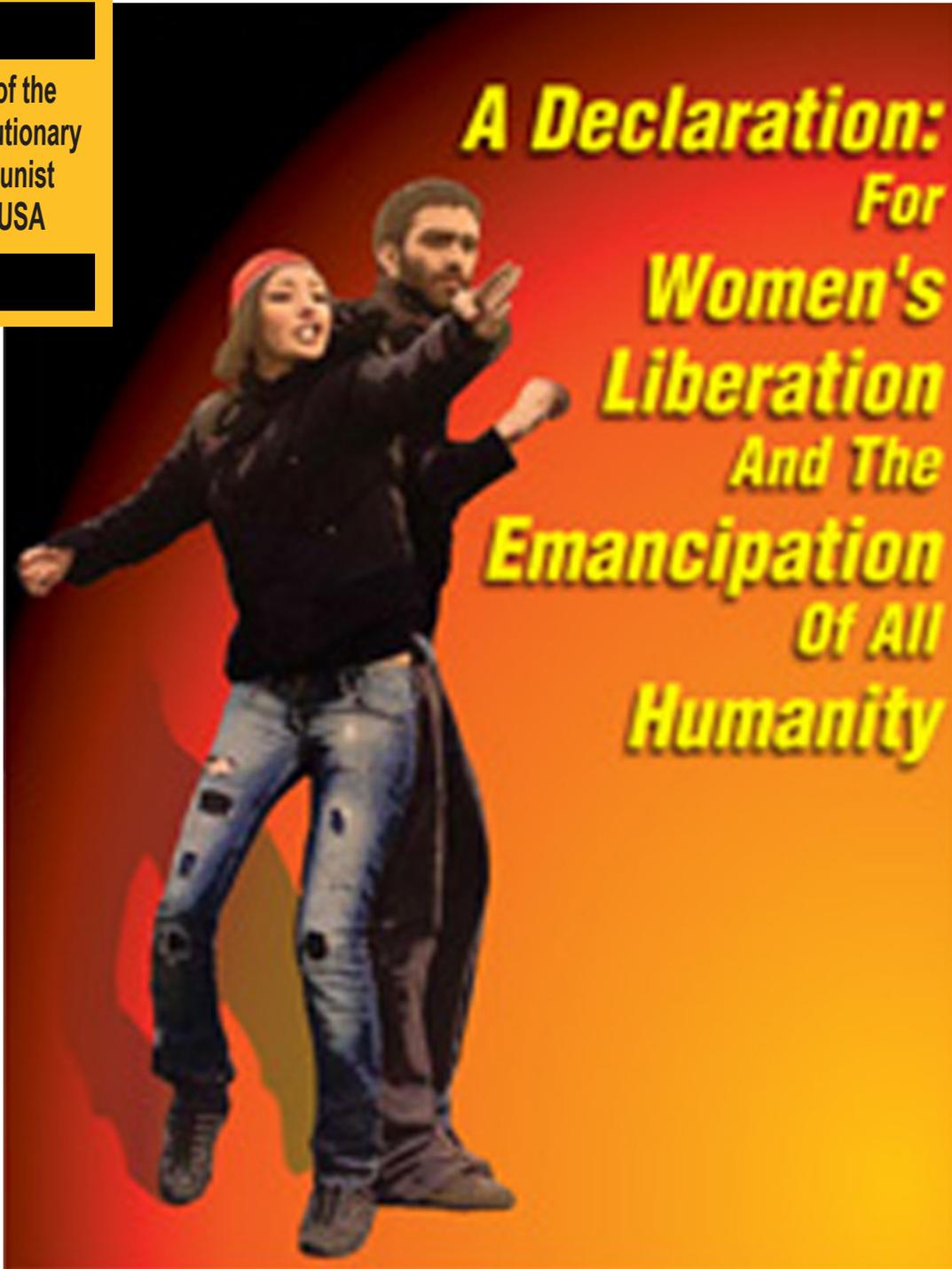


REVOLUTION

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Voice of the
Revolutionary
Communist
Party, USA

**A Declaration:
For
Women's
Liberation
And The
Emancipation
Of All
Humanity**



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

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

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A Declaration: For Women's Liberation And The Emancipation Of All Humanity

Spin the globe. Anywhere you look women are being held down and slammed backwards.

From China...

Where baby boys are greeted by gatherings of celebration and joy. Girl babies, by the way, bring condolences and often turn up in garbage dumps amidst mounds of stinking refuse...¹

To El Salvador...

Where women are arrested out of hospital emergency rooms if they are suspected of having had an abortion, and where their medical records have been seized by the state and even their uteruses have been used as evidence to imprison them.²

WE NEED A REVOLUTION!

From Bangkok and Bangalore and Moldova...

Where literally millions of young women are either kidnapped, or sold by their starving families, or lured with the promises of employment and then sold across borders into a sex-slave trade on a scale never seen before in history...

To China, Vietnam and Silicon Valley, USA...

Where the labor of women in the network of global sweatshops powered the last two decades of capitalist expansion...and where these same women now return home, empty-handed and used up, cast off in the capitalist crisis.

WE NEED A REVOLUTION!

From the pockets of privilege in the suburbs...

Where middle-class girls must navigate a lifetime of mutually exclusive messages —to be sexy but to

guard their “purity,” to climb the corporate ladder but to remember that the most meaningful thing they can ever do is be a mother who puts her family before all else—and where in some places a biblically rooted virginity cult has been built up, with fathers giving their daughters “purity rings” and millions taking “abstinence pledges”; and where teenage women cut and starve themselves in epidemic proportions.

To the desperate streets of the inner city...

Where among the most oppressed, a generation has been brought up in a culture that derides women as “bitches” and “ho’s,” openly exalts pimps and violence against women; where despite its boasts of “great freedoms,” the United States imprisons one-third of all women in the world who are in prison³; where teenage women are led to believe that their only worth and meaning in life lies in having a child, and then they are forced to endure poverty and humiliation, and often to take desperate and degrading measures to feed their children; and where women from Mexico and other parts of Latin America risk rape, or starvation in the desert, to make it to “El Norte” so they can work endless hours to support their family back home, often being pressured into sex by immigration agents, bosses and other men who know they are vulnerable without papers.

WE NEED A REVOLUTION!

From the war-torn lands...

Where in the Congo, as in Bosnia before it, the rape of women has been a systematic part of a civil war and where tens of thousands of women and young girls have been so brutally raped that their insides are torn apart and they can no longer hold their bladders or bowels.⁴

To the hearth of the family...

Whether in the U.S., where a woman is beaten by her partner every 15 seconds and three women are killed every day by possessive lovers and abusive husbands⁵ ...or in parts of Africa, where tradition dictates that families mutilate their own children, cutting off the genitals of pre-pubescent girls to blunt for life sexual sensation and “prepare” them for the position of a “proper and loyal wife,” never tempted to stray from her husband...or India, where hundreds, perhaps thousands, of wives are set on fire and murdered each year by husbands or in-laws once the dowry (the money paid to the groom’s family) has been paid...or all over the world, where under the sway of religious fundamentalism and backward social relations, women are killed by brothers and fathers if they “bring shame” on the family.

WE NEED A REVOLUTION!

From the “sacred vows”...

When the “queen for a day,” bride dressed in “virginal white” ritual of the wedding day—now built up into lunatic proportions in countries like the U.S.—marks the passage of a woman into what is all too often a lifetime of domestic drudgery and subordination, whether or not she also works outside the home and very often even if she has an advanced education and a position in a prestigious profession.

To the “sacred texts”...

Which in every major religion enshrine the subjugation of women through myth (Eve causing “the fall of man”), through code (the Qur’an and Shariah law of Islam that value a woman’s testimony as half that of a man and authorize a man to beat and whip his wife to keep her obedient to him), and through prayer (the Jewish prayer of a man that thanks God he was not born a woman).

WE NEED A REVOLUTION!

From the cradles...

In which no sooner is the girl-child born than she is set on a course which—in spite of the claims that, in “modern” countries like the USA, there are no limits

on what girls can become—will in reality be marked by the many limitations, and degradations, imposed by society on girls and women.

To “old age”...

Where the older woman is, more often than not, cast off, disrespected, forgotten, ridiculed and devalued...

To the grave...

Women die unnecessarily: in childbirth, in unsafe abortions, denied healthcare, and without food or clean water. Women die violently: at the hands of their husbands and brothers, and fathers and in-laws, and conquering soldiers and pimps. Women die unvalued: ground up and uncounted in the most dangerous work places and war zones and nameless streets.

