

Bob  
Avakian

**THE NEW  
COMMUNISM**

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**The science, the strategy, the leadership  
for an actual revolution,  
and a radically new society  
on the road to real emancipation**

## 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”<sup>1</sup>—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,<sup>2</sup> 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*<sup>3</sup>—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.<sup>4</sup>

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*,<sup>5</sup> 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*).<sup>6</sup> 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*,<sup>7</sup> 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 the cotton by hand. 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,<sup>8</sup> the book by Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*,<sup>9</sup> 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 into 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 6*<sup>10</sup>—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, god-damn 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.

## Notes

1. The “5 Stops” refer to the following demands that reflect key concentrations of social contradictions:
  - 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!(These “5 Stops” are available in poster and leaflet forms at [revcom.us](http://revcom.us).)
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?
3. *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America (Draft Proposal)*. Authored by Bob Avakian, and adopted by the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, 2010 (RCP Publications, 2010). Also available at [revcom.us](http://revcom.us).
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](http://revcom.us) and also contained in *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*, a *Revolution* pamphlet, 2008.
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](http://revcom.us).
6. 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](http://revcom.us).
7. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1951).
8. *REVOLUTION AND RELIGION: The Fight for Emancipation and the Role of Religion; A Dialogue Between CORNEL WEST & BOB AVAKIAN*. Film of the November 2014 dialogue available as a 2-DVD set from [revcom.us](http://revcom.us).
9. Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (Basic Books, 2014).
10. Revolutionary Union, *Red Papers 6: Build the Leadership of the Proletariat and its Party*, June 1974.

Part I

# Method and Approach, Communism as a Science

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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](http://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 or 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.”<sup>11</sup> 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 mind 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 “materialistic” 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*.<sup>12</sup> 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."<sup>13</sup> 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 over 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 about—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*,<sup>14</sup> 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*<sup>15</sup> 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*,<sup>16</sup> 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 Eliot Spitzer on there—remember him, he used to be governor of New York until they discovered he was going to 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 Eliot 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*)<sup>17</sup> 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*.<sup>18</sup> 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 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 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!*<sup>19</sup> 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 Kmart, 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<sup>20</sup> 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*,<sup>21</sup> 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,<sup>22</sup> 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), I wrote “The New Synthesis of Communism: Fundamental Orientation, Method and Approach, and Core Elements—An Outline”<sup>23</sup> which 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 having to do with 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 its 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 talk<sup>24</sup> 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*,<sup>25</sup> 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 till 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, 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*<sup>26</sup>—that there is a place where epistemology and morality meet.<sup>27</sup> 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 from 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 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* 4:10<sup>28</sup> 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*<sup>29</sup>]: "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 article<sup>30</sup> 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 14<sup>th</sup> demonstrations against police brutality and murder and mass incarceration,<sup>31</sup> 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 Badiou<sup>32</sup> 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*<sup>33</sup> 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.

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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; the full talk, in English and Spanish, is available for online viewing at RevolutionTalk.net.
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21. Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1997).
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23. Bob Avakian, “The New Synthesis of Communism: Fundamental Orientation, Method and Approach, and Core Elements—An Outline,” Summer 2015. See Appendix 1. Also available at revcom.us.
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.
25. Karl Marx, *Capital*, 1867.
26. Bob Avakian, *Basics, from the talks and writings of Bob Avakian* (RCP Publications, 2011). Available as a free eBook at revcom.us.
27. *Basics* 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.”

*Basics, from the talks and writings of Bob Avakian*
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*
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 insight-press.com. Also available at revcom.us.

30. Lenny Wolff, "Wanted: People of Conscience to TAKE A STAND," *Revolution* #381, April 6, 2015. Available at [revcom.us](http://revcom.us).
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.
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](http://demarcations-journal.org) and [revcom.us](http://revcom.us).
33. Bob Avakian, *From Ike to Mao and Beyond: My Journey from Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist, A Memoir by Bob Avakian* (Insight Press, 2005).