're supposed to do.”

Another time, when I was arguing with Leibel Bergman about what was happening in China, I made the observation about Zhou Enlai, who was a major leader in China: “Well, it looks to me like he's thrown in with the revisionists.” And Leibel angrily responded:

“Why would Zhou Enlai want to go revisionist?” I said, “It’s not really a matter of what he wants to do, that he wants to go revisionist, it’s a matter of *line*.” Here’s what happens: You come to these crossroads, one after another, where you face new challenges. Engels made this point: Revolution doesn’t develop in a straight line, it develops through stages; and at every stage, some people get stuck. There are new contradictions that pose themselves, and what was good enough to get you to point A is not good enough any more. You have to make new breakthroughs, new ruptures, new leaps. As I’ve been speaking to, very acute contradictions pose themselves repeatedly along this road, and there are very powerful pulls to come back within the bourgeois realm, to put it that way. I mean, think again about these people in Angola, those who are in power there now. We can’t say that they all started out as corrupt, self-seeking profiteers and looters. No, even though their outlook was an eclectic mishmash—nationalism mixed in with some communist inclinations—and that was a real problem, most of them were sincere revolutionaries of a kind, with a mixed bag of nationalism and communism, which wasn’t good enough. It’s not a matter of not being sincere—you come up against contradictions repeatedly, and if you don’t keep applying yourself more and more deeply to grasp and apply the scientific method of communism in grappling with how you keep on the road leading to where you need to go—if you don’t keep re-grounding yourself in the scientific understanding that this is where we have to go, or these problems will not be solved, what the masses are going through will not be eliminated, so we have to find a scientific way to keep going on this road—if you don’t do that, you will get pulled onto the other road, whether you want to or not. This gets posed very acutely for the top leadership of a party and a broader revolutionary movement, but it gets posed for everybody who’s involved.

So, this is a contradiction we have to recognize—we have to keep fighting even to recognize, let alone to stay on, the road of going to communism. You cannot do it by spontaneity, and going along with whatever is right on the surface at a given time. And, to come back to the situation in Cambodia in the 1970s, you cannot do this the way the Khmer Rouge, the so-called communists in Cambodia, tried to do things. The accusation has been made that they persecuted everybody who wore glasses—in other words, people who were intellectuals—and that accusation is only a slight exaggeration. They did adopt an orientation that everybody who’d had any privilege above the basic masses in the old society should be put at least into the category of highly untrustworthy people, if not into the outright enemy camp. And, as far as I understand things from the study I have done of this, they dealt with a whole bunch of real contradictions all in the wrong ways. For example—nobody talks about this any more, but at the time, if you were living through it, you were definitely aware of this—the U.S. imperialists bombed the shit out of Cambodia. They killed a lot of people, destroyed a lot of things, and installed and backed a brutal puppet dictatorship in Cambodia that persecuted a lot of people, as part of these imperialists’ overall war in Indochina. In fighting this U.S.-backed regime, the Khmer Rouge had their base areas in part of the countryside in Cambodia. When the U.S. stopped the bombing and pulled out its main military forces from Indochina, that regime collapsed and the Khmer Rouge came to power. But then they took real contradictions and grabbed ahold of the wrong ends of them, repeatedly. For example, they took this

position: There are some people who lived in the base areas that got bombed and attacked when we were waging the war against the old regime, and the U.S. behind it. Those people in the base areas really had it hard, so those are people we can trust. But the people who didn't live in the base areas, they're not very trustworthy. So those people were all put under suspicion.

Well, there was a real contradiction there, which was part of larger contradictions, but that was absolutely the wrong way to deal with it. You're making potential enemies out of many people who should not be enemies. And things are more contradictory than that. Not everybody, including not all the basic peasants, who lived in the base areas were highly advanced revolutionaries either. It was more complicated than that. So they just made a mess out of these real contradictions.

And they did the same thing in the economy. They basically tried to eliminate, or largely eliminate, right away, any kind of commodity exchanges, because they calculated: If we allow commodity exchanges and money, and some private property, and so on, those things are just going to eat up what we're trying to do. Instead of the correct approach of Mao, who said: These are real contradictions, but under the dictatorship of the proletariat, these things can only be restricted, you can only restrict bourgeois right, you can't eliminate all these contradictions, especially not right away—contradictions like those between mental and manual labor, the use of money, the persistence of commodity relations—all those things we can only restrict, Mao said, until we get to a whole different place, not just in China, but in the world as a whole. I talked earlier about what the material basis is for why that is the case, that for some time under socialism you can only restrict these things. So, Mao had the correct way of dealing with these contradictions, but the Khmer Rouge had a really crude way of dealing with it, which was this way of thinking: because these things will tend to give rise to capitalist impulses, we have to stomp them all out. And, as a result of that, they undermined the economy and in that way, too, made enemies out of a lot of people that they shouldn't have made into enemies.

I don't have time now, and I don't want to try here, to go into a more elaborate analysis about Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, but there are a lot of important lessons by negative example to learn from this. These are the kinds of contradictions you have to deal with, if you're gonna be part of leading a revolutionary movement. And in a strategic sense, we can say two things about this: It gives you a terrible and repeated headache; and we should welcome it. Both things are true, because this is what leads to where we need to go—working and struggling through these contradictions in the right way, with the right orientation of *for whom and for what*, and with the right scientific, dialectical materialist method and approach.

And then, whether you're in a socialist country and are "a party in power," to use that as shorthand, or if you're in a country where a revolution has not yet been made, another contradiction that you face is the influence of the larger world, the "outside world"—in a certain sense, the influence of society and the world as a whole—on and within the

vanguard party that's working to transform that whole world. This is a lot of what we're dealing with. We can put it this way: The necessity to have a vanguard party is an expression of and flows out of the very contradictions that you're working to overcome through the communist revolution. While you're working on this, those very contradictions—including the contradiction between those people who work in the realm of ideas and those who work more in physical labor—pose the need for a vanguard party to lead this process. All these deep-seated contradictions that can't be eliminated once and for all, right away—those contradictions are the very things that both require you to have a vanguard, and that pose the possibility of that vanguard being pulled off the correct path. And, again, there is, in a more general sense, the influence of the larger world out there, the prevailing society, and what prevails in the world at large—not just ideologically, although that's very important, but practically, in terms of the economy, in terms of the social relations, and all the influences this exerts on everybody in society, including people in the ranks of the revolution. All this finds its expression within the vanguard, both before and after the revolutionary seizure of power.

This negative influence, to put it that way, has been especially pronounced in this recent period of the last few decades, since the defeat of the revolution, the overthrow of socialism and the restoration of capitalism, in China. And you can think about a country like the U.S., which is not just any old country, but the most highly parasitic imperialist power in the world as a whole, and certainly one of the most parasitic in the history of humanity, with the effects of this on broad strata of the people, the constant pulls—all the things I was talking about earlier, in terms of the “self,” and commodity relations, all the ideological pulls toward individualism, and so on, as well as the effect of the material conditions, rooted in the mode of production and the corresponding social relations—the necessity and pulls all that exerts on people. The Party that needs to play the vanguard role in the revolution is not—even if it tries to be, it cannot be—sealed off from the larger society and world; and if it does try to seal itself off, there's something very wrong to begin with, which we'll talk about. So, in a country like this, all these influences are particularly pronounced and exert a powerful pull, even among the revolutionaries, even within the vanguard party. This is true before—and in even more pronounced and acute terms after—the seizure of power, when the party is then the leadership of the new socialist society, and is in a position either to lead people to continue on the socialist road, toward the final goal of communism in the world as a whole, or to drag society back toward capitalism. That's not a contradiction we can just wish away. It's something we have to recognize and struggle with repeatedly, on the basis of a scientific method and approach.

The Cultural Revolution Within the RCP

Now, those general observations bring me to this Party in particular. There has been—it was recognized, more than a dozen years ago now, that there was a need for—a Cultural Revolution within this Party, with everything that implies: a thoroughgoing struggle to transform the whole direction the Party was taking, and the whole character the Party was taking on. This stood in very acute contradiction to the indispensable need for this

Party to actually be a revolutionary communist vanguard. Why was it necessary to do something as drastic as this?—and it was and is something drastic, to have a Cultural Revolution within this Party. Because, owing to a lot of the factors that I’ve mentioned, and some others that I’ll touch on, the whole character of this Party was beginning to turn into its opposite, was very seriously on the precipice, on the very edge, of descending into not being a revolutionary communist vanguard, and degenerating into just a clique of reformists who had lost the whole orientation of scientifically going after the problem of radically changing society, bringing about the kind of profound transformation that’s represented by the communist revolution. All this had become very powerfully asserted within this Party, despite and in opposition to the “official line” of the Party and my work and the leadership that I was struggling to provide, to keep the Party on the road of revolution and communism.

There were a lot of different manifestations of this. People here should be familiar with much of this, but there was a whole way in which the Party was turning into what we’ve described as an alternative lifestyle: just a place to hang out with other people who didn’t like the way the world was. The goal of revolution was going out of consideration—it was some far-off, abstract thing that maybe, “one fine day,” some other people would make—while this Party would just sort of keep the banner fluttering weakly in the wind. There was a turning inward, there was a tailing after identity politics, and other reformist trends, rather than an approach of “solid core with a lot of elasticity on the basis of the solid core” (even if that specific formulation had not yet been brought forward, that was the basic orientation and approach that should have been what people were basing themselves on, but instead they were going somewhere else). The work that I was doing, which has been further developed since but which was already quite developed in the direction of what I have outlined about the new synthesis of communism: All of that was being ignored—perhaps “appreciated” on one level and then put on a shelf to gather dust—or it was being opposed, either directly or, to use the parlance of the times, passively aggressively. The whole orientation of being a vanguard of an actual revolution was being given up on—which, it hardly needs saying, was a betrayal of everything the Party is supposed to be about.

In confronting this, it was necessary to approach and analyze it scientifically. Are we still for—do we still understand the need for—the dictatorship of the proletariat? Do we still understand that the goal is communism—and that communism is not just some vague idea of equality, but actually what Marx was talking about when he put forward what has been encapsulated in the formulation the “4 Alls”? Do we even understand that you need a vanguard party—which is kind of a sharp contradiction if you think about the fact that you’re supposed to be a vanguard party, yet you’re falling into questioning whether you need a vanguard party—and is there the orientation that this has to actually *be* a vanguard party, not some gathering of veteran activists from a previous era when people felt more revolutionary, and felt buoyed up by revolutionary struggle in the world, which has since ebbed? All this did become concentrated around my leadership and the work that I was doing, because, as I said at the time, these questions—do you need the dictatorship of the proletariat? is the goal communism in the sense of what Marx set

forth, in fundamental terms? do we actually have to overthrow this system? do we need a vanguard party, that is an actual vanguard of communist revolution, to lead in achieving all this? and what method and approach do we need to learn from the experience of the past, and from broad spheres of human activity, in order to forge forward on this road?—these were the kinds of questions I was working on, assuming, for a long time, that this whole Party was in the same place, grappling with these same contradictions, when it turned out not to be the case at all, with very few exceptions, on every level of the Party. In fact, the rest of the Party was leaving all that aside and—again with very few exceptions—going off into something else, which really didn't have to do with revolution and communism at all, even if the words were still spoken.

Now, here, let me speak to the question: Why was I doing the work I was doing? Once again, we're back to *for whom and for what*. I wasn't doing this work for myself. When I was young, in middle school and then even more so in high school, my life got changed in a very major way by coming into contact with people that I hadn't really known that much before, in particular Black people. I started learning about their situation and how that relates to what goes on in this society as a whole. I was drawn to the culture—not just the music and the art overall, but the whole way of going through the world—of the Black people who became my friends, and the world they introduced me to. And I came to the point of recognizing: *these are my people*. Now, I knew they had a different life experience than I did. But these are my people—I don't see a separation—it's not like there are some other people “over there” who are going through all this and somehow that's removed from me. *These are my people*. And then I began to recognize more deeply what people were being put through, the oppression they were constantly subjected to, the horrors of daily life as well as the bigger ways in which the system came down on them. And as I went further through life and began to approach the question of what needs to be done about this, and was introduced to taking up a scientific approach to this, I realized that my people were more than this. I realized that my people were Chicanos and other Latinos and other oppressed people in the U.S.; they were people in Vietnam and China; they were women...they were the oppressed and exploited of the world...and through some struggle, and having to cast off some wrong thinking, I have learned that they are LGBT people as well.

These are my people, the oppressed and exploited people of the world. They are suffering terribly, and something has to be done about this. So it is necessary to dig in and systematically take up the science that can show the way to put an end to all this, and bring something much better into being. You have to persevere and keep struggling to go forward in this way. And when you run into new problems or setbacks, you have to go more deeply into this, rather than putting it aside and giving up.

So this is why I've been doing the work that I've been doing. And this question of what I was doing, the leadership I was providing and what this had brought forward, became the central question—or, as we have put it, the cardinal question—of this Cultural Revolution within the RCP, because this concentrates the fundamental question of whether this Party is going to be a vanguard of the future, or a residue of the past.

This was a very sharply posed, in fact a very dire, situation because, a real vanguard party is a really precious thing for the masses of people. Look, how many times can the masses of people say—in going through life in this shithole of a system, how many times can they say: “We have a force that’s really on our side, all the way, and won’t stab us in the back, or stop short of what we need.” How many times can people say that in the course of their lifetime, and can it really be true? So, it is a precious thing for the masses of people to have a party like that, which did come out of the upsurge of the 1960s and into the early ’70s, and was, in fact, the most important achievement that came out of that whole period and that whole upsurge in this country. Lots of things went backward; lots of forces either got crushed, or went off track, or gave up; lots of people got demoralized, settled in and accepted, went along with, the way things are, or got broken down by the workings of this system—people who’d once been much better. This Party came through that and didn’t do that. But over the decades since, it was worn down by the workings and the influences of this system, and by the fact that people had not been carrying forward the struggle to resist and overcome that, and to follow the leadership that was leading them to have that not happen, and instead to fight to forge further forward on the road we need to be on. Still, you just can’t throw away a party—unless it’s absolutely clear that it can’t be brought back from the road of revisionism and going into the sewer.