WE NEED A REVOLUTION— A REAL REVOLUTION— THE MOST RADICAL AND LIBERATING REVOLUTION IN HISTORY!

The fabric of women’s oppression is carved deeply into the calloused hands of women in the sweatshops of China and Honduras. It is draped over the faces of young women in Saudi Arabia and Indonesia. It is stripped off the bodies of girls of Moldova and Bangkok who are put up for sale in brothels worldwide, and it is worn like a prize by pre-teens in the U.S. and Europe who are taught to dress and move like sex objects *long* before they understand what sex even is. This fabric ropes back into history, it winds its way around the globe, braided into all the dominant religions and “moral codes” and woven into every aspect of human societies. It is a heavy veil that casts the darkness of humanity’s first oppressive divisions over the lives, the dreams, and the prospects of every corner of humanity in the 21st century.

To live like this on this planet in the 21st century cannot be justified and should not be accepted. None of this can be tolerated or excused away with counsel of patience.. ≈≈

WE DECLARE: NO MORE!

Women need emancipation. Women need liberation from thousands of years of tradition's chains. This is a declaration that stands on the clear recognition that for humanity as a whole to advance, half of humanity must be lifted from centuries of being condemned to being the property of men and pitilessly exploited, demeaned and degraded in a thousand ways.

Women are not breeders. Women are not lesser beings. Women are not objects created for the sexual pleasure of men. Women are human beings capable of participating fully and equally in every realm of human endeavor. When women are held down, all of humanity is held back. Women must win liberation, and they can only be liberated through the revolutionary transformation of the world and the emancipation of all of humanity, and through being a powerful motive force in that revolution.

At a time when many proclaim that finding "common ground" with religious fundamentalists is necessary, or even desirable, this declaration does not accept and will not compromise with women's enslavement. This declaration has no patience for those who tell us to "be realistic" when what they mean is to tinker around within the horrible confines of the world as it is. This declaration calls out the moral and ideological bankruptcy of those who claim the mantle of women's advance but mean only "getting in" on the world as it is—waging what can only be a losing and perverse battle for the "right" of women to have an equal share in running an empire, exploiting others, or even down to the humiliating level of owning and marketing their own bodies as sexual commodities.

When so few will dare, this declaration is calling for something unseen in generations: an uncompromising outpouring of women and men the world over who refuse to see women oppressed, beaten, imprisoned, insulted, raped, abused, harassed, exploited, murdered, spat upon, thrown acid at, groped, shamed and systematically diminished.

This declaration calls for a revolution—a revolution that takes the full emancipation of women as a cornerstone. A revolution that unleashes the fury of women as a mighty force, and that grasps how central this question is to uprooting and abolishing all exploitation, oppression and degrading social relations, and the ideas that go along with them, among human beings as a whole, all over the world.

This declaration is a communist declaration, summoning a revolutionary movement of emancipators of humanity.

This, and nothing less, is the challenge before us. ≈≈

WOMEN'S OPPRESSION IS NOT "NATURAL": IT IS BOUND UP WITH THE DIVISION OF SOCIETY INTO EXPLOITERS AND EXPLOITED, AND IS WOVEN INTO AND PERPETUATED BY "MODERN-DAY" CAPITALISM...

Growing up in any society, it is easy to think that the way we live, the assumptions we operate with, and the everyday relations we are used to, are just "natural" or even, as we are often told, that they are ordained by some god or other supernatural beings or forces. Probably nowhere does this apply more than in the way people think about and experience the family as well as the relations between men and women.

But there IS NO unchanging, and unchangeable, natural order—god given or biological. The history of the family, like "human nature" itself, has been one of continuous transformation.

Most early human societies traced the lineage of children through mothers. While these societies maintained a division of labor between men and women, largely based on women's role in childbirth and the necessity of prolonged nursing at that time, they did not institutionalize relations of oppression or domination between men and women. It was only with the development of society's ability to produce a surplus above what was necessary for mere survival, and the rise of private property on that foundation, that people were divided into exploiter and exploited, and a state arose to enforce the domination of one class over another. Bound up with that very development was the further transformation of the original division of labor by sex into an oppressive relation of male domination over women.

Families, and the institution of marriage, emerged first not as a romantic—partnering of male and female and a place to nurture and care for children—but as an economic and social unit that cemented relations of wealth and power within a society as well as lines of inheritance through which to maintain the accumulated wealth and power, or lack thereof, from one generation to the next. The root of the word "family" reveals a great deal about its original function. It comes from the Latin word "familia" (meaning "a household of slaves") used in ancient Rome to refer to the male-headed household in which not only slaves and servants but also wives and children were counted as the man's property, over which he held the power of life and death.

Ever since private ownership of socially produced wealth emerged, and along with that, class divisions among people—divisions based on different people's differing roles in producing that wealth and the corresponding larger or smaller share of wealth they received—women were expected to guard their virginity before marriage and then become mothers who unquestioningly subordinated and channeled their hopes and dreams into satisfying the husband and bringing up *his* children. Women who failed or refused to do so have been regarded as "whores" or in some other way demeaned and persecuted, subjected to scorn and often to violence, and deemed useful only as objects of sexual gratification and plunder—or cast out altogether. Through a variety of cultures, time periods and religious myths—from the biblical figures of the

Virgin Mary and Jezebel to “pop icons” like Britney Spears and her tabloid-covered transition from girlhood innocence to despised seductress—these two models, of “chaste woman” and “whore,” have endured (and at times been perversely combined, as in the image of the “virgin whore”—a “temptress” always just beyond reach—created by the molders of “mass culture” in countries like the U.S.). From today’s religious assault on abortion and birth control to the worldwide networks of sex slavery and prostitution, these two models continue to mangle the lives of billions on this planet—and poison the atmosphere in which every male and female relate.

In this way, for thousands of years, generation after generation of women and girls—that is, HALF OF HUMANITY—have had their humanity and potential squandered and suffocated, and their spirits and lives mutilated. They have been reduced to nothing more than their biological ability to bear children and their usefulness to men.

This is the real root of the family which is held up as the most important building block of society. *This* is why the reality of family life becomes, for so many women, a prison filled with cruel mockery of the love, compassion and support they originally sought in it. *This* is why, even where people do come together based on genuine bonds of love and a true desire for equality and respect, the way the family and society is structured—as part of the overall relations of domination, exploitation and oppression that prevail in every part of the world today—so often thrusts people into roles they promised themselves they would never take up. *All this* is why the family, for so many women as well as children, is the site of crushing and demeaning horrors.

These brutalities and constraints of the family are not betrayals of a romantic, loving and cherished institution. They are its actual roots—and its continuing role in societies today, whether “backward” or “modern”—spilling out and contorting even the best intentions of people.

The earliest division of society into exploiters and exploited—with some people being captured and enslaved by others—was bound up with the emergence of oppressive relations between men and women. (Taking women as “prizes of war” and maintaining

them as concubines—sex slaves—played a significant part in the emergence of master-slave relations. This is enshrined—and indeed celebrated—in the “sacred texts” of major religions, such as the “Judeo-Christian” scriptures and the Qur’an of Islam.) Since the time of ancient slave societies, where the economy was based on agriculture and/or the husbandry of herds, having a lot of children was important to the male landowners and property owners, as a source of workers—tilling the land, or tending to the herds—and, in the case of males, a source of warriors, carrying out raids and battles against rival tribes and villages, or fighting wars against rival empires. The essential role of the family, and in particular the woman (wife and mother) within the family, was to provide the male head of the household with children and to rear them to in turn fulfill their “proper” roles, according to the division of labor in society, including that between men and women; to maintain and perpetuate the existing property relations, in which a man’s children, as well as his wife, were his property—all this enforced by law or at least by the prevailing traditions, customs and codes. The family thus served as a basic “cell” of the larger society, which was crucial in reproducing not only the population of that society but also its dominant social relations (including ownership, or non-ownership, of property), relations of inequality and exploitation.

