

**An Historic Contradiction:
Fundamentally Changing The World
Without “Turning Out the Lights”**

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Introduction:

Recently Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, drew attention to the following contradiction and then invited some people associated with or with responsibility in regard to the Party to respond with their thinking on this contradiction. Avakian wrote the following:

In the polemic against Alain Badiou’s political philosophy in the online theoretical journal *Demarcations*, the following concise indictment is made of Badiou’s ultimate reformism, and of reformism in general:

“And the world stays fundamentally unchanged. Capitalism-imperialism continues humming in the ‘background,’ crushing lives and destroying spirits in its meat-grinder of exploitation. And the horrors continue unabated.”

This is our standing and powerful refutation of every other trend in the world. On the other hand, the way that a lot of people look at what we’re about—and not entirely without justification—is: “Here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party’s over.”

All this embodies a real, and profound, contradiction that we must continue to wrestle with.

We are excited in this issue to run the following responses to Avakian’s invitation.¹

1 Editor’s note:

The following replies were originally written as personal letters and hence assumed a certain “common language” between Bob Avakian and the correspondent. As a result, there is a lot of “shorthand” used. Sometimes the meaning of these terms are explained in context, or are otherwise clear; at other times, this may not be so. Some of those terms include:

New synthesis: the basic breakthrough in communist theory developed by Bob Avakian, in the dimensions of philosophy and method; internationalism; the character of the dictatorship of the proletariat and of socialist society as a transition to communist society, including the particular concept of “solid core with a lot of elasticity”; and strategic approach to revolution. [For more on the new synthesis, see especially the Manifesto from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, *Communism: The Beginning of a New Stage, A Manifesto from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*.]

The 4 alls: this formulation was often used to drive home the all-round character of the communist revolution by the Chinese communists who sided with Mao during the last battle to prevent capitalist restoration in China. (Capitalist restoration began with a military coup that occurred shortly after Mao’s death in 1976, in which Mao’s closest followers—including his widow Chiang Ching—were arrested and/or killed.) Marx’s formulation (from *The Civil*

War in France) was: “This Socialism is the *declaration of the permanence of the revolution*, the *class dictatorship* of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the *abolition of class distinctions generally*, to the abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionizing of all the ideas that result from these social relations.”

The two humps: this is a formulation from Bob Avakian’s mid-’90s talk “Getting Over the Two Great Humps: Further Thoughts on Conquering the World.” These “humps” refer to the process of 1) getting to the point where the forces of proletarian revolution are strong enough to seize power in a particular country; and 2) getting to the point internationally where the overall “balance of forces” has shifted in favor of the proletariat and the question of actually getting to communism comes more directly onto the agenda.

The “Ohio”: the “Ohio” process borrows a metaphor from the Ohio State marching band and its routine where the band members spell out “Ohio” in script in a marching routine in which the first members of the band traverse through, and spell out in turn, each letter of “Ohio”—the point being that people who come around the revolutionary movement go through a process of development.

Class truth: this refers to the notion widely held in the international communist movement that “the bourgeoisie has its truth, and the proletariat has *its* truth,” as if truth itself had a class character. In reality, truth has no class character; an idea is true to the degree that it accurately reflects the objective world. Bob Avakian is the first communist who identified and criticized this notion of “class truth,” which ends up constraining and ultimately blocking the search for what is really true.

The proletariat, due to its position *as a class* which has nothing to fortify in the present order, has every interest in being as thorough-going as possible in getting to the truth of things; and the science of communism, and its outlook and method of materialist dialectics, is the best method for getting at the truth; and in these senses it can be said that communism is both partisan and true. But it does NOT follow that communists are always correct in their observations and conclusions, and that non-communists are never correct; relatedly, all statements must be judged on the degree to which they correspond to reality, and not who says them or what (often narrowly conceived) interest they seem to serve.

Reification: literally, turning a process into a “thing.” As it applies to the proletariat, this refers to a view, also more or less explicitly unchallenged in the communist movement until Avakian’s criticism, that confounded the fundamental interests of the proletariat *as a class* and the sentiments, views, and programs that conformed with *those* fundamental world-historic interests with the position, sentiments, views and programs that find a following among this or that section of the proletariat at any given time.

Reductionism: a philosophical method that reduces complex phenomena to a single determinant cause—e.g., reducing the causes of complex social behavior to a gene (or set of genes) and ignoring the social factors that come into play in shaping social behavior and constraining the forms it can/might take. This is linked to *positivism*, a philosophical school that limits the search for truth and the scope for statements about the dynamics of reality to immanent causes. Such views are often contrasted to the metaphor used by Bob Avakian of truth being like a *multi-level, multi-layer, constantly moving map*.

One:

When this contradiction was first posed, my immediate response was that this was concentrating a painful truth, but it just really shouldn't be true and it's just a wrong orientation on the part of the communists that's made it true. But the more I thought about it, it's not just the mistakes of communists that leads to this, and we can't just idealistically say, "well this is just wrong, and no problem because we have the new synthesis." (As Bob Avakian said sometime ago, the new synthesis is dealing with **objective contradictions**.) Nor is it just the "anti-communist verdicts" (though those are also real). There is an objective contradiction here, and one we have to fight for a different answer on than "turn out the lights... the party's over."

On a fundamental level, there is tremendous joy and exhilaration that exists in fighting to free humanity from the completely unnecessary, centuries-old and pervasive shackles that have us all brutally bound. Yes, there are times of great frustration, danger and sacrifice. But there's nothing else more stimulating, challenging, full of laughter and heart-soaring hope. And you think about what it will mean when the masses of people truly rise up, when millions of people lift their heads. Think of all the creativity that can be unfettered, the energy and the artistry. We don't even fully know what could be unleashed, what is crushed under today.

And the new synthesis provides a radically different understanding and ability so this is not the case (here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party is over). Not just no problem, but a truly different framework to provide a different answer, not a blueprint, but a framework and pathway. On the level of epistemology in terms of Marxism embracing all of reality—learning from different spheres, a rupture with the utilitarianism in relation to philosophy, culture, the appreciation of play and awe and wonder. The methodology that appreciates the multi-layered map and the way in which different contradictions get expressed through many channels, and not just in relation to the main social contradictions at any given time. Understanding this—and understanding more deeply what it's going to take to transform the mental/manual divide—requires space, ferment, dissent and debate. And socialism with this new understanding will be a truly incredible place to live, and thing to be a part of.

In thinking about this, I first thought about a point from *The Fever* that has always stuck with me. Wally Shawn is talking about the "in the city where I grew up, the city I love most of all" and he describes what it's like on a cold winter night where it's not snowing yet, but "you feel it would like to." He talks about being in a nice part of town, where a wetness covers everything, "like the wetness you see on a frozen cherry" and "the men in their overcoats are staring harshly with open mouthed desire at the fox-headed women whose lipstick ripples, whose earrings ripple, as they step through the uneven light and darkness of the sidewalk... And that's the kind of thing that the communists will never understand..."

And on one level, there is clearly a bigger point he's making about beauty, frivolity, sheer loveliness that communists should understand, have to understand. And the way he's posing this is quite poetic.

But on the other hand, no, it's not good when men "stare harshly" at women on the street "with open-mouthed desire." But nor can you *only* say "goddamn right, we won't accept that as beautiful because what does it mean to the lives of women, and women as a whole to be nothing but objects of that kind of desire, objects of visual and sexual satisfaction for men—and all the violence,

brutality and degradation that comes with that objectification (even perhaps despite the subjective intent of some of many of those men).” (I was on the train just last week and was on the other end of one of these ubiquitous comments, and I happened to be in some kind of crappy ass mood and you just wanted to scream, the city is not some fucking museum of women as baubles and objets d’art for you to go around admiring our legs, butts, hair or whatever the fuck!)

So it does have to be said this isn’t any good... if humanity is to actually be liberated, women have to be treated as full human beings, not objects for ogling, not any women eliciting “open mouthed desire” from any man. And this has to be struggled over broadly in society, and from different angles, and within a larger process—what it means to be beautiful has to change, the content of sexual desire has to change. (And there also has to be struggle for the understanding of what comes along with how Wally sees that beautiful moment, that moment is part of a bigger package that Wally doesn’t like. Not that everyone will understand this or agree, but there does have to be struggle around this broadly, and not just from the Party out even as there will be laws and standards.) And you can hear Wally Shawn saying, “see what I mean?”

But it’s not that the communists should go around waging struggle every time someone upholds exploitative or oppressive social relations, on every question in every sphere. That *would* be turning the lights out, stifling and putting a chill over all of society. But there does have to be struggle—and in this realm, a great deal of struggle. And again, this can’t go at every individual on every question every time, but it does have to hit people “where they live” and there are many people for whom they would argue that is “turning out the lights, party over.”

And then back to the other part of the contradiction I think Wally is talking about, there are things that have beauty that aren’t so good and this is complicated, though much of this you have to have space, and for some things, even appreciation for. Bob Avakian’s point about Shakespeare here is really important. Or take a contemporary example—largely, music today is pretty awful on the woman question and a lot of it is, frankly, unlistenable, but there are a lot of things you have to understand and let go, or sift through. (Eminem is an interesting and complicated contradiction on this one, a truly incredible and creative lyricist, with a lot of very good defiance and heart for the youth and really interesting angles on the national question. But a lot of that defiance is channeled into upholding and rhyming about the murder of women—literally killing his ex-wife and putting her in the back of a trunk and I know for me, I love a few songs on any given album and just can’t listen to the rest. Or a different angle, that Dolly Parton song Jolene—it’s really pretty terrible, but I find it to be a moving and beautiful song.) The question of levels of matter, knowing what is essential at any point and what is not, and an appreciation for a complex reality and intangibles in art and culture (without then falling off the other end as art and culture being some kind of untouchable, exceptional sphere).

While it’s not *simply* the mishandling or wrong orientation on the part of communists, in the history of our project, this contradiction has rung true. In working on this, I looked through a book on “Street Art of the Revolution: Festivals and Celebrations in Russia, 1918-1933.” It’s just incredible. After the seizure of power in the Soviet Union, there was a lot of necessity but there was also a great flourishing of creativity, literally like an uncorking. And a lot of artists were both taking responsibility to be part of meeting that necessity, including bringing the masses into political and cultural life, and there was a great deal of experimentation in that regard.

In October 1918, Lunacharsky (who was the commissar for public education) said, “let us make the squares our palettes, the streets our brushes!” This book explains, “The cities were turned into

huge open air exhibitions with hundreds of large decorative panels and monuments. Street shows and plays—some with thousands of performers, and tens of thousands of spectators—light effects, music and songs, created an entirely new synthesis of art forms.” The pictures in this book show great festivities, huge red banners hanging all over the streets, big murals, sculptures and tens of thousands of people filling the streets. It’s breathtaking. They also wanted to unleash the artists to put themselves to architecture, and every other part of life, Lenin had a vision of the walls being covered in frescoes.

[I found a really interesting and significant quote from Lenin in this book that I hadn’t heard before: “In relation to all forms of popular education, Lenin emphasized that ‘it would be the greatest and most terrible mistake which a Marxist could make to think that the millions of craftsmen and peasants could emerge from the darkness along the straight line of pure Marxist education.’ These simple people, he said, ‘must be approached in such a way that their interest is awakened—they must be roused from all directions and by all manner of means.’” (the book says “simple people,” and the citation for this was in Russian so I don’t know where it’s from). I thought this was very interesting in terms of the dynamism and vibrancy Lenin was fighting for, and learning from that, you can see the role for the enrichment in terms of taking up all spheres.]

There was a lot of discussion about this art serving the people, and from what I can tell this was a lot of the impetus of different artists themselves and there was a great deal of experimentation with abstract art. A lot of it was geared to the building of the new society (and Rodchenko talks about art of construction). But there was also a great deal of experimentation here and a lot of use and playing with abstraction. Rodchenko, for example, wanted to make a new kind of painting that reflected the new world and new people. He wrote in one place, “Down with ART, the means to ESCAPE FROM LIFE which is not worth living. Conscious and organized LIFE, the ability to SEE and CONSTRUCT, that is the modern art.” (This is most definitely not the only kind of art that is required, and I think even this doesn’t have quite enough space, but there is a lot to learn here including again, in the experimentation and how different artists saw filling the needs of this new society broadly understood.)

Toward the late ’20s the festivals became very geared towards celebrations of industry (this was in there before, but it became really constricted around that) and there was in the arts the single focused emphasis on socialist realism. The book I have on Rodchenko describes it this way, “The climate had changed, and at a time when the Soviet Union was struggling with a series of Five Year Plans to modernize industry and agriculture to establish economic viability it was felt that the simple rhetoric of Socialist Realism provided a more easily intelligible framework for communicating the changes that were taking place. Like many of his colleagues Rodchenko was not able to comply with this prevailing aesthetic and as a result he was thrown more and more in upon himself with few outlets for his work.”

The lights more or less went out. And yes, there was a profound amount of necessity they were facing—the numbers lost in the war, and what it took to fight that war are staggering. The newness of all this was a big deal. And you do need economic plans, but not everything that goes on in your society has to immediately serve that or it’s no good. This was an unprecedented flourishing, and it’s not like everything should continue at the same height or intensity (or that it was all fantastic), but the constriction around all this, along with many other contradictions, did lead to “turn out the lights, the party’s over.”

On a different level, today there is often a great deal of narrowing we, the communists, do. We still have a situation where a lot of comrades spend a lot of time going around, “correcting” the masses—struggling over a lot of smaller contradictions. There is still not enough learning from what is impelling people, learning what contradictions they’re up against, and yes, waging struggle, but that existing in a larger context.

I don’t know extensively about it, but there is a whole scene coming out of the hipster culture, but also seeking to break with it in some ways that is seeking out love and support, a searching for community. And a lot of this finds expression in spirituality—both Christian, and the more vaguely “eastern” kind (generally an amalgam of chakras, meditation, seeking to tap into the energy force). I went to a loft party of this artists’ collective who were friends from college who started this collective because they wanted to find the same support and artistic pushing and challenging and collectivity they found in college. It was an interesting scene and there was a lot of sweetness, and actively trying to break out of “smug irony” which colors so much of hipster culture. (Interestingly, a couple of the women were part Middle Eastern and one was part Palestinian and they were very open to talking about radical ideas.) This was definitely not something radical in its own right, but they are attempting something positive. (One interesting thing to think about is the way a lot of these sections did get pulled into very active political life around Obama, and the contradictoriness that could mean now.) One contradiction that is often spoken to in these scenes which divides into two is that we shouldn’t be so angry, and we should not just focus on the negative of what they (the rulers, however that’s understood) are doing, but also on the positive that we can bring into being. On the one hand, there really is something to this—we do have to talk a lot more about what can be made possible with the DOP [dictatorship of the proletariat], what kind of world is possible, and really learn from others in how they see that. But posed in the way this gets posed is also seeking to step aside from what people really *should* be angry about. Anger at crimes against humanity is not a big negative, or big downer—well maybe it can be, but you do have to go back to that bumper sticker, “if you’re not outraged, you’re not paying attention!” You do have to confront, “it is what it is.” And yes, it can be transformed through struggle. But that confronting of it is what it is is really no fucking good. I’m not arguing you stay in a big determinist, negative state but it’s not all roses, or just “focus on the positive.”

And part of the contradiction here is that very real, living and realizable positive vision—which I think can inspire on a whole higher level—won’t be brought into being unless we confront the reality, and go up against, and overthrow this system.

Or there’s another scene, which I need to learn more about, at this gritty bar where these rock ‘n rollers sing gospel funk. The musicians are incredible. I went to one show and it was infectious and amazing musically, but the singer fills between the songs with actual preaching—“you are special, you’re loved, each and every one of you, and we can all learn from that Jewish carpenter, a life of love etc.” A very multinational crowd, and again, people weren’t being ironic, they were passionate and enthused about the music and the scene, and there is a real community around this (though I’m sure many of the people who come aren’t actively religious). There are A LOT of problems in all this, and it has potentially very bad directions. But there are positive aspirations (especially up against a more apathetic backdrop) that need to be radically ruptured and transformed.