I have to say that, in the twelve years since the Cultural Revolution in this Party was initiated, there have been many times when I’ve said: “Well, we’re just not succeeding with this Cultural Revolution, we’re still not getting this Party back on the road it needs to be on.” This comes up in lots of little ways as well as big ways. For example, I was reading a report about somebody working around RiseUpOctober, and they were carrying out correspondence with a minister they wanted to get involved in this important struggle. Well, the minister sent this comrade an email—this was during the time when the finals of the NBA, the professional basketball championships, were going on, and this was in the Bay Area, where the NBA team there, the Golden State Warriors, was in the championship series, playing against the Cleveland Cavaliers—and the minister is all caught up in this, and in part of his email, while talking about political questions, he also says that he really hopes the Warriors win. And the comrade sends back an email and, among other things, says, Yeah, I hope the Warriors win, too; but, by the way, you really ought to listen to this NBA talk by BA.⁶⁴

Now, there is a really acute contradiction involved here: The NBA talk by BA is all about how the NBA is not a real contest that takes place mainly on the basketball court, but is more governed by the marketing strategy of the NBA executives, and that they shape the way the playoffs and the championship get worked out. So what’s happening on the court is happening on the court, but it’s being governed by much bigger things, by billion dollar marketing, which is much more shaping which teams are gonna be playing in the championship series, and which will win. So here you have this person saying, Listen to this NBA talk by BA, but, yeah, I hope the Warriors win, too.

If I were the minister reading this, I’d be thinking, “Well, you send me this talk by BA,

but, when I listen to it, it seems like you don't really believe what he says, because you're also talking about how you hope the Warriors win." So that, to understate it, is kind of a problem. Once again you have two kinds of goods you're promoting here. On the one hand, you're trying to develop something that is very important, RiseUpOctober, but you're tailing this minister. Instead of coming at it like we have different ideologies, and different views of the fundamental problem and solution, but we have a common interest in fighting this horrible police brutality and murder and mass incarceration, and therefore we should work together to make RiseUpOctober as powerful as it can be, you're trying to find a way to sort of suck up to this minister, if you want to put it crudely. "Yeah, I want the Warriors to win, too"—instead of presenting the world the way it actually is, including what the NBA is, and then uniting and struggling from that standpoint. This is perhaps a small-scale example—and I don't want to blow this one example, in and of itself, out of proportion, and pick on the person who fell into this kind of thing in this case—but the fact is that this type of thing has gone on, and still continues to go on, over and over again: You come with a mishmash of communism and populist reformism, and try to maneuver around and tail people, in order to get them to do what you want them to do in the immediate situation, forgetting the larger picture and where it all needs to go.

So this is a real problem, and sometimes it gets discouraging. But, we still need to keep the struggle going, for two very important reasons. Under the present conditions, it would be very difficult to bring into being a new party that could play the vanguard role that's needed. You don't just create a party because you want to—you don't just conjure up a party out of your head—and you can't just call one forth out of nothing, or out of conditions which at this time are not very favorable for creating that. Secondly—and this is very important—there is still a significant number of people in this Party who do want to be what they're supposed to be, who do still want this Party to be the vanguard it needs to be, and there are many people out there who need to be brought into this Party on the basis of what it needs to be, and not on something opposed to that. So, even with all the disappointments, we have to keep carrying forward the fight for that. But I'm just putting this out in very straight terms: This Cultural Revolution has not yet been fully won in this Party. And it is not a Cultural Revolution that has ended, by the way. All too often you hear people talking as if it's a thing of the past—like, "Yeah, back in the time when we had this Cultural Revolution in the Party..." There are all too many people, on different levels of the Party, referring to this in the past tense—but that is not the case.

The fact is that this Cultural Revolution is still continuing—but in some new forms and in a new framework: continuing the struggle to further transform the Party in the context of transforming the larger world, building the movement for an actual revolution, and, yes, bringing forward waves of new people as a key part of building and strengthening the Party as the leading core of that revolution, even as we're continuing the struggle to transform the Party to be more and more what it needs to be.

In this connection, here is a very important question: Why should people join this Party if it has been necessary, and it is still necessary, to carry out this kind of Cultural

Revolution in order for this Party to be the vanguard it needs to be? There's an answer to that question, but the answer is not a simple or superficial one. The answer is that many more people, wave after wave of people, should join this Party—on the right basis. But there are a lot of different dimensions to that answer, and it is important to grapple deeply with this question.

Now, in speaking about the continuing need for this Cultural Revolution, I'm not saying this to spread negativity. I'm being scientific. This is my best scientific understanding—and, collectively, it's the best scientific understanding of the leadership of the Party. There is still a struggle to be waged. The masses of people need this vanguard. Now, it would be worse for this Party to betray what it's supposed to be about, than if it had never existed. And we can't allow that to happen. But that's the challenge—and, look, there's nothing mystical about this. These kind of pulls and this kind of struggle will go on within every party—otherwise you wouldn't have had the restoration of capitalism in China; you wouldn't have had so many parties which were once good, or relatively good, but went completely off course when they couldn't correctly deal with things like the coup in China and the restoration of capitalism there, and many other important changes in the world. So, once more, it comes back to the basic things I'm stressing here: the need for science, and the need for the orientation of constantly, on a scientific basis, coming back to the question of *for whom and for what*. And what is the content of that "*what*"? And how do we fight for that in the world at large, as the main thing, but also, at the same time, fight for it within the ranks of the revolutionary movement and the Party that does need to be at the core, leading that revolutionary movement?

So, we should dig deeply, think deeply and grapple deeply, with this question. This is still a real challenge. But look, if I thought this Party were hopeless, I wouldn't be here, I'd be doing something else to form a different party. I'm not doing that, not because, "Oh, I just can't let go of this." It's because you make a scientific assessment that there is a basis for this Party to be what it needs to be; and, as a key aspect of that, there are the forces—forces inside the Party, and others who are at this time still outside the Party—who want to fight to go forward on this road, and who need to be led to fight forward on this road, including new people coming into the Party. But we all have a role to play in that—if you're in the Party, or not at this time in the Party, we all have a role to play, based on a scientific recognition of the reality and the great need. This goes back to what I said earlier: Leadership is decisive, and without a vanguard party based on the science of communism—and, yes, the new synthesis as a further, qualitative advance of that science of communism—the masses of people, ultimately, have nothing, whether they know that or not at any given time. It is not an exaggeration to say that, without that leadership, they are ultimately left completely at the mercy of this merciless system. That's just how real and how great the stakes are.

The Need for Communists to *Be* Communists

This raises another point I spoke about at the beginning of this Cultural Revolution in the RCP. And that is the phenomenon that, as I put it then, *most of the time, most*

communists are not communists. Now, this is obviously a problem! So, what do I mean by that? I mean that people, even people who sincerely consider themselves and want to be communists, are influenced strongly by all the pulls of living in a world which obviously is not communist and is powerfully pushing things in the opposite direction, in terms of how the system operates, the ways of thinking it promotes, and the influence of all that on people. And it seems that communists, living in this world of bourgeois relations, have many times found it very difficult, in their own thinking, to get beyond the realm of bourgeois right; to get beyond thinking that all we need to do, or the most important thing we need to do, is improve democracy; to get beyond thinking that we just need to have more equality; to get beyond thinking that, for example in a country like China (and this was a major theme of the revisionists there), since China for centuries has been trampled on by all these other powers in the world, what is needed, and what should be the basic goal, is to build China up as a powerful country so that it can take its rightful place in the world—which then strongly influences things to go on the road of capitalism, because that seems to be a kind of “shortcut” to building up the country as a power to contend with all the other powerful countries in the world—and this takes the place of thinking about the whole world and how to move beyond oppression and exploitation for the masses of people in the whole world. You see, another form of bourgeois right is just thinking in terms of “my nation, my people, my country” in opposition, at least objectively, to every other nation, people and country. Where does my nation, where does my people, where does my country stand in relation to everybody else? It becomes a contest of commodity relations on the level of nation to nation, or people to people, or country to country.

A lot of communists have had a very hard time getting beyond that whole way of thinking and instead approaching things with the orientation: yes, we make revolution in particular countries; yes, we have to struggle against the inequalities that are embedded in this system, within and between nations and countries; but the goal is way beyond that. The goal is to get to a radically different world where we have moved beyond all the things that constantly give rise to inequality and oppression and exploitation, all the things that are concentrated in that formulation of the “4 Alls.” A lot of communists—or people who call themselves communists—have forgotten about the “4 Alls.” They just concern themselves with the immediate struggle and what they can do to improve things here and there within the given framework, particularly the framework of the particular country they’re in. I’ve referred a number of times to the polemic in *Demarcations* #4, “Ajith—A Portrait of the Residue of the Past.” I’ve also referred to another important polemic against Ajith, by the OCR of Mexico, *Communism or Nationalism?* which is also in *Demarcations* #4. These polemics go deeply into the difference between actually being a communist and working toward the “4 Alls,” on the one hand, and working for something less, even in the name of communism, on the other hand.

What all this points to is the need for a continuing struggle for communists to actually be communists, to be guided by what communism is really about: the application of the scientific method and approach of communism, aiming for the goal of what’s concentrated in the “4 Alls,” all over the world, and not looking at things in terms of

something more short-term, more narrow and limited. In other words, communists, too, have to continually struggle to break themselves out of the confines, beyond the narrow horizon, of bourgeois right, in terms of their basic orientation and approach. This struggle is ongoing, and will be ongoing, because this is not happening in a vacuum—it is happening in a world where bourgeois relations and bourgeois right are constantly asserting their influence on people, in the way this system works and the way it conditions and propagandizes people to think and act.

A Fundamentally Antagonistic Relation— and the Crucial Implications of That

I want to focus now on a point that is emphasized in the Interview with Ardea Skybreak, and it's something that needs to be repeatedly emphasized: In fundamental terms, the relation between the Party and the ruling class of this society and its state—which, after all, despite its outward trappings of democracy, is in essence and in fact a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, with everything that means—this relationship is, after all, an antagonistic relation. Let's get into what that means and the implications of it. Whatever the particular status is, at any given time, of that relation, and whatever the outward appearances of that are—in other words, whether the powers-that-be are fully going after the Party, or apparently ignoring it, or infiltrating it on a certain level but to appearances not doing more—whatever the particular expression of that relationship is or appears to be at a given time, it is always an antagonistic relation, which means it is one in which, ultimately, one side has to destroy the other. That's what it means when it's antagonistic. It doesn't mean this will fully come to a head immediately—and, again, we're not setting out right now to overthrow the system and go for the seizure of power—but that doesn't change the fact that this relationship is, fundamentally and in its essence, antagonistic all the time.

The Ardea Skybreak Interview goes on to point out that there are, among the representatives and functionaries of this ruling class and its state, those who recognize and take seriously the threat posed to this system, even potentially, by an actual vanguard party and its leadership, and especially outstanding leaders when they emerge. Here it's worth thinking about a comment by Donald Rumsfeld, who was the Secretary of Defense under George W. Bush when they invaded Iraq. (By the way, I just have to say, as a matter of method: I never really agreed with the criticism of Donald Rumsfeld's statement about “known unknowns” and “unknown unknowns,” which he made during the Iraq war. When asked, at a certain point about the situation there, he said, there are some things we just don't know, and he added: “There are known unknowns.... But there are also unknown unknowns.” Many people ridiculed him for that statement. But I thought he had a point, methodologically. There are things that you know that you don't know, and then there are things you don't even know about that you may not know. He was correct about that. So, even though it's Donald Rumsfeld, you have to be scientific.) But, to get back to the more important point here: Rumsfeld was asked, why are you going after these Islamic fundamentalists with such a vengeance? In response, he made an analogy which we should think about seriously. It demonstrates that there are some

people in the ruling class who think strategically. His analogy was this: Back when Lenin wrote that little pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* in the early 1900s, if we had known everything that would lead to, we would have crushed it right then.

So this is something to think about. You have people in the ruling class who think about things in that kind of way, and they don't always wait until things pose an immediate threat to them before they pay attention to them and recognize the potential threat. Maybe not all the representatives of the ruling class approach things that way, but there are representatives who pay attention to these things and call the attention of others to it. And the question sharply poses itself: To what degree is this understanding clearly and firmly grasped among the ranks of the Party and the movement for revolution—and to what degree are the standards of this Party and this movement an expression of a correct understanding of this fundamentally antagonistic relation—or to what degree are the standards an expression of something else?

Now, besides the Ardea Skybreak Interview, there was an important article that I'm sure you're familiar with—the article about watching the movie *Fruitvale Station* with BA.⁶⁵ There were two basic points made in that *Fruitvale Station* article. One of them more or less corresponds to the point in the Skybreak Interview about the rare combination represented by BA: someone who is highly developed theoretically and has brought forward very advanced theory, and at the same time has a deep understanding of and a deep identification with the masses of the oppressed. That was one of the points—that was the first point—that this *Fruitvale Station* article was making. It wasn't just “Look how sensitive BA is, he isn't the stereotype of a cold, machine-like communist”—that was a point, but the essential point was the same point that's in that section of the Ardea Skybreak Interview about the rare combination. And then, flowing from that, was the point that was explicitly emphasized in that *Fruitvale Station* article: We had better recognize what this means, what we have here, and do everything we can to prevent the other side from taking it away from the masses of people. And the question, again, poses itself: How much, in reading the Ardea Skybreak Interview, did people really pause on this section that I'm referring to, speaking to this antagonistic relationship, and how much did it make them think of what was emphasized in that “Fruitvale Station” article? These are questions people should think about and grapple with.