Where industrialization and capitalism have replaced agriculture and herding as the main basis of the economy, the family has continued to be a key “cell” of society—playing an essential part in maintaining and reproducing the relations of exploitation and oppression that are characteristic of capitalism. Capitalism is a form of society in which the necessities of life, and goods and services in general, are produced and exchanged as commodities—things to be bought and sold. In this society, the ability to work (labor power) itself becomes a commodity: this ability to work, where work can be found, is sold to an employer (capitalist), to use for his benefit, in exchange for a wage or salary. Capitalists are caught up in, and cannot escape, cut-throat competition with other capitalists, driven by the necessity to expand or die. It is through the process of employing the labor power of others (who own no capital) that capitalists seek to constantly increase their store of capital. And while capitalism requires, and provides for, various strata of people who serve it and its political system, and others whose roles are necessary for

In many ways, and particularly for men, the woman question and whether you seek to completely abolish or to preserve the existing property and social relations and corresponding ideology that enslave women (or maybe “just a little bit” of them) is a touchstone question among the oppressed themselves. It is a dividing line between “wanting in” and really “wanting out”: between fighting to end all oppression and exploitation—and the very division of society into classes—and seeking in the final analysis to get your part in this.

**—Bob Avakian, Chairman of the
Revolutionary Communist Party, USA**

(or, in any case, are compatible with) the overall maintenance and continuance of capitalist society, some of whom are well paid, at bottom it is by more extensively and intensively driving those who carry out the actual process of production, more ruthlessly exploiting these workers (proletarians), that the capitalists seek to constantly increase their store of capital—and if they do not do this on the necessary scale, they run the risk of going under. In return for this, those they exploit in this way receive a wage just sufficient for their survival, to keep them in a condition where they can continue to work—and to be exploited—and to raise new generations who will be in the same position. This is the fundamental momentum and logic of capitalism. At times—in accordance with the requirements of capital accumulation, and driven by the dynamics and dictates of this process—capitalists will lay off part of their work force, while more intensely exploiting those who remain. Or they will close down whole facilities and move their capital into spheres of the economy, or geographic areas or regions, or parts of the world, where people are more vulnerable to exploitation and the prospects of “profitable investment” seem greater.

Today, more than ever, all this takes place on a global scale, with the most desperately poor and pitilessly exploited victims of capitalism largely in the Third World of Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. But even within a country like the U.S., there are masses of impoverished and bitterly exploited and oppressed people, numbering in the tens of millions.

Within the basic relations of capitalism, overwhelmingly the wage or salary of the employees is “funneled” through the institution of the family: It is through the family that the necessities and requirements of life are met (to the degree they can be) and that new generations are raised, reproducing once again not just the population but the prevailing relations, of inequality and exploitation, in the society as a whole. And within the confines of capitalism, even where many women may have jobs, earning a wage or salary themselves, women in their masses still cannot escape the larger divisions in society, including the oppressive division of labor between men and women, in which women continue to have the primary responsibility for the rearing of children (and as the main care-givers of family members of all ages) and are evaluated essentially in terms of their usefulness to men, as mothers and wives and objects of sexual gratification. These relations have been inherited from thousands of years of patriarchal (male-dominated) society and are reinforced not only by powerful tradition but also by the very workings and effects of capitalism, in which everything—even marital relations and sexual relations—are fundamentally relations of property and the exchange of commodities, and through which overall it is on one side, the male side, that continues to dominate. Even leaving aside the crude expressions of this, in such things as “pre-nuptial agreements,” how many marriages, or other intimate relations between men and women in this society, do not involve, on the part of the man, the demand for sex (as well as the maintenance of the household and the rearing of his children) in exchange for his “being a provider” (and maybe “helping out around the house” once in a while); and, on the part of the woman, the surrender of sex (and other “services” for the man) in exchange for financial security (or simply survival)?

Why is it that prostitution is a common feature in every society which is founded on exploitation and which, as a key part of that, incorporates the relations and traditions of patriarchy and male domination? Why is pornography, along with prostitution, and all the degradation of women this involves, so widespread in a country like the U.S.? Why is there the “double standard” in which a female who has sex with many different people is vilified as a “slut” while a male who does so is celebrated as a “stud”? This is an extension of the basic property relations between men and women, and in particular the marriage relations through which men in general seek to control the sexual activity of their wives, but at the same time seek—and feel “entitled” to—sexual gratification, and if they believe that sex with their wives is no longer satisfying, they often do not try to deal with this by striving for a more loving relationship and caring intimacy with their wives but instead feel driven, and enabled and empowered, to turn to other women for gratification, including in the form of prostitution and/or pornography. Or, men avoid or delay marriage—and the “complications” and “restrictions” it theoretically imposes on them, including the “obligations” of monogamy—and they seek instead, or for a time, to find sexual gratification without obligations, in casual encounters and through pornography and/or prostitution. And why are there women available to be used, and abused, through prostitution and pornography? Because, as a result of the fundamental nature, and the essential workings, of a system based on the drive of capitalists to constantly accumulate more capital, through the exploitation of masses of people who own no capital—and with all the oppressive relations that are bound up with this, especially the structures and ideological influences of patriarchy and male domination—there are large numbers of women who are poor, desperate, powerless and vulnerable, who can be trapped, tricked, coerced, kidnapped, beaten, injected with drugs and in other ways forced into selling their bodies, and because the dominant culture in capitalist countries promotes, at every turn, the idea that women’s bodies are commodities, and conditions and encourages not only men but women themselves to view them and use them as such. In today’s world, this is a worldwide phenomenon, with millions and millions of women, and even young girls, ensnared and brutalized in the international sex trade and the “sex industry,” which is a source of billions of dollars of profit and capital.

Along with all this, there are the far-too-common incidents, in a country like the U.S., where a woman attempts to break away from an abusive husband or boyfriend, only to be stalked, or even killed, by him—her children sometimes murdered along with her. This, too, is an expression, in extreme form, of relations and traditions in which a woman and children are the property of the man; it is the outgrowth of the mentality that if he can no longer have this property, then nobody will! This is the same basic mentality, and reflects the same kind of oppressive relations, as when, in other cultures, an unmarried woman or girl is murdered, often by male members of her own family, because she has “lost her virginity” and so—even if this is the result of rape—she has thereby been devalued as property which her family, and her father in particular, is counting on exchanging in marriage arrangements.

The point of all this is not that it is fundamentally the “fault” of men, or that “men are the enemy.” Rather, what this reflects and reveals is that the relations among human beings, which have

developed over thousands of years—since the time that private ownership of land (and other means of production) and the division of society into exploiters and exploited emerged—have been, and remain, grounded in oppression...that capitalism is the latest, and a highly developed, embodiment of these oppressive relations...that overthrowing capitalism, and overturning, uprooting and completely abolishing all such relations, everywhere in the world, is in the interests of the vast majority of human beings, men as well as women...and that the emancipation of women is, and must be, both a crucial goal and a decisive part of the struggle to finally abolish all such oppressive relations. Capitalism, especially as it has increasingly developed as a worldwide system of capitalist imperialism, has incorporated, within its overall process of accumulation of wealth and capital, many relations of exploitation and oppression that predate capitalism. Especially in the vast Third World, this involves the oppression of women in forms which are loudly denounced by the defenders of “modern,” “enlightened” and “democratic” capitalism—at the same time as this “modern,” “enlightened,” “democratic” capitalism thrives upon, and could not do without, these very forms of oppression, and which it therefore works to maintain in the “backward” parts of the world it dominates and exploits, along with maintaining the particular modes of exploitation and oppression, including the oppression of women, which are deeply woven into the fabric of these capitalist countries themselves. The extreme impoverishment and degradation of masses of people, throughout the sprawling slums and the vast countryside of the Third World, are a lifeblood for the vampire system that is capitalist imperialism. These masses are a seemingly endless source of desperate, more easily exploitable and, in the eyes of the exploiters, “disposable” human beings—to be used, and used up, when it is profitable and cast aside when other sources of exploitation seem more profitable. And within all this, the exploitation and oppression of women is indispensable for imperialist capital—as a source of “cheap labor” themselves and for the bearing, and rearing, of new generations of “cheap labor.” This, at base, is why “democratic” and “enlightened” capitalist imperialism works not to eliminate, but rather to perpetuate, not only “modern” but also “medieval” forms of women’s oppression.

In sum: “Modern” capitalist society—or in reality the global system of capitalist imperialism—has inherited the oppression of women from past societies out of which capitalism has emerged, and while changing some of the forms in which this oppression takes place, it has not eliminated, and cannot eliminate, this oppression; it has incorporated pre-capitalist forms of this oppression, in various parts of the world, particularly the Third World, into its overall, worldwide system of exploitation and oppression; and it perpetuates all this through the fundamental relations, the ongoing process of accumulation and the overall functioning of this capitalist-imperialist system itself.

THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN IS UTTERLY UNNECESSARY: REVOLUTION IS THE WAY OUT AND THE WAY FORWARD

There is no longer the need for women’s role in society to be dictated by their biological role in childbearing. There is no longer the need for humanity to be hemmed in by patriarchal traditions and oppressive religious morality. Today, this is as insane, as it is cruel, as it is *utterly unnecessary*.

For the first time in human history, it is possible not only to dream about, but to bring into being, a world that is no longer marked by the subjugation of half of humanity. Today it is possible to break the chains that bind women as well as to dig up and overcome the very divisions into classes and the corresponding traditions that entrench and enforce women’s oppression.

Capitalism, with its development of technology, transportation, communication and massive means of socialized production, has created the material basis for all of humanity to live in collective abundance—if these means of production are wrenched out of the hands of the capitalist ruling class and put in the service of humanity, and *if* all the relations between people and all traditional ideas are also radically transformed.

This requires revolution. That is, the overthrow of this system and the capitalist-imperialist class that embodies and runs it—and

“The whole question of the position and role of women in society is more and more acutely posing itself in today’s extreme circumstances... It is not conceivable that all this will find any resolution other than in the most radical terms... The question yet to be determined is: will it be a radical reactionary or a radical revolutionary resolution, will it mean the reinforcing of the chains of enslavement or the shattering of the most decisive links in those chains and the opening up of the possibility of realizing the complete elimination of all forms of such enslavement?”

**Bullets, From the Writings,
Speeches, And Interviews of Bob Avakian,
RCP Publications, 1985, p. 183**

the establishment of a *new revolutionary state power*. As the *Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA* explains:

“This new revolutionary power must, and would, immediately strip the capitalist-imperialist class of its property and power. It would immediately set about meeting the most pressing needs of the people and solving what up to now have seemed the most ‘intractable’ problems. And it would do all this to serve, and as part of, something larger: a world revolution, leading to the all-around emancipation of humanity. This new power, a socialist state rooted in the conscious activity of tens of millions of people, would embark on a series of further struggles to dig up the very roots of exploitation and oppression in every sphere, from production to social institutions to ideas, in a process full of monumental challenges and real vitality and diversity.”⁶

And, in line with everything we have emphasized here, this historic transformation of society, and indeed the world as a whole, would have as one of its cornerstones—as a fundamental and decisive goal, and driving force—the struggle for the complete emancipation of women.

Today the history of communist revolution has been buried and heaped with scorn. It has been deemed a “failed project” by the so-called champions of progress.

But if any system should be evaluated as a monumental failure—for the way it squanders and plunders humanity as a whole as well as women in particular—that system is capitalism. As we have seen, capitalism has not freed women, it has merely taken the age-old oppression of women and updated it and integrated it into the most violent, most oppressive, most massively immiserating form of human organization this planet has ever seen. And every day it spreads its reach, grinds up the lives and bodies of millions, and casts them into oblivion like so much human waste—leaving no part of the globe untouched. Despite the reality of these horrors—and the fact that they are the inevitable products of the outmoded system we now live under—we find the utter collapse and capitulation to “the limits of the possible” on the part of those who once proclaimed the banner of the liberation of women.

At a time when the basic right to control when and whether to bear a child hangs by a thread, when abortion and even birth control are under fire, the “feminist” movement can rarely even bring itself to utter the word abortion and concedes, wrongly and outrageously, that there is something morally wrong with it. Such “feminists” have forgotten, or turned away from, the essential truth that women who have been denied the right and ability to decide themselves if and when to bear children, who do not have even that measure of control over their own bodies, have been reduced to a position that is tantamount to slavery.

At a time of massive food-crises, all-around economic crisis and imperialist wars that steal lives by the millions, when the need is greater and more urgent than ever to bring about a radically different world where humanity is unchained as a whole, these “feminist leaders” aim no higher than the fight for individual

women to be able to “get in on” the perks that go with being on the top of the dog-eat-dog heap. Even those who dedicate themselves to improving the lot of the most oppressed and poor women around the globe do so with their hopes and efforts still tethered to the current oppressive order, a truly hopeless and demoralizing task.

EQUALITY AND EMANCIPATION FOR WOMEN HAS NOT BEEN, AND CANNOT BE, ACHIEVED UNDER THIS SYSTEM: WHAT WAS—AND WAS NOT—ACCOMPLISHED BY THE WOMEN’S LIBERATION MOVEMENT OF THE 1960S AND EARLY ’70S

To understand these lowered sights, it is necessary to speak to some of the advances as well as shortcomings of the movement for women’s liberation that, to a very significant degree, reshaped the culture of the U.S. in the 1960s and ’70s, as well as some key developments since then.

First of all and most importantly, this was a tremendously positive struggle!

It is hard for people who didn’t live in those times to understand how truly horrific things were for women in the ’50s in the U.S. Behind the romanticized “Father Knows Best” portrayals of domestic bliss, women led lives of suffocation and brutality. Millions were driven into deep depression and isolated insanity. Their social interaction was, to a large degree, restricted to their children, and their horizons were supposed to be no higher than “Good Housekeeping.” Abortion and birth control (or at least many forms of birth control) were illegal in many states—there was no general right in the country to birth control or to abortion. Women were barred from many forms of employment, married women had little or no control over property and finances independently of their husbands, and in most states husbands had the legal right to rape their wives.

It is a *very good thing* for all people that this was forcefully challenged in the ’60s and ’70s! It was a *very good thing* that women lifted their heads and demanded equality. Inspired by the Black liberation struggle and utilizing “speak bitterness” sessions like the ones that had been held among peasants rising up in revolutionary China, women formed consciousness-raising groups that broke down their isolation. They gained the strength and support to leave abusive marriages and to set new standards of what partnerships should be. They entered school and all spheres of work in growing numbers. They challenged the mores that stifled human relations, exploring—and challenging stigmas on—women’s sexuality. Very importantly, they fought for—and won—the right to abortion! Men, too, began to change, a great many transforming their attitudes and beginning to see the struggle for women’s emancipation as key to any struggle for a better world. All this fueled and was given further initiative by changes taking place in the structure of the U.S. and global economies which drew more women out of the homes and into the workforce. This also took place against a backdrop of revolutionary upsurges all over the world. It was a time of major social upheaval, tremendous ideological ferment, and daring self-sacrifice and

struggle. In the U.S., a generation became deeply disaffected over—and many troops rebelled against—the Vietnam War; the Black liberation struggle shook the country to its foundations; and the culture was filled with defiance and soaring dreams of a different world.

But, even from its inception, two different streams contended within the women's movement. One stream was bourgeois feminism; it isolated the question of women's status from other forms of oppression and fought merely for reforms and for women's right to equality within the world as it currently exists. The other, far more radical stream, with revolutionaries at its core, had a basic sense that the emancipation of women was bound up with freeing humanity from oppression and exploitation of every kind—and, at the same time, grasped that no real progress could come about if women were maintained in a subordinate situation.

Unfortunately, the revolutionary upsurge of that time crested before revolution had been made. Here it must be emphasized that by revolution we don't mean merely a major change in attitudes or significant social upheaval. Revolution refers to the overthrow of one class by another and to the establishment of a new state power with radically new relations of production and overall relations between people. Instead, the capitalist system—its economic base and its social fabric, enforced by its machinery of power and violence—remained intact, so it was impossible to follow through on, or even to maintain, much of what had been gained.

Very quickly, and really coalescing under the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, a backlash was unleashed against everything positive that had been accomplished. Many who had once aspired to remake the whole world began adjusting their dreams downward. Throughout society and around the world the initiative was reversed. For the rulers of the U.S., the reassertion of the "traditional family" and "family values" became an indispensable part of not only reasserting patriarchy but also stitching back together the reactionary fabric of society that had been significantly frayed.

Christian fascists were given powerful backing by ruling class forces and unleashed—under this banner of "family values"—to hound and harass women who sought abortions. They have gone so far as to blow up clinics and even murder doctors. They have pushed the shame and ignorance of "abstinence only" into the public schools, and have assaulted the teaching of the scientific fact of evolution. They have worked to strip away the rights won by gay people and to re-legitimize bigoted homophobia. Perversely, this assertion of religion and patriarchy even became a way of bringing many who were deeply disaffected and still bitterly oppressed into their reactionary fold.