Without tailing it, or being idealist and humanist (ie, “it’s all good and loving and great”), and with a full understanding of the negative potential, we can’t just look at the negative side. We have to look at what can be learned, including what can be learned about what we need to be speaking to, what needs we need to be meeting out in the world (I also thought this was important in light of the stuff in the new talk [“Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces For Revolution”] about some of what

is attracting people to this Christian Fascist morality is the desire from people to be about more than consumerism). And in the context of a serious movement for revolution, how this can be repolarized (not that they're going to necessarily stop playing religious music, but that taking on a different character and that largely a part of something bigger in society).

I want to speak too to the first part of the contradiction—the world can't stay as it is. There is the brutal lopsidedness in the world, and the fact that while I'm sitting here, children in Tanzania are literally living off fish carcass and huffing glue as the only means of survival and sanity, or the Bangladeshi 8-year-old on the cover of the New Year's issue of *Revolution*. What is her life like, and what is our responsibility to her? This is a question that we have to ask, both ourselves, and the masses broadly. Not as a “religious guilt trip,” but because we actually do have a responsibility towards her, and as Bob Avakian has continued to emphasize epistemology does meet morality.

Now many people are genuinely agonized about this, and are seriously trying to dedicate their lives to do something about it (this is an interesting and important element on the terrain on campuses today for example). But most Americans really have no idea. And among more progressively minded people, this is taking particularly sharp expression around Obama, and what people are accepting because he's doing it. To understate it, it's not always so popular to wage sharp struggle around this, and you're not always the hit of the party so to speak.

The first part of what's spoken to in this contradiction has real life meaning for billions of living, breathing, thinking people—the world cannot stay as it is. And that is a struggle that many people do find uncomfortable and unpleasant. There are a couple friends I've not gotten invited to hang out with again because it's not a conversation they want to have. Now maybe that will change some time in the future for these particular individuals, and maybe not. But you also can't flatten this out and get dogmatic, religious or revenge-ist about it. I'm reading Wally Shawn's essays and this is exactly the contradiction he speaks to—we should enjoy and celebrate life, and appreciate the beauty of it, but what does it mean or is it possible to do that, when there are people being tortured and mutilated, millions living their lives in profound suffering and struggle. And these aren't just parallel facts—who are the people that made the clothes I'm wearing, what is it like for the woman who sewed the tag on this sweater, what does she have to go through to even to get to the factory in Tijuana or Juarez? There is a real relationship there, and while again, we can't flatten reality or objectively have an orientation that seeks to just turn the tables, this does and frankly should make you lose sleep. (And it is part of who Avakian is that this reality is something he returns to repeatedly, struggling to bring to light the exposure around all this, and yes, the visceral feelings one should have about it.)

The point is that turning the tables isn't the only way this can be changed and actually that wouldn't fundamentally change it at all. Or that the only way this lopsidedness can be overcome is at the cost of intellectual space, ferment, debate, awe, wonder and artistry. But there is a tension there—in terms of orientation, line, resources, and the need for a radically different kind of dictatorship, an actual living application of solid core with a lot of elasticity. And the answer has to include unleashing those 8 year olds, those women in Juarez and kids in Tanzania to be part of that intellectual debate and ferment on all questions, and be learning from and approaching correctly the need for intellectual space, ferment, debate, awe, wonder and artistry.

Ok... so I've spent time on the reality of this contradiction being objective, and what the pulls have been to "turn out the lights, party's over." But now I want to speak more to this "at what cost" question, and on a higher level, speak to why it can't be the case that the party is over when the communists come. It is bound up with being rooted, and struggling to stay rooted, in our final goals. Not constricting or narrowing the struggle around necessary immediate goals to be all of what you're embracing or wrangling with.

I go back a lot to the situation in Tom Stoppard's *Rock 'N Roll*. This is a very anti-communist play taking place in Czechoslovakia, not a communist country... but it deals with the emergence of the rock 'n roll subculture and the band "plastic people of the universe." (Much of this is based on history, letters back and forth etc, but I'm only going from memory of having seen it once...) Anyway, the state ended up arresting the band, arresting many of its followers, the main character's record collection was entirely smashed and their long hair was cut in jail. There's a whole discussion in there about this subculture being so dangerous because they didn't care. The main character has a monologue about how the state knew how to deal with Havel (the writer) and other dissidents because they cared, and they couldn't exist without each other. Setting aside Stoppard's cynicism, I thought there was something to this. Here was something that was so totally other, and it's not that the content was necessarily that advanced, or advanced at all (and there was a lot in early rock 'n roll that isn't really that good if you were gonna pick it apart), but it was something fresh, something that felt free-ing (and that was freeing in real ways in terms of different social relations and new attitudes). A socialist society needs subcultures... or maybe it's better to understand it this way—there will be subcultures, and while there are potential "sharks," there's also a lot of potential life in there, crackle, springing things in the air. An organized white supremacist subculture won't be allowed, ie, a group whose sole mission is to brutalize and actively and violently keep oppressed a section of the masses. But, for the most part, this really has to be given space and a lot of this can be windows into what is missing in society, a place people can get a certain sustenance. It's not that "it's all good," but the kind of flourishing needed won't happen otherwise.

(An interesting point from the example I cited above about the band that plays gospel-funk, there are ways fascist movements can also conceivably get inside some of these alternate scenes and work to make them serve very counter-revolutionary aims.) I think part of the dynamics here is that you can't just take things on their own terms, but also look at what they are, or can be, a larger part of in society. I was talking with a comrade about this question of sexuality and social relations, and I was thinking about what Bill Ayers describes in *Fugitive Days* about the sexual relations in the Weatherman. They basically had a line that monogamy was bourgeois and people all slept with each other. This was bound up with a lot of dogmatism and religiosity and even some degree of what came off as fanaticism in terms of breaking down individual desires, and even Ayers talks about the male chauvinism that this was all still soaked in. Taken on its own terms, or seen as an end, this really wasn't any good. But stepping back, and seeing what it was coming out of, the larger context of all kinds of things being sprung into the air, and the need for that to break open and transform into different relations (like if there had actually been a revolution, what that kind of sexual experimentation could've been a bigger part of instead of *quickly* turning into its opposite). This is part of the problem with quick verdicts on everything, as if everything has to be compressed into whether it's the complete answer or not and not what may be part of a bigger process, what may be pulling against that bigger process... and no, we shouldn't be liberal. We do have to fight for standards, and yes, measure things against whether they're liberatory or not but not in a flat way. Sometimes you have to let things play out some, and open up struggle to broader society.

It's most definitely not that the sexual revolution was all good but then it was all good in a bigger sense, because it was a part of a much bigger thing happening—morés being challenged, gender

roles being changed, the sixties were coming out of a painfully repressive society combined with mass ignorance. And a lot of this was tied to the women's liberation movements. You see powerfully from the new talk, and then reading that *Female Chauvinist Pigs* book [by Ariel Levy] what it has meant, not only that there wasn't a revolution (!!!), but also the points from the Chair on not the right synthesis coming out of those movements... There's a lot to say about the situation today which I won't go into now (I do have thoughts on this to write soon) in terms of reversal of a lot of this, backlash and the grotesque expressions all this takes among young women today. (One example of these reversals I was just thinking about—I grew up around that book, *A New View of A Woman's Body*, and I remember in high school drawing diagrams on the girls locker room mirror in lipstick of where women's clitoris' were because almost none of the young women I went to high school with knew, and I'm afraid that's even worse today.)

Really stepping back to all this, those three levels Avakian talked about in the *Conversations* book in relation to sexuality are very important (some things you make laws around, some things you have educational campaigns or big struggles around, and some things you just ignore, or let be). This relates to the realm of sexuality, but is something that also applies more broadly.

There would have to be a lot put into the hands of the masses themselves—posing different contradictions for struggle, and learning from what is bubbling up from below or different directions, different forms and forums of debate that wouldn't necessarily include the voice of the Party because you don't want to weight an argument yet, or we're not sure how to fall out on something at a given point... again, this isn't just all without risk, especially with other shit popping off.

There will be howling contradictions of holding on to state power and meeting people's needs, especially given the environmental crisis and the necessity that will pose—but we have to lead this so those real needs don't end up trumping the biggest need—building a society that can actually get to communism, that doesn't close down, become stultified and static... with the guarantee of where that will lead.

[There are also different levels of society where you have different kinds of freedom. You'd really have to think through what degree you'd let some kinds of experimentation go on in the army. It's one thing in your society if there are things going on and you don't quite know what will come out of it, but you don't have that same level of room in the army, it will have to be a disciplined force, and would also have to have a higher degree of consciousness. I don't want to make this solely about sexuality, but as an example, what if there is a movement on a college campus of experimenting with orgies. The Party may think this isn't so good, but it's maybe part of something bigger in society, and important to let it play out, encourage discussion and debate. There's not the same level of freedom in the army for that kind of open-endedness, though throughout society, and definitely in the army, there does have to be discussion and struggle about standards, about the content of something at any given time, and changing both solid core and elasticity. And on the basis of certain laws (ie, outlawing rape, pornography etc), the Party would sometimes weigh in on these debates, and sometimes not. More to think about here in all this...]

All of this has to be given much more life in how we're approaching people today. In the meeting where this was discussed, I raised that there are lots of people in the arts and intellectual spheres who have no idea that what we're doing has anything to do with their deepest concerns. And while it's also the case that on the other side of it, we better have an understanding of the flip side of that—that what they're doing has something to do, not narrowly or instrumentally, but broadly with

what we're doing—changing the whole world (the questions they're going at and posing, the artistic forms they're bringing forward, scenes they're creating etc.). We do have to understand that, but that alone doesn't solve it.

Some of these artists think they don't have anything to talk with us about because they're "not political." There is not a lot of cross-pollination in these cultural scenes, and as we've come up against, not a lot of ferment. So the way some people see it is "they're artists, and focusing in on how these notes sound together." (This is what someone said to me just recently.) And yet, they're also people in the world—posing big questions in their art, agonizing about the reality in the world, and wondering, even if not always consciously, why it is this way... There does need to be engagement with all this with the most radical, revolutionary thinking on the planet today. And yet they think it doesn't apply. Communism doesn't relate to what they're dealing with. This is something we have to change, not by arguing they need to have a "political discussion," but by posing the questions and the need for this engagement in a bigger context.

We have to answer this contradiction with the lights on, and answer it repeatedly—and the more I'm wrangling with this here, the more you grasp how essential this contradiction is to beginning a new stage of THIS revolution. We do face a great deal of necessity—and there's a lot bound up with this campaign in terms of the stakes and the contradictions being bound up and bound together. To use shorthand, the coming together of "up on the mountain and down on the ground."

Again, there is a real contradiction here, but it has to be answered on a higher level. With strategic confidence, and deeply rooted scientific and lofty approach. With all the sharpness, and fire for revolution, with the intolerance and impatience that the world can't stay as it is, and fueled by our biggest aims and goals of what it really means to be fighting for the emancipation of *humanity*—with our eyes and approach set there.

Two:

It was an important "prompt" in writing this letter to have had the benefit of the quote from Bob Avakian in issue #187 of the paper (and in going back and reviewing that whole essay in "Observations...")—to deeply reflect on how awe and wonder are "an essential quality of human beings. Human beings will always strive for this. Far from trying to suppress this, or failing to recognize it, we can and should and will give much fuller expression to it." In the history of the international communist movement (ICM), this understanding about human existence has not been given full expression in how we would and could lead the process that moves human society beyond the 4 alls. The lack of appreciating this aspect of human beings has contributed a great deal of mechanical materialism in handling the truly difficult contradiction between not leaving the world the way it is but yet not turning out the lights in our efforts to transform it (though I've not read the early Marx when, as I understand it, he had a great deal of humanism and not yet dialectical materialism). Nonetheless, we do need to lead a process where the whole society is overall characterized by the unleashing of imagination and curiosity and thirst for what's true and being amazed by all that.

I've often thought of the point made in Sunsara Taylor's appreciation letter on the "main man" (Bob Avakian) and what she said about the intangibles that he embodies—how he has related to people throughout his life and what is expressed or concentrated about values and morality and the world we strive for. It harkens back to the point made in one of his talks about the good guys finishing first instead of the bourgeois view that good guys always finish last—akin to the quote from Engels at

the end of “Harvest of Dragons” about maintaining our sense of purpose and sense of humor and realism as well as romanticism. He has consistently led with this and it is as lofty as it is inspiring and part of what is rare in this leader.

In a discussion on this, the question was posed about why has there been a tendency for communists to “turn off the lights, the party’s over.” We talked about the intense necessity we face when we have power—linked to the fact that our trend being distinguished from others in not accepting the world as it is. The reality of the enormous pressures of all of it being on us when we have power—and in the middle of most likely a socialist state(s) being encircled on a world scale for some time, not to mention all the complexities of leading the socialist state(s) itself forward. Things like droughts and famines and other natural disasters add further dimensions to the pressure to meet the pressing needs of the masses we will be responsible for, which will probably be a greater aspect of any new DoP [dictatorship of the proletariat] given drastic environmental changes of our time.

But all this raises again not only what state power is good for—but how the new synthesis has been hammering at the question of a state power that is worth having—keeping the eyes on the prize of a communist world. It is indeed very hard to handle this sharp contradiction correctly that is posed by the need to continually transform the world but doing so without turning out the lights. It is part of repeated willingness to go to the brink of being drawn and quartered but yet NOT ending up actually going over the brink (i.e., losing state power and/or our goal of a communist world). We have to do this by NOT having everything directly or tightly linked to production—but by allowing room for things like “pure research”, “pure science” and “absolute music”—as part of “having big arms” that takes in all the different aspects of human existence.

In relation to this, a UCLA student’s comment in our paper about their building occupation recently captures something about this essential characteristic of humans. It is a window into what some of the advanced are thinking about the world. It also shows the potential attractive power of our project as re-envisioned by Bob Avakian for these educated youth now and needs to be connected with them. But more, it indicates what could be unleashed among such youth in the transition to communism—as one of the other unresolved contradictions, and its role as a driving force for revolution (along with the woman question, mental-manual contradiction, and internationalism). The student is quoted as saying that “capitalism in general takes the wonder out of life by placing everything in a utilitarian frame where everything has a practical use. It has to have practical use like a commodity. Everything is put into terms of a commodity that is worth a certain amount on a scale of value. For a lot of us, it takes away what is wondrous and joyful in this world and what provides mystery in this world.”

This captures something important related to the recent quote from our “main man” in our paper I referred to above—and the problem of our movement’s previous tendency (in theory and practice) of too much “turning off the lights” which is an obstacle to getting to communism itself. After all, socialism cannot flourish, cannot be a radically new kind of state, if it meets the material needs of the people but by taking the joy and wonder out of life. It is thought provoking that this student identified the utilitarianism of capitalism (linked to commodity production and relations) as the source of taking away wonder, joy and mystery in the world. Until the rupture with it in the new synthesis, utilitarianism has been a sharp contradiction in the legacy of the ICM—and in part responsible for the tendency to “turn off the lights.” Instead, we need to lead by actually turning on the lights of human imagination, curiosity, creativity, ingenuity as a critical component of ever more fully rupturing with economism—of being able to lead a process to emancipate all of humanity vs something short of that (which will end up worse than where we started, e.g., what’s happened in the counter revolutions in China and Russia).

How to lead society puts us to the test. All the pressures lends itself to going to what we know—pulls to circling the wagon and batten down the hatches in holding on to power but will lose it anyway. We can't just hold on to state power—will be difficult but has to conform to how the world and society actually is in reality instead of trying to make reality conform to our ideas.

There has to be a lot of exploration and experimentation in realms such as arts and sciences for any society to flourish—with the dictatorship of the proletariat and communism giving much greater flight to human imagination and creativity than previous societies ever did or could if it is truly revolutionary and revolutionizing all aspects of life, including but not restricted to, or constricted by, production to meet the needs of society (material as well as “spiritual” or intellectual and intangibles). There has been (and is) still a lot of mechanical materialism in the ICM that constricts and restricts communism to certain spheres—even if it's not just the most narrow interpretation of “labor becoming life's prime want” but reifying the production and producers of the material necessities of life, or restricting things to the political sphere/struggle (as crucial as this is in taking and holding on to power) but not enough placed on the intellectual, cultural, and emotional development of human existence—those intangibles that are in fact “essential qualities of human beings.” Bob Avakian's new synthesis is a rupture from that legacy of the ICM and is part of how I understand why it gives hope and daring on a scientific (materialist) foundation.

