

A Major New Work

**By Bob Avakian**

# **The Science, The Strategy, The Leadership for An Actual Revolution, And A Radically New Society on the Road to Real Emancipation**

*Excerpt from the section:*

## **III. The Strategic Approach to An Actual Revolution**

*Editors' note: The following is an excerpt from the new work by Bob Avakian, *The Science, the Strategy, the Leadership for an Actual Revolution, and a Radically New Society on the Road to Real Emancipation*. In addition to excerpts already posted on [revcom.us](http://revcom.us), we will be running further excerpts from time to time on both [revcom.us](http://revcom.us) and in *Revolution* newspaper. These excerpts should serve as encouragement and inspiration for people to get into the work as a whole, which is available at [revcom.us](http://revcom.us) and will be published in the future as a book.*

*This excerpt comes from Chapter III, "The Strategic Approach to An Actual Revolution," from the section titled "Hastening While Awaiting."*

### **Hastening While Awaiting**

Now, this gets to the point about "hastening while awaiting"—which is another one of those things that everybody can repeat, but what does it mean, and does it really have any importance? We got this formulation from Mao. During the war against Japan, which I discussed earlier, Mao talked about how, in resisting—militarily, in that case—Japanese occupation and aggression against China, they didn't have the basis to go over to the offensive right away, to drive out the Japanese. They had to fight, for a certain period of time, on the defensive; they had to avoid major encounters that could be decisive in terms of the outcome of the whole thing. In that situation, Mao used the formulation: we are hastening while awaiting—awaiting changes in the international situation, in that case. In other words, as World War 2 broke out, there was a whole larger struggle against

Japan, or in which Japan was enmeshed—most of all, the inter-imperialist contradiction between Japan, Germany, and Italy, on one side, and the U.S. and Britain (and France, sort of) on the other side. (I say France was sort of involved because it was occupied by Germany and divided in half, and, so it wasn't able to fight very much for most of the war.) Anyway, without getting into all the details of that, this was what Mao was talking about: waging the war of resistance against Japanese occupation, hastening while awaiting changes in the international situation.

Now, obviously, we have not only adopted but also *adapted* this; we're not waging a military struggle now, and we're not awaiting changes in the international situation in the same way they were in China—we're hastening while awaiting the development of things toward a revolutionary situation, which obviously involves the whole

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

But, while we’re hastening, we are awaiting. Awaiting is part of the formulation, it’s part of the contradiction, it’s part of the strategy. Why are we awaiting? And what are we awaiting? We’re not awaiting Godot. We’re not waiting for some *deus ex machina* (some god-like force from outside the contradictions of the material world) to intervene and create, oh finally, a basis for revolution. We’re not even looking or waiting for “the great god, the masses” to come and create for us a revolutionary situation—“Oh, when the masses get ready, then everything will be fine; they’ll all want a revolution, and they’ll all come to us and say, ‘Please lead us to make a revolution.’” If you think that’s gonna happen, you are in for a big disappointment. You could think: “It’s just not fair, we’ve been out here since 1996 with the National Day of Protest against police brutality and murder, criminalization of a generation and repression. Now a lot of people are talking about police brutality and murder, but everybody’s not coming to us and saying, ‘Lead us, please,’ because we’ve been out here for 20 years. It’s just not fair.” Well, tough shit. That’s not the way it works, OK. And if you think that is what is going to happen with a revolution—finally

everybody’s gonna come around and say, “Please lead us, because you’ve been out here talking about revolution forever”—forget it. So we’re not waiting for something like that. But we are awaiting while we’re hastening. Why? Maybe this sounds, as they say, counter-intuitive, like it’s self-contradictory in a bad sense, but it isn’t. Why are we awaiting? **Because we are actually serious about making a revolution.** It’s the same principle Mao emphasized in their situation, in the fight against Japan. There were people in China who said, “We gotta go at the Japanese all-out, right now—we can’t just carry out actions from a strategically defensive position, we’ve got to take the offensive.” And Mao said, if we do that, we’re just gonna be crushed. If you read Mao’s military writings about the resistance against Japan, you’ll see this over and over again: We cannot take the strategic offensive against Japan right away, we don’t have the basis and the forces to do that at this point. If we do that, we’re going to be crushed. So, if you’re serious about defeating Japan, you have to fight during a whole stage of strategic defensive in order to get to where you can go over to the offensive. And if you try to just lash out and take the offensive right away, you’re going to be crushed, because we still have meager and weak forces compared to this powerful juggernaut, which Japan still is.