In the face of this backlash—together with the ebbing of revolutionary movements and of the orientation of fighting for change through mass independent political action of the people—the stream of bourgeois feminism came to be identified as the only outlet for those concerned about the unequal and oppressed status of women, even as this bourgeois feminism more and more tied and subordinated itself to the ruling class, and the Democratic Party in particular.

This absorption of the "official women's movement" into the Democratic Party, and its utter subordination to the confines of electoral politics, has done incalculable damage. For over two decades now this "feminist movement" has encouraged and influenced progressive people to accommodate to a dynamic where yesterday's outrage becomes today's "compromise position" and tomorrow's limits of what can be imagined. The defensiveness and cravenness of this "movement" in the face of the Christian fascists in particular—its refusal to really battle them on the morality of abortion, to take one concentrated example—has contributed to the disorientation of two generations of young women, and men as well.

These developments in the 1980s—and in particular this reactionary backlash against women, worldwide—led to the situation described 20 years ago by the Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, Bob Avakian, which in many ways rings out even more powerfully today:

"The whole question of the position and role of women in society is more and more acutely posing itself in today's extreme circumstances... It is not conceivable that all this will find any resolution other than in the most radical terms... The question yet to be determined is: will it be a radical reactionary or a radical revolutionary resolution, will it mean the reinforcing of the chains of enslavement or the shattering of the most decisive links in those chains and the opening up of the possibility of realizing the complete elimination of all forms of such enslavement?" (*Bullets, From the Writings, Speeches, And Interviews of Bob Avakian*, RCP Publications, 1985, p. 183)

With all this at stake, it is necessary to examine and expose some false paths and dead ends that stand in the way of emancipation.

ROADBLOCKS TO EMANCIPATION

1

U.S. IMPERIALISM AND ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM: A "LOSE/LOSE" CHOICE AND DEADLY TRAP

Most obscene among these wrong views are those who sing the praises of U.S. imperialist democracy as the best of all possible societies and who even go so far as to champion the U.S. military as a force that can liberate women. They point to the unbearable horrors of Islamic fundamentalism, where women are stoned to death and kept locked in their homes, and under the head-to-toe covering of a burkha, as "proof" of the superiority of the "American way of life." And they point to the ascendancy of women like Hillary Clinton—who as Secretary of State gets to be part of the U.S. apparatus of massive plunder, death and destruction—as a great stride towards the realization of women's equality.

In reality, there is no "choice" for women—or for humanity more broadly—between U.S. imperialism and Islamic fundamentalism. Not only are women subjugated and oppressed in the imperialist

countries, there is also the marked phenomenon of the rise in the U.S. of Christian fascists who are every bit as reactionary, misogynist, and “medieval” as any Islamic cleric, and who are fanatical advocates and fighters for what is in fact the most oppressive force in the world today: U.S. imperialism.

Further, liberation for women can never be delivered through the guns and boots and warships of an imperialist army. A recent statement from the March 8 Women’s Organization (Iran-Afghanistan) drives this home very powerfully:

“U.S. imperialism invaded Afghanistan and Iraq in the name of a ‘war against terror’ and the ‘liberation of women.’ It ended up pouring terror on the people of Afghanistan and Iraq and reinforcing all patriarchal, tribal, and religious authorities. Before the U.S. occupation of Iraq women had more equal status. They could move around in cities freely without the Islamic hejab [head covering].”

Today, under U.S. occupation in Basra, Iraq the price to hire someone to carry out an “honor killing” against one’s wife or daughter is a mere \$100.⁷

While they may appear very different, the burkha enforced by fanatical Islamic fundamentalism, on the one hand, and the “thong,” widely advertised and promoted as “sexy underwear” for women, in “modern” capitalist society, on the other hand, are both hideous symbols and embodiments of the degradation of women. The fundamental thing they have in common is that they are both manifestations of a world marked by horrendous forms of oppression, both “traditional” and “modern”—a world dominated overall by capitalist imperialism—a world that needs to be turned upside down and radically transformed.

As Bob Avakian has pointed out in speaking to a phenomenon that is increasingly shaping the lives of many millions around the world:

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

‘outmodeds,’ you end up strengthening both.”

Between these two “outmodeds” it is the imperialist ruling classes, and that of the U.S. in particular, which have, by far, done the most harm to humanity and pose the greatest threats. In fact, imperialist domination itself in the Middle East, Indonesia, and elsewhere—along with the massive disruption and dislocation that this domination causes, and the corruption, venality and vicious repression characteristic of the local governments that are dependent on and serve imperialism—gives great fuel to the fire of Islamic fundamentalism as a response to all this, although a reactionary one. Anyone who uses their feminist credentials to legitimate any part of the U.S.’s savage imperialist aggression is morally bankrupt. If they are able to do this while managing to maintain the self-delusion that those who are *really* calling the shots give a damn what they think, they may well have crossed over to the realm of the criminally insane.

What is urgently needed is to bring forward another way—a way that opposes BOTH of these reactionary and outmoded forces. And the more this kind of movement and powerful resistance is brought forward in the U.S., the more it will give air to breathe and initiative to genuine revolutionaries in parts of the world that are quite rightly hotbeds of hatred against U.S. imperialism.

And what is needed, above all, is a revolution, to sweep away capitalism-imperialism, and all reactionary and outmoded systems and relations...all the ways in which half of humanity is held down, demeaned, plundered and despoiled by the other half... and all the ways in which the masses of humanity are enslaved and oppressed by a rotten and murderous system, ruled over by a relative handful of ruthless exploiters.

As we have discussed, capitalism, especially in this era of highly globalized capitalist imperialism, is a worldwide system of exploitation. “Modern” and “democratic” capitalism, as it takes expression in countries like the U.S., both itself embodies, and indeed rests on, exploitation, domination, subordination, degradation and alienation of masses of people, right within its own borders, and is inseparable from, and once again rests on, even more extreme forms of all this in other parts of the world, particularly the Third World. Any attempt to “reform” or “perfect” the more “modern” and “democratic” forms of this, within the imperialist “homeland,” will fail to uproot, or to fundamentally

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Bob Avakian, Chairman of the RCP,USA
Basics 1:28

change, relations of oppression “at home.” Even worse, it will lead—in fact if not always in intent—to a perverse attempt to join in the plunder of the rest of the world, to, “at best,” bargain for improvement in the situation of some of the oppressed and discriminated against in the imperialist country itself, in exchange for supporting the imperialist rulers in their drive to fortify and expand their empire of exploitation and plunder. It will not only fail to bring liberation to women, and other oppressed people, anywhere—it will lead to being complicit with the unspeakable crimes of this system, and/or to disillusionment and demoralization. The reason for this is, once again, simple and basic: This capitalist-imperialist system is founded and rooted in relations of exploitation and oppression, and cannot do without such relations, both more “traditional” and more “modern.” It does not hold the potential for abolishing all this, but is the main source of it, and the main engine driving and enforcing it, in today’s world.

2

ENOUGH, ALREADY, WITH THE MOTHERHOOD CULT!

After three decades of assault by religious fascists and a ruling class seeking to bring back traditional morality, the “women’s movement” has increasingly accommodated to a whole cult around motherhood. These bourgeois feminists have become defensive about abortion and many have even begun casting the next “wave” of feminism as a fight for the “rights of mothers.”

But, although there are more than a few instances in which some women—particularly women who are poor and/or part of oppressed minorities—are tricked, or forced, into sterilization, and otherwise deprived of the ability to have children—and this, too, must be vigorously opposed and fought against—the main problem in the world today, in terms of the oppression of women in particular, is hardly that women’s right to have children is under assault. Millions upon millions of women are being forced into motherhood against their will all the time! It is the right of women to be fully emancipated human beings that is in danger of being buried.

Fighting for “the right of women to be respected as mothers” is NOT the same as fighting for women to be full and equal human beings. Until you break with the notion that women’s essential role is as breeders of children—and especially if you yourself champion this idea—even with the best intentions, you will only end up reinforcing the very horrors and outrages against women and children you were motivated to put an end to.

There is nothing “sacred” about motherhood. Women’s biological role in having children, of necessity, shaped the earliest divisions of labor in human societies where people largely lived hand-to-mouth. Then, for thousands of years in different forms of class society, this division of labor was turned into a relationship of oppression and subjugation, enforced by families, by customs, and by the state. It was backed up by religious superstition and the ideology of male supremacy. But today, we are *long past* the time when women’s biological role in child-birth has to be a defining

part of their lives or of the role of women in society more broadly. This is a very good thing!