The '60s upsurge gave a glimpse to some of this kind of potential—a lot of exploration and experimentation in all kinds of spheres. It was both a product of, and a catalyst for, a vibrant revolutionary youth movement of that time (as it will be in any revolution). The question of morality and culture were central to how the youth of all strata were inspired and entered the fight for another future. E.g., the “flower child” genre of music had a lot of interesting shoots—much of which dead-ended after the '60s but some of it further flowered into lasting tracks for future generations of rebels. What developed in the arts internationally (e.g. films, music, literature, etc) was unprecedented in many ways, including in regards to love. Maybe because previous socialist revolutions have come out of semi-feudal societies, or maybe because our movement itself has not made enough of a theoretical (and therefore practical) rupture with the patriarchy in terms of what [[Avakian]] speaks to in the latest talk about 100 years between Engels' “Origin...” and Skybreak's “Primeval Steps...”—but there has been no small amount of puritanical tendencies in the history of the ICM in regards to human, especially female, sexuality. Maybe that's partly responsible for the lack of love songs or other artistic works about love in the ICM?

Communism is a society where people voluntarily and consciously work for the common good. IF we try to manage/suppress contradictions, it will work against getting to communism. To see contradictions (i.e., unevenness in nature and society) as driving forces for change is to face objective reality as it exists—full of motion that can go in a variety of direction, and with a multitude of dimensions—and more keenly poses the possibilities of leading a process that can get over the two humps and reach our goal without “turning off the lights.”

Three:

Why is there a basis for people to say, to throw this accusation at our project: “here come the communists, the party is over, turn out the lights”? Have we done anything to “earn” this?

Motion is matter. Matter is motion. This makes up reality. Communists haven't always dealt with reality as matter in motion, as contradictions, as ceaseless motion that's interacting, rupturing,

etc—whether one is talking about the natural world or social reality (humans coming together to produce and reproduce necessities of life)—all this is motion that’s not linear but contradictory, why it’s motion—main direction and counter currents such as in evolution—things develop in one way and then a different way which is the same as social reality. Nowhere in reality where dialectics doesn’t apply—human consciousness is the same thing.

Marx, in discovering the science of dialectical and historical materialism, developed the understanding of contradictions (e.g., between the forces and relations of production) as the driving force for change. But in the history of the international communist movement (ICM), unresolved contradictions in society or the dictatorship of the proletariat (DoP) have often been seen as things to control/suppress/manage instead of dealing with the reality of how unresolved contradictions are driving force for change, ruptures, breaks into something else—revolution. Such attempts to control/corral reality denies its actual existence as matter in motion, and turns communism into a religion in treating it as a narrative that is imposed on reality instead of as our leading a ceaseless process of knowing and changing the world. Mao did further grapple and develop our understanding of contradictions as motive force for change, but Bob Avakian has gone much further in developing our understanding of this. As Avakian has noted, Mao still had some tendency to see communism as a kingdom of heavenly peace. Avakian is going beyond that with a deep and all around grasp of dialectics and materialism in his method and approach, including as reflected in the new talk. This has been rare in history, someone who can advance and apply communist theory as a living and developing science (and not as a thing in itself).

Is the role of the Party to put out fires under the DoP or is it to lead struggle to get to communism but going through contradictions of where society can and needs to go? There is a main direction but it’s not one road to get there, and there are other things or side/secondary directions that doesn’t always mean they are counter currents to the main direction but represent the many channels point.

Objective reality is contradictions in ceaseless motion. Our understanding of the DoP as part of the coherence of human history—a transition period full of change—there will still be contradiction between productive forces and production relations. There’s been a tendency among communists to see contradictions coming to an end when we get to communism—and thereby an inclination to want to micro-manage everything in the struggle to get there—which pits us against leading the process—the objective process of getting to a whole new world—getting to communism.

Four:

...on why the world must not stay as it is but it also must not be, “Here come the communists, turn off the lights, party is over.”

Of course! Why would anyone want to turn off the lights and end the party? It seems so obvious that we would want to keep the lights on, keep the beauty and the joy and the curiosity and humor. That we would not only want to retain, but give greater expression to, experimentation and imagination and love! I mean, there are the crude economists—the ones who think that anything that doesn’t exalt the worker is bourgeois rubbish. And, there are those who have become so embittered with the truly horrible ways the world has treated them and those around them that their minds do not extend past the desire for revenge. And, it’s not that these sorts of tendencies haven’t at times been pronounced in the history of the revolutionary and the communist movements.

But, really, can't we see now with hindsight how undesirable all that is? Can't we see how stultifying things can become and don't we see that it is much better to have a society that people would actually want to live in? A society with art and ferment and great contestation and tremendous experimentation. A society that values people speaking their minds and mixing it up with each other. A society where people don't fear bringing forward new ideas, where there is no "one form" or "one way" to make or perceive beauty or to make or perceive love. A society in which the state never suppresses individual expression or experimentation.

...ooops!

How quickly and how easily one can lose the whole thing. And, if you miss the chance to make revolution, or if you lose state power once you have it, there are no "do-overs." In thinking about this question—of why the world must not be allowed to stay as it is, but at the same time, it must not be the case that "here come the communists, turn off the lights, the party is over"—I have been brought back to Issue #4 of *Revolution* newspaper repeatedly.² I have also been brought back to the summation of one of the grad students who told us that there should be even less toleration of the intellectuals than in Maoist China the next time around. He himself was a big supporter of the Chinese revolution and his opinion on the intellectuals was actually formed from having seen how horrible China has become since the loss of state power and the role that many intellectuals played in restoration and legitimating that restoration. He felt that too much was at stake, state power is just too important, to allow even as much elasticity as there was in China under Mao.

The only way to even begin to grapple with this contradiction in a way that doesn't end up in either of those alternatives, or the one of flipping back and forth between the two, is to really come at everything from both "up on the mountaintop" and "down on the ground." Both grabbing a hold of the key links at any given time that must be held onto or advanced around, without which nothing could move forward towards communism, AND meeting that necessity in a way that is consistent with and actually advances things towards the final aim. *And*, there is a real importance, actually a necessity, to grasping the nature of reality in a much more multi-layered, multi-textured way, really taking up an even more deeply dialectical and materialist understanding of the world.

I think a lot of the pull towards turning off the lights comes in because there are real and pressing needs that must be met at any given time, and there is a finiteness to resources, leading attention, time, etc. But there has also been a real tendency towards viewing things too statically—or in too isolated a way. A work of art comes out and a verdict is drawn on it too quickly and too narrowly. It is a fact that everything has a principal aspect and it is a fact that everything ultimately conforms to one set of production and social relations or another, but there is also the fact that the particular exists within a larger context and is interacting with and being influenced by many other contradictions. And whether something *ultimately* conforms to outmoded relations and whether it directly and acutely challenges the ability to be moving beyond outmoded relations, are often two very different things. Whether something is relatively harmful, relatively helpful, or "neutral" has to be evaluated not only by isolating it and examining it and reaching a verdict on it—but by evaluating it in the context of a whole society and world situation, what dynamics are at play and what can be made the dynamics with the role of a solid core actively contending. And this must not be done *only* from the standpoint of immediate objectives—no matter how critical they actually are.

² "Issue 4 of *Revolution* was criticized for, among other things, an absolutely uncritical line toward the arts; this took the form of repeating without comment certain bourgeois-democratic and even anti-communist statements by some artists, while one-sidedly exaggerating the positive aspects and effects of some progressive artists and works.

It is not that the necessity faced by Mao going into the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) was any less serious—the stakes for losing state power and the forces aligned against the maintenance and advance of the revolution were not any “lighter” than what confronted Stalin. But, how he understood and how he met that necessity, how he went about transforming it, was different. Rather than confronting less necessity, Mao, in many ways, was grasping more deeply and confronting and seeking to transform more deeply *greater* and *deeper* necessity. When he said the object of the Cultural Revolution is to overthrow the capitalist-roaders in power, but that its deeper aim was to transform world outlook—he didn’t add the part about transforming world outlook because he had “more freedom” than Stalin, but because he recognized the deeper necessity that had to be transformed at the same time that the immediate objective had to be met if any of it were to actually contribute to getting to communism. But, not only did he see *more necessity*—he also, flowing from the same deeper grasp of dialectical materialism, saw more freedom, or perhaps better put, *different freedom*.

He saw new ways that the strengths of the masses, the unevenness of the masses, could be brought to bear. It was not that he didn’t have to confront the necessity of overthrowing those who were restoring capitalism, or defending the socialist state, or bringing forward successors, or feeding the country, but he went about doing this in a different way—in a way that was also confronting some of the even greater and more challenging necessity of transforming things fully—including the thinking of and relations among the people—in a way that can get to the 4 alls. This is an application of meeting immediate necessity that was extremely acute and held world-historic implications and stakes—but not compressing everything down to meeting that need by any means necessary and at whatever cost.

Very few people have identified this statement of Mao’s as particularly significant, as concentrating what he was trying to do with the GPCR—and even fewer have pursued the method involved in this and in some significant ways built upon but also gone beyond Mao in this regard. In struggling to go beyond a superficial “well of course, keep the lights on” approach, and to really identify where this contradiction resides and why it will be so acute all the way through, I have been repeatedly struck more deeply with the significance of the Chair highlighting and drawing out this comment from Mao. And, the fact that flowing from really grasping this, he has gone beyond Mao in significant ways.

There is a lot of stuff that needs to be let loose that isn’t even just about meeting the most acute needs of the revolution in a different way, as important as that is. There’s a lot of stuff that ought to just rip and get stirred up—intellectually, artistically, in terms of social relations and experimentation. Some of it will have to be weighed in relation to pressing necessity—but there is a shift in really grasping the importance of ferment overall, how this is a positive thing, how it creates an atmosphere for new things to emerge, for people to be awakened and aroused into political and cultural life, and how it actually provides a much greater sea and mix for the vanguard forces to be interacting with. It actually provides much more freedom and new avenues for learning and transforming the world.

I recently saw the play *Twelve Angry Men*, about a jury deliberating a trial. They begin almost unanimously declaring the suspect guilty, no one even feels they have to think twice about it, except for one guy. What’s fascinating about the play is the whole process they all go through whereby they are forced to wrangle and really think critically about how they came to their conclusions and whether they hold up. By the end, everyone has changed their view. There was a tremendous amount in the play that was actually quite instructive about how unevenness and ferment can play a very positive role. Not just ideas that come forward that conform to the interests of the

proletariat—but even the busting open of ferment and critical thought and yes, of course and very importantly, in that context the increasing influence of ideas that correspond to the interests of the emancipation of humanity.

By the end of the play every one of the “airtight” arguments of the prosecution had been ripped with holes. It wasn’t that anyone was sure that the suspect was innocent, but they were all convinced that based on the case against him he hadn’t been proven guilty beyond any reasonable doubt. But, this took a collective process. Different people poked holes in different aspects of the case—one had experience in knife fights, another wore glasses and knew what that was like, another was older and had some insights on how that might impact some of the witnesses’ testimony, etc. And, many of these holes only got poked after a question was posed by one person that was pondered by another and weighed in on by a third—and opposed by many as well. No one person had what it took to demolish the prosecution’s argument—but, even if at the beginning, one person had been able to line up and refute every single argument that had been made, it wouldn’t have been as compelling or convincing to the whole jury. The rest of the jury wasn’t ready to hear it—they weren’t yet *thinking*. They changed through the whole process. It is both that one person couldn’t have come up with all the answers alone as well as the fact that there was a process going on.

And, there was tremendous unevenness to that process and a way that the unevenness worked, or got going in a positive direction, because of the steadfastness and persistence and, very importantly, critical method of one person.

You could also see that it was harder at the beginning for that guy to get a hearing because people weren’t yet thinking critically. They just came to their conclusion and the fact that everyone else agreed with them, except for one guy, made them feel they didn’t even have to defend their position. It was like, “duh.” And the first one who came over to the side of the “not guilty” was not even convinced that the trial didn’t merit a “guilty” verdict, but he really was won over on the basis of being inspired by the fact that the one guy had the courage to stand out on his own and the fact that he felt the argument should be answered on its merits. Taken in isolation, if this guy were boxed off and evaluated statically, he might not have seemed a very favorable element. But, in a greater mix—his partial strength (which wasn’t at first at the forefront in his actions) became very critical in opening up a process. In a similar way, other people’s particular strengths were brought to bear and a positive dynamism got going.

There was a lot to learn from the dynamics of the most backwards jurors, too. First, you could tell from the very beginning that some of them were deeply racist, but this kind of blended in with and was excused by the others because both of their own prejudices and their own beliefs that the suspect was guilty and so that racist prejudice wasn’t really impacting any verdict (so they thought). But, as the critical thinking got going and people started having to defend the position of guilty, rather than being allowed to hold it just because their gut told them so, the ugliness of the racism actually stood out more and more. People divided out. Some followed their principle despite their gut. Others got more emboldened in trashing principle and lashing out in racist rants. This, again, if evaluated just on its own terms would be seen as extremely negative. “Oh no! Look at how the racism is getting more emboldened and pronounced. This process is going in a way that is very bad and needs to be reined in.” Such an argument could certainly be made. But it would be wrong. Because there was a bigger process going on and things were being clarified and this position was actually lashing out because the ground beneath it was being dug up.

Overall, several things stood out in watching this play with the question (about turning out the lights, for short) in the back of my mind. First, the importance of unleashing a process, the way

unevenness can be the source of growth or new things. Second, the great importance of critical thought and engagement, of actually having ferment and a context where people are THINKING (not just where the right thoughts get presented and united around). Third, the very big role that a very small minority with a good method and some key truth can play in this context. I guess with that, the importance of this small minority (here I mean US) grasping that they have to unleash ferment and thinking, that we are responsible for this as well. It both has value and import for *how* we are going to arrive at the 4 alls—the process we need to unleash and the ways that people learn, the ways that we will learn, etc—AND tremendous importance in terms of what communism actually is and must be.

This includes the fact that there are whole realms that really haven't been recognized as realms in their own right and handled correctly in the history of our movement. The realm of art, for instance. There is a quote attributed to Lenin in the book, *Street Art of the Revolution: Festivals and Celebrations in Russia 1918-33* that a comrade pulled off the shelf and we were looking at. The book writes, "Under socialism, Lenin had insisted, art would no longer serve the elite of society, that 'upper ten thousand suffering from boredom and obesity; it will rather serve the millions and tens of millions of laboring people, the flower of the country, its strength and its future.'" [Lenin, *Complete Collected Works*, vol. 12, p. 104]

This is at the beginning of a whole book that documents the tremendous artistic flowering and festivals that made art available to the masses of workers and peasants for the first time. That involved tens of thousands of them in producing the art. That celebrated them taking center-stage in history and in emancipating themselves and humanity. I need to spend more time with this book and look further at the content of what was expressed in this art—but even right there in the beginning, there was a conception of the realm of art expressed by Lenin in this quote that while expressing something very important and unleashing an artistic movement that was truly unprecedented and much needed, still came at this realm too narrowly. It is right that ultimately art and culture will serve one set of production and corresponding social relations or another and that it is a great necessity to put art in the hands of the masses and to create works and culture that celebrates the new—but it is wrong to view art up until then as merely or mainly serving the boredom of the elite. Art is its own realm. There is much about art of the past that has to be divided into two. There are things—especially things bound up with the church—that have to be taken on rather directly and transformed, or new things brought up in their wake. But there are also things that can be appreciated even where they reflect outmoded outlooks because those relations are overall being transformed and they don't hold the same kind of threat or weight. Things that are beautiful or at least provocative and stirring and, even while they reflect outmoded relations and thinking (think of Shakespeare), are not reducible to those outmoded relations.

This gets tricky because you come right up against the problem that—most of what is considered "beautiful" in this world, or "funny," or "romantic" or "joyful," most of the things and arenas in which one would want to keep the lights on, the content of them is almost saturated with "the world as it is." I mean, it is almost impossible to turn on anything on tv and not be assaulted by derogatory and demeaning images of women. You can't get more than 4 seconds into most stand-up comedy routines on tv without at least experiencing the impulse to change the channel even if you don't always do it.