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

Now look, the point is made in “On the Possibility”—and I want to stress this point because things should not be misinterpreted and vulgarized in a social-pacifistic kind of way (socialist in name but pacifist in content)—if you read “On the Possibility,” just like the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic*, it is a very carefully and finely crafted statement, not as some kind of intellectual exercise,

but because of all the many different contradictions it's dealing with, including the existence of the enemy, and what that enemy will do if you act foolishly or speak foolishly. And at one point in "On the Possibility" it emphasizes something that is also in the document "Some Crucial Points of Revolutionary Orientation—In Opposition to Infantile Posturing and Distortion of Revolution":<sup>10</sup> "If you try to implement a strategy like urban guerilla warfare—attempting to wage armed struggle with the aim of bringing down this system when the conditions do not exist for that—this will be a strategy that can only amount to substituting for the masses of people, because it won't bring forward, and it won't be able to bring forward, the masses of people, and you're just going to be isolated and crushed before you could bring forward the masses of people to be part of such an armed struggle. At the same time, "On the Possibility" makes a point of emphasizing that this is different than the masses of people rising up spontaneously against their oppressors, or defending themselves in a given situation. Anyone with a decent orientation should be able to understand why that is justified. (I'm paraphrasing what's in the document "On the Possibility of Revolution" where things are stated very precisely, and people can and should study that document carefully.) You can't use the fact that we can't go over now to the form of struggle they were using in China in resisting Japan—you can't use that to say that, whenever masses of people rise up, well, that's the wrong strategy.

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

only 25 people showed up at the meeting. It was meaningless. You don't do that when masses of people are rising up. You get my point. You don't do that.

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

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

you have some whole other set of conditions, when you don't, you're on the road to being crushed. And that, too, is a betrayal of the masses of people. So the point is to be hastening while awaiting.

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

I will point to this—an analogy with something said by Lenin that is discussed there, in the beginning of Part 2 of *Making and Emancipating*: Lenin analyzed that in imperialist countries there were certain sections of the working class that got bought off from the spoils of imperialism; and he said, nobody can say exactly where these more bourgeoisified, better-off sections of the working class are going to fall out when the revolution actually comes. Nobody can say exactly, he insisted—we'll have to see in the actual event. And in those 6 paragraphs, that formulation—"nobody can say exactly"—is used precisely to make the point that you don't know, when you're working on things, where it's all going to lead. That point is

also made in the strategy statement ("On the Strategy for Revolution"<sup>51</sup>) that you don't know where the "jolts" in society are going to lead. Uprisings of the masses, for example—you don't know what mix that might become part of. But what you do know is that you have to be working to push things as far as you can, as fast as you can, toward the goal revolution, and consolidate, to the greatest degree possible, the forces for revolution out of each such situation, so that you've advanced through it and, as that strategy statement talks about, you're on a higher plane from which then to carry forward further work toward the goal of revolution.

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

another contradiction we have to handle correctly.

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

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

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

At every point, we must be searching out the key concentrations of social contradictions and the methods and forms which can strengthen the political consciousness of the masses, as well as their fighting capacity and organization in carrying out political resistance against the crimes of this system; which can increasingly bring the necessity, and the possibility, of a radically different world to life for growing numbers of people; and which can strengthen the understanding and determination of the

advanced, revolutionary-minded masses in particular to take up our strategic objectives not merely as far-off and essentially abstract goals (or ideals) but as things to be actively striven for and built toward.

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

So what's being emphasized here, in these two paragraphs ("Some Principles for Building a Movement for Revolution"), in opposition to that kind of reformist approach, is the importance of looking for the big contradictions in society around which people can be moved and which get to the deep fault lines of the system—like fault lines for an earthquake—the deep contradictions which lie at the very base of this system which, if people move around them, begin to deepen the cracks in the whole system and create more favorable conditions to actually bring the system down and replace it with something much better. So that's why it says we must be searching out the key concentrations of social contradictions.

And then the second paragraph says this:

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

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

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

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

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

To what degree, in how you are working to contribute to the revolution, do you continually go back to this strategy statement (as well as "Some Principles for Building A Movement for Revolution") as a guide and measure, and what is your sense of this in terms of how this is approached more generally by people in and around the Party and the movement for revolution?

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

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

## ENDNOTES

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

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

### "Enriched What Is To Be Done-ism"

#### ***Hastening while awaiting—not bowing down to necessity***

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

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

Of course, it *is* necessary not to fall into voluntarism. There are many different ways in which such voluntarism can be expressed, leading to various kinds of (usually "ultra-left") errors and deviations, if you will—including in the form of giving in to infantile or adventurist impulses—all of which is also extremely harmful. But—particularly in a protracted or prolonged situation in which the objective conditions for revolution (that is,

for the all-out struggle to seize power) have not yet emerged—by far the much greater danger, and one that is reinforced by this objective situation, is this kind of determinist realism which doesn't grasp correctly the dialectical relation between the objective and subjective factors, and sees them in static, undialectical, and unchanging terms.

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

Revolution is not made by "formulas," or by acting in accordance with stereotypical notions and preconceptions—it is a much more living, rich, and complex process than that. But it is an essential characteristic of revisionism (phony communism which has replaced a revolutionary orientation with a gradualist, and ultimately reformist one) to decide and declare that until some *deus ex machina*—some god-like EXTERNAL FACTOR—intervenes, there can be no essential change in the objective conditions and the most we can do, at any point, is to accept the given framework and work

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

within it, rather than (as we have very correctly formulated it) *constantly straining against the limits* of the objective framework and seeking to *transform the objective conditions to the maximum degree possible* at any given time, always being tense to the possibility of different things coming together which bring about (or make possible the bringing about of) an actual qualitative rupture and leap in the objective situation.

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

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

51. “A Statement from the Revolutionary Communist Party: On the Strategy for Revolution,” *Revolution* #224 online, February 11, 2011. Available at [revcom.us](http://revcom.us).