Strengthening the Party—Qualitatively as well as Quantitatively

So, with everything I've said about the contradictoriness of this Party, there is, in fact, a great need to strengthen this Party, quantitatively and qualitatively—with growing numbers of people, and with people who come into this Party and join the fight to further rupture it onto the revolutionary road, and have it more thoroughly be on the revolutionary road. There's a need for that—I'm gonna say it straight up—there is a very real and great need for that. There's a need to wield *BASics* as a “handbook” of revolution, communist revolution, in a consistent way. There's a need to use the film of the Dialogue with Cornel West and *REVOLUTION—NOTHING LESS!* There's a need to consistently use the website revcom.us, not simply as some sort of “guide” for communists alone, or

as a place where you can find interesting information, but as a crucial means to influence and provide leadership for broad masses of people, as well the Party and the ranks of the revolutionary movement at any given time. The website is being developed with that purpose in mind—to build the revolutionary movement, and to continually draw forward new people toward and into that movement, aiming for an actual revolution and a radically different world. That’s what is said about the website when you look on the website itself. And there is the importance of the print newspaper for those people, prisoners and some others, who don’t have access to the internet—who can’t access the website, as such—but can get the newspaper, even if it’s interfered with a lot. The Ardea Skybreak Interview, as well as the Outline on the new synthesis of communism, and *Demarcations*⁶⁶—these are also important resources to go back to repeatedly, for people to really develop as communists, and to popularize and utilize broadly.

I think many of us, if not all of us, have had this experience: One of the ways you most learn, and develop as a communist, is by seeing the contention of opposing lines. A lot of times, things aren’t clear to you—what are these differences about? Then you see them sharply posed in polemics, and you recognize what the issues are, what the contention is all about, and why this matters. This is something Lenin brought out in *What Is To Be Done?*⁶⁷ He recalled a discussion he had with a representative of the economist trend in Russia (the economist trend argued that the way to build the socialist movement was to concentrate on leading the trade union struggle and other everyday struggles of the working class, and somehow out of that you could move toward socialism). Lenin polemicized strongly against that economist trend—making very clear why it was wrong and how it would never lead to a revolution that would go on the road of socialism. In opposition to that, as I spoke to earlier, he insisted that communists have to be *tribunes of the people*—going among all sections of the people, exposing the system in broad terms, and bringing forward the need for communist revolution. He argued compellingly that the proletarians are never going to come to a position of seeing the need for revolution and communism if this is approached from within the narrow sphere of their own experience and their own immediate struggle. So these were very clearly opposed views—Lenin’s, on the one hand, and the economist trend, on the other. Yet, in that essay (*What Is To Be Done?*), Lenin recounted how he was talking with this economist and they seemed to be agreeing on everything—but, at a certain point in their discussion, a question came up over which they found themselves in sharp disagreement, and then they realized that they didn’t agree on anything! And this is not a unique experience. You know how it goes—it all sounds good—everybody’s for the same things. But then, at a certain point, it becomes clear, if things are posed sharply, that people do not agree, and are not for the same things, at all.

Now, sometimes disputes are not really about anything important. Especially among various opportunist trends, like the Trotskyites, their disputes are meaningless, or worse, because it’s all idealism, it’s all a contestation of ideas in their head which don’t really deal with or correctly reflect the real world. Therefore, there’s a constant tendency among them to split and split and split, because if the test of your ideas is not the real world, then you can always find something to disagree over—and, believe me, intellectuals are

very good at doing that, especially if they don't get back to the actual reality. Now, let me emphasize again, I'm not anti-intellectual, but I do recognize the contradictions that exist in the world, including among the intellectuals. In fact, I count myself as an intellectual, and, as I have emphasized, the masses need revolutionary and communist intellectuals. But, if you're divorced from the real world, if your ideas are not in correspondence with the real world, and if the real world is not the ultimate test of your ideas, you can always find things to disagree about that you can never resolve, and therefore you split and split again. Well, those kinds of polemics and splits are useless, and worse.

But struggles and polemics that are waged over substantive things that have to do with the real world are very important, because you discover whether people actually agree, or whether they're really talking about completely different things and completely different means for arriving at them, and you can see more clearly what difference this makes in terms of changing—or not changing—the world. This happens over and over again. This is why *Demarcations* is so important. The different polemics against Ajith are very important. Ajith wrote a whole long thing, about 100 pages, with the title *Against Avakianism*.⁶⁸ Well, a number of different people, including communists from different countries, wrote substantial answers to that, and much of this has been published in *Demarcations*. It's very important to get into these things: What is being said by way of opposing the new synthesis of communism? What is correct in opposition to that attack on the new synthesis? And why is this new synthesis correct? We shouldn't act as if we are what people accuse us of being. People say we're a cult. Well, if you don't have any substance underneath what you're talking about, that's what you're going to be. You go around talking about this new synthesis, and so on, but what if somebody asks: "Well, what is this new synthesis?" "Oh, well, that's a different story—I don't know what it is, I just know I'm supposed to talk about it." That, to say the least, is not very convincing; that is not going to get us where we need to go.

So, things like *Demarcations*, the Ardea Skybreak Interview, the Outline on the new synthesis of communism—these are very important and substantial things that people should go back to repeatedly. I happen to enjoy reading polemics, because I like to see the lines sharply posed, and opposed. But even if at first it's difficult, you have to fight your way through these things, because it really is a matter of life and death, ultimately. It really does have everything to do with whether the masses are actually going to get out of this nightmare or not.

At the same time—this is another important point to emphasize, and it is emphasized in the Interview with Ardea Skybreak: While we want, and we need, to struggle to win people to be communists, this is not "all or nothing, all at once," and it shouldn't be approached that way. The point is made in that Interview: There is a place for everyone who can't stand this world as it is and wants to work for a radically different world—there's a place, and there needs to be a place, to be a part of and contribute to this movement for revolution, while you are learning more about it. As it is put in that Interview: You don't have to go from zero to 60 right away, and we shouldn't insist that people do that. We shouldn't be putting those demands on people, and we shouldn't be

running them around, keeping them busy all the time, while never engaging in any discussion and struggle with them over what this is all about—which, unfortunately, is all too common a tendency. It's not that there aren't many pressing things—as Mao said, so many deeds do cry out to be done. We have far too few forces and there's so much we need to do. But it's not the correct approach, and you won't solve the problem and make breakthroughs, if you just run people around and run them into the ground, or expect them to be 24/7 revolutionaries the first week that they're getting involved. There has to be a process, and we have to lead people through this process—which, yes, involves struggle, sometimes very sharp struggle, but it has to make allowance for the fact that it is a process, and that people need to work their way through contradictions. We have to lead them in this process of working through contradictions, and not expect them to zoom forward at breakneck speed, in a straight line—and we definitely should not just fill them up with busy work, without any time to really get into what this is all about. That's one of the reasons why people will not stick around—if you just get them to do, do, do, do, do, and you never go into the deeper questions of what this is about, why there's a basis for this, and how we're proceeding strategically, and why therefore we shouldn't get thrown off by temporary twists and turns, or ebbs and flows in the struggle, because we have a deeper grounding and a deeper understanding of what the basis is for all this, and here's how we're going to work on this. If you don't take the time to go into that, and struggle with people over that, people are going to continually fall away, because you're putting incessant demands on them, and they're running up against obstacles and they don't understand the larger—and, yes, complex—process, so they expect things to go forward in a straight line, and they don't have a basis for dealing with it when that doesn't happen.

We have to have the right combination, the right synthesis. We used to have that formulation of struggling all day against the powers-that-be, and talking about big things all night. Maybe today, as some people have suggested, it might be the opposite: maybe the night's when the resistance (the “fight the power”) goes on, in the main, and it's during the day that you talk about big things of theory, and strategy, and so on. But even there, there has to be some rhythm and pacing, in the sense that you have to allow for people to go through a process, even while you're struggling with them to keep going forward in that process, but not expecting them to just come zooming along, zero to 60, in a straight line.

So, that point in the Interview with Ardea Skybreak—and, again, the whole Interview—is a really important resource for Party members, and those close to the Party at any given time, but also for people who are newly coming around, and even people in society much more broadly who don't even know anything about communism—and what they do “know” is all wrong. That's also why the special issue of *Revolution* on communism, its history, and how this relates to the future of humanity, the special issue with the Interview with Raymond Lotta (“You Don't Know What You Think You ‘Know’ About...The Communist Revolution and the REAL Path to Emancipation: Its History and Our Future”) is so important. It's very important to be steeped in that, and to popularize and use it broadly with people.

Forms of Revolutionary Organization, and the “Ohio”

Besides the Party, which is the most important form of organization of the masses, in relation to their fundamental need for a revolution whose ultimate aim is a communist world, there are other important forms of revolutionary organization. There are the Revolution Clubs, which is an important form of basic revolutionary organization of masses, particularly when they are new to the revolution. Now, again, if people come into this and stay in the same place, and kind of find a niche, a little resting place, for years and years, that’s a problem—that means we’re not doing what we need to do. Not everybody is going to advance forward. Some people are going to learn more about this and decide they don’t want to be part of it, because they don’t want to give their lives to this, even if they’re sympathetic. At the same time, many people should be moving forward. But, particularly for people who are newer, the Revolution Clubs embody a means for them to take part in the revolution in an organized way, while they are learning more about this.

There is an important role for this kind of organization in terms of “representing” for the revolution: boldly putting forward this revolution, being a “pole of attraction,” drawing growing numbers of people around and into the ranks of the revolution, and popularizing the leadership for this revolution (the Party and BA). And there is a role for the Revolution Clubs as what we might call a “conveyor belt” to the Party. Now, that may be sort of a crude metaphor, but what it speaks to is that the Revolution Clubs should provide a way for people to work through the contradictions they are confronting, as they are taking part, in an organized way, in the revolution, with many of them moving toward the Party and getting to the point where they want to, and should, become part of the Party and contribute to the revolution in that way, and on that level, which is yet a higher level than something like the Revolution Clubs.

So, here is a question about the Revolution Clubs: How does “solid core with a lot of elasticity on the basis of the solid core” apply to building the Revolution Clubs, with their two main slogans: “Humanity Needs Revolution and Communism” and “Fight the Power, and Transform the People, for Revolution”?

Now, in addition to the Revolution Clubs, we need to have a living and creative orientation toward the emergence or development of other forms of revolutionary organization among the masses. It’s not that the Revolution Clubs are unimportant—they are very important. But we shouldn’t have a stereotyped approach to things. In the course of the upheavals that are going to go on, and people rising up, and in the course of our working and struggling with people, they may suggest other forms of organization, or themselves work to bring into being other forms of organization, which are expressions of the same basic revolutionary line; and, as opposed to having a rigid approach to this—as if everything has to be just one way, and the development of new forms of revolutionary organization is somehow a problem—we should have an open and creative approach toward the development of different forms of revolutionary organization as

things unfold, while continuing to recognize, and to give expression to, the importance of the Revolution Clubs. Here's the important point: All this needs to be guided, in a fundamental sense, by the same overall line and the same strategic goal—in other words, the same solid core.

This brings me to what we call the “Ohio.” This is a metaphor that was developed by some of us who are football fans. Way back in the day, we watched the Ohio State marching band performing at halftime of football games. They had this script “Ohio” that they spelled out (and I see that they still do this): They start with the “O,” and individual members of the band are marching through as they form the “O”; then the ones who have been part of the “O” go on and start forming the “H”; and then they move on to form the “I”; and then the last “O.” Meanwhile, other people come in and take over the first “O”—and so on it goes. If you look at the script “Ohio” being spelled out, there are people at every point, in each of the letters, but it's not all the same people in the same place. They're moving through it. So we adopted this as a metaphor for the process that needs to go on, where things have, at any given time, an actual identity, while people are moving through them. In other words, a revolutionary movement at any given time has an identity, in the way this “Ohio” does, as people are moving through it, but it's not always the same people remaining in the same place. People are supposed to be moving through it. (Otherwise, if the band did this script “Ohio,” and the first group of people didn't move, you wouldn't have the word “Ohio”—you'd just have one big mess.)

Now, it might seem somewhat silly to draw from things like a band performance at football games, but that just illustrates the principle that we can and should draw from all different parts of life. And this is actually a helpful metaphor: It gets at both the fact that there's a need for, and an identity to, organized forms through which people can be part of and contribute to the revolution, while they are continuing to learn and are in motion, but also that this will turn into its opposite if, in an overall sense, people only go so far and then get stuck in the same place. The point is for many of them to be moving through this and advancing more and more along the path toward joining the Party; and work and struggle should be carried out with them, with that orientation and that objective in mind—helping them to advance to the point where they meet the criteria and standards for being in the Party, and on that basis join the Party and continue to develop, and to contribute, in the context of being in the Party.

Now, again, some people may come to more clearly understand what this is all about and say, “Well, I don't wanna devote my life to that, I wanna fall back and do something else, or be supportive in a less involved and committed way.” OK, we should find the ways to work with people like that, to the degree that we can. But many people should be moving forward, even while this movement, and organized forms like the Revolution Clubs, have their identity.

The same basic principles apply to people who are in the Party. I referred earlier to the point that is emphasized in the Interview with Ardea Skybreak—that it's no good if people are in the Party for years and decades and they stay on the same level. If you've

been in the Party for a long time, and you're still just on the same basic level as when you joined—doing the same thing you did years ago—something's very wrong! Where's the "Ohio" as applied to that? This is another principle and another contradiction that we have to grapple with.

Statesmen, and Strategic Commanders

In moving toward a conclusion, I want to come back to this point about "statesmen," and strategic commanders of the revolution. What does this mean? Well, there are different dimensions to this. Most basically, it means grasping, applying, and contributing to the development of, the theory and strategic approach for communist revolution; that's the most basic thing it means to be a strategic commander of the revolution. It means you understand your role, and act, as an overall leader of the revolution—whatever your place or position is within the revolution, or within the vanguard party of the revolution, you think and act, in the appropriate ways, as someone who is contributing to the overall leadership of this revolution, as opposed to just being a cog in the machine and making an absolute out of a division of labor.