Still, you have to pull back the lens—to both more boldly struggle for a different pole and have more strategic confidence that if we get the ferment going, we can lead through it. We don't have to "answer" every wrong thing that emerges and attempting to do so will actually impair our ability to lead society towards the 4 alls.

In thinking about the content of much of the culture and art that we will need to be transforming, I have been brought back to how the Chair handles the impulse towards religion. Religion itself is gone at very sharply, in its content, in its roots and its ongoing role, in the method of thinking it trains people in—but the impulses towards religion are not all “doused in the icy waters of science.” The need for meaning, for morality, for awe, wonder, etc. These impulses which are quite human and will be with us and give one expression or another—are recognized and embraced, but de-coupled from the religious or superstitious form and expression they are dominantly given today. And, a way where they can be given even greater expression, in a different context and with a different overall content, is shown.

In addition to the constricting of things down to immediate and even very key campaigns and needs of the proletarian revolution (seizing state power, holding onto it, etc.) and suppressing—or allowing to die of benign neglect—things which do not contribute to those objectives narrowly conceived, there is a way that the particularity, and the importance, of some of these realms in their own right has been not recognized and so they have been treated too narrowly.

Related to this, a tremendous amount of freedom has not been recognized either.

Not only are these human needs and will a society lacking artistic and intellectual ferment be stultifying—but, going back to *12 Angry Men* and the nature of communism itself—the existence of ferment and debate and critical thinking and experimentation have value in their own right. Without them you cannot really get a process going where people can fully transform themselves and their outlook and their thinking and the world—and, without them your society is going to be a dreary place and any conception of communism (which you will never achieve) will be equally dreary.

One tricky thing that stood out as well, though, in contemplating *12 Angry Men* is the way that those who hold positions that go *with* spontaneity, that have never been deeply challenged and never had to really defend their views with substance, can lash out when they are no longer allowed to just hold these views “just because.” There was not only racism that was unleashed in an unvarnished form—but also real disgust and anger with the idea of having to defend their guilty verdict. They wanted to be able to continue—as everyone had allowed them to at the beginning—saying, “Well, I just believe this.”

It seems this gets to some of what is so complex about leading a process that aims not just at immediate objectives but actually at transforming world outlook. Changing how people deeply feel and believe. You cannot just declare it or legislate it. This is one of the extremely important leaps beyond Mao that Avakian has made with the new synthesis and a rupture from official ideology. You cannot change people’s thinking just by declaring that some things are correct and allowed and others are not.

You need to have space for people to deeply feel and believe about the world in different ways. And for people to not feel like they have to defend every single deeply held belief all the time. But, some of the most deeply held beliefs are some of the ones that MOST need to be critically examined and transformed.

I recently read a letter seeking advice on a relationship and the response from the feminist blogger. A young woman who has lived with her boyfriend for 2 years recently discovered that he was viewing porn on his computer and then that he is going away to a friend’s bachelor party where there will be strippers, etc. She wanted to know if she could tell her boyfriend it was wrong, and specifically that getting a lap dance was cheating on her. The advice given back was infuriating. Everything was

absolutely relativist (oxymoron which moronically applies)—”some people think porn is anti-feminist, some people think it’s fine, some feel lap dances cross the line of monogamy, others want to have open relationships, you have to decide what your personal boundaries are, etc.” (Paraphrasing.) The advice went on, “You two should negotiate what both of your needs are and find a way to meet both of your needs.” The part that was supposed to be “empowering” was telling this young woman that she should value her own needs more than the need to be in a relationship.

In thinking about how we would answer this letter—it was clear that some things would have to be said up front. First, that pornography and strip clubs concentrate the oppression of women—the reducing of women down to objects for the sexual pleasure or plunder of men, dehumanizing them, and quite often concentrating straight up hatred and brutality against women. The question can’t be approached just on the level of the two individuals and how they both perceive their “needs” but in terms of broader social relations and what serves the liberation of women and all humanity and what pulls against it. But, after that there are a lot of things that might be really good advice for a friend to give another friend, or even more things that might be insisted upon for members of a communist vanguard, that would actually be harmful to insist upon in an advice column if it was from or tied to the Party. (Others could write things that we might even agree with, but which, coming from us would not be correct to insist upon.)

Part of the complexity of the woman question—as well as other deep ideological questions of world outlook—is that it interpenetrates with every other contradiction, from the most foundational economic to every aspect of culture and ideology and music and dance and art. And, almost everywhere it is saturated with the ideology and outlook of the current and past ruling classes. At the same time, much of the way the woman question plays out is on a very intimate, very private level of how people “authentically feel.” All this is shaped by and influences larger social relations—but not all of it is immediately linked in that way and almost none of it is experienced by the individual as a “larger societal social relation.” It is experienced as “just the way I feel” and often those feelings are very overpowering, very deep, very seemingly “innate.”

These things don’t change just because someone comes in and pronounces a correct way to experience love and intimacy. And, while there are things that are definitely harmful and that should not be allowed (pornography and battery, for instance), there are many things that ultimately conform to outmoded views, but which people themselves need to have the space to exist or at least be in the mix. And the need to have a lot of ferment and experimentation and room for debate and discussion without quickly coming to verdicts will be extremely important.

Compared to something like foreign policy, which is very complex but which most people can recognize rather quickly is tied into serving or endangering one form of state and production relations or another (even if they are not clear on how that is the case, they are clear that there is a relationship between foreign policy and the state), love and romance don’t strike people in this way. These are spheres that are shaped by, do reflect and ultimately reinforce one set of production and social relations or another—but people don’t see them that way. And even when they change their feelings—when societal movements are underway that recast what people find tolerable, what they are reaching for, what they are experiencing and struggling for—often and in their majority they still don’t recognize how these things changed even in their own thinking.

You want a society that is increasingly taking up a scientific approach to everything—including the relationship between the individual and society and the woman question and the relationship between thinking and feeling (while they are not the same, thinking—even if not always conscious—does influence feelings, there is a framework that different experiences are being “processed”

through in anyone's thinking that influence how they will feel about given experiences). But, part of getting people to change their outlook is bringing them right up against the fact that they have been thinking and feeling a certain way without ever having to interrogate it or defend it and then when they are forced to—they can't. This is what happened in *12 Angry Men*—this is how I recall breaking with religion. I just couldn't defend it anymore—but there was someone arguing me into a corner on it and forcing me to defend it.

People do take offense too. “How dare you intrude or tell me what to think and feel?” It is very necessary that a lot of this kind of debate and ferment be unleashed among the people—but some of this is the kind of struggle that the state (and even the Party) cannot do very much of without turning out the lights on people. But, there are questions that can be posed, works of art that can open up new angles and provoke thought, that actually get a process going where people are wrangling and debating among themselves and each other.

Here's another element of the freedom and necessity posed on this to grasp more deeply. Back to the play—the most reactionary and racist guys do get “cornered” and forced to defend their views and this is very necessary. Everyone learns through the process and while the most backwards more seem to “give in” rather than fully transform, their backwards views are isolated and deprived of their social impact. And, in this process, the first guy who changed his verdict—the one who did so more on the basis of principle that things ought to be debated out—played a very positive overall role. Had, in the very beginning, some force of authority come down on the most backwards guy and told him he had to defend every one of his most deeply held positions, the very juror who first helped open up this process would most likely have been driven—from the very same principles—to oppose that voice of authority “intruding” on the backwards guy's deeply held beliefs. In other words, to simplify, I will call this first juror to switch his views Jerry. The very principle that drove Jerry to support the guy who voted “not guilty”—that someone who has deeply held views ought not just be ganged up on but given some space—would have likely driven Jerry to prevent a voice of authority to immediately probing and insisting that the most backwards juror defend his most deeply held (even if reactionary) beliefs. But, this very unevenness—in the context of a process—was able to be brought to bear in a much more positive way. There was more freedom there than would be apparent if a narrower, more constrained approach was taken.

I think this applies now—as well as in the future dictatorship of the proletariat (DOP)—to some of the relative strengths and weaknesses of many of the enlightened strata with bourgeois democratic illusions.

There are things that friends can say to each other that the Party can't and shouldn't say. And frankly, there are things around which it is important to have a lot of people talking and debating and thrashing things out—even more important in some ways than the content of everything that is being thrashed out at a given time. When you first really open up debate on sexual relations—there is a lot that is going to be very contradictory and outright backwards—not just on the part of men but also women. This does not get answered simply by saying, “But there will be a lot positive that gets unleashed as well,” even though that is true. It is also important to get that there is the overall mix of surfacing these questions, getting them on the table where people are actually wrangling with them and thinking about them. Writing about them and debating them. Or just sitting back and contemplating and not saying much at all. It is this kind of mix out of which, even with a very small solid core, a whole process can be unleashed where it contributes in very uneven and non-linear way to a different dynamic around these social relations, including by making the greatest strength of what positive does get uncorked, even while none of this will be absolutely positive.

The point is not, “Oh, of course, let’s keep the lights on!” as if there are no contradictions in that. It is not Issue 4 where you just let everything rip and go wherever it may even as it devours, very quickly, the solid core. Nor is the point to instead hold onto the solid core at any cost, squashing down anything that threatens it. The point is to meet the necessity being confronted in a different way—to grasp even more fully both the freedom and the necessity posed and to lead in relation to all of this differently.

I believe the leap that Bob Avakian has made in philosophy, in coming to an even more dialectical understanding of materialism—reflected in the discussion of many channels or of a multi-layered/colored map and in other ways—and where a lot of unevenness is recast in relationship to a solid core and where a whole different dynamic and process gets going, this way of more deeply recognizing and then acting to transform necessity, is very key to keeping the lights on even as we change the whole world and approach this task urgently.

A big part of this is continuously stepping back from just the immediate aims—but also grasping the positive role of ferment and critical thinking and exploration and experimentation. Grasping that it both requires and enables us to lead in a different way—with more ideology and method and substance. And there is a real question of strategic confidence. Not being freaked out by every thing that pulls away from your immediate goals—seeing how it can be made a part of an overall mix that helps get to communism. Some things will need to be answered and some things will need to be suppressed, but many things can be made of an overall process where what is positive—even if just on the level of opening up space and ferment—is brought into a positive dynamism with other things going on and out of which people are learning and the Party is leading things forward.

I recognize that there is a bigger context in which all of this takes place and here I have not even touched the importance and dynamics of not just oppositional art or ideas, but cultural trends and whole new schools of thought and scenes, subcultures and counter-cultures. And, the way that there is a social base for just suppressing a lot of stuff and just meeting pressing immediate needs—and how these needs are real and this social base does need to both feel that the world really has changed and will not be allowed to return to the old way, but also that these sections of people need to be being transformed themselves to see the importance of coming at these contradictions in a different way. As emancipators of humanity. There is a LOT on really getting this question of unevenness—and a need to rupture more fully and continuously with mechanical materialism and positivism, in our movement and in my own thinking. And where strategic confidence really comes from—scientifically and with a fuller recognition of freedom and necessity and how to approach and transform the one into the other. I found this writing assignment actually quite a challenge—it forced me to stretch my thinking and gave rise to quite a lot of wrangling among some of us who were writing. What I have written is a beginning of really trying to get inside some of this—as could probably be expected, having finally worked through as much as I have been able to at this time, I am left with many more ideas just starting to really fire in my thinking. More than anything, I think this has forced us to begin to really grapple with the deeper contradictions and stakes involved in handling this contradiction well. This process really must not stop now.

Five:

“And the world stays fundamentally unchanged. Capitalism-imperialism continues humming in the ‘background,’ crushing lives and destroying spirits in its meat-grinder of exploitation. And the horrors continue unabated.”

This is our standing and powerful refutation of every other trend in the world. On the other hand, the way that a lot of people look at what we're about—and not entirely without justification—is: “Here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party's over.”

I've been thinking a lot about method and approach since I read this. In particular how previous communist leaders especially those who have led socialist states have dealt with the question of necessity—and often extreme necessity. To state the obvious the aspect of “not entirely without justification” speaks to the limitations and often grievous errors and shortcomings of the first socialist states that the Chairman has been wrestling with and which the new synthesis addresses. A synthesis, which has a conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat, that comprehends both continuing and recasting the positive experience and theory from the international communist movement (ICM) as well as making significant ruptures with what has gone before.

What is concentrated in the Manifesto is radically different than what anyone else in the world has arrived at. It is also radically different and a more scientific understanding of socialism and human societies than what communists have understood previously.

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

“Applied to socialist society, this approach of solid core with a lot of elasticity includes the need for a leading, and expanding, core that is clear on the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the aim of continuing socialist revolution as part of the world struggle for communism, and is determined to continue carrying forward this struggle, through all the twists and turns. At the same time, there will necessarily be many different people and trends in socialist society pulling in many different directions—and all of this can ultimately contribute to the process of getting at the truth and getting to communism. This will be intense at times, and the difficulty of embracing all this—while still leading the whole process broadly in the direction of communism—will be something like going, as Avakian has put it, to the brink of being drawn and quartered—and repeatedly. All this is difficult, but necessary and a process to welcome. (From Manifesto, citing the Constitution of the RCP,USA)

I've been thinking a lot about how Lenin, Stalin and Mao dealt with necessity and some of the methodological problems they were constrained by and which still constrain revolutionary leadership. This had to do with actual necessity they were up against—being at war, preparing for war, recovering from war in a world where imperialism is still dominant—and how much that impacted the class struggle internal to those parties. But it also had to do with a method and approach to dealing with that necessity.

The more perspective you get on this—the more painfully evident it is how much the Communist movement has been saddled with economic determinism, reification and positivism. This has had real consequences, done very real damage and continues to exert noxious influence. It's influenced how Communists have dealt with necessity—for instance—thinking about your point in

“Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution” that Mao at first had hope in the intellectuals... “It is interesting that Mao made the comment, during the course of the Cultural Revolution, that at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution he was thinking in terms of bringing forward a core of intellectuals as successors in terms of the top leadership of the revolution, but he became disillusioned with the intellectuals because they proved unreliable. So, then he began to think more in terms of the whole Red Guard phenomenon—unleashing the youth as a revolutionary force.”

Not to be simplistic about what Mao was up against or to negate that there were objective social forces to be looked to and relied on—and that these were forces that could and should be marshaled for continuing the revolution—or that there are strata that objectively must be the backbone of the revolution—but this must also have cast how Mao summed up the 100 flowers campaign (something to be looked into again) and the significant problems of approach in that. An instance where Mao went against Mao’s own emphasis on the decisiveness of ideological and political line [and where the questions get concentrated] but also drew wrong and sweeping conclusions about the intellectuals. Mao’s back was really against the wall—he was searching for answers—and weighed down by strains within the science that he both criticized and waged struggle against but also carried substantial elements forward into “Maoism.” And due to this there were ways in which the lights did go out—without civil society with space for ferment, of elasticity and things going in many different directions, without dissent AND the ability for scientific, intellectual and artistic inquiry and creation to go outside what are the main lines of what the Party has identified as key fault-lines and key transformations to be made—the air does go out of society. Critical thinking, scientific inquiry and ferment and artistic work that did not go along with or go well with “the mainstream of the mass movement” (even when that was going mainly in a correct direction) were stifled and the society as a whole was deprived of important insights, truths, innovation and new things from unexpected quarters that could have greatly contributed to the goals of the communist revolution in the fullest sense.

This wasn’t the result of totalitarian urges and absolute power corrupting absolutely but it does have to do with how communists have faced necessity—Mao did make historic breakthroughs (from Stalin’s theory of the productive forces to understanding where the danger of capitalist restoration does arise from) and Mao also carried forward elements of reification, nationalism and positivism that had become part of the “canon” of Marxism—that if persisted in are very bad (just as persisting in the theory of the productive forces in China was not just an honest error but revisionism that got picked up by representatives of class outlooks that wanted to rig up the capitalist system).

Looking at trends within the ICM—for instance the kind of spontaneous economism and reification picked up by those who uphold Mao Tsetung and are trying to regroup the left in various countries—or the influence of this in some places where there are parties—by comparison you see once again the rupture with this and how essential this is to both to making revolution in the world as it is and has developed and to staying on the communist road—or more accurately to be able to open up the Communist road once again.