It is not any more “natural” for women to be involved in child-rearing than men. It just seems that way because of how societies have been organized for thousands of years—and how people are relentlessly indoctrinated from birth. It is not the case that the only—or the best—way for children to grow and flourish is in atomized family units with women as the primary care-giver. Positive bonds between humans are not formed through genes or through hormones. They are formed through caring and closeness, listening and empathy, teaching as well as learning, and from sharing struggle and joy and pain and humor and the process of discovery. All of these are—or *can be*—qualities of human beings generally, and should not be the exclusive province—or duty—of just one sex.

When the banner of motherhood is being raised as the “next wave” of feminism, it is time to say: enough! This may be dressed up in the likes of Michelle Obama, a high-powered role model career woman who insists she “puts her kids first.” Or it may come in the form of the fictional character in the blockbuster film *Juno*, about a high school girl who is upheld for sassily choosing to have a baby—rather than an abortion—and then is further portrayed as a heroine for giving this baby to a woman who feels she will remain forever unfulfilled if she cannot become a mother. The message is constantly being driven home: motherhood is the essence, the defining and crowning achievement of being a woman. This is just the same old crap—a slightly new twist on the stifling life of the 1950s, somewhat “updated” but still constituting the same overall reactionary package.

It is *long past* time that a new standard be set. It is impossible to uphold the role of mother as the defining and most elevated status for women without everything that goes along with that, including the imprisonment of women to their biology, to child-rearing, to subordination to men, and to male-supremacist judgment and blame. Anyone who genuinely seeks the emancipation of women—and of humanity as a whole—has to decisively break with the cult of motherhood. Women are human beings, capable of equality with men and full participation in every sphere of society, and they should be valued and find their own identity as such.

Once again, the right, and the freedom, for a woman to decide when, or if, to have children—and whether or not to marry—and breaking out of the suffocating confines of identifying the purpose and worth of a woman in terms of her being a wife, and mother, is crucial to emancipating women from a status that in many ways is equivalent to that of slaves, and to envisioning, and realizing, a radically different world and much better future for women and for humanity as a whole.

3

“STRONG FAMILIES” ARE NOT THE KEY FOR OPPRESSED PEOPLE

There is a widespread belief—one that is constantly hammered at by spokespeople and various assorted “role models” for the ruling class, beginning with Barack Obama himself—that oppressed

people right now need “intact, father-headed family units.” We addressed this in our Party’s statement “The Oppression of Black People, the Crimes of This System, and the *Revolution We Need*” (*Revolution* Special Issue #144, available at revcom.us/a/144/BNQ-en.html):

“While there *has* been a tremendous breakdown of Black families in the last several decades, that too has stemmed from the workings of this system, which has cast many Black men to the margins of society, with nearly a *million* of them in prison as you read this. The economic basis for ‘stable, two-parent’ families has been undercut. You could have every Black father actively involved in the care of every Black child, and the fact would still remain: this system has *no future for millions and millions of these youth*, with or without fathers present.

“If you really think that the ‘stable, two-parent’ family will solve the problem, take a look back to the years of KKK terror, lynchings and Jim Crow segregation in the South. Back then the great majority of Black families were traditional two-parent families. But that did not and could not prevent the devastating effects of white supremacy and capitalist exploitation and oppression.

“But there is an even deeper problem with this non-explanation: *it directs oppressed people towards an outlook that will strengthen the chains of oppression and lead away from liberation...* ‘Restoring the man to the head of the family’ covers over the reality of what that means for the woman—which is exactly being treated like a slave, whether a ‘favored’ one or one who is beaten, abused, betrayed, molested, and raped within the ‘holy confines’ of the family (which is all too often how it really goes down). When you get right down to it, this ‘rightful role of the man’ bullshit is just the talk and mentality of a wannabe slave master. And all this other talk from the street of ‘ho’s and bitches’...all this hatred of gay people, with the talk of ‘faggots,’ the persecution, and the actual beat-downs and even killings of anyone whose sexual feelings differ from ‘the norm’...all that stuff, too, is the same messed-up, destructive mentality.

“We don’t need this—**and it will never lead to liberation and a better world!!** While the communist revolution will immediately remove the obstacles that society has placed in the way of forming Black families, it will NOT do this on the basis of the traditional relations and ideas that dominate families in capitalist society, but on the basis of equality and mutual love and respect—and of looking outward toward transforming all of society, including unleashing the full participation of women in every sphere. Black men, and other men, don’t need to ‘get in’ on their ‘right’ to assert domination in the family over women and children—they need to rise up together with women in equality as part of emancipating all of humanity.

“And Black children don’t need ‘male role models’—they need an end to the crippling conditions that hem them in at every point. **They need revolution, and they need revolutionary role models, women no less than men.** They need to see men and women who model the mutual respect and equality that reflects the world we are fighting for: a whole new liberated world where girls grow up strong and without fear of being raped, degraded or abused,

where no child is ever deemed ‘illegitimate,’ and where men—like everyone else—find their worth in contributing to the betterment of all of humanity through the revolutionary transformation of all society rather than by getting in on even a little of the oppression of this nightmare world.”

4

THERE IS NOTHING LIBERATING ABOUT “CHOOSING” TO BE A SEX OBJECT

One of the great things about the struggles of the 1960s and ’70s was the way that they challenged the stigma and shame that hung over women’s sexuality. The “sexual revolution,” as it has been called, had many positive aspects—fostering healthy openness about women’s sexuality, women’s bodies, homosexuality, and even the right for women to openly enjoy sex and explore one’s sexuality without being demeaned for it.

At the same time, this was taking place in a larger context of patriarchy and capitalist commodification of everything, including sexuality. As a result, much of this was twisted and contorted into slightly dressed up forms of age-old male supremacy. Pornography became rampant and took on a new air of “respectability,” even as it became more violent, demeaning and sadistic. Instead of fighting to get rid of sexual objectification and intimate relations of use and abuse altogether, some fought for women’s “right” to get in on this as well. Those who opposed this were deemed “uptight,” “prudish” and “puritanical.”

Today, guys from elite colleges to urban junior high schools openly proclaim the code of “bros before ho’s.” Girls learn early that if they don’t want to be sidelined from their peers they have to find their place in a landscape of casual hook-ups and “meaningless” blow-jobs (always on *his* terms). Never far beneath the surface is the reality that women who do not “voluntarily” participate frequently find themselves being coerced or outright *forced* to do so, often discovering degrading pictures or videos of themselves being circulated and laughed over on camera phones and Facebook.

While boys who participate in this are slapped on the back, or at least excused (“You know, boys will be boys”), girls are shamed, isolated and made to feel worthless. This shame is viciously fueled, and then preyed upon, by Christian fundamentalists who preach that girls’ value is reducible to their virginity and insist that fathers be even more strictly controlling and watchful. Then there is the seemingly more sophisticated, but very confused, “post-feminist” generation, reared on Sex in the City-style “female accomplishment” and female bonding. But the idea that buying obscenely expensive shoes, fucking big-time financial charlatans, and obsessing endlessly about it with your so-called “girlfriends” is somehow “empowering women” would just be frankly embarrassing—if it weren’t so poisonous. All this is doing is setting young women’s sights on being empty and narrow, self-absorbed and essentially complacent with the world as it is, not the least of which is their own subordinated position as women.

Even those who—for a time—are able to convince themselves that this “choice” is somehow empowering can only do so by

accepting the terms that demean themselves and other women in a male-supremacist set-up. And even deeper, you don't get the "right to be sexy" or to be the "owner of your own body as a sexual commodity" without a world that gives rise to the notion that women should be evaluated by their bodies and sexual attractiveness—and that world thrives on and mandates the shipment of women in droves across borders as human chattel, into brothels and "comfort stations" for U.S. troops, and as mail-order brides. No one should want to make peace with, or find their way in, that.

Along with these debased notions of "empowerment," the illusion is widely promoted that, in countries like the U.S., women—and in particular women who are white and middle class—now have "no limits and no restrictions" on what they can become, when in reality their prospects, as well as their aspirations, are conditioned and ultimately confined within the prevailing relations of this society. For the women—and there are more than a few, especially among young women—who get caught up in such illusions, in many, many cases this leads once again to disillusionment, demoralization and depression, when their aspirations and "dreams" cannot be realized...or when, in any case, their hopes and dreams run up against the reality that the U.S. remains a society marked by patriarchy and male domination, and by the many ways in which women, as well as others, are "devalued" and degraded in a society like this...all of which surrounds women—not only the poorest but even more privileged women—on every side and penetrates into their most personal and intimate relations.