A party needs a division of labor, it needs people doing different tasks and working on different fronts of the overall revolutionary movement. It also has, and needs to have, a structure which—no apologies to "Occupy"—is not just horizontal, but is also vertical. In other words, you have people on different levels of the Party who correspondingly have more or less responsibility for the whole thing. And that goes along with the epistemological dimension to this because, without being mechanical or rigid about this, there is, there should be, a general correspondence between the level of the Party that you're on and your ability to contribute, and especially to lead—both in the sense of the "raw material" that you have to work with (that is, the information that is coming to you, through Party channels, as well as other sources) and in the sense of your ability to synthesize things and develop line and policy. So, if you're in the very top leadership of the Party, you have a lot more "raw material" that's feeding in from the world overall, as well as specifically from the work of the Party, from the different levels of the Party, and you have correspondingly more responsibility for synthesizing that into line—into theory, strategy, policy, and so on. But everybody at every level has the same fundamental responsibility, and should have the same orientation that they are responsible for the whole revolution. In that fundamental sense, it doesn't matter what role you have in the overall division of labor. You might be working on a particular thing, such as Stop Patriarchy,⁶⁹ but you're not a "Stop Patriarchy communist." You are a communist who might be working, primarily, in Stop Patriarchy, or SMIN (Stop Mass Incarceration Network),⁷⁰ or other things. Your fundamental responsibility is to contribute as much as possible to working through all the contradictions that have to be fought through to advance on the road of revolution and get to the point where we can actually go all-out with a real chance of winning. This means thinking critically, and raising criticism, in the right spirit and in the right way, through the right channels, if you think things are off track or things are not being taken up which should be taken up. This same basic principle applies more broadly to people who are not yet in the Party but are moving

through the “Ohio” as part of the broader movement for revolution: they should have the same fundamental orientation of contributing everything they can to the revolution, even though people who are part of the Party can approach this on a still higher level, as part of a more advanced collective organization and process.

The basic principle and fundamental orientation is this: Take responsibility for the revolution as a whole. This is what it means to be a strategic commander of the revolution.

Related to this is the important point Lenin emphasized: the need to go among all sections of the people—advocating for, winning people to, and, yes, organizing them into the revolution in different forms and on different levels. Doing this as a representative of the proletariat, in the largest sense—in other words, the emancipation of humanity through the advance to communism. As a representative of that, we should be going among all sections of the people. If they don’t agree: “OK, then, what’s your analysis of what’s going on in the world, and what needs to be done about it? Or if you don’t think anything needs to be done about it, let me tell you a few things and see what you think about that.” We should be eagerly taking on this responsibility and taking up this orientation of going among all sections of the people in this way. We should be chomping at the bit, as the saying goes: “Let me go to those college students and tell them what’s going on out here in the real world that they’re sheltered from!” Not in a way of tearing them down—“Oh, you’re soft, you haven’t been through anything, you don’t know what it’s like”—no. But let’s engage with people, let’s struggle in a good way with people: “Look, here’s what the hell is going on out here. This is what this system actually is about, and what it does to people, while it hides this from people like you. You need to know this, and you shouldn’t want to live in a world where this is what’s going on. You wanna live in a world where the police shoot down people in cold blood, and then mock their family when they shed tears—that’s a world you wanna live in? You wanna live in a world where every time you turn around there’s some kind of assault on women, either physically or in terms of their basic humanity? That’s a world you want to live in? Well, if you don’t, let’s talk about *why* the world’s this way, and what can be done about it.”

We should be eager—let’s go among all sections of the people. Something Cornel West said at the Dialogue has a lot of important truth to it, and we should apply this in a creative way. Speaking about Black people—and while there’s a particularity about that, it’s true about the basic masses more generally—he said, “Historically Black rage has always been the central threat to the status quo. Historically, not because Black people have a monopoly on truth, goodness and beauty, but because when Black folk wake up, lo and behold, all people who are subordinated and dominated can get in and wake up. This is what we understand together. This is why we’re here.” That’s true! And that’s something that should be wielded by us, as representatives of that in the fullest sense. Let’s go among all sections of the people and be very bold about it, and very firm about it. If people give us shit, we should give it back to them—but in a good way, in a way that’s lofty and pointing them toward what really matters, not petty things.

This involves correctly carrying out unity-struggle-unity with different people and forces, both in struggling around the fundamental understanding of problem and solution (what's the problem in the world, what's the solution), as well as in relation to particular struggles, around one of those "5 Stops," for example—struggles which, if we do our work in the way we should be doing it, can contribute to the movement for revolution, even if many of the people involved at a given time are not yet won to revolution. That's another contradiction we have to handle correctly, that's another expression of the "Ohio," so to speak. We need both revolutionary organization, and broader mass organization, of people standing up and fighting back, fighting the power. And we need to work so that all of this contributes to the revolution that is needed.

Methods of Leadership, the Science and the "Art" of Leadership

The last major point I want to talk about in this presentation is methods of leadership, the science and the "art" of leadership. I want to start by drawing from some important developments over the last few decades to illustrate this. Some people are more familiar with some of this, and some people less, but in the period of the 1980s there was a people's war that was developed in Peru, led by the Communist Party of Peru. It made a lot of advances. Now, there were things about their line that we did not agree with. There were ways in which we felt they were veering toward religiosity, or actually lapsing into religiosity, with the idea that communism was the inevitable development of matter in motion. We raised these things and struggled over them. But, at the same time, because this was an important struggle that emerged in the world where people were trying to fight on the communist road, and mobilize masses to do that, we supported that and built support for it. And then, at a certain juncture, when this people's war was making significant advances, the ruling class in Peru (with the U.S. imperialists behind this) moved more decisively against the Party leading this: they did surveillance, they found out where the leadership, including the top leader, Gonzalo, was located, and they busted in and arrested them.

This situation presented a number of acute challenges for the international communist movement, including for our Party, which had played an important role in the development of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (the RIM), which was an international organization of Maoist parties, including the Party in Peru. For the reasons I summarized, we had taken the approach of supporting the people's war in Peru, even while we had significant differences over some important questions of orientation and method, and we were struggling over those differences—without, by the way, advertising it to the whole world to prove how smart we were, or how much better than the Party in Peru we understood things, or any of that kind of nonsense, which has nothing to do with what we are, and need to be, about. We carried out struggle in the way we thought would contribute to, rather than undermine, the revolution they were waging, and the overall struggle this was part of in the world. But when this arrest took place, some new contradictions posed themselves very immediately and very acutely. There was a very real possibility that the regime there would move to execute Gonzalo. So, immediately, we and some others associated with the RIM moved to build a movement internationally

to defend Gonzalo—to work against the possibility of his being executed. We (in saying “we,” I mean the RIM) organized delegations to go to Peru and put pressure on the regime not to carry out such an execution, and to demand that Gonzalo and the other leaders be released. At the same time, ideological struggles were growing more and more sharp, including within the Party there. Their difficulties were compounded by their tendencies toward religiosity, which found concentrated expression in terms of their view of Gonzalo: they basically regarded him as infallible, incapable of making mistakes, or at least any serious mistakes.

As an aside here, but a relevant one, I always have to laugh at the bourgeoisie and their mouthpieces and intellectual camp followers when they say things like, “You communists, you think people like Mao are infallible,” blah, blah, blah. Well, I have to say: “What about the Pope, motherfuckers?!” They celebrate the Pope as a great man. The Catholic Church actually declares that the Pope is infallible in matters of faith and morals—that’s the doctrine of the Catholic Church. Can you imagine if we said that the leaders of the communist movement are infallible when it comes to matters of politics and ideology?! Every time you hear them going on and on about this, you have to say the hypocrisy is quite astounding. “Oh, the revered leader, the Pope. Have they elected a new Pope—is the smoke coming out of the Vatican?” These “anti-totalitarian” bourgeois minions and hangers-on, in the media, etc., don’t say, “What a bunch of dogmatic totalitarians, these Catholic authorities, actually proclaiming that their leader is infallible!” Anyway, to return to the matter at hand: The Party in Peru had a tendency to treat their leader as more or less beyond question and beyond criticism—they put him in a special category, which we didn’t agree with and struggled against, as part of some broader ideological questions we were struggling over, particularly tendencies toward religiosity. But, again, there’s the question: What do you do in the face of the enemy—when the enemy is moving viciously against people who are striving to lead things on the road of revolution and communism, even if you think they are making some significant mistakes? You have to make a scientific analysis, you have to apply dialectical materialism. What do you understand to be the main thing—or, to put it another way, what do you understand to be the principal aspect of the contradiction? Is the principal aspect, the defining and main character, that this is a righteous struggle on the road of revolution, which, however, is making some significant mistakes? Or is it basically on the wrong road and going toward the wrong place? That’s a fundamental question you have to determine. And then, if you determine that it’s fundamentally correct, even with serious shortcomings, you have to support it, all the more so when it is under serious attack from the enemy.

But then things got still more complicated. Within a year or so, the regime in Peru came out with statements and videos they attributed to Gonzalo, saying that the Party should fight for negotiations for a peace accord to end the people’s war in Peru. Well, things became very sharp. What do you do about this? How do we approach this? This was, obviously, a new and significant development. The government is claiming this is what’s happening, and it is a major development if the leader of this Party is calling for negotiations to end the people’s war. Well, the rest of the leadership of the Party there—

that is, the leadership that remained outside of prison—simply refused to investigate this scientifically. Instead, they carried further their kind of religious approach: Because they had built up Gonzalo in such a way as to make him essentially infallible, they refused to even consider the possibility that he was calling for negotiations to end the people's war. Therefore, they insisted, this had to be a hoax perpetrated by the government, and that's the end of the discussion.

Well, we said, no, you can't do that—you have to approach this scientifically. You can't simply dismiss this, just because it would be a very negative thing. You can't say, "I don't want to believe that, because it would have very negative consequences, so I'm just going to say it's not true, and not look at it." We argued: First of all, we have to investigate and authenticate, that is, we have to find out if these statements being attributed to Gonzalo are authentic, we have to do our best to determine if Gonzalo is actually calling for negotiations to end the people's war. And while we're investigating that, we also have to, even more fundamentally, evaluate whether, whoever is saying this, it is correct or not to call for such negotiations. We can't just simply dismiss it. You can't say there's never a time when you would enter into negotiations with the regime that you've been fighting against. There have been times in the history of the communist movement when it has been correct to do that. I pointed out earlier that, in the Chinese revolution, at a certain point they shifted gears, entered into negotiations and formed a united front with the very force they'd been fighting against, life and death. So, you can't automatically say this is wrong. You have to look into it: What are the reasons being given for this? What are the conditions being pointed to as the basis for this call for negotiations? Is it a correct analysis of the conditions, of the necessity? Is it a correct analysis of what to do in the face of this necessity?

Struggle over this went on inside the ranks of the RIM for several years, where we were fighting to get that to be the approach. And it was very difficult, because again the Party there—the leadership that remained outside of prison—was insisting, "No, this is a hoax, there's nothing to look into, there's nothing to analyze, there's nothing to evaluate, and if you say there is, then you're just aiding the imperialists and the regime in Peru who are perpetrating this hoax." So, this was a very difficult contradiction to deal with. Because we were struggling for a scientific approach to this, we got viciously attacked by people declaring themselves supporters of the Party in Peru. We were denounced as counter-revolutionary, I was slandered as an agent of U.S. imperialism, and so on and so forth. These are some of the things you have to go through if you're serious about actually getting where we need to go. This is what it means, and what it involves, to be a strategic commander of the revolution, to take responsibility for the revolution, including in its international dimension. It's not that we were trying to run the revolution in Peru, but we were doing our best to act on the responsibility to contribute everything we could to the advance of the revolution in the world as a whole. And that means, at times, that you have to struggle with people in other countries about the course of the revolution there. It's like when Leibel Bergman told me: "There you go again, telling the Chinese people what to do." Well, that was a juncture where we had to become involved in struggling over what had happened in China, and what to do about it. And this was the case with the

situation that had become acutely posed in Peru.

Well, finally, after several years, the RIM did put out a statement which basically said: We cannot at this point fully resolve the question of whether Gonzalo is actually calling for negotiations to reach a peace accord to end the people's war, but whoever is calling for it, it's wrong, and here's why. (A big part of the reason why we couldn't determine, definitively, if Gonzalo was actually calling for these negotiations was because he was in prison, and the authorities wouldn't let people from the delegations sent by the RIM talk to Gonzalo in prison and pose the question: Are you actually calling for this or not?) But it needs to be emphasized that this statement that finally came out from the RIM wasn't just—snap—like that. We did a lot of work to analyze different situations where negotiations had been entered into by revolutionary forces that had been at war with a ruling regime. We analyzed as best we could what were the actual conditions in Peru with the development of the struggle there. On that basis, we wrestled with the question: Was it right or wrong to call for negotiations to end the people's war? And we came to the conclusion that it was wrong.

All this involved a lot of intense struggle. As I said, it involved being called CIA agents every other week, and so on and so forth. But you have responsibility—your responsibility is not just to the movement or to the organized forces as they exist at any given time. That's part of it, but your *fundamental* responsibility is to the masses of people in the world, and you always have to proceed from that. This doesn't mean that, in carrying out that responsibility, you don't have to take into account—or, to put it in positive terms, in carrying out that responsibility you do have to take into account—what the advanced forces, the vanguard forces in a particular country, or in general, are doing and saying. But you still have to apply science to figure out what is right, what is the road that leads forward, and what is the road that leads to the wrong place, into the swamp, especially at crucial junctures like the one that shaped up in Peru at that point.

Now, even after the RIM issued that statement, on the basis of the kind of approach I've summarized, the forces that were promoting the idea that this was a hoax didn't give up. They actually managed to reverse things and get a statement signed by the RIM several years later that denounced this as a hoax, even at the point where it was becoming increasingly clear that it was not a hoax—that, in fact, Gonzalo had been calling for a peace accord all this time. Even when the evidence was more and more strongly pointing to that, people would not give up on the claim that this was a hoax. And it's worth noting that one of the main people pushing for this continuation of the "hoax line" was Ajith—who, along with far too many others, proceeds with an orientation that we can't be thoroughly and consistently scientific, we just have to go by what we think, at any given time, will advance the revolution—which is a very narrow, pragmatic approach to the question of what will advance the revolution.