I’ve been going back to the talk *Communism: A Whole New World and The Emancipation of All Humanity*—Not “*The Last Shall Be First, and the First Shall be Last*” and thinking about the section in the second half that speaks to the problems of positivism—and reducing things to immanent causes—an understanding of reality that is flat and linear and leaves out qualitative leaps from one form of matter to another. In that section you talk about positivism applied to history being a form of economic determinism—to direct extensions of economic factors that are narrowly conceived. That negates the relative autonomy and initiative taken in the superstructure. You give there the example that the Civil War did not happen as soon as the two modes of production in the economic

sphere came into conflict. Political spokespeople articulated positions and developed rationalizations and philosophy. And due to political events and initiative taken by different actors on that stage the situation did finally erupt into warfare. Initiative was taken by people in the superstructure.... by people who have thinking and wills and who are shaped by production relations but that is a very complex process mediated by and modified by a lot of factors... culture ideology and individual wills, (decisions and blunders that influenced how things turned out). Mechanical materialism and determinism generally do not see the factors that may lead to ruptures from an existing framework.

It does seem that in the face of great necessity the blunt instruments of reification and reductionism have been a huge problem in the legacy of the movement and departing from this is really a radical and liberating rupture. Listening to this talk again after the exchange in the ICM over Communism being a science—I was reminded of the point you made that Communism is both objective and partisan but it's not objective because it is partisan. Dialectical materialism corresponds with the broadest interests of the proletariat (from the mountain top) and is a method that can approach reality. You made the point that unlike previous exploiting classes the proletariat does not have institutionalized impediments at getting at the truth. All truths are good for the proletariat. As a class the proletariat is not compelled to violate the scientific approach and if it does it only undermines the partisanship of what we are trying to bring about. (apologies this is paraphrased here from notes vs verbatim)

The irony or tragedy here is that Communists have constructed institutional impediments—for example trying to impose an official ideology that was actually an impediment that got in the way of correctly grasping and transforming reality. And when Communists have done that—this has undermined the partisanship of what this revolution is all about—and constructed obstacles and impediments to abolishing the 4 ills and getting to communism. People won't want to go there and they will not be satisfied and many will rightly want to overthrow you if the society you run is one without oxygen and ferment or a society. The lights go out if there is not space for people to undertake non-proscribed initiative in many different spheres, to be able to innovate, follow curiosity where it leads and organize political action to accomplish objectives and to organize dissent. And more fundamentally you can not get to communism with an understanding of socialism that is using instruments to understand reality that are crude and blunt—that don't see the actual multi-dimensional and uneven nature of reality as an advantage vs something to be feared and flattened. It's far more difficult to repeatedly go to the brink of being drawn and quartered—and it takes a much more conscious understanding of the whole process of getting to communism—that the masses have to take up and engage in an increasingly expanding way—but to demystify it, what other human endeavor has not had to make quantum leaps in theory and practice and to do so often with perilous stakes? On the other side of this—when you think about leading hundreds of millions of people who have been cruelly oppressed the majority of whom will be part of the revolution with the spontaneous outlook of revenge and hundreds of millions more who join the revolution at a time of crisis and want to get back to the way things were... If you don't think Marxism is a science you don't have a prayer of leading a revolution the way it is being newly re-envisioned.

Geometry until the 1970s had no way to comprehend reality that was not man made—it was smooth and ordered and there was no way to measure the “roughness” of the physical world until the development of fractals in mathematics. Solid core and elasticity as an abstraction is a qualitative leap and deeper reflection of reality and method for transforming it in the direction that conscious forces—with leadership—are working towards. Understanding that “there will necessarily be many different people and trends in socialist society pulling in many different directions”—that this is not only “the reality” but if you can embrace this—while leading the whole process, broadly in the direction of communism—all this unevenness is not just evil necessity. All of this can ultimately contribute to the process of getting at the truth and getting to communism.

The appreciation of reality as multi-layered and multi-dimensional—of transformations coming not from trying to flatten the complexity of society into linear lines of attack on key social contradictions—as crucial as those are—seems to be one of the things the next round of socialist revolutions are going to have to handle very differently. We’ve gone into some of this—the necessity Mao and the revolutionaries faced of being encircled by the spontaneity of bourgeois culture, and the superstructure of Chinese society being relatively untouched—but then reducing the oxygen for initiative in the superstructure to the model operas and shutting out and tightly constraining initiative from artists not consciously trying to create proletarian art forms. Of having to narrow the great difference between the countryside and the city—but seeing that only as “bringing the bottom up” and not seeing the positive role for things going in many different directions especially but not only in the cities and how that might impact the whole situation—or the reductionism of dealing with the “problem of the intellectuals” by sending them “down” to the countryside. The reification in that—of seeing class position and possible pathways for transformation in a very reductionist way—of what position you occupy in the division of labor of society as being determinant in a very reductionist way—contrasted with the more scientific approach you’ve been fighting for with the New Synthesis. In socialist society new things will arise that will have to fight for recognition including correct ideas and social movements in different arenas with revolutionary potential that do not come just “from the proletariat” but from unresolved contradictions in the society, and communist leadership has to be able to embrace and synthesize all this and lead it forward with the outlook and interests and scientific method of the proletariat that is seeking to eliminate itself as a class and emancipate all humanity.

If you really want to get rid of all exploitation... If you want to take up the scientific outlook of the proletariat vs the proletarians... the further distance traveled in “Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution”—between the Communist Movement and the Labor Movement—is indeed something to be celebrated! I’m sure I’m not the only one who yelled hurra for busting out of the “traditions” of economism!

Reification and economism and the flattening of different levels of contradictions and reality when put into power have in significant ways dimmed the lights—of the rich diversity and vitality needed for the kind of vibrancy where people and society can really begin to thrash things out and thrive—the kind of society people want to live in and fight for and carry forward. Flattening the contradiction between the individual and society is not something people will put up with for long—or be attracted to and willing to make great individual and collective sacrifices to bring into being. But to bring this back to the contradiction that I began with—handling great necessity—including being able to put your arms around the process as a whole—and not to narrow political, ideological and cultural life and curiosity to solving the most acute social contradictions or leading struggle along necessary major faultlines—is something that I think about or worry about.

This is something that I think you have written about—that this is part of the contradiction of the need for leadership and a Party on one hand—and part of the contradiction that objectively exists about being a disciplined vanguard when you gear up the machinery so to speak. And this too is something that elasticity based on a solid core speaks to. The vibrancy people around the world were inspired by in the Soviet Union in the ’20s being extinguished by the threat of war and Stalin’s mis-identification of problems and solutions. The mobilization of the whole society to address the differences between the countryside and the city—while an advance from Stalin—still carried with it problems of reification and flattening the contradictions that socialist society is teeming with to address an acute—strategic contradiction, and it seems like this same method has some connection to identifying the short term necessity with the long term objectives on the international level.

Elasticity based on a solid core—embracing and leading all of it—while still leading the whole process broadly in the direction of communism—as something like going to the brink of being drawn and quartered—and repeatedly. That is a radically different way of understanding socialism and transforming reality—this formulation from the Manifesto is like one of those equations that mark a break and a leap in human understanding (like $E = mc^2$ or the equation for fractals) that scientists are just beginning to mine and only a relative handful in the world right now actually understand—the stakes are enormous but there is a basis for people to take up this method and approach that has revived the viability and yes the desirability of Communism.

There are reasons people think “Here come the Communists—the party is over turn out the lights” that have to do with slander and reasons that have to do with how the proletariat has actually led society so far—and ways that this same ditty concentrates the gulf between the Communists and the masses that has to be bridged. You CAN get a positive cognitive dissonance going that gets on the grapevine—by challenging the verdicts in a societal way and people encountering the comrades who model something quite different—and more than anything by people learning about the Leadership We Have and becoming familiar with Bob Avakian—both as a leader who has come to concentrate what Communism IS and the person.

There are also ways that this beginning of a new stage of a communist movement has to look and feel like something entirely different than “turn out the lights” to the people stepping into it—and for those people dealing with the same gap between misconception and reality among their peers. Some of the same concerns expressed above about how we handle necessity and key objectives and not shutting out the many channels and multi layered nature of reality and how people come to take up communism are contradictions we have to do better on—and I’ll try and write more about that as part of reporting on the process of forging cores of ardent advocates for this line.

Six:

In thinking about the experience of our project and the basis for “here come the Communists, the party is over, turn out the lights,” I went back to the discussion in “Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity” about the reification of not only the proletariat but the reification of socialism itself. At the time “Making...” came out, this was one of those jump-off-the-pages points—the tendency to equate the immediate objectives of a particular phase with the whole transition to Communism, rather than seeing any particular phase as part of the larger process of the transition on a world scale to Communism. Along with this or as a result of this linear and mono-dimensional conception of socialism came real constriction of developments that appeared to (or in fact did) conflict with the main direction of things at any given time and/or of things which deviated from a linear conception of the socialist road to getting to Communism.

Isn’t it part of the reification of socialism to narrowly equate or to measure “the value” of human spheres of activity based on what they directly or demonstrably contribute to the political sphere in relationship to those immediate objectives rather than understanding how it is part of the overall process? And how unevenness as a phenomenon is going to be reflected in the overall process as well and between different spheres as well as within them? An appreciation of the rigorousness and the complexity of intellectual work in an overall sense and in relationship to specialization (which itself creates important new necessity in terms of the universal and particular but which I don’t think can be handled by negating the need for specialization). The pull to gauge everything through the political arena and the immediate objectives you are fighting to accomplish could lead to negating

both the embrace side of things and the does not replace side. And doing the latter without over simplifying the contradictions or tailing but being able to lead that as part of the overall process and maybe even mainly through the overall process.

One expression of the “turn out the lights,” I think is a great underestimation of the complexity of social activities that human beings engage in in many discrete spheres that need to be a vital part of the process—part of the mix of what it will take to uncork human potential in ways that can ultimately uproot all the vestiges of class society and the corresponding social relations and ideas. The recent quote from Bob Avakian (BA) run in the newspaper very poetically frames it ... “far from suppressing awe and wonder and imagination it will flourish in dialectical relationship with—AND IN AN OVERALL SENSE AS PART OF—a systematic and comprehensive scientific outlook and method for comprehending and transforming reality.” This is the opposite of the lights going out. The part of the quote in caps is getting at how these are not irrelevant distractions or dangerous deviations but an essential part of what makes us human and of the process of getting to Communism.

I also think this is related on many levels to the new synthesis, solid core and elasticity and the role of decentralization and individual(s) within the overall collective framework. It is complicated what goes into developing a passion, talents, abilities and breakthroughs or different schools of thought in different fields or opening up new fields of human knowledge altogether. There is much about how intellectual and scientific and artistic life cross national boundaries more so than ever before. (The point is not that artists and scientists aren’t influenced by nationalist considerations and cultural biases etc., but that interknittedness of the world has become more pronounced in part due to imperialist globalization and what that has made possible and necessary.)

There are often complex mixes of historical “stamps” of different periods in different parts of the world, along with an individual’s personal interaction with the proximal and larger dynamics of their circumstances (both in terms of causality and of chance) and how that all gets concentrated in different people who make contributions on different levels in many different realms of life. If leading/guiding institutions under socialism are too quick to prevent this from emerging in any robust way ... or try to channel these “impulses” and trends into what is most immediately needed or at least deemed “safe” outlets, it could very well squeeze the diversity and vibrancy out of social life that in the name of Communism will keep us from ever getting there.

In looking back on the ’60s I can think of a wide range of examples where the developments that contributed to breaking things open came in very unexpected and unanticipatable ways. It wouldn’t have been the ’60s without the influence of China and the emergence of the most revolutionary forces in the U.S., but it also wouldn’t have been the ’60s without the upheaval and challenging of convention that was going on especially among the youth and the attendant counter culture and many of the wild turns and dead ends that it spawned as well. The fact that there wasn’t a revolution meant that what was unleashed had to find expression within the framework of imperialism/capitalism because the whole framework wasn’t broken open. So this may account for some of why things went in a lot of these specific, different paths. But, I tend to think it’s not simply or even mainly this but rather the opposite. Great societal upheavals with strong revolutionary currents can give rise to much ferment and creativity throughout society in many aspects of social life and in very unexpected ways.

For instance, Chihuly who is famous now for his incredibly beautiful blown glass works went off during the ’60s to Europe to study the traditional masters and then did something very unique with the art form in size & composition and in public art presentations which were interactive with nature. Or Alice Waters who was in SDS at Berkeley is seen as having “revolutionized” concepts of what we eat. Stephen Jay Gould was another example. Bruce Lee. It isn’t a surprise that

these people came out of a particular time and even areas that were the concentrated “hotbeds” but each in the overall tumult of the times and the overall ethos fused this with their own passions and interests, in ways that changed the terrain in their fields and interacted back on other fields and the overall ideological and political terrain as a whole.

New areas of study and scholarship opened up that had not been conceived or tackled before and new questions were being asked. Ecology (this was relatively new back then; animal liberation as well). Gender studies. The recent discussion of the party’s line on the woman question and how the important work being done on these questions got written off; didn’t get embraced, sifted through, recast and synthesized to a higher level (embraces does not replace) is indicative of the problem when some unorthodox and radical currents emerge which don’t “fit” with the Communist movement to date.

We need to understand how what others are delving into about reality and its transformation can open up new insights and clash up against our understanding at any given time. And I would think that even more important is the ability to dig into our own underlying assumptions and examine do they really correspond to the transformations needed to get to Communism. In thinking about the third section of the new talk “Unresolved Contradictions,” part of the poverty of our thinking (economism) was because it didn’t get beyond the realm of bourgeois right and as discussed in the article “Most of the time most Communists are not Communists”, the Communist revolution can be turned into a vehicle for a more radical bourgeois equality rather than the most radical transformation of the historically conditioned social relations that arose with class divided society. An aspect of this, I think that is part of the unresolved contradictions is that the more that things can be radically transformed heading in the right direction, this will unleash even more ferment and questioning on the one hand at the same time that there will be a pull to settle for what has been achieved as basically good enough. Or if handled correctly the resulting ferment that is unleashed through the process can give rise to a deeper understanding of the contradictions and what it will entail to thoroughly transform things in ways that it is hard to even imagine at the start of the process.

Most important here is the method that would enable the Communists and everyone who is seeking to transform the world, to really look at these things from the lens of the truly radical transformations that we seek to help usher into the world.

I still think the way that Avakian framed the questions and the criteria that are needed to guide looking into the question of, in order to help frame the scientific investigation, debate and synthesis and for others to engage as well, is a very good model. A very important lesson in the discussion of that question is that the masses can be used to suppress in ways that is not that much different than if the state does it and that overall the chilling effect is very harmful for society.

One of the problems I have thought about in relationship to this question of the lights getting turned off—in a successful revolution, there is both the pull of “running things” and a settling in and the conservatizing effect, including in the party that the “trajectory” or strategic conception for many of the big questions is basically set and the process is one of working through the contradictions to step by step carry out the remaining transformations. This has been a big question throughout the cultural revolution in the party around the importance of theory, and of line in contrast to the view that the line is set and the question is how to implement it. I think this would really contribute to turning the lights out—we know what we need to know so really the only question is how can different sections of people be won to helping implement or carry out the immediate objectives that correspond to the current stage of the process. There is also a pull to want that to be an orderly process, even allowing for periodic outbreaks of class struggle, in contrast to the vision the chair has painted of a societal

environment where the level and scope of contestation in society is not at all “managed”. The debate is fostered, encouraged and allowed to rip and ripple throughout society with the party being in these currents as well as able to step back and look at the whole panoply of contradictions (and not just the things which are demanding the most attention spontaneously) to help lead the process. Looking for the basis of change in the unevenness of the transformation process, the unresolved underlying contradictions in socialist society and on that scale is an important part of the strategic conceptual rupture with past socialist societies.

I went back and re-read Skybreak on some idea of the social role of art and there is a lot of good food for thought in those essays relevant to these questions, including appreciating the social role of art that is distinct from other spheres like science or politics. One point that I thought captured this, “The particularities of the artistic process in no way free artists from having a social role and social responsibility, whether they recognize it or not. But the fact that art can, and should, present “a wide range of alternatives” and fresh insights into life and that it can contribute to the forging of new outlooks through a conscious skewing of reality and by being freed of the strictest accountability in this regard...” (and then it goes on to talk about both sides of the contradiction of being freed of strictest accountability). And later the article gives an example which I appreciated differently in this reading about the stream-of-consciousness writing of “some of the dadaists and early surrealists which were, I think, valid social experiments, testing and probing the limits of ‘sociality’ and individuality of artistic production and perception and fulfilling a useful function in the destruction of old and stuffy formalism among other things—even as these writings also revealed their own methodological limitations. And they revealed the fact that ‘freshness’ in art is after all not fundamentally dependent on some idealized notion of spontaneity, but on an ability to consciously ‘skew’ things in new and different ways—‘change the focus,’ alter and bend perspectives to provide fresh views and insights—all of which can only be aided by conscious reflection and struggle.”