FAR MORE RADICAL— FAR MORE LIBERATING

The false paths and dead-ends we have examined are worse than useless. They not only fall short of what the times demand and the potential that exists now for genuine emancipation—they lead away from the real solution. They lead people to think narrowly, as individuals looking out only for themselves, and hemmed in by the horrible boundaries of today's reality.

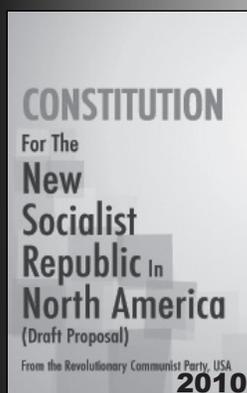
Capitalism has not brought the emancipation of women, nor can it. Capitalism has merely changed the forms in which women are oppressed and has masked the structural nature of this by allowing women, like men, to see themselves as isolated individuals—thereby obscuring the systemic and systematic subjugation they, and others who are oppressed, face. While the fight for equality for women is an absolutely essential part of liberating women, by itself it is not nearly radical enough. If the fight for equality is restricted to the narrow horizons of the capitalist world, and if the system of capitalism itself is left intact, women can become, "at best," the "owners" of themselves as commodities, or they can gain control over others, treating them in effect as commodities—but they can never break out of the narrow and constricting confines of this exploitative set-up.

In fact, as we have explained, the oppression of women arose alongside the first division of humanity into classes. While capitalism cannot free women, it has created the basis for a revolution that can finally put an end not just to this or that form

of oppression or exploitation, but to exploitation and oppression as a whole. But in order to do this, this revolution must take up, as a key and central component, the emancipation of women.

This revolution and this future is possible. And it is the vision of this world that must guide us today—both in where we are aiming to go and in how we live and relate throughout the struggle to get there.

This means that today we must fight to break down every barrier to women's full emancipation in every realm of society and their full participation in every aspect of the struggle to transform society. This means waging the struggle to transform all relations between women and men, to bring forward an atmosphere that not only is supportive of women's defiance and impatience for full emancipation, but that actually sharpens and welcomes that impatience as a force that can move all of us forward. This means men have to change their attitudes—now, not sometime later in the future—so that they are fighting for a world truly worth living in and creating the best atmosphere for women to be fully unleashed in this struggle today. ≈≈



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REVOLUTIONARY STATE POWER—A MOST LIBERATING THING

Imagine if the pent-up anger, as well as the creativity and yearning for a different way of living, that burns inside women were unleashed and given conscious direction; if it became fuel in not only challenging any and every form of women's oppression but in contributing to the development and revolutionization of society and the world as a whole.

Imagine if half of humanity were no longer forced to live with the ever-present knowledge that at any time of day or night, in their own homes or on the street, they could be attacked and raped—by conquering soldiers, predatory strangers, and most often by their own so-called “lovers.” *Imagine* what it would feel like if women could walk the earth truly free of that kind of fear.

It's not just a dream—it is possible.

Imagine if *never again* did a woman know what it was to sell her body as a desperate last resort to feed herself or her children, or in any other way have her sexuality forced or coerced.

Imagine, instead, if sexuality and intimacy became for everyone something only engaged in when it was free and voluntary and on the basis of mutual respect, equality and a shared desire. *Imagine* young people growing up with the education and support they need to explore healthy relationships and sex when they are ready, unburdened by physical danger or unnecessary emotional harm.

It's not just a dream—it is possible.

Think what it means that today for men there is no insult that hits harder than being called a “pussy” or a “fag.” Now, *imagine* a day when people look back at today's restrictive notions of gender—of what it is to be a “man” and what it is to be a “woman”—as mind-boggling absurdities of humanity's oppressive past.

Imagine a society in which women were not evaluated on the basis of physical beauty standards, their human worth and potential reduced to one or another body part—but instead were related to as human beings, in the fullest sense.

Imagine if abortion and birth control were available to all women at all times without stigma or apology. *Imagine* if everyone learned the science surrounding women's biology—as well as science and the scientific method more broadly—so that never again could so-called “holy men” prey on people's ignorance to heap the weight of tradition, the shackles of forced motherhood, and the suffocation of shame on women for exercising these most fundamental rights.

It's not just a dream—it is possible—and it is urgently crying out to be done.

But *imagine more than this*.

Imagine if all this were insisted on and given guidance and resources by a new revolutionary state and its communist leadership. Now *imagine*, if in that context and on that foundation, a whole process were unleashed in which debate and dissent were actually encouraged throughout society. Where those who were impatient at the rate of change were not suppressed, but given a platform to criticize and the reins to experiment. *Imagine* if people from all parts of society and different backgrounds were working together to spring into the air, and to radically change, all of human relations established through thousands of years of tradition's chains.

Imagine if, instead of being a place where people's need for love

and compassion is so often frustrated and even mocked, families themselves were undergoing a radical transformation. *Imagine* marriages and partnerships forged on a truly voluntary basis in a context where love, respect, compassion and equality were increasingly characterizing the way people related throughout society. *Imagine* if people had privacy and ease of mind within their homes, but if, at the same time, everyone knew that if they experienced abuse or other forms of degradation they would be supported by society and its institutions if they came forward to expose it, struggle against it, or leave.

Imagine if people were aiming to go even further, developing new forms of community and ways in which people sustained each other, and mutually flourished together, that were increasingly breaking down and creating the basis to finally transcend the institution of family based on the narrow—and narrowing—ties of biological kinship.

Imagine if, as a transition to that, in diverse ways, from among different communities and in their interrelations, society as a whole—both men and women—began taking responsibility for and finding joy in the rearing of new generations. Children would no longer be the property of their parents—neither expected to fulfill their parents' dreams nor lacking options because of their parents' hardships—and the idea of “illegitimacy” would again go out of existence and be regarded as the outmoded and outrageous notion it is. *Imagine* a whole new generation reared with play that no longer inculcated young minds with notions of boys being better than girls or one people better than another. *Imagine* each new generation coming up instilled with the ethos of a new society that prioritized the common good while unleashing critical thinking, creativity and individual expression.

Imagine a society where creative energies were no longer channeled into ever-descending new ways to demean women and accentuate oppressive social divisions, but instead, without the restrictions of gender or other unequal and oppressive social divisions, people broadly were brought into the process of creating art that uplifts people, challenges them to think critically, and expands their horizons. *Imagine* boys and men not mired in stupid and exploitative “guy culture,” no longer influenced by a lifetime of bombardment with images of women's bodies, half-naked and half-starved, used to sell everything from consumer goods to ideology and wars—boys and men able instead to relate to women as equal human beings. *Imagine* the flowering of this radically new and liberating culture—founded on equality and mutual respect between men and women and between different cultures and peoples, teeming with diversity, and filled with fun as well as seriousness, meaning as well as humor, critical thought as well as exploration and beauty.

Imagine how all this would create a whole different atmosphere in which people would encounter each other and relate. *Imagine* the conversations it would give rise to and the new thinking it would generate. *Imagine* if, as one young woman said after having her horizons expanded by stepping into the revolutionary movement, “you walked into coffee shops and overheard young women talking about philosophy and how to solve humanity's biggest problems instead of the size of their butts.” *Imagine* how this would help fuel and give initiative to, and interact positively with, innovations in the sciences and sports, education and philosophy, and all the other realms of human activity and thought.

Imagine if outbreaks of struggle against vestiges of the oppression of women—even where they ran up against or “disrupted” other

important efforts to solve real social needs—were not squashed down or suppressed, but drawn forward, given life and enabled to play a key part in the process of changing the world. If leadership were given so that these challenges, too, became part of learning more deeply about the social transformations that were needed and *how* the needs of society could be met in *new ways*, ways that are in line with and a living advance towards the ultimate aim of a communist world, free of all forms of oppression and exploitation.

Utopian? Not in the least.