If what will supposedly advance the revolution is going against material reality and *inventing* a reality to superimpose on the actual reality, then that's not a revolution that you want to be advancing. If your method for doing what's good for the revolution is

inventing “truths”—and, to put it in somewhat crude terms, conning the masses of people into believing that things are not as bad as they might be at a given time—if that’s your way of going about doing what’s good for the revolution, that’s not a revolution we should be part of, because that’s not going to take things where they need to go. You’re not going to be able to deal with all the real world contradictions that you have to deal with, if that’s the method you’re using. And it’s not accidental, or incidental, that someone like Ajith argues that communism is not a science in the same way that other sciences are—that communism is different, that its “truths” are significantly determined by the subjective element of the position and class feelings of the masses of the oppressed, that this is more determining of what’s true than a scientific approach, and that it’s dogmatic to insist that science applies to revolution just as much as it does to any other sphere of material reality. Well, again, denying the scientific character of communism—and substituting subjective notions of “truth” (what you’d like to be true)—that is a method and approach that can only lead to someplace other than revolution aiming for communism. So it’s not surprising that someone like Ajith is attacking the new synthesis for its insistence that communism is a science, which has to apply the same basic principles and methods of science in general, and that we have to be consistently scientific, and investigate and deal with the real world as it actually is, and as it’s moving and changing.

Another experience I want to touch on here, which also holds important lessons in terms of method and approach, is the experience with Nepal, where, unfortunately, at another critical juncture (the coming together and concentration of a lot of contradictions), the leadership of the Party there went off the revolutionary road. I referred to this earlier in talking about how the argument was made to them: You comrades face a lot of great necessity, but you should not impose *unnecessary necessity* on yourself. And here, once again, the question was posed: With a revolution that, in an overall sense, you consider to be part of the same revolution in the world that you’re a part of—even if it has its own particularity, as the revolution in every country does—what do you do when you can see that this revolution is going off track and will plunge over a cliff if it keeps going the way it’s going? As people should know, we wrote many letters to the Party in Nepal, sharply raising criticisms of the line they were pursuing after a certain point.⁷¹ Now, when we first started recognizing this, around 2005-2006, we didn’t come out in *Revolution* newspaper and say: “The revolution in Nepal is not being led in accordance with the new synthesis of communism, therefore it’s no good.” No! That’s not what we did at all. We raised, in letters that were not at the time made public: Here is our understanding of the actual contradictions you’re dealing with, and here is why we think you’re dealing with them in the wrong way. If you give up on the goal of overthrowing the present regime, and instead try to go on the parliamentary road of electing yourself into a position of running the government under the present system, and with the present state still in power and in effect, you are going to be swallowed up by that system, and all the gains of the revolution that you’ve achieved so far—waging people’s war in the countryside, establishing revolutionary political power in parts of the countryside, carrying out some land reform, lifting certain burdens of oppression from women—all that’s going to be given up, and the revolution will end up being abandoned and defeated.

What were the conditions and contradictions they were confronting? At that point, besides the people's war they were waging in the countryside, there was a big upsurge in the cities, in particular the capital, Kathmandu. The country was being ruled by a monarchy, and there was a mass movement that got to the point of demanding the abolition, the overthrow, of the monarchy. Now, it was correct that they couldn't stand aside from that movement, and act aloof, as if, "Oh, we're off over here doing our people's war, and that struggle in the capital doesn't mean anything, that's just a bunch of bourgeois reformist stuff." It was correct for them to take part in and fight to lead that upsurge in the capital in a revolutionary direction. But in the process of it, they came to accept, more and more, the terms that were being set by that movement, as it was. To go back to what Leibel Bergman raised in regard to Zhou Enlai, the question is not "Why would the Nepalese comrades want to go revisionist?" It's not that they "wanted" to go revisionist. There were certain shortcomings in their understanding of things all along, and there were some in the leadership who were more and more openly arguing for a bourgeois-democratic orientation, but mainly they were on the road of revolution and making important advances on that road. But they ran up against certain new obstacles and contradictions—they came up against the prospect of not just fighting more limited battles in the countryside against outposts of the police and sections of the Nepalese army, but actually having to fight the backbone of the Nepalese army. Behind that was India threatening to intervene to put things down if the revolution got too far, and the U.S. and other imperialists were looming in the picture, as well as China, which pretended to be supportive in some ways, but if the Nepalese Party continued on the revolutionary road, would turn against it. These were very real things that they had to deal with.

In this context, we waged several years of struggle, very concretely. And every time they raised to us, "You don't understand, this is what we're up against," we did not say, "It doesn't matter, you're violating basic principle." We very seriously dug into what they raised to us, the conditions they were pointing to when they said, "We have to do this because this is what we're up against." We did not dismiss any of that out of hand. We went into all of it, to evaluate it as thoroughly as we could. We even questioned: Well, maybe in this situation they do have to do this. But we always arrived at the conclusion that, no matter how difficult it would be to remain on the correct road, if they went on the road they were increasingly taking—the road of accommodation with the existing system and state power—they would give up the whole thing. There was certainly no guarantee of victory—they might get defeated if they persevered on the road of revolution, and that would constitute a serious setback, not just in that country but for the revolution in the world as a whole—but it would be much worse to throw away the revolution by taking the road of revisionism and betraying the masses of people who were willing to sacrifice to fight for this revolution, because they had come to see it in their interests.

Here again we see the difference between dialectical materialism and *determinism* in the name of materialism, where you analyze the conditions before you, but you don't look at

the larger picture and the deeper underlying dynamics and contradictions. For example, on the one side, it's true that, had they continued on the road of revolution, there would have been a real possibility of powerful forces—India, perhaps China, maybe even the U.S. or other imperialists—intervening more directly against them. But it also would have raised the banner of revolution and communism powerfully in the world and set off a lot of contradictions, or sharpened a lot of contradictions, including in countries like India. And if they'd been able to hold out for a while, things could have gotten very sharp in India, in terms of exposure of the Indian government for its role in opposing the revolutionary struggle in Nepal. Once again you come to a juncture like this and you don't know in advance, you can't say, how all this might turn out; but if you just look at what's immediately before you and the difficulties you're up against right then, and you don't grasp the potential to transform necessity into freedom and set off a whole chain of events which might get contradictions going in a whole different way, in your more immediate circumstances and more broadly in the world as well, then you're going to take the road of revisionism because it seems to be more "realistic."

In relation to this situation, in assessing our responsibilities and recognizing the need to struggle sharply, we understood that the point is not to act like a "petty critic" finding fault with and poking at every little thing you don't agree with. It's so ironic, you hear certain opportunists saying, "The RCP, they just denounced what was happening in Nepal on the basis of a misreading of a few Marxist works, like the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*⁷² and *The State and Revolution*.⁷³" This from people who never carried out any scientific analysis of the actual concrete conditions facing the revolution in Nepal, but were just trying to jump on a bandwagon to say, "Well, we can still call ourselves Maoists even while we're betraying everything we're supposed to have been about."

At every stage, every key juncture, we were very assiduously, very systematically, digging into things. Even far into this process, when it had become more and more clear that the Nepalese comrades were going completely onto a trajectory leading to disaster, there were a few times when there would be a little spark of something that raised the possibility that maybe they were trying to get back on the right road, and each time we would jump at that and try to figure out if there were something there that could and should be united with and encouraged. This was our approach even for some time after we had published our letters openly, which put the whole struggle out to the world—for several years after that, whenever there was any kind of a spark, we would look very seriously into it. Why? Because this was not some kind of contest to determine who was the "better Marxist." The reason we didn't go along with what they were doing in Nepal was not out of any considerations like that. The orientation with which we proceeded, and what we were doing our best to analyze—and this is what I want to really drive home—is this: What is actually going to advance the revolution that the masses of people need, and what is going to take it over a cliff? Once again, it's a question of applying science to the question of *for whom and for what*. This is what it means to be a strategic commander of the revolution.

Now, just a few more points, and then I'll conclude.

Here is another example—perhaps a seemingly small one—regarding the science and the “art” of leadership, and the relation between them. This goes back to the time when there was the revisionist coup in China, in 1976, and then, for over a year, we had this very intense struggle within our Party—and, in a concentrated way, within the leadership of the Party—over how to evaluate this coup. Although the RU (Revolutionary Union) had existed for a number of years as the forerunner of the Party, the Party itself had just been formed in 1975, and then, within a year—*wham!*—we were hit with this: in China, the seeming revolutionaries, the people who were with Mao, were arrested and denounced as a counter-revolutionary “Gang of Four.” The people who seemed most closely allied with Mao are arrested and denounced as counter-revolutionaries, and people like Deng Xiaoping—who you knew were sharply opposed to Mao—are, after a little while, being brought back into positions of power and authority. What do you do in response to that? Well, we had an intense struggle within the Party, over the course of more than a year, because there were people in the leadership of the Party who wanted to support this coup: Leibel Bergman, and some others, whom we called Mensheviks—harking back to the Russian Revolution, and the people who were opponents of Lenin. They wanted to support this coup, for two reasons. First, because it would make things much more difficult, in more immediate and narrow terms, if you didn’t support this coup. You wouldn’t get to go to China anymore, and you would be on the “outs” with a powerful country that was still pretending, for a time, to be revolutionary and socialist. You couldn’t go to masses of people and say, “China is a great inspiration as a socialist country.” When the masses of people would raise, “Prove it to me that you can really do this,” you couldn’t say, “Well, there’s China.” Of course, you shouldn’t rely on that kind of approach anyway, that isn’t scientific. But if you have a kind of pragmatic approach, you could try to hold up the existence of China as a supposed socialist country as “proof” that this can be done. But, especially in more immediate terms, there were all kinds of difficulties that would arise, if you did recognize the reality of what had happened. Well, these Mensheviks in our Party didn’t want to do that—they approached this very pragmatically: what will work in the short term, what “truths” will be best for things in the short run. And the second reason they supported this coup is that they actually liked the program of the revisionists better than they liked Mao’s program. “They need to get down to the practical nuts and bolts of developing the economy, and cut out all this singing and dancing in the factories, all this culture that is just a waste of time”—that, believe it or not, was actually put forward by one of the leading Mensheviks, in defending this coup and arguing that it should be supported. As if Mao and the “Gang of Four” didn’t care about developing the economy.

Here I have to tell a story about when I was in China in 1971. At that time already, this struggle, between communism and revisionism within the Chinese Communist Party, was getting sharper, and the revolutionary forces were being accused of not caring about developing the economy. All they wanted to do was talk about revolution and the class struggle, they didn’t care about developing the economy—that was the accusation. Well, when we went to Shanghai, which was where the revolutionary forces, the so-called Gang of Four and their followers, had their strongest base, we were hosted at a dinner. And

something happened which went against the whole stereotype of dogmatic communists. The guy hosting the dinner was a member of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party—and, unfortunately, he was arrested, and I believe executed, as a consequence of the coup. But, at this dinner, we were treated to a very special dish, fresh water crab, a real delicacy. And, at one point, as we were eating this crab, the leading comrade hosting the dinner started enthusing about how great this crab was, and he declared: “The person who invented crab is a genius!” Well, I’m thinking, this is a little different than the stereotype of the dogmatic communist. But earlier, before that dinner, we had a meeting where this same leading comrade went on, for something like an hour, regaling us with statistic after statistic after statistic relating to how they were developing the economy in Shanghai, and using that to help the economy in the surrounding rural area, and contributing to the development of the socialist economy in the county as a whole. I’m sitting there listening, and after a while I say to myself, “OK, we get it, we get it, you’re being accused of not developing the economy, but you are developing the economy.” But the point is that the revolutionary leaders in the Chinese Communist Party felt the need to go into details about production like that, because of the attacks that were coming down on them—and specifically the accusation that, since they were, very correctly, putting emphasis on the importance of the class struggle, the struggle between the socialist road and the capitalist road, that was somehow supposed to mean that they didn’t concern themselves with developing the economy, which was not only a false but an absurd accusation.

So, when the coup happened in China a few years later, those of us who recognized the need to analyze what had happened scientifically did a tremendous amount of work. We were combing through every source we could find, including intelligence service reports from Hong Kong, which was then under the rule of the British, and from Taiwan, which is where the counter-revolutionaries went under the protective umbrella of the U.S. imperialists (when the Chinese revolution succeeded on the mainland in 1949, the counter-revolutionaries of the old ruling class went to the island of Taiwan). We were reading reports from the intelligence services out of Hong Kong, and out of Taiwan, which were purporting to tell what had been happening, before the coup, in the internal struggles inside the Chinese Communist Party. What were the so-called Gang of Four saying? Hua Guofeng—who was the nominal leader at the time of the coup—what was he saying? What was the role of Deng Xiaoping in all this? And I remember, at one point, there was something that struck me (something that I, and others, did believe was authentic): In these intelligence service reports, as you combed through them, you saw an exchange of notes between two of the leaders of the “Gang of Four”: Jiang Qing, who was Mao’s widow, and Zhang Chunqiao, who was a major theoretical leader of the revolutionary camp. In this exchange, they were talking about the new naval uniforms—new uniforms that the revisionists were proposing for the Chinese navy. Jiang Qing’s note stated strongly that she really didn’t like those new navy uniforms, that they were very bourgeois. And she definitely had a point. If you look at the uniforms of the Chinese military now, and compare them to the very simple uniforms of the People’s Liberation Army when Mao was there, it’s a vast difference. Those uniforms from Mao’s time were deliberately simple uniforms, as an expression of the fact that this was not a military with

heavy divisions of rank, and all that—there were some differences of rank, but they weren't emphasizing that, they were emphasizing that this was a people's army, an army of revolution, an army linked with the masses of people. In contrast to that, the present uniforms are an outward expression of how the Chinese military, under a bourgeois regime, has become a standard, conventional bourgeois military. And this was already apparent when these new naval uniforms were being proposed—this was even before Mao died, but he was largely out of the picture because he was sick, and basically dying. So, Jiang Qing said, "I really don't like these navy uniforms that are being proposed, they're really bourgeois." I still remember what Zhang Chunqiao wrote back: He said, "I agree with you, comrade, about these uniforms, but there are many good comrades in the navy who are enthusiastic about these uniforms, so we really shouldn't make it a point of struggle right now."