The discussion of why these were valid social experiments and what they revealed about their own limitations and in doing so how this helps deepen an understanding of what achieving “freshness” of perspectives more pivots around etc. This example of dadaism (which I don’t know much about although I knew young artists who got into this in the ’60s as a form of challenging the suffocating atmosphere) and neither outright dismissing it nor uncritically embracing it but understanding and learning from it is the kind of approach that is needed to many phenomenon and trends that emerge in society (and to fostering an atmosphere where they can emerge and contend in the first place). This is where the moving multi-layered map becomes very important to understand not only the historical context and the potential pathways of change including whether/when/how to divert them from their spontaneous path. When I re-read this I thought if the Chinese Communist Party didn’t like jazz, they definitely would not have seen anything positive about the role of dadaism or surrealism and what gave rise to it, what role it was playing when it emerged etc.

I can understand the pulls involved in this because it goes on now in an embryonic form, the flattening of everything into the main direction that things of necessity must take but which can suck the air out of the vibrancy and the joy of the process. Understanding what we are doing as leading a process with all its richness and complexity. I have always been struck by the fact that even in the most dire situations (like the speech to the party meeting that launched the Cultural Revolution inside the RCP) that Bob Avakian evokes a lot of laughter not because the situation is funny but because he gets us to step outside ourselves and look at things including from through the lens of the absurdity of a particular argument or line. I find this to be in keeping with the last lines of *Harvest of Dragons*—defeating the bourgeoisie without in the process of what it takes to do this becoming like them.

I saw a play by Tom Stoppard, *Rock and Roll* which is set in a supposedly socialist Czechoslovakia

in 1968 (not) as it is being invaded by the Soviet Union as the backdrop. While it has important basics wrong, nonetheless the play is raising important questions, even if the play ultimately wraps them up into an anti-Communist package. The play revolves around the arrest and imprisonment of a Czech rock band and its ardent followers (which is a true story apparently) and beyond that dominant story line, there are other characters who are banging up against the defense of a rather economist vision of socialism articulated by a member of the Communist party—and unfortunately his arguments were not completely foreign. I guess what I am trying to say is that it was not a gross caricature of the Communist. There unfolds a sense that the social relations are too empty. For instance the professor's wife is angry with him because he is unable to comfort her during her battle with cancer — treating her as if she is merely a set of ideas disembodied from her person. Anyway, the band and its fans are not taking up this music because they want to topple the government. They love the noisy music (and maybe some amount of wanting to embrace the west or at least the youth culture of the west which is not synonymous with the governments and social structures). For the music fans, there seems to be a big element of breaking with the stifling atmosphere of the revisionist, drab society—and the music captured the youth who wanted to wail/rail about their alienation. In the play, the government and the party see the music as so threatening to the “order” of society that it has to be suppressed.

Coincidentally to writing this, I was recently listening to the 1st question from the film of the talk by Bob Avakian, *Revolution... Why it's necessary...* as you laugh along with the answer to the question — will people be able to smoke weed under socialism? You feel like the party is definitely not going to be over if a Communist leader like Avakian is leading the new socialist society. (And I am not just saying this because it still resonates personally!) The answer goes into how there should be many ways people will find to get high from being in a different kind of society and in that context we'll see how people want to relax and if people want to smoke weed. Then it makes the point about our mission is not to ban people from having fun in ways that don't harm others. The fun in the answer to this question is captured in both the comedic response, and in the way it is getting at something deep about our job is not to banish fun ... far from it. Communism and the scientific approach to freedom and necessity and transforming the world should be exhilarating and unleash a lot of fun in doing it even as there are very real stakes for what we are doing and will be all along the way. And I thought the way this was cast, the “we” (i.e. we collectively) was an expression of what we are setting out to do in putting before people the big questions (ok smoking weed is not THE big question) and expanding the “we” who will be part of figuring this out.

Seven:

“And the world stays fundamentally unchanged. Capitalism-imperialism continues humming in the `background,' crushing lives and destroying spirits in its meat-grinder of exploitation. And the horrors continue unabated.”

This is our standing and powerful refutation of every other trend in the world. On the other hand, the way that a lot of people look at what we're about—and not entirely without justification—is: “Here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party's over.”

Some thoughts on winning and holding power—and letting the lights blaze brightly:

How do we avoid that dynamic—which is not only a matter of bringing in a more lively and vibrant

society than we've been able to in the past, but of actually getting to communism? How do we, instead, construct society in which the pathways to getting to communism are increasingly opened wider, and cleared where they are blocked and calcified—even as power is firmly held onto?

The key to this lies in the new synthesis, applying its various dimensions. But the new synthesis is not just a more lively way of getting to communism—it is the difference between getting there and, sooner or later, being turned back, with the restoration of exploitative and oppressive capitalism.

To begin with, epistemology. In going back over “Dictatorship and Democracy, and the Socialist Transition To Communism,” it is striking that that is where it begins—with the real challenge of working with ideas in a critical and creative way, while being a member of a vanguard party, and with the contrast between a communist approach to other viewpoints and “proof-texting.” With the talk on epistemology later reprinted in Observations, this is elaborated. I won't repeat all that here—but it is really illuminating, and stimulating, to just refresh and recall some of what is laid out there. The question of “class truth” vs a “methodology that lets you get at the truth more fully”... of whether the intellectuals “are basically making trouble for us...”—all these are gone into here. I believe that much of the ability to synthesize something higher—and again, all this ultimately comes down to much of the ability to keep the pathways to communism opening wider, in a process that includes tributaries that branch off and then rejoin the main flow and current, to keep going on that road and not back to the past—flows out of the insights that can be grouped around this question of epistemology.

In short, do you *need* to be challenged, to be engaged, with vigor? And not just “you” in the sense of the vanguard—is *this* (vigorous debate waged by the most ardent advocates of contending views, initiatives and ideas coming from all quarters, an open ideological struggle in which people who do not believe in communism are not compelled either by law or social pressure to clothe their ideas in that fabric) the only way—the *only* way—that *society as a whole* can come to a deeper understanding of the truth and through that whole process transform the world *and transform itself and its own outlook, sensibilities, morality, aesthetic—its own consciousness and humanity—in the process?*

In this I want to highlight a certain point in the epistemology discussion:

It's not like Mao didn't have a lot of that, but it's a little bit different way, what I'm putting forward. You trust the masses that if you put the problems to them you can struggle with them, learn from them, lead them and win a big section of the masses as you do this.

and this is related to a point a bit later:

That's the synthesis of partisan and objective. Either we actually believe the most fundamental truth about capitalism and communism is what it is—either we have a scientifically grounded understanding of why communism should and can replace capitalism, all over the world— or we don't, in which case we end up fearing the truth.

Now all that carries with it the demand for a lot of work. I believe that this is importantly linked to the “parachute point”—which is really a recognition of the truth of the matter... that most people do not make the leap to ideologically becoming communists simply through participating in, or being alive during, the socialist revolution, monumental and unprecedented as that revolution is. This is not to deny that such an experience will act as a crucible, that it will change people's

outlooks and approaches to life in ways that are incredibly transformative. But people will still have other ideas, other ways of proceeding to the questions.

This I think relates to the tremendous importance of that (metaphorical) depth charge of a passage in the “Dictatorship and Democracy” talk:

But what about this question of official ideology that everyone has to profess? Well, I think we have more to sum up about that from the history of socialist society and the dictatorship of the proletariat so far.

With regard to the question of the party, I think two things are definitely true. One, you need a vanguard party to lead this revolution and to lead the new state. Two, that party has to have an ideology that unifies it, an ideology that correctly reflects and enables people to consciously change reality, which is communist ideology.

But, more broadly, should everyone in society have to profess this ideology in order to get along? No. Those who are won over to this ideology should proclaim it and struggle for it. Those who are not convinced of it should say so. Those who disagree with it should say that. And there should be struggle. Something has to lead—the correct ideology that really enables people to get at the truth, and to do something with it in their interests, has to lead; but that doesn’t mean everyone should have to profess it, in my opinion. And this is just my opinion. But it’s worth digging into this a bit, it’s worth exploring and wrangling with the question. [*Observations*, “Three Alternative Worlds,” pp. 15-16]

I went back as part of this and tried to find the constitution of the People’s Republic of China that they passed in ‘74. The best I could do was Chang Chun-chiao’s commentary on it, *Mao Makes* 5. Here is what he says, in discussing the first important revision between ‘54 and ‘74:

Starting from the preamble, the draft revised text records the glorious history of the Chinese people’s heroic struggle. “The Communist Party of China is the core of leadership of the whole Chinese people” and “Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought is the theoretical basis guiding the thinking of our nation”—such is the conclusion which the people of our country have drawn from their historical experience of more than a century and which is now inscribed in the General Principles of the draft.

The first statement is correct, but the second is not, or is at best open to serious eclectic interpretation, in that it implies or certainly leaves itself open to the interpretation that the people of the nation are all, or overwhelmingly, proceeding from the “theoretical basis of MLMTT.” This was, and would be in any future revolutionary society even several generations into the transition, a fiction. And fictions, *especially* so-called “useful fictions,” if taken literally do grave damage in the long run, and sometimes before too long; they mask the reality you are confronting. Such fictions blind you to the actual unevenness of phenomena, and hence blind you as well to the (multiple) pathways of potential development pertaining to any given phenomenon (and its interaction with the multifarious other phenomena of the world). If you say that this theoretical basis guides the thinking of the nation—and while there are world-views or ethos that have initiative in a nation and could be said to guide it in that sense, it seems to me that this formulation is definitely open to implying that

all or the vast majority of the people in the nation are into this, or should be into this—then people who disagree with that are either going to go silent and withdraw or else “learn the lingo” and figure out how to use it to mask, and advance, narrower interests.

The fact that most people do not and will not for some time proceed from this ideology is one of those unresolved contradictions that is a tremendous potential source of dynamism in socialist society. In the section of Raymond Lotta’s recent speech on the environment reprinted in the newspaper, here is discussion of the need to actually cut production.³ While I note that Lotta is rethinking that

³ In addition to his discussion of cutting consumption, and other points, some of Raymond Lotta’s points on the new synthesis, the socialist society, and ecology are important, I think—what will be NEEDED in order to advance, not just what the state will have to put up with while “holding its nose”...

[From Lotta’s speech:]

One of the things that Avakian has been emphasizing is the importance of intellectual, scientific, and cultural ferment in socialist society. Science must be freed from all the institutional fetters and constraints of capitalism that I mentioned earlier—like the commercial imperative, the role of the military, and so on and so forth.

On the one hand, socialist society will need to mobilize scientists, engineers, and ecologists to work on enormous problems such as the environment. There will be need to organize great mobilizations, great efforts and enormously focused projects to address the kind of calamitous situation we face. But society and humanity will also require far-ranging research, new thinking, and experimentation that will not be so directly related to these focused projects, because of the enormity of the environmental problems and because we need to understand more. And this experimentation must also be supported and funded. Science must be unfettered.

And at the same time, science must be uncloistered. There is the knowledge that comes from basic people in workplaces and communities. And socialist society must be promoting all kinds of cross-pollination of understanding and experience: meteorologists and engineers exchanging knowledge about the sciences and scientific method with basic people getting into science, while professionals will be learning from the insights and the aspirations of basic people.

Science will be popularized in society. The great debates among scientists and ecologists about how to solve the problem of global warming, about its scale and how it is developing—these debates, these discussions, these insights will be popularized and taken up in society. Socialist society, through the socialist state led by a vanguard party, will need to establish priorities in development: in reconfiguring industry, in allocating funds and materials and protecting natural resources.

We will need to create sustainable cities. We will need to develop agricultural systems that do not cause undue harm to the environment, that allow for technologies and practices that can be locally adapted and fitted to particular conditions—and that can deal with changes in climate, that can innovate, and that can respond to changes in need.

We will have to meet the great and immediate needs of the masses of people—to pay focused attention to those who have been at the bottom of society, their needs and requirements—and at the same time we’re going to have to be developing an economy that is no longer based on fossil fuels, and that’s going to require extraordinary innovation and extraordinary effort. It’s going to require a correct understanding of priority and how to mobilize and unleash people to address these problems.

But these policies, and indeed the very direction of society, all of this must be debated out broadly in socialist society. And the unresolved contradictions of socialist society, the fact that there still are social differences between professionals and intellectuals and those who are mainly working with their hands, the fact that in socialist society there is the need to use money and price in some forms, the fact that in socialist society there are still gaps in development between regions, still tremendous social struggles and ideological battles to wage to overcome patriarchy and the legacy of the oppression of minority nationalities. The fact that we don’t have all the answers to the environmental crisis.

point (there is the question of the character of production, and there is also the necessity posed to the new state by the need to defend itself and the need for some level of industry to do that), there will still definitely be a need for a different kind of production, a different level and type of commodity consumption, and a radical change in living standards and expectations and *aspirations*, etc. Terms will be set; but if this is just imposed on people it won't really take. There will need to be a tremendous amount of struggle and ferment in the superstructure around questions of morality and human nature—where people struggle over and define what *kind* of people they are going to be, with what kind of morality, outlook, etc. The role for art in this (and I have been thinking a lot about the particular crucial role of art in the synthesis of the visceral and theoretical) will be of great importance, as will be the role of free-wheeling debates and discussions and so on with people coming from all kinds of views... Actually, it is worth going even more deeply in regard to the character of participation of people like Arundhati Roy—on one level, they could be unleashed in many ways but it is also the case that they, or people like them, will tremendously *complicate* the process. The party will be struggling with masses over questions of outlook and ultimate goal, and non-communist intellectuals—proceeding from a whole host of places—will have their own ideas, and this will dramatically enter into the swirl, *even as counter-revolutionaries will be trying to operate in the midst of the whole thing*. In the short run this can pose problems in actually accomplishing transformations that will literally be crucial and this can even threaten the grip on power—but the “bet” here is that the understanding of reality that comes out of it will be immeasurably deeper and the whole process of sharp debate by ardent advocates will much more involve masses in comparing and contrasting and figuring out what is really true and what corresponds to the largest interests of humanity so that the ability to distinguish between black cat and white cat (which is ultimately what the state power of the dictatorship of the proletariat [DOP] must rest on) will be strengthened.

A lot of this will turn on questions of internationalism—and how will it be, what will be the process, where people in this country will come to *viscerally* feel a connection to people in the Himalayas, for instance, who are already being devastated by global climate change? Avakian, in that same talk, raises the question of the contradiction embodied in the need to have people demonstrate in favor of Vietnam in China during the GPCR... well, again, if you don't rely on what they relied on—education plus the influence of the party—but instead throw it open, it *can* become another source of vibrancy, of “keeping the lights on”—for will you plunge into the fray in ways that actually involve

All these kinds of things in socialist society will bring forward questioning..... will bring forward new ideas..... will bring forward protest, dissatisfaction, struggle..... and even upheavals. Is this a good or a bad thing?

Well, Avakian sees this as a driving force for continuing the revolution. And specifically with regard to the environmental crisis, he has spoken of what he calls the Arundhati Roys under socialism. As people know, Arundhati Roy had been in the forefront of struggles against the construction of environmentally destructive dams in India. Will Arundhati Roy and people like her still be able to protest under socialism? Avakian has emphasized that socialism must be a society where dissent is not only allowed but encouraged and valued. And people like Arundhati Roy must also be looked to—in order to help develop solutions to these very deep and serious environmental problems, even as there will be ideological struggle over issues of socialism, communism and where humanity is headed and needs to go.