All of this is not only possible, but tremendous accomplishments in this direction were actually made in the first stage of communist revolution. This was especially true in China from 1949-1976, under the leadership of Mao Tsetung. There, it took less than a decade for prostitution to disappear as a social phenomenon, and for women to be able to walk alone at night in major cities like Shanghai without fear. The common saying, among peasant men, that, “A wife married is like a pony bought—I’ll ride her and whip her as I please”—was replaced with a new motto, “Women hold up half the sky!” Many of the things that had kept women locked in their homes—like childcare, cooking, and laundry—were taken up in new collective forms. Women joined in productive labor, took up affairs of state, entered the military, attended school, and became leaders of the revolutionary party. Men, too, began to change and to relate to women in a new way—working alongside women in the public arenas and transforming the domestic sphere to share childcare and housework based on equality.

Very importantly, the arts, and the culture overall, were radically transformed so that a whole generation of girls and young women grew up with heroes who were strong and confident women, and it never occurred to them that they couldn’t do what boys do. To take one concentrated example: before the revolution came to power, the practice of “foot binding”—breaking the bones and then binding the feet of young girls, so that they could hardly walk, in the name of “sexual attractiveness”—was widespread, and it had lasted for hundreds of years. Not only did the Chinese revolution put an end to this cruel practice, but within two decades women in Chinese ballet defied tradition to portray revolutionary fighters and soldiers—and made breakthroughs in creating new forms of athleticism for women and new aesthetics in ballet, and in art and culture overall! Women’s oppression was not, of course, completely eliminated. Thousands of years of oppressive relations do not vanish overnight—indeed, it takes a dogged fight, even after the seizure of power, to dig up these birthmarks of the old society. Every advance described here only came about through sharp struggle, involving tens and hundreds of millions of women, and men. But the most remarkable thing is how much was accomplished and how quickly things did begin to change, in radically new ways. State power was in the hands of the masses and the revolutionary leadership of society gave backing and initiative to those making advances, and then battled to spread these advances throughout society.

It is true that the revolution in China was reversed, and capitalism was restored after the death of Mao Tsetung in 1976 (coming on top of the restoration of capitalism in the formerly socialist Soviet Union, two decades before that). And, as an essential part of this restoration of capitalism, the oppression of women—including not only systematic discrimination against and demeaning of women, but widespread prostitution and the killing of girl babies, in line with the prevailing situation where females were once again valued less than males—has been revived with a vengeance. In *Communism: The Beginning of a New Stage, a Manifesto from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*⁸, we have analyzed the reasons for this reversal of socialism and the lessons that must be drawn from this bitter setback—but also from the tremendous achievements of the revolution and the

experience of socialism in China (as well as the broader experience of the revolutionary communist movement as a whole, internationally and historically), all of which is crucial in order to once again forge ahead, make new breakthroughs, and do even better, on the road of revolution and communism. Here, what is important to emphasize is that the reality of what was achieved, in the relatively brief period of socialism, in China (as well as other important, even though not as far-reaching, advances in the Soviet Union, when it was socialist) points very powerfully to the potential for the final realization of the emancipation of women, and of humanity overall, from all of tradition’s chains, all exploitative and oppressive relations, and the ways of thinking that go along with, and reinforce, such relations.

Through summing up and analyzing the tremendous accomplishments as well as the shortcomings in conception, method and practice of these first revolutions, together with broader explorations in other fields, Bob Avakian, the Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, has forged a *new synthesis* on revolution and communism. There has never been a stream of human thought or endeavor that has been more radical when it comes to the emancipation of women than that of communism; and never has communism been more far-seeing and radical and scientific than with its development through the leadership of Bob Avakian.

In regard to the struggle to overturn the rule of capitalism-imperialism, and then to advance, in the new society, on the socialist road toward the final goal of a communist world, Bob Avakian has given emphasis to an even greater role for struggle in the realm of ideology. He has stressed the need for vibrancy and ferment generally in society, as well as the need for continual interchange between economic and political transformations being carried out and debates raging in the spheres of science and philosophy and the arts. He has recognized the necessity for even more ways to be undertaken to break down barriers to the participation in all realms of society, and the struggle to change society, by people who have previously been locked out of intellectual work. And, as a key part of this new synthesis, he has insisted on an orientation of recognizing the positive role of the ongoing struggle to uproot fully all vestiges of women’s oppression (as well as other remnants of oppressive society) in the overall process of revolutionizing all of human relations and thinking, and how this must be embraced by the revolutionary leadership and unleashed as part of preventing any “settling in” rather than forging forward in the struggle towards communism. Avakian has emphasized the need for the structures of this oppression, and the means to overcome it, to be analyzed more deeply—including through further scientific summation of the experience of past revolutionary societies—and resistance to this oppression to be taken up in practice even more powerfully, all the way through the revolutionary struggle, not just after but also before the seizure of state power, starting now.

And, all throughout his role as the leader of the RCP, he has insisted that the revolutionary movement *today* be a living manifestation of the new social relations between men and women and a new morality that fosters mutual respect and equality. As he put it, nearly three decades ago now:

“In many ways, and particularly for men, the woman question and whether you seek to completely abolish or to preserve the existing property and social relations and corresponding ideology that enslave women (or maybe ‘just a little bit’ of them) is a touchstone question *among the oppressed themselves*. It is a dividing line between ‘wanting in’ and really ‘wanting out’: between fighting to end all oppression and exploitation—and the very division of society into classes—and seeking in the final analysis to get your part in this.” (*A Horrible End, or An End To The Horror?*, RCP Publications, 1984, pp. 140 – 141) ≈

THIS REVOLUTION IS POSSIBLE. THIS REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT IS NEEDED NOW.

A CHALLENGE

There is an untapped well of anger that burns within women all over the planet.

Bringing this to the surface, unleashing this fury, and tempering it as a mighty force for an actual revolution...

Taking up the fight for women's liberation as an essential part of the emancipation of humanity as a whole...

Building powerful and uncompromising resistance to every assault on women today...

Modeling a whole different and emancipatory morality, rooted in the goal, and struggle, to uproot all forms of exploitation and oppression...

Digging into and taking up the radical and truly liberating science of communism, which has been advanced by this Party and its leader, Bob Avakian...

All this is the responsibility—and the opportunity— of *everyone* who craves a different world.

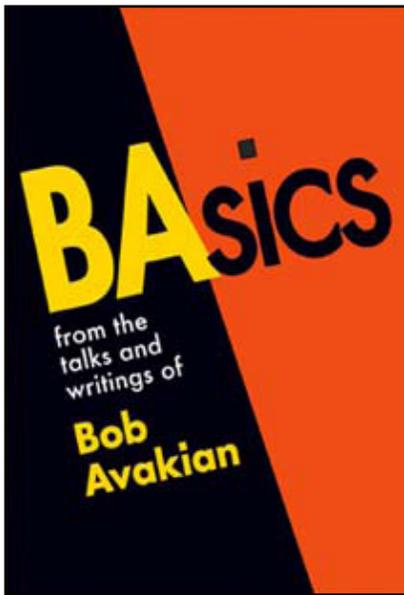
We are living in a time of great danger—a time when the lives of women the planet over are under unrelenting assault. We are also living at the first time in human history when it is possible to not only dream but fight to realize a whole new world where all of humanity can flourish; to lift, finally and once and for all, the veil and heavy weight of women's oppression and bring about a liberating new day, for people everywhere.

To quote once again the *Constitution* of our Party:

“There is no greater cause, no greater purpose to which to dedicate our lives.” ≈≈

ENDNOTES

1. Eric Baculinao, “China grapples with legacy of its ‘missing girls,’” MSNBC, September 14, 2004 [back]
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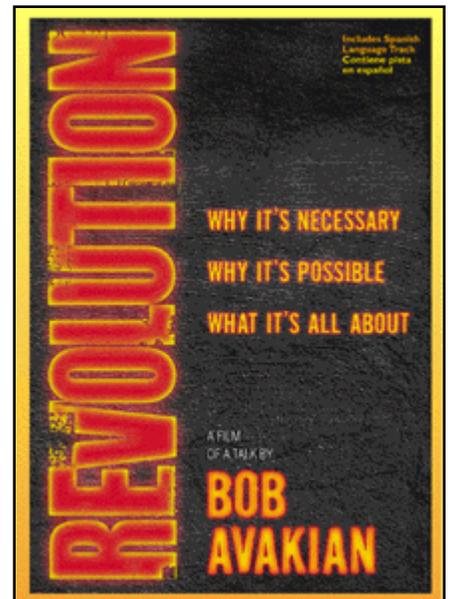
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