I remember thinking to myself: That's the nuance, the subtle difference, that is so important here. Now, why? It wasn't that Zhang Chunqiao was tailing the people in the navy, and saying that their sensibilities should count for more than matters of principle. What was he doing? He was analyzing different contradictions, and different levels of contradictions. What was the larger picture here? How did this proposed change in the navy uniforms relate to that larger picture? Is this something we should focus the struggle over right now? Or will it lead to confusion, rather than clarifying matters, if we focus a lot of struggle over this right here, right now, when a lot of people will spontaneously not understand why we're making such a big deal about these uniforms? So, he concluded, even though the criticism of these uniforms is correct, we still shouldn't make this a big focus of struggle now. And I remember saying to myself, and other comrades, at the time: See, that's the subtle difference in terms of leadership, that difference between the two of them. Not that Jiang Qing wasn't in the right place, and wasn't on the right side, but that's the subtle difference, in terms of the "art" of leadership.

But, turning to the larger picture, so this can be understood more fully, what was going on at the time was that there were two, antagonistically opposed, camps within the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, right up to the very top level, with Mao sick and dying and not able to affect much. At that point, basically all Mao could do was give very basic direction; when he spoke it was like little gusts of wind that came out, and he was only able to articulate a sentence or two at a time. He was still trying to give direction, but he was largely out of the picture. And you had these two camps within the Party that had developed over a whole period of time. One of them, consisting to a large degree of veteran leaders from way back in the Chinese revolution—most of them veterans of the Long March⁷⁴ in the course of the Chinese revolution—just wanted to develop China into a powerful modern country, and were willing and, in fact, determined, to adopt capitalist principles and capitalist means for doing that. And then you had other people who were grouped around Jiang Qing and Zhang Chunqiao, who were determined to stay on the revolutionary road of transforming Chinese society, and ultimately the world as a whole, toward the final goal of communism and the achievement of the "4 Alls." This struggle was very intense, ranging over a number of

decisive questions, but it had not been resolved when Mao died. I mentioned Hua Guofeng. When Mao was basically out of the picture, Hua Guofeng was made the acting head of things. Although in some ways a compromise between the two fundamentally opposed camps within the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, Hua leaned more toward the revisionist camp, and after Mao died, Hua ended acting decisively in the interests of the revisionists by ordering the coup that arrested the “Gang of Four.” Beyond Hua, the revisionist “veterans” in the top leadership of the Chinese Communist Party had powerful positions themselves, and/or powerful connections with the leading people, in key institutions, in particular the military. And they were preparing the military to be the backing for, and the ultimate enforcers of, the coup. On the other side, you had someone like Zhang Chunqiao who, as part of this whole struggle, actually was put into the position of being the political leader of the military. He was the head of the political department of the military, which obviously would involve a lot of influence within the military. But all these veteran revisionists were saying: No way is Zhang Chunqiao going to be the political leader of this military.

Now, in the context of this intensifying struggle, with its truly monumental implications, you could say that something like how to assess, and handle, the question of the naval uniforms seems like a minor matter. Taken by itself, that might have been relatively true, but the point is that, precisely in this context, if this were handled incorrectly, the negative effect could be magnified. What was involved here, around the naval uniforms, was not essentially a matter of “diplomacy,” nor simply a matter of being “sensitive” to the comrades in the navy, even good comrades who liked these uniforms. It did involve that, and taking things like that into account is part of the “art” of leadership. But, more essentially, what is involved is distinguishing secondary contradictions from more decisive ones—both with regard to a particular problem (in this case, that of the navy uniforms), and in terms of how this fits into the larger situation and the contradictions that characterize that larger situation. To put it another way, it involves an application of “solid core with a lot of elasticity on the basis of the solid core,” and concretely analyzing, scientifically, what that means in a given situation. This kind of method and approach is fundamentally what makes possible the right combination—or, better said, the right synthesis—of firmness and flexibility, in dealing with many particular situations and things overall. And the fact is that situations similar to this will arise continually in the course of building a movement for revolution and providing leadership to this process, as well as in providing leadership, on different levels, within the Party that must be the leading core of that revolution.

Here a story relating to Zhang Chunqiao is relevant. When the coup happened in China, and the “Gang of Four” were being attacked, I talked with somebody who was very familiar with the situation in China, who had lived there for a number of years and had spent a lot of time in Shanghai, which is where Zhang Chunqiao came out of. I asked, what do you think about the attacks on the “Gang of Four”? And he said, basically, this is bullshit. He talked about Zhang’s ability as a leader—recalling, for example, that he sat in a meeting where Zhang Chunqiao talked for eight hours without any notes. Well, I immediately replied: “That’s my man! Here we go!” But, besides the affinity I might feel

for someone with the ability, and the inclination, to talk at length, the larger point is that this illustrated how Zhang Chunqiao was not a dogmatist, that he had a grasp of communist principles and methodology and could apply them in a living way. Relating this to something like this navy uniforms question, the point is that, in a certain sense, in dealing with a problem on that level, Zhang Chunqiao could readily distinguish principal from secondary contradictions, without having to mechanically work it through, like a kid learning how to walk. And the point is that we should all be aiming to get to the point where, in many instances, we can do this as a matter of method we generally, and in an overall way, apply without having to stop to think about applying that method. We all have to learn how to do that, and we all have to keep on learning, and do the necessary work involved—and sometimes, all of us will have to apply ourselves very conscientiously and systematically to struggling with questions like: What are major and secondary contradictions here, and what is the relation between them? Reality continues to change, and there are always further developments in theory that are brought forward in response to this. For example, it's very likely true—almost certainly true—that Zhang Chunqiao had never heard of the formulation: “solid core with a lot of elasticity on the basis of the solid core.” But he was applying the basic principles and methods that go into that formulation. The point is that there is an “art” to communist leadership (and knowing how to handle something like this navy uniforms contradiction is an example)—but that “art” of leadership is fundamentally based on and proceeds from a scientific method and approach and a clear sense of the strategic goal.

Now, just one more or two more examples, on the “art” of leadership and its relation to the science of leadership. Back in the 1970s, when the RU was working to unite forces to form the Party, we were in a kind of liaison relationship, a working relationship, with some other organizations, including the Black Workers Congress (the BWC). And some people from the BWC did become part of this Party, which is a very good thing. But, at that time, very sharp struggle developed which was basically over nationalism versus communism—or communism versus an eclectic combination of nationalism and communism. One of the forms this took was that the BWC leadership was arguing that, as the Communist International (the Comintern) had analyzed, more than 40 years earlier (I believe this was in a Comintern Resolution of 1928), the Black national question in the U.S. was essentially a question of the Black peasantry (small farmers, sharecroppers and others) in the South. Therefore, the BWC argued, invoking this Comintern Resolution, the key to ending this oppression was the right to form a separate Black republic in the South.

Now, you'll notice that in the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic*, it upholds the right of self-determination, the right to form a separate republic, for the Black nation within what has been the U.S.—within the New Socialist Republic when it's formed. But the question back then was, not is there a *right* to do this, but is that right the *heart* of the struggle to end the oppression of Black people? And a lot depended on this. We were arguing that, yes, Black people are an oppressed nation, and, yes, there is a right to self-determination of that oppressed nation, but that nation is no longer primarily a peasant nation anchored to the land and spread, more or less evenly, throughout the rural areas

of the South. Instead, we analyzed, this Black nation has become much more proletarianized, concentrated in the urban areas of the South as well as the North, and much more closely and directly linked to the proletarian revolution itself, even while there definitely remains a question of national oppression, which has to be taken up in its own right. (This has to do with what I was talking about at the beginning of this presentation, in terms of changes that were brought about in the forces of production and the relations of production in the rural South, coming out of World War 2 and continuing since then.) So, a very sharp struggle developed: Was the heart of the oppression, and the fight for the emancipation, of Black people the right to form a separate Black republic in the South—or was that a *right*, but it wasn't at the *heart* of what the struggle for the emancipation of Black people, and the revolution overall, should be about?

I remember very well that, particularly because this was being raised by the BWC, I spent a considerable period of time, weeks and weeks, in a local library where I was living at that time (in Maywood, Illinois, just outside Chicago), looking into the census reports from every state in the South—looking at where Black people were concentrated in the South. First of all, I looked into the question: how many Black people lived in the North, and how many were still in the South at that time? More than 40 years earlier, when this resolution was written by the Comintern, overwhelmingly Black people lived in the South, and mainly they lived in the rural South, as sharecroppers and tenant farmers, and so on. Then World War 2 came along, and there were a lot of changes. So at this time, when I was doing this research, it was about 50-50: a lot of Black people had gone on the “Great Migration” to the North, millions of people; it was about 50 percent in the South and 50 percent in other parts of the country—the North, and the West.

I went further, digging into these census reports. Black people in the South—the 50 percent of Black people overall who were in the South—where did they live? And it was striking—the degree to which Black people in the South had become concentrated in the urban areas. For example, I remember that, in looking at the Black population in different states, county by county, it turned out that there were more Black people in Fulton County, which is where Atlanta is, than in the rest of Georgia. And the same kind of thing was true in Texas: there were many, many times the number of Black people in Harris County (which is where Houston is) as there were in any rural county in Texas. And it went on and on, as you looked into the statistics: South Carolina, North Carolina, and so on—you went through each of these states and you could see the pattern developing that there had been a major change, a major transformation not only in the sense that Black people had migrated, in their millions, to the North, but that the ones who remained in the South were, overwhelmingly, no longer peasants living and working in the rural areas, spread out more or less evenly on the rural farmlands. They had come into the urban areas and were then proletarians in much greater numbers than those who remained in the rural areas as farmers and sharecroppers.

The BWC was dogmatically invoking this statement from Stalin: the national question is in essence a peasant question. And, they claimed, if you say it's not a peasant question,

then you're negating the national question, you're not recognizing national oppression. Our position was: Look, you can't approach this dogmatically. You have to proceed on the basis of what are the actual conditions of people: Are they peasants spread out over and working on the land, or are they people who've mainly migrated to the North—to the cities of the North, and the West—and to cities in the South itself? And what is their social position?

It wasn't just a question of where they were located. In moving into the cities, they related to the economy in a different way. They became, in large numbers, wage workers, where they could get employment—working in large groups in factories and other work sites—rather than being peasants, spread out on small plots of land and fitting into the economy in that way. So there was a major change in terms of their relation to the economic system, to the mode of production, and you had to look not just at where were they living, but what went along with that in terms of their social position, and what implications that had for the revolutionary struggle. In approaching this with that kind of scientific method, it became clear that the masses of Black people were much more proletarians than they were peasants. I remember one of the people writing polemics against us, on behalf of the BWC, quoted that Comintern resolution and went on to argue: The resolution of the peasant question cannot come about under the rule of imperialism. So said the Comintern, in 1928; therefore, it could not have happened. But we said, Wait! We wrote back and demanded: Where in your dusty books, oh dogmatists, does it say that this change could not possibly come about?—because, in fact, it has. And just because, at a certain point, the Comintern analyzed things a certain way—you can't superimpose that on reality. You have to look, you have to investigate, to see what actually has happened. Has this done away with the oppression of Black people as a people, as a nation? No! Has this changed substantially the conditions and the forms in which that oppression is taking place and, consequently, how it relates to the overall revolutionary struggle? Definitely yes!

So, we didn't just say, "Oh, we have a new theory here about the national question." We did a lot of work. I remember, it wasn't like today, when you can go on the internet to do research. I had to pick up these big, heavy census tracts: I would go to a library in Maywood and put these heavy books down on a table and go through each county, in state after state, writing down the statistics for each county very systematically, because you have to be systematic and scientific. Look, if the BWC was right, they were right. And that would have had significant implications. If they were wrong, they were wrong. And there were serious implications that way, too.

But to cap this story off—and illustrate again the point about the relation between the science and "art" of leadership—a little bit later than this, after the split between us and the BWC, as well as the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization (formerly the Young Lords Party) had become complete—I was on a party-building speaking tour going around the country. Well, in Cincinnati, I was in the middle of my speech—and the security was not very good, to say the least, because all of a sudden, I hear this ruckus at the entrance to the place, and in marched these members of the BWC. They proceeded to

go right up to the front of the room, where I was—you can evaluate how good the security was! They unfurled this map that was shaded to show how many Black people were in the South. This was done by state, but not by county. Their map just showed, by state, where Black people were. Well, they came in and defiantly held up this map. So, I decided: since the security is shot to shit, I might as well just go ahead and make the best of this situation. I said, OK, I'm glad you brought that map, because there are a lot of important things we can learn by looking more deeply at what the situation is. And then I proceeded to talk about how, if you shaded the map differently—not focusing on how many Black people there were in different states, but if you looked at it in terms of where they were *within* the states—it would present a completely different picture of what the situation of Black people actually was. And then I proceeded to go through this: for example, if you look at Fulton County or you look at Harris County, and so on. And at one point, in the middle of this—you can imagine this very tense situation, where they are defiantly holding this map, and I'm illustrating points, using their map—I said, “Would you mind raising the map up a little bit?” And they did! So, I continued, using their map to help illustrate what were the significant facts about the Black population in the South (and the North and West) and what that said about their actual relation to the system—to the mode of production, and to the system overall.