This is all part of the process of getting at the truth of society and the world, of promoting critical thinking in socialist society, and enabling the masses to more deeply understand and more profoundly transform the world. And this will get very tense and wild at times, including protests and upheavals that can destabilize society. But all this is part of the process of getting to communism. Maximum elasticity and experimentation—without losing power, without losing the revolution and everything it means for world humanity. You need visionary communist leadership, a solid core, as Avakian calls it, to lead this complex process forward.

people in wrangling over and coming to feel differently about their connection to people in other parts of the globe fighting imperialism and trying to make revolution? (One of the great things about the '60s in this country was the way in which a whole section of the youth came to not just oppose the war but to *viscerally identify* with the Vietnamese.) At the same time, there will be real stakes involved in actually winning those struggles.

The analogy of *Remember the Titans* (also referred to in that talk) is interesting too in this regard—there was a ferment that worked itself into that situation as things “took”—the surfer/hippie/somewhat gender-bending kid, the role of the working-class white kid from Bayonne... there was a feeling of “the lights getting turned on” in what could have been a very stultifying scene if the *only* thing that had happened had been the Denzel Washington character imposing authority (even as a certain coercive authority was necessary to even start the whole process and set it in motion and even as that authority with the power of coercion was necessary to continue to “backbone” it). So if you pursue that, for a minute, there is a way in which the many channels can both get unleashed and given more room to develop with good leadership, and also ways in which that in turn becomes part of what is potentially favorable for the leadership to keep things going in the direction of communism.

Another example: in a salon that we did about two weeks ago with eight people of very different levels of partisanship and even basic acquaintance with what we're all about, another comrade introduced the idea that there would be, in socialist society, autonomous regions of the oppressed nationalities in which there would be autonomous control over education, culture, etc. Someone raised a question about this and we went into a bit more deeply why we would do that and what it would look like and how it would relate to the society overall, and then someone else (who's been around for a while) disagreed and raised that “wouldn't that just feed a lot of nationalism, and if you did that, how would you prevent women or even gay people from having their own autonomous regions?” And again, the whole question of “no official ideology” (but a vanguard leading the new state that IS united around communist ideology) and the parachute phenomenon and all that as a potential source of vibrancy came into play—for the fact is that if you unleash all kinds of people into thinking that this is THEIR society and that THEY have a role to play in making the world anew, even while you are struggling with people to take up communist ideology (and hopefully that struggle is being carried out in an inviting, involving and illuminating way) but have not yet won most of them to it, people are going to be flooding into political and social life with all kinds of notions and different ideologies (or at least influenced by different ideologies) including nationalism and feminism... and while we should be aware of the openings that presents for counter-revolutionary forces, why should we quake at that? (This relates to the guppies/sharks point in that epistemology discussion with comrades [see *Observations*].) Why shouldn't we and why wouldn't we welcome the opportunity to join things with people who are into nationalism or feminism as part of their search for a way to remake society without oppression, or at least without particular kinds of oppression—to work side by side with them, to discuss things, to debate, to learn and lead...? If our shit is so right, we should certainly be able to join it with people who are into those other trends and learn a hell of a lot in the process—and it will be a much more interesting way for many many people to work out for themselves what IS the ideology that can lead to a world without oppression than if the only way they get it is in hothouse atmosphere, or where that ideology itself is given a place of privilege in the discourse that goes beyond “setting the terms” and actually veers into “monopoly on the truth” (or at least a “special purchase” on the truth)—which HAS been a problem pointed to by the new synthesis.

That “monopoly on the truth” has been, I believe, a major factor in “turning out the lights.” And the fact that we don't and won't claim such a monopoly is a major part of the “no” in the answer

to “aren’t you going to be just another version of the Islamic Republic of Iran? yes and no”—one reason that the future society is not going to feel like the IRI because those leading the society are *not* going to labor under the illusion, and force others to labor under the illusion, that they have a monopoly on the truth or anything more than a methodology that enables them to get at the truth more fully (and we will have to be vigilant to combat the latter sliding into the former, by dint of people’s tendencies to mush things together *and* the powerful pull of spontaneity in situations where state power is in the balance and you really are in danger of going over the brink and actually *being* drawn and quartered).

Why should we be scared of something analogous to autonomous regions being set up for women who just don’t want to deal with men for a while? Why can’t that—and why can’t the autonomous regions for oppressed nationalities—be a source of vibrancy in the society, interacting with (and sometimes not) the larger society, bringing different challenges, some focused on eliminating a particular form of oppression and some going further afield (and even the questions of national oppression and women’s oppression should not be narrowly construed in a way walled off from other big questions) and not just letting different contradictions come out, but striving to “surface them” when we can sense they are roiling underneath... all this should not be reduced to some sort of concession but should be seen as a potentially genuinely exciting element of socialist society!

Related to this epistemological point: there is a discussion in *Observations* in the chapter “A Scientific Approach to Maoism, A Scientific Approach to Science” that also pertains to this point—the question of resisting the pull toward “turning out the lights,” of being scientifically grounded enough in why that will cut against the further advance toward the truth (through zigs and zags) and, hence, the further advance to communism and will eventually lead to the return to capitalism.

Are we going to have a scientific approach to our science or not? This doesn’t mean we are retreating into “contemplative philosophy”—just thinking about, or contemplating, things for its own sake, in the sense of not trying to change the world. What I have tried to bring forward is a different way of approaching understanding and changing the world, including that I took the Mao formulation about “embraces but does not replace” and developed it more in terms of the whole dialectical process between Marxism and other schools of thought. What I am arguing for, in regard to “embraces but does not replace,” is a very complex thing. It is a very dynamic thing. It is grounded in the understanding and orientation that, ultimately and in a fundamental sense, we can and should embrace everything. Marxism is a way of engaging all of reality, not just some parts of it.
[p. 83]

And then Avakian goes from there to get into “Communism and Different Schools of Thought.” He states that “it is actually *good* to have a clash of schools of thought. At this stage [note: I understand “this stage” in context to refer to the whole period before the emergence of communist society] it is even good to have the clash between Marxist and non-Marxist schools of thought. Not because Marxism is not capable of ultimately embracing everything, but because you don’t want to turn it into a ‘closed system.’ And while all Marxists should learn to think as creatively and critically as anybody—or more so—it is also good, for this whole period, to have the dynamic between that and people who are not Marxists, or at least not consistently Marxists.”

I just have to ask, do we all realize just how *new* and how *radical* this really is? How Mao’s insight into “embrace/not replace” has been qualitatively opened out into this much more

expansive and much more *materialist* (and non-religious) vision of how humanity will change the world and itself? And do we realize, and are we conveying, and actually applying right now, how much this can be a source of vibrancy and ferment and not just not turning out the lights, but keeping them brightly blazing?

Here is a vision of a society in which radical debate flourishes in every sphere—because, again, nobody has a special purchase on the truth and there is no requirement that ideas pass through any sort of ideological strainer in order to be judged as potentially true, or even admissible to the discourse—no “strainer,” that is, other than rigorous scientific research and debate to test their correspondence to reality... and in which communist thought grows through interacting and contending with and, ultimately, synthesizing and encompassing the best of different trends... though even this latter point, which rests on a view of communism as overarching, would itself be controversial... And a good controversy at that. (Well, obviously, there are material constraints on what can be published and filmed, etc. and there is the constraint of bogus theories that have clearly proven to be false... but I’m focusing on a different point here.)

This is the only way that masses will come to the communist stand, method and outlook in any kind of well-grounded yet “agile” way. People will learn through research and debate (as well as other kinds of practice), through comparing and contrasting—and as regards debate it will be debate with consequences, debate that spurs people to go deeper on their own, and with others, etc. because it will be urgent to know, as deeply as possible, just what the “truth of the matter” is. Independent journals, on-line threads, conferences, salons, free-lance seminars... the flourishing of a certain kind of civil society which would precisely roil and be alive with great debate and discussion...all this can be and will be part of a whole different society. It will pose challenges—how not to “lose the whole thing,”—but it will also compel a much more scientific approach throughout society.

This relates to that example above about nationalism and feminism. Can communism hold its own? I think that there will actually be a flourishing of some nationalism and feminism, and I also think there will be the potential for a fruitful contention/collaboration between those trends and communism (here the recent talk’s emphasis on how it would have been better to have engaged the theoretical work being done by feminists back in the day applies). A tension, yes, but (what should be and can be) a fruitful tension ... for so long as these contradictions are unresolved, they will find expression in different ideological tendencies, different roads forward contending for followings among masses... and so long as things are unknown, there will be different schools of thought that arise to inquire into and explain them, different methods and advances in method (in part spurred on by deeper understanding of objective reality—just as advances in physics spurred on different advances in method, including most recently in the piece done a year ago in the paper from BA re: “Crisis in Physics, Crisis in Philosophy”). And so long as the four alls have not been abolished, these differences will ultimately reflect different classes, and some of these challenges could give strength to other class forces, to directions that would take, if pursued, things back toward capitalism. But again—this is the best way for society as a whole, and the people making up that society, to get at the truth... it does require *leadership*, and it puts more challenges than ever on the solid core... but it is the only way to go. If you can’t rule something out of order by fiat (and we shouldn’t *want* to), then you—and everyone else—are going to have to work a lot harder, to get at the truth and to get at the underlying contradictions behind what is being thrown up in this grand debate and ferment. But the more and better we learn to do this, the more the lights will go on and blaze.

How WOULD you handle the low turnout at a demonstration of international solidarity (to refer to the example given in the “Dictatorship and Democracy” talk)? You could rely on social coercion of greater or lesser severity... or you could do what we have to do now, which is to figure out why the

fuck that is happening and try to transform it. It's funny, and it's been remarked on many times by Avakian—when you don't have state power, you can't really get anything done without winning people to it, and that requires work. How many times has the Chair returned to, and led us to return to, the problem of the paralysis borne out of the pyramid configuration politically and the underlying parasitism of U.S. society (among other things), and gone at that from so many different angles? We continue to work on that question of winning people to actually take action around the abuses and the whole direction of society...

I also think that some of what is being gotten at in the importance of a constitution applies to this. Both the guarantee of rights and giving people a sense of the rules of the game... but also the struggle that will be involved—the mass ferment and debate—in the process of changing the constitution. That's something I want to think about more, but you can envision a whole debate when you do that about where society should go anyway, what should be our goals as a society, what set of rules and procedures can best encompass without unnecessarily constraining that, how do the organs of power at any given time actually concretely relate to getting to the 4 alls and in what ways are they beginning to pose themselves against that, etc. That kind of debate and struggle can be tremendously involving and many new waves of people can come forward through that sort of thing...

* * *

A word on the development of dialectics by Bob Avakian. In the history of our movement, too many things have been combined together to conceal contradiction and unevenness. Mao brought this out in Stalin's denial of the existence of antagonistic classes in socialism. But it was more pervasive than just that. The combining of the party and masses (not that anyone said that they are the same, but there were tendencies to treat them the same—e.g., democratic centralism as the form of organization not just for the Party but for the society as a whole, or communism as not just the ideology of the Party but also the ideology of everyone else)... the combining of the proletariat and the truth (or the wrong sort of understanding of the “partisanship” of communist ideology)... these ideas all serve to conceal contradiction, unevenness and even antagonism even as they seem to finesse it. Mao's rupture was tremendously important—his contributions stand out all the more in historical perspective—but he was going up against a whole system of thought that was intertwined with a whole way of leading and “running” society, in a mutually reinforcing dynamic. He inherited a system of thought that went along with that whole model and was wrong on some essential points. It is not that Mao did not make tremendous advances and truly immortal contributions in the dialectical method, especially in the grasp of the fluid interpenetration/struggle of all things, the role of leaps and ruptures, etc. and, importantly, the rupture with some of the metaphysics and idealism, and mechanical materialism, that Marx and Engels carried with them, despite their own monumental rupture. But there are still important ways in which the dialectical method and approach brought forward by Avakian more sharply interrogates and illuminates reality—e.g., the multi-layered, multi-level map; the role of unevenness; etc. The recent talk, for example, takes three vexingly difficult questions, all of which have been scenes of real setback or at minimum cruel (relative) stasis over the past decades... and shows the teeming life beneath the ice.

* * *

A few further points, written a little later:

In the salon referred to above, people first listened to the “Imagine” section of the DVD and then question 21 on the q/a of the 7 talks, which goes into the differences between society being organized on the basis of democratic centralism, and what Avakian has been working on with solid core

with a lot of elasticity (and this also includes a point on funding Amy Goodman, and what goes along with that in terms of “complicating things”). I had made a point early on in this salon about Copenhagen and the ability to actually deal with this being fettered by capital and enforced by the state, and the crying need for revolution and a whole new state power to actually deal with this. And everyone roundly agreed. And then, later, the other comrade leading this brought in the Amy Goodman point referred to in that q/a, and the need to fund her even as she would be opposing you, at least in part...and everyone again roundly agreed, even more firmly—like, of course, why ever would we *not*? But then the other comrade raised “but what if the Amy Goodman mobilizes people to oppose your plan to save the environment?? What if people, or a lot of people, don’t want the lower consumption of commodities as much of what we would need to be doing would entail...and you are waging struggle with them... and then Amy Goodman comes into the mix and says you’re going about it all the wrong way? Or what if someone like Howard Zinn opposes doing things to aid revolutionary struggle in other countries on a pacifist basis?” “Ohhh...” and people began to get a different sense of the complexity and stakes of what this is all about.

I think to a certain extent there is an analogy to the fact that if we are able to actually gel a core of students today around our line, as part of a larger ferment on campuses, it will actually be part of stimulating the growth of other trends of thought...though it would be more dialectical than that in how the interplay between other trends gaining adherents and our solid core taking root and growing would actually go. In fact, this salon itself was an example of solid core with a lot of elasticity... though there were only eight people besides myself and this other comrade, they came from a range of outlooks and experience, including at least one or two who had not yet seen the Imagine section. But we were able to lead this in a spiralling sort of way where people were able to get their ideas out on the floor, test them out against each other (and against, or better said in the context of, what was being said in the DVD and audio, which we at times brought it back to), and work things through to where everyone participated on a level in grappling with what would be the character and contradictions of socialist society that stimulated everyone and put people in a mood to get into this more. It was the furthest thing from dull.

It is worth noting here that a major feature of this salon was debate and discussion over human nature and whether it can be transformed... and the role of state power, and what kind of state power, in that transformation. This was in large part conditioned by, and wrangling with, why people were so passive these days, so tuned out, so uninvolved not only in politics but in any kind of ferment whatsoever—and how and whether you could actually ever make a revolution, and how much people needed to change in order to do that and whether they could change and how to get them to change. We didn’t say “yeah, but that’s not what we’re talking about” or “oh, okay, if that’s what you want to discuss then let’s discuss that and forget about the agenda” but instead we were able to listen to people, to let it run a bit, and then to see where their very real and important concerns did relate to the larger project that is the new synthesis, including in its dimension of what kind of state power, and how that state power envisioned the transformation of human nature (in a different way than “engineering human souls” or a narrowly constrained party-masses dialectic that would leave out, and eventually suppress, the different kinds of initiative that people would be hungering to take, the contending schools of thought, civil society, etc).

This question of human nature also came out in a very interesting salon that another comrade and I led right before New Year’s—this one with people who are more consistently working in the core of various Party-led initiatives or else interacting with the Party in consistent ways. This was a very lively salon, focused on part IV of the Manifesto and in particular the elements of philosophy and DOP in the new synthesis, and also a bit (as part of that) on Bob Avakian the person. One person is a psychologist and is very much grappling with how much can we change people now and some of

what he openly recognizes as perhaps illusions to exaggerate how much this can be done short of a new state power...this went along with, on his part but it also came out when others tried to speak to this, something of a difficulty in imagining how that power would work, what it would “look like”... and getting into this in different ways was important and illuminating. And then, off another question, we got much more deeply into the question of dictatorship and democracy (and the point which we really *should* popularize, of “democracy—it’s just another dictatorship!”).

People really do need to know—and *we* need to both have a better sense of and more clearly articulate —*what* this new power will do. We need to imbue people with a much more living sense, now, of how state power will be a very good thing, something worth sacrificing everything for, something crucial to hold onto... and give them as well a living sense of our understanding of how to make sure it remains *worth* holding onto. A more living and concrete sense of the vast difference between bourgeois and proletarian dictatorship... and bourgeois and proletarian democracy. To put it another way, a more living and concrete sense of what we mean by solid core with a lot of elasticity... both through discussion *and* through their lived experience of working with us (and there is still much to improve on both fronts). Because again, the more that we are doing all this now... really fitting people to be emancipators of humanity *now*, to the greatest extent we can... the better shape we’ll be in at that future point when the opportunity presents itself to NOT let the world go on as it is, and the better shape we’ll be in to keep the lights blazing.