What was involved here was a combination of the science and the “art” of leadership. It wasn't just a matter of not being cowed in some abstract sense, or dealing with a difficult situation with a certain amount of finesse. It was a matter of having a scientific method and approach, and proceeding on that basis to do the work to actually see if reality conformed to what the BWC was arguing, or if it was very different. That was the basis for being able to deal with situations like the one that arose with that event in Cincinnati. It was necessary to have a dialectical materialist approach, because if you went at it superficially, you might not understand the significance of this transformation—from being more or less evenly spread out, through all these rural counties, to being concentrated overwhelmingly in the urban areas. But if you're approaching it as a materialist, a dialectical materialist, you see that this represents a very significant change in the situation of Black people. It certainly doesn't do away with their oppression as a people, it doesn't do away with their status as an oppressed nation which, yes, has the right to self-determination; but it radically changes the concrete conditions of this, and there are real implications to that, strategically and in terms of how you go about fighting this oppression, how the right to self-determination fits into that, and how this relates, in turn, to the overall revolution aiming for communism. This is the difference between lazybones dogmatists—who say, “Well, 40 years ago, the Comintern said this couldn't happen, so it can't happen, so it didn't happen”—and actually having a scientific method and approach. That scientific method and approach was the foundation for being able to quickly adjust to a very difficult situation, and even, in a certain way, enlisting those BWC people to help in illustrating an important point that they didn't want illustrated—that the actual picture was vastly different than what they were presenting.

Finally on this point about the science and the “art” of leadership, I was reading on the revcom.us website a statement by Art Blakey II,⁷⁵ who was donating to the campaign to

raise money to get *BASics* to Baltimore for the masses there. I was assuming that this Art Blakey II was the son of that well-known jazz drummer, and I was thinking that, if I were in a position to do so, I would like to not only convey my thanks for his contribution but also to mention something about my friend Billy from back in the day. Those of you who have read *From Ike To Mao, And Beyond*, know that Billy was into the “life”—he did some bad things, but he had a good heart nonetheless. He was killed in one of these after-hours clubs—one of these situations where he got caught up in somebody else’s business, the kind of bullshit basic masses all too often get caught up in. And, when I saw this note from Art Blakey II, I was thinking about the fact that one time, when I ran into Billy, and we were catching up, although I knew he was into the “life,” I was hoping there was still more there, and I was gonna struggle with him, so I asked him what he was into, and we talked about different things. Well, at one point, I asked him what kind of music he was into, and he said, “I’m really into Art Blakey.” So, when I read this note from Art Blakey II, it made me think about this, and (assuming he was the son of *that* Art Blakey), I wanted to convey something which would express my thanks, but also tell this story about my friend Billy, because maybe it would mean something to him.

It might not seem that this has much of anything to do with leadership, and in particular the “art” of leadership, but in fact it does. There is a dimension to this leadership that proceeds on the basis of the scientific method and approach but also involves something akin to the “navy uniform” point. It has to do with the right synthesis of solid core and elasticity. But, without falling into humanism, it also has to do with the humanity of what we’re all about—the emancipation of humanity, but also living that in the present while we’re fighting for the future. In other words, it has everything to do with what kind of society and world we’re aiming for, and how the leadership we provide should be in line with that and also be a model of that.

Working Back from “On the Possibility”— Another Application of “Solid Core with a Lot of Elasticity on the Basis of the Solid Core”

To bring this to a conclusion, I want to stress, once more, the importance of working back from “On the Possibility.” And more specifically, the point that, in doing so, there is a need to apply, and continually learn to better apply, the very important principle of centralization, concentrated as centralization of line—centralization in terms of ideological line, above all method and approach, as well as political line and strategy—and, at the same time, centralization in terms of fundamental and overall organizational “architecture” and functioning; all that on the one hand, while at the same time, and on the other hand, there is a lot of scope given to decentralization, in terms of initiative at lower levels and in local areas, and the corresponding attention to specific conditions, etc., within the same overall organizational framework, and the same overall ideological and political line and strategic orientation. This is another application of “solid core with a lot of elasticity on the basis of the solid core.” This applies, in one way, now—during the period when the “three prepares”⁷⁶ are being worked on, and the conditions for revolution, that is, for the all-out struggle for the seizure of power, have not yet been

brought into being—and it will apply in a different way, with even greater strategic implications, once the conditions for that struggle have been brought into being, and such a struggle is actually underway.

If we don't have the right combination, the right synthesis, of centralization and decentralization, as spoken to here, we're going to be much more vulnerable to the attacks that will come from the enemy. If everything is too top-heavy, and everything relies only on initiative at the top, then the approach of the enemy—and specifically what they refer to as their decapitation strategy (just lop of the top leadership and everything will fall apart or become highly vulnerable)—will be much more effective and much more punishing. So there needs to be a lot of decentralization, of people taking initiative. But at the same time, if that initiative is not grounded in the same overall orientation, the same method and approach, the same strategic orientation—if it's not grounded in that solid core—then it will go off in all kinds of directions and we won't be working together as what we actually need to be, in the right sense: a conscious organized revolutionary machine.

Here is something that needs to be very clearly and firmly grasped: It is a matter of strategic importance to develop a large core of experienced and tested leaders—not just “tens” but at least hundreds of such leaders, on all levels—firmly grounded in the line, above all the scientific method and approach of the new synthesis, and capable, on that basis, of taking initiative to lead, including in situations of sharpening contradictions and the intensification of repression and even attempts at violent suppression by the powers-that-be, throughout the process of advancing the “three prepares”; and then, when the conditions come into being, this core of tested leaders needs to be capable of giving direction to thousands, and in turn millions, to fight all-out, in a unified way, for the seizure of power. Whether or not such a cadre of leaders—in the hundreds, at least—is developed, will have a significant bearing on whether or not all the work we are doing now is really preparing for revolution, and whether there is a real chance of winning when the time comes.

So, in conclusion: makers of revolution, emancipators of humanity—that, and nothing less, is what we are called on to be, and to bring forward in greater and greater numbers. A vanguard of the future, not a residue of the past—that is the challenge that must be met, and the struggle that must be waged. Going forward from what we're doing here, back out into the world—the world of the movement for revolution and the Party as its leading core but, beyond that, the larger world, and its transformation, which is the scope and the purpose of what this revolution and this Party are, and must be, all about: bringing alive, applying in a living way, propagating and fighting in a compelling way for, what has been grappled with and learned here, and the revolutionary line and leadership it represents—to consistently build for an actual revolution, concretely accumulate organized forces for this revolution, and continue to further transform and strengthen the Party as the force at the core of this revolution. This is what we must be all about, what we must be determined to do.

ENDNOTES

1. The “5 Stops” refers to the following demands that reflect key concentrations of social contradictions (and is available in poster and leaflet forms at revcom.us):

STOP Genocidal Persecution, Mass Incarceration, Police Brutality and Murder of Black and Brown People!

STOP The Patriarchal Degradation, Dehumanization, and Subjugation of All Women Everywhere, and All Oppression Based on Gender or Sexual Orientation!

STOP Wars of Empire, Armies of Occupation, and Crimes Against Humanity!

STOP The Demonization, Criminalization and Deportations of Immigrants and the Militarization of the Border!

STOP Capitalism-Imperialism from Destroying Our Planet!

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2. In response to a call co-initiated by Carl Dix (spokesperson for the RCP) and Cornel West for a massive mobilization in New York City on October 22-24, 2015 to stop police terror and murder, thousands took part in three days of action. RiseUpOctober started with the reading at Times Square of the names of the Stolen Lives, those killed by police; the next day this was followed by nonviolent direct action to shut down Rikers Island prison; and then on the third day this culminated in a march and rally of nearly 4,000 people. Through the work building for these three days and through the actions themselves, a political and moral challenge was issued in society: Murder by police must stop—Which Side Are You On? [\[Back\]](#)

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4. V.I. Lenin, “The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism” (March 1913, *Collected Works*, Vol. 19 pp. 23-28, Progress Publishers) as cited in Bob Avakian, *Phony Communism is Dead...Long Live Real Communism!* Second Edition (RCP Publications, 2004) and *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, a talk by Bob Avakian, serialized in *Revolution* beginning October 21, 2007, in issues #105 through #120, available at revcom.us and also contained in *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*, a *Revolution* pamphlet, 2008. [\[Back\]](#)

5. Bob Avakian, *Ruminations and Wranglings: On the Importance of Marxist Materialism, Communism as a Science, Meaningful Revolutionary Work, and a Life with Meaning*. From a talk given in 2009. *Revolution*, May-September 2009. Available at revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

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12. Bob Avakian, *Break ALL the Chains! Bob Avakian on the Emancipation of Women and the Communist Revolution* (RCP Publications, 2014). Also available at revcom.us. Printed sampler edition available from The Bob Avakian Institute at thebobavakianinstitute.org. [\[Back\]](#)
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14. Ardea Skybreak, *Of Primeval Steps and Future Leaps: An Essay on the Emergence of Human Beings, the Source of Women’s Oppression, and the Road to Emancipation* (Banner Press, 1984). [\[Back\]](#)
15. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848. [\[Back\]](#)
16. Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 1884. [\[Back\]](#)

17. Raymond Lotta, “On the ‘Driving Force of Anarchy’ and the Dynamics of Change—A Sharp Debate and Urgent Polemic: The Struggle for a Radically Different World and the Struggle for a Scientific Approach to Reality” in *Demarcations: A Journal of Communist Theory and Polemic*, Issue Number 3, Winter 2014. Available at demarcations-journal.org and revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

18. *Revolution: Why It's Necessary, Why It's Possible, What It's All About*, a film of a talk by Bob Avakian (Three Q Productions, 2003). Available through revcom.us; selected clips available at youtube.com/revolutiontalk. [\[Back\]](#)

19. *BA Speaks: REVOLUTION—NOTHING LESS! Bob Avakian Live*. Film of a talk given in 2012. For more on this film and to order the DVD set, go to revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

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22. Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (Viking, 2005). [\[Back\]](#)

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24. *The Material Basis and the Method for Making Revolution*. A talk given by Bob Avakian in 2014. Audio and text available at revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

25. Karl Marx, *Capital*, 1867. [\[Back\]](#)

26. Bob Avakian, *BAasics, from the talks and writings of Bob Avakian* (RCP Publications, 2011). Available as a free e-book at revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

27. *BAasics* 5:11

“There is a place where epistemology and morality meet. There is a place where you have to stand and say: It is not acceptable to refuse to look at something—or to refuse to believe something—because it makes you uncomfortable. And: It is not acceptable to believe something just because it makes you feel comfortable.”

BAasics, from the talks and writings of Bob Avakian [\[Back\]](#)

28. *Basics* 4:10

“For humanity to advance beyond a state in which ‘might makes right’—and where things ultimately come down to raw power relations—will require, as a fundamental element in this advance, an approach to understanding things (an epistemology) which recognizes that reality and truth are objective and do not vary in accordance with, nor depend on, different ‘narratives’ and how much ‘authority’ an idea (or ‘narrative’) may have behind it, or how much power and force can be wielded on behalf of any particular idea or ‘narrative,’ at any given point.”

Basics, from the talks and writings of Bob Avakian [\[Back\]](#)

29. Bob Avakian, *Birds Cannot Give Birth to Crocodiles, But Humanity Can Soar Beyond the Horizon*. From a talk given in 2010. Available as an eBook from insightpress.com. Also available at revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

30. Lenny Wolff, “Wanted: People of Conscience to TAKE A STAND,” *Revolution* #371, April 6, 2014. Available at revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

31. April 14, 2015 marked a day of nationwide demonstrations against police murder. These actions were called for by Carl Dix (spokesperson for the RCP) and Cornel West as a means to retake the political offensive in this struggle. [\[Back\]](#)

32. Raymond Lotta, Nayi Duniya and K. J. A., “Alain Badiou’s ‘Politics of Emancipation’: A Communism Locked Within the Confines of the Bourgeois World” in *Demarcations: A Journal of Communist Theory and Polemic*, Issue Number 1, Summer-Fall 2009. Available at demarcations-journal.org and revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

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34. Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-50*, 1850. [\[Back\]](#)

35. *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*

Part 1: “Beyond the Narrow Horizon of Bourgeois Right”

Part 2: “Everything We’re Doing is About Revolution”

A talk by Bob Avakian, serialized in *Revolution* beginning October 21, 2007, in issues #105 through #120. Available at revcom.us and also included in *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*, a *Revolution* pamphlet, 2008. [\[Back\]](#)

36. Sasha Abramsky, *The American Way of Poverty: How the Other Half Still Lives* (Nation Books, 2014). [\[Back\]](#)

37. Raymond Lotta, “You Don't Know What You Think You ‘Know’ About... The Communist Revolution and the REAL Path to Emancipation: Its History and Our Future,” an Interview with Raymond Lotta. Special issue of *Revolution* #323, November 24, 2013. Available at revcom.us. Also available as an eBook from insight-press.com. See also thisiscommunism.org. [\[Back\]](#)

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42. *BA Speaks: REVOLUTION—NOTHING LESS! Bob Avakian Live*. Film of a talk given in 2012. For more on this film and to order the DVD set, go to revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

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45. As the Constitution of the RCP explains:

(I)n this new synthesis as developed by Bob Avakian, there must be a solid core, with a lot of elasticity. This is, first of all, a method and approach that applies in a very broad way.... A clear grasp of both aspects of this [both solid core and elasticity], and their inter-relation, is necessary in understanding and transforming reality, in all its spheres, and is crucial to making revolutionary transformations in human society....

Applied to socialist society, this approach of solid core with a lot of elasticity includes the need for a leading, and expanding, core that is clear on the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the aim of continuing socialist revolution as part of the world struggle for communism, and is determined to continue carrying forward this struggle, through all the twists and turns. At the same time, there will necessarily be many different people and trends in socialist society pulling in

many different directions—and all of this can ultimately contribute to the process of getting at the truth and getting to communism. This will be intense at times, and the difficulty of embracing all this—*while still leading the whole process broadly in the direction of communism*—will be something like going, as Avakian has put it, to the brink of being drawn and quartered—and repeatedly. All this is difficult, but necessary and a process to welcome.

For an important discussion of “solid core with a lot of elasticity on the basis of the solid core,” see Ardea Skybreak, *SCIENCE AND REVOLUTION: On the Importance of Science and the Application of Science to Society, the New Synthesis of Communism and the Leadership of Bob Avakian, an Interview with Ardea Skybreak* (Insight Press, 2015). Also available at revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

46. “Badiouists” refers to those who subscribe to the political philosophy and social theories of Alan Badiou. For an analysis and critique of Badiou’s views, see the polemic by Raymond Lotta, Nayi Duniya and K. J. A., “Alain Badiou’s ‘Politics of Emancipation’: A Communism Locked Within the Confines of the Bourgeois World” in *Demarcations: A Journal of Communist Theory and Polemic*, Issue Number 1, Summer-Fall 2009. Available at demarcations-journal.org and revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

47. *Basics* 2:12

“The achievement of [the necessary conditions for communism] must take place on a world scale, through a long and tortuous process of revolutionary transformation in which there will be uneven development, the seizure of power in different countries at different times, and a complex dialectical interplay between the revolutionary struggles and the revolutionization of society in these different countries...[a dialectical relation] in which the world arena is fundamentally and ultimately decisive while the mutually interacting and mutually supporting struggles of the proletarians in different countries constitute the key link in fundamentally changing the world as a whole.”

Basics, from the talks and writings of Bob Avakian [\[Back\]](#)

48. “On the Possibility of Revolution,” *Revolution* #102, September 23, 2007. Available at revcom.us and also included in *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*, a *Revolution* pamphlet, May 1, 2008. [\[Back\]](#)

49. “Some Crucial Points of Revolutionary Orientation—in Opposition to Infantile Posturing and Distortions of Revolution,” *Revolution* #102, September 23, 2007. Available at revcom.us and also included in *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*, a *Revolution* pamphlet, May 1, 2008. [\[Back\]](#)

50. *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, Part 2: “Everything We’re Doing Is About Revolution” begins with the following 6 paragraphs:

“Enriched What Is To Be Done-ism”

Hastening while awaiting—not bowing down to necessity

Next I want to talk about “Enriched What Is To Be Done-ism” and its role in building a revolutionary and communist movement. I want to begin by reviewing some important points relating to the whole orientation and strategic approach of “hastening while awaiting” the development of a revolutionary situation in a country like the U.S.

I spoke earlier about the outlook and approach of revisionist “determinist realism”*** which, among other things, involves a passive approach to objective reality (or necessity), which sees the objective factor as purely objective—and purely “external,” if you will—and doesn’t grasp the living dialectical relation between the objective and subjective factors and the ability of the latter (the subjective factor—the conscious actions of people) to react back on and to transform the former (the objective factor—the objective conditions). In other words, this “determinist realism” doesn’t grasp the essential orientation, and possibility, of transforming necessity into freedom. It doesn’t really, or fully, grasp the contradictoriness of all of reality, including the necessity that one is confronted with at any given time. So, one of the essential features of “determinist realism” is that it dismisses as “voluntarism” any dialectical grasp of the relation between the subjective and objective factors, and sees things in very linear, undifferentiated ways, as essentially uniform and without contradiction, rather than in a living and dynamic and moving and changing way.

Of course, it is necessary not to fall into voluntarism. There are many different ways in which such voluntarism can be expressed, leading to various kinds of (usually “ultra-left”) errors and deviations, if you will—including in the form of giving in to infantilist or adventurist impulses—all of which is also extremely harmful. But—particularly in a protracted or prolonged situation in which the objective conditions for revolution (that is, for the all-out struggle to seize power) have not yet emerged—by far the much greater danger, and one that is reinforced by this objective situation, is this kind of determinist realism which doesn’t grasp correctly the dialectical relation between the objective and subjective factors, and sees them in static, undialectical, and unchanging terms.

It is true that we cannot, by our mere will, or even merely by our actions themselves, transform the objective conditions in a qualitative sense—into a revolutionary situation. This cannot be done *merely* by our operating on, or reacting back on, the objective conditions through our conscious initiative. On the other hand, once again a phrase from Lenin has important application here. With

regard to the labor aristocracy—the sections of the working class in imperialist countries which are, to no small extent, bribed from the spoils of imperialist exploitation and plunder throughout the world, and particularly in the colonies—Lenin made the point that nobody can say with certainty where these more “bourgeoisified” sections of the working class are going to line up in the event of the revolution—which parts of them are going to be with the revolution when the ultimate showdown comes, and which are going to go with the counter-revolution—nobody can say exactly how that is going to fall out, Lenin insisted. And applying this same principle, we can say that nobody can say exactly what the conscious initiative of the revolutionaries might be capable of producing, in reacting upon the objective situation at any given time—in part because nobody can predict all the other things that all the different forces in the world will be doing. Nobody’s understanding can encompass all that at a given time. We can identify trends and patterns, but there is the role of accident as well as the role of causality. And there is the fact that, although changes in what’s objective for us won’t come entirely, or perhaps not even mainly, through our “working on” the objective conditions (in some direct, one-to-one sense), nevertheless our “working on” them can bring about certain changes within a given framework of objective conditions *and*—in conjunction with and as part of a “mix,” together with many other elements, including other forces acting on the objective situation from their own viewpoints—this can, under certain circumstances, be part of the coming together of factors which *does* result in a qualitative change. And, again, it is important to emphasize that nobody can know exactly how all that will work out.

Revolution is not made by “formulas,” or by acting in accordance with stereotypical notions and preconceptions—it is a much more living, rich, and complex process than that. But it is an essential characteristic of revisionism (phony communism which has replaced a revolutionary orientation with a gradualist, and ultimately reformist one) to decide and declare that until some *deus ex machina*—some god-like EXTERNAL FACTOR—intervenes, there can be no essential change in the objective conditions and the most we can do, at any point, is to accept the given framework and work within it, rather than (as we have very correctly formulated it) *constantly straining against the limits* of the objective framework and seeking to *transform the objective conditions to the maximum degree possible* at any given time, always being tense to the possibility of different things coming together which bring about (or make possible the bringing about of) an actual qualitative rupture and leap in the objective situation.

So that is a point of basic orientation in terms of applying materialism, *and dialectics*, in hastening while awaiting the emergence of a revolutionary situation. It’s not just that, in some abstract moral sense, it’s better to hasten than just await—though, of course, it is—but this has to do with a dynamic understanding of the motion and development of material reality and the interpenetration of different contradictions, and the truth that, as Lenin emphasized, all boundaries in nature and society, while real, are conditional and relative, not absolute. (Mao

also emphasized this same basic principle in pointing out that, since the range of things is vast and things are interconnected, what's universal in one context is particular in another.) The application of this principle to what is being discussed here underlines that it is *only relatively*, and not absolutely, that the objective conditions are “objective” for us—they are, but not in absolute terms. And, along with this, what is external to a given situation *can become internal*, as a result of the motion—and changes that are brought about through the motion—of contradictions. So, if you are looking at things only in a linear way, then you only see the possibilities that are straight ahead—you have a kind of blinders on. On the other hand, if you have a correct, dialectical materialist approach, you recognize that many things can happen that are unanticipated, and you have to be constantly tense to that possibility while consistently working to transform necessity into freedom. So, again, that is a basic point of orientation.

***The subject of “determinist realism” is spoken to in part 1: “Beyond the Narrow Horizon of Bourgeois Right”—available at revcom.us—and, in the serialization of part 1, is found in “Marxism as a Science—In Opposition to Mechanical Materialism, Idealism and Religiosity,” in *Revolution* #109, Nov. 18, 2007.

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52. “Carl Dix: The New Jim Crow at the Baltimore Sparrows Point Steel Mill,” *Revolution* #386, May 11, 2015. Available at revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

53. The Three Rules of Discipline and Eight Points for Attention were issued in 1928 by Mao for the people's army, who was then fighting against the Guomindang:

Three Rules of Discipline:

Obey orders in all your actions.

Do not take a single needle or piece of thread from the masses.

Turn in everything captured.

Eight Points for Attention:

Speak politely.

Pay fairly for what you buy.

Return everything you borrow.

Pay for anything you damage.

Do not hit or swear at people.

Do not damage crops.

Do not take liberties with women.

Do not ill-treat captives.

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54. *Basics* 1:1

“There would be no United States as we now know it today without slavery. That is a simple and basic truth.”

Basics, from the talks and writings of Bob Avakian [\[Back\]](#)

55. Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2014). [\[Back\]](#)

56. *Basics* 3:22

“You cannot break all the chains, except one. You cannot say you want to be free of exploitation and oppression, except you want to keep the oppression of women by men. You can’t say you want to liberate humanity yet keep one half of the people enslaved to the other half. The oppression of women is completely bound up with the division of society into masters and slaves, exploiters and exploited, and the ending of all such conditions is impossible without the complete liberation of women. All this is why women have a tremendous role to play not only in making revolution but in making sure there is all-the-way revolution. The fury of women can and must be fully unleashed as a mighty force for proletarian revolution.”

Basics, from the talks and writings of Bob Avakian [\[Back\]](#)

57. Bob Avakian, *Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution*, edited transcript of a talk given in the fall 2009. Available at revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

58. Robert D. Putnam, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015). [\[Back\]](#)

59. Bob Avakian, *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy* (Insight Press 2005). [\[Back\]](#)

60. Through the BA Everywhere campaign, and in other ways, the RCP works to promote and popularize the leadership of Bob Avakian and the new synthesis of communism he has brought forward; this is the leading edge of the all-around revolutionary work of the RCP. Information on the BA Everywhere campaign is available at revcom.us.

Also working “to preserve, project, and promote the works and vision of Bob Avakian with the aim of reaching the broadest possible audience” (as put forward in its Mission Statement) is The Bob Avakian Institute, a nonprofit institute organized for educational purposes. Information on The Bob Avakian Institute can be found at thebobavakianinstitute.org. [\[Back\]](#)

61. Bob Avakian, “Putting Forward Our Line—In a Bold, Moving, Compelling Way,” published in two parts in *Revolutionary Worker*: Part 1, #1177, December 1, 2002; Part 2, #1178, December 8, 2002. Available at revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

62. In *Bringing Forward Another Way*, a talk given by Bob Avakian in 2006, he analyzed these “two outmodeds”—increasingly globalized western imperialism (or “McWorld/McCrusade”) and Islamic fundamentalist Jihad—and the relation between them:

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

While this is a very important formulation and is crucial to understanding much of the dynamics driving things in the world in this period, at the same time we do have to be clear about which of these “historically outmodeds” has done the greater damage and poses the greater threat to humanity: It is the historically outmoded ruling strata of the imperialist system, and in particular the U.S. imperialists. [\[Back\]](#)

63. “An Open Letter to Middle Class People, Especially Middle Class White People,” *Revolution* #400, August 17, 2015. Available at revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

64. Bob Avakian, “The NBA: Marketing the Minstrel Show and Serving the Big Gangsters,” one of the 7 *Talks* from 2006. Audio available at revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

65. “Watching *Fruitvale Station* With Bob Avakian,” *Revolution* #349, August 24, 2014. Available at revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

66. As indicated on its website, *Demarcations: A Journal of Communist Theory and Polemic* “seeks to set forth, defend, and further advance the theoretical framework for the beginning of a new stage of communist revolution in the contemporary world.” This journal promotes the perspectives of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA. It is available at demarcations-journal.org and also revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

67. V.I. Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?* 1902. [\[Back\]](#)

68. In July 2013, Ajith, the Secretary of what was then the CPI (M-L) Naxalbari, a Maoist party in India, published a polemic entitled “Against Avakianism.” It appeared in *Naxalbari*, the theoretical journal of that party. [\[Back\]](#)

69. Stop Patriarchy is a mass organization of women, and men, whose essential mission is indicated by its main slogan, “END PORNOGRAPHY AND PATRIARCHY: THE ENSLAVEMENT AND DEGRADATION OF WOMEN.” The RCP, which played a key role in the initiation of Stop Patriarchy, works to develop this organization as a powerful force in the fight against attacks on the right to abortion and birth control, and the sexual degradation and all-around oppression of women, and to build this struggle in a way that contributes to the revolution that is needed to put an end to this, and to all, oppression. Information on Stop Patriarchy is available at StopPatriarchy.org, and also revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

70. Stop Mass Incarceration Network (SMIN) is a mass initiative in which the RCP has played an initiating and leading role. SMIN has been deeply engaged in the struggle against mass incarceration and police terror and murder, as well as having been an initiator of RiseUpOctober. Information on SMIN is available at stopmassincarceration.net, and also revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

71. These letters were openly published in 2009. See Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, “On Developments in Nepal and the Stakes for the Communist Movement: Letters to the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, 2005-2008 (With a Reply from the CPN(M), 2006),” January 29, 2009. Available at revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

72. Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1875. [\[Back\]](#)

73. V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, 1917. [\[Back\]](#)

74. The Long March, one of the most extraordinary military feats of the 20th century, was a major turning point of the Chinese Revolution. In 1934, Mao led 100,000 Red Army fighters and communist organizers on a 6,000-mile long march to regroup and reorganize forces for revolution. They trekked through dangerous swamplands and treacherous mountains. They fought warlord and reactionary armies. They spread revolution wherever they went. When the Long March reached its destination, only 10,000 people had made it. But because of the Long March the revolution was able to go forward. [\[Back\]](#)

75. “BASics to Baltimore Pledge from Art Blakey II—Jazz Musician/Activist,” *Revolution* #389, June 1, 2015. Available at revcom.us. [\[Back\]](#)

76. The “three prepares” refers to the following slogan, advanced by the Revolutionary Communist Party:

“Prepare the ground, prepare the people, and prepare the vanguard—get ready for the time when millions can be led to go for revolution, all-out, with a real chance to win.” [\[Back\]](#)

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