* * *

One exciting thing about the new synthesis is the implication that we do NOT have a pre-formed or static vision of what the “new man” (to use that term from Guevara that was prominent in the ’60s) will be... we don’t know exactly what the first human born in a time when the 4 alls really are abolished, when the “no mores” really are “no more” will feel and act like... but instead that this will be the work and the outcome of people themselves, increasingly and consciously struggling with those 4 alls as the lodestar, over “what kind of people are we? what does it mean to be human? where are we trying to go?”

This leads to another source of “brightness”—the struggle to forge a new morality, and the closely-related struggle to transform human nature.⁴ This struggle *was* embarked on in China in a way that really broke new ground. I heard a talk given by the curator of the exhibit on art of the GPCR at the Asia Society last year—he had been an urban art student in 1949 and taken up the revolution, and then been struggled against, sharply, during the GPCR. While far from a supporter of the GPCR or Mao, neither was he a mindlessly bitter opponent, and when one of us asked him a provocative question it sort of surfaced some latent “socialist morality” in him. Then another person in the audience commiserated with him over the fact that he had produced all this very popular art during the ’50s and ’60s, and never gotten personal credit for it, let alone money. He replied, well, yeah, that

⁴ We also did a salon during this holiday period with some party members focused on the new talk. One comrade at one point, really invigorated and stimulated by what she had been reading on the woman question, raised that this posed the question of a whole sphere of struggle around morality in socialism to her in a different way. “What will the morality actually be around teenagers experimenting with sex?” Yes, that is true, that will be very contentious and rich—but don’t we have to right now be struggling over and forging answers to that question, if we are even going to be able to get to state power? And shouldn’t the process of doing that be a “lights-on” process that will give people a sense of what it would be like with a whole different power...and be part of “fitting them to rule?” All the way back many years ago, I remember the Chair raising the point re: fitting the masses to rule that this can’t wait until after the seizure of power.

was true, but you have to understand—none of us really cared about that back then—we were more concerned with serving the people.

In other words, there really was a different morality that people took up, fairly broadly, and this took a leap with the GPCR (and here too you could hear this in the talks that Bai Di and Dongping Han gave). At the same time, I think that in future societies this needs to be much more consciously and creatively taken up by the masses, and as something to struggle over. Is there an analogy to the socialist constitution? Just as the constitution at a given point will correspond to the level of development of the struggle for the 4 alls, so too with the morality... and this will be in motion, and not static, and there should be ferment and debate and initiative in this realm as well, as there will be with the constitution, and nodal points when things take a leap. With the constitution, that will culminate in re-writing; I don't think we're going to want to codify morality in quite that way, but there are, I think, ways that you can see how this works.

Not to digress too much, but this is a very critical fluid feature of every revolutionary struggle and even radical upsurge. The U.S. Civil War, actually, featured two very different moral visions of what is freedom and what is justice and what it means to be human, and the protagonists in that conflict self-consciously understood it this way, even if they didn't get the class relations at the bottom that were shaping those antagonistic views. This is reflected in the ways that the major Protestant denominations split in the years going into the Civil War. Arno Mayer asserts in *The Furies* that competing moralities and notions of what it means to be human were arrayed against each other in the French and Russian revolutions (he also argues that the revolutionary moralities in both cases took on the character of religion, which seems maybe overdrawn in the latter case but also has an element of truth—Stalin's mummification of Lenin's body being one example of religious trappings).

Even the hippies and earlier the beatniks—weren't those different moralities? There were other things going on, but these were also cases of a generation declaring that the dominant morality was bankrupt, ridden with hypocrisy, and, at best, lacking all relevance. The hippies were a very spontaneous phenomenon—there was no Moses delivering a worked-out new moral code with 613 commandments. But there was still something different in the moral sphere there, with its own art, styles and beauty standards, sexual morals, education, views of work and money, and it did pose and was surely perceived as a challenge by the larger society and the authorities of that larger society (interesting how hippie boys walking around with long hair in particular drove cops and reactionaries up the wall—with one of the favorite witticisms of the reactionaries of the period being “how do you tell the boys from the girls?”). Looked at from the vantage point of not turning out the lights, there's probably quite a bit more to mine from that whole hippie phenomenon. In any case, the society we're talking about should be generating those kinds of challenges, even as there is a solid core that is itself both taking initiative within that whole sphere as well as keeping its big arms around, while letting rip, the ferment that does bubble up.

There is a particular and very important role of art in all this. I find it interesting that two very important movies of the past year—*Avatar* and, earlier, *District 9*—both (among other things) challenged the audience on what, indeed, does it mean to be human, and in a very visceral, and literal, way (in *District 9* in particular the audience is purposely led to find the aliens repulsive and then finds their allegiance shifted through the course of the film). And both, I think, succeed in making people re-think their assumptions, including their moral ones. To the extent that there will be a flowering of that—and there is every reason that there should be one in the kind of new society we are talking about/struggling for—people will be stimulated to be constantly thinking and re-thinking these questions.

There will be lots of spheres where this gets joined, both in relation to sharp political events and junctures, and in its own right. Internationalism will surely be one such sphere. The woman question will be another. In the latter in particular, people will not limit themselves to debate but will want to live their morals, with experimental communities of different kinds that found themselves on different social relations (as happened, to a limited extent, in the '70s)... Some of these will bear fruit and some will not, but there has to be room for this sort of thing, and a leadership that knows how to let this run and at the same time encompass it and learn from it for the larger direction, even as it will at times run against immediate needs and goals in some short-term senses. The state power in U.S. society, faced in retrospect with what were truly wonderful and wondrous challenges and all kinds of creativity in every sphere, had very little to respond with other than repression and relentless commodification. A lot of very creative impulses were essentially either crushed or else “starved out,” left to die on the vine.

What forms are brought forward to rear children... what kinds of romantic/sexual relationships develop between people ... how to “maximally emancipate” in these spheres while dealing with, and transforming, the very real (but also, as Mao insisted, the relatively fluid) constraints of the material base of society—all these will be living, and lively, questions in the new society. Just as art works like *Revolutionary Road* bring the relationships of the former periods under sharp interrogation, in part to unearth things that continue to assert their influence today, so too will there be artworks pointing to the roots of still-unresolved contradictions and insistently raising the question as to how much has really changed. And just as other art works like *Woman On the Edge of Time* project themselves as far as they can into the future to both deeply critique the relations of today and inspire, so too will such works have an even more profound scope and influence in the future society... giving expression to the restless frustration that many will feel even with what at one point were truly advances.

Art, I believe, is critical today and will be critical in the future in giving people a visceral sense of “what it feels like” to be someone else. That is for sure not its only function, and it should not be reduced to that... but it surely is one important function, and it is accomplished in many different ways and in every sphere (including absolute music!).

Which is not to say that this sphere is “ours” or something, that art as art somehow naturally leads you to communism. There is also art that hardens the heart, that reinforces the narrow, and there will be art in the future that will be very very mixed—with one and same work encompassing both revengism and/or pining for elements (and relations) of the past, and loftier sentiments simultaneously. And there will be, literally, the art of the past—which has all its limitations, but cannot just be tossed into the trash can. But here too—let’s set terms... and let it contend. For surely art that more truly reflects future possibility can surpass that which insists on dwelling in and ultimately extolling the land of limits and the defense of privilege.

To close: none of this is possible without state power. We want state power. But we must at the same time, remember why we want it and what it must ultimately serve. To quote “The End of a Stage – The Beginning of a New Stage: Mao More Than Ever!”:

If it is true that without state power all is illusion, it is no less true that the whole purpose of proletarian state power is to continue the revolution and advance to communism—and without this, state power itself will become an illusion for the proletariat!

Eight:

I first became aware of the phrase and song, “Turn out the lights, the party’s over,” thru Don Meredith on Monday night football. His use of it was to declare that the particular game they were televising was for all intents and purposes over, that it was decided who was going to win and who was going to lose. So when I heard this phrase as something the intellectuals would say when they saw the revolutionaries coming, the first thing that hit me was them having and expressing their sense that revolution (the party) has been tried and failed. And that it was time to turn the lights out on that project. But paying a little more attention to what we were being asked to address made clear that the expression we were being asked to speak to had to do with their sense that the kind of world the revolutionaries would bring into being if we succeeded in making our first great leap, would be one where the lights would go out on much that would make it a world that people would want to live in.

Much of this sense of revolution as a world where the lights would be out is rooted in the lies and misconceptions promoted by the anti-communist offensive the imperialists intensified in wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The talk that Stalin, and Mao, murdered millions, that all freedoms were stripped away from individuals, that intellectual life was curtailed, etc. And by the lack of critical thinking about what these revolutions were trying to accomplish and what they were up against. Like seeing that adults in revolutionary China wore clothes that were all the same color and attributing that to a desire to create a world where the color and life had been squeezed out of people and society.

Not getting what they were up against here. That given the lack of resources they were dealing with, they decided not to devote the resources needed to dyeing the clothes worn by adults. But that they did begin to dye the clothes worn by children, a decision that explicitly came from deciding that the children should have more “light” in their lives. But the reason for these decisions and other steps taken by the revolutionaries in power in China and the Soviet Union are outside the considerations of people when thinking about the things that are said about those revolutions. The verdicts on these revolutions remain unexamined.

There’s another part to the sense that the lights will go out if the revolutionaries succeed. It is that the revolutionaries made mistakes, got some things wrong and fell short on others. In a discussion over the Manifesto, one young person who works closely with the Party spoke of a scientist from the Soviet Union in the ’30s who had wanted to explore an area of research that the Party decided was something that wouldn’t directly advance the goals they were trying to accomplish. He wasn’t allowed to pursue his research, so he risked his life to go into exile to pursue it. As I recall, the person said he walked across a frozen river, at one point falling thru a thin part and having to swim in icy water to make it out. A close tie who was engaged in this discussion asked whether it would’ve been possible for the Soviet Union to devote the resources to the area of research this guy wanted to pursue. That maybe it was better that they put those resources to some other purpose.

I figure that’s exactly what they were thinking in the Soviet Union at the time, and that there will be a huge pull to that kind of thinking in a future revolutionary society. “There’s a lot of things we need to do right now. A lot of immediate needs to meet, as well as necessary transformations to make. How can we fritter away our resources by chasing those paths which might lead to nothing but dead ends?” There will also be a social base for this kind of thinking.

(It’s a key indicator of the potential for successfully charting the uncharted course—making revolution in this kind of country—whether we could win people like this tie to grasp and take up the

re-envisioning of communism that BA has been bringing forward. Millions and millions of people from the social base for revolution having a solid, if basic, understanding of the important role of winning the allegiance of broad sections of the intelligentsia to revolution and winning sections of them away from aligning with imperialism will be a key part of having a shot at making this kind of revolution in the first place.)

It seems like the question here wasn't just resources, but was it a problem for the revolution to have these intellectuals pursuing various avenues of research and knowledge without the oversight of the state. Not only would much of this, if not most of this, not lead to directly advancing very real and important goals that it was life and death for the revolution to achieve, but it would leave you with all these people going off in their own directions, investigating things, finding things out that may or may not be good for the revolution for them to be discovered and exposed.

Here this goes beyond the immediate constrictions the Soviet Union faced resources-wise to even the better experience on this front in China. There was the 100 flowers campaign, and I know the conventional wisdom on this, or at least what gets said in a lot of the books and articles on this, is that it was basically a trap. Let people express their bourgeois ways of thinking so you could identify who was the problem and then arrest them for it. I know there is a complex reality to this—that forces opposed to Mao's leadership seized on difficulties coming off the Great Leap Forward to gain the initiative and reverse a lot that he was trying to do. And that this could've meant that these forces did indeed use the campaign Mao had initiated—the 100 Flowers—for a purpose different than he intended. And actually arrested some of those who had spoken out during the 100 Flowers.

Leaving aside these complexities for the moment, it does seem to have been the case that while Mao had a better grasp on the role of the intelligentsia, his approach was one of leading a controlled process. One where people who held unpopular ideas weren't suppressed for that and involving the masses in the process of directing the new society was to be how things worked, but that all this was to be guided in the desired direction that the revolutionary authority felt things needed to be taken. A kind of 'everybody marching in step' toward the desired communist goal.

This is something different than solid core with a lot of elasticity, than creating an atmosphere that encourages diversity, questioning, involvement and dissent, including from those who oppose the goals for the revolution. Also different than unleashing and trying to lead a process that repeatedly drags you to the brink of being drawn and quartered. Not that if you fuck up, you could end up being dragged to this brink, but that if you're doing things right, this will repeatedly happen.

Why do we need to take this approach? We're trying to bring into being a classless, communist world. Why do we need the involvement of people who oppose that goal? They not only don't know how to realize that goal—they don't want to see it realized. What's the point to giving them the ability to have their say?

This reminds me of another engagement with a tie who was grappling with Avakian's new synthesis. One of the parents of police murder victims who has been a stalwart in that movement, and who has been supportive of some of the things the revolutionaries have done that weren't directly related to fighting police brutality. (This divides up. Some of those initiatives he supported were being guided by an overall revisionist approach. But he also watched the Revolution talk DVD. And he loved the talks by BA on religion and democracy we held after this talk.) In hearing us talk about why it would be important to create an atmosphere of interrogation and dissent, including by people who weren't down with the goals of the revolution, he said "You all can deal with those people. I don't think I'm gonna want to hear from people who weren't with us when we made the revolution."

There's a lot of people who feel this way about this. And when the question of revolution comes to the fore, isn't something that's the "farthest thing from people's minds" like it is for most people today, there will be many, many more who think this way. And we'll need to tap into, unleash and lead such people to make revolution in a country like this. Which means we'll have to win large numbers of people to see why we do need to be willing to listen to people who aren't with the goals of the revolution, but to be encouraging them to tell us what they think about things, including what they think about what the revolutionary authority is doing and not doing.

Back to why we need to take this approach—this comes down to needing to know reality as deeply and as it really is and as it's developing in order to transform it in the desired direction. It matters that our aim is to end exploitation and oppression once and for all, but having good intentions won't guarantee that we'll not go off track in trying to realize that goal. We need to know what we're dealing with as best as we possibly can and need to be able to check that understanding of reality along the way often from different angles to stay on course. Our approach should make us best able to get at reality as it actually is, but even applying that approach correctly won't cut it. We'll need to have all the forces in society we can unleash also investigating reality and posing what they're finding out and thru sorting thru what's correct and incorrect in our and everyone else's take on reality that we'll be able to come to as deep an understanding of reality as we can.

There will be forces seeking to fish in these troubled waters—reactionaries wishing to use the chaos this approach will necessarily unleash to bring forth forces aimed at overthrowing the revolutionary authority. Again, it's not that this could happen if we fuck up, but this seems like it will be a part of the process. Such forces won't cede the field to the revolutionary authority to see how well it does, and they will be attuned to what openings our approach provides them. The revolutionary authority will have to work to stop such forces from succeeding in their aim to turn society back to capitalism without closing down the elasticity they'll be trying to fish in. Because without this elasticity, we won't be able to unleash the process that can keep the process of revolutionary rule moving in the direction of communism.

In going thru this I was initially thinking about things like scientific research and political expression, but it also has application to the realm of culture, broadly considered. Look, after revolution is made in a country like this, it would probably not be possible to immediately make available a television system with 100's of channels like are available today in this society. But if the upshot of the revolution is that people have to give up access to a wide variety of different cultural expressions, we're going to start hearing from a lot of folk that things were better before the revolution.

I don't know all the right terms for this, but we're going to need to be able to have cultural expressions on the level of fine arts—painting, sculpture, movies, music, other kinds of performance, as well as more popular level cultural expressions in a variety of arenas. Some of this will take the form of breaking down barriers that kept broad sections of people from participating in these realms, but it can't just be that. On a radical list that I subscribe to, someone posted a stream of consciousness e mail that in the midst of touching on a number of topics ranted about how it was BS for the Russian revolutionaries to have funded the Bolshoi after seizing power. After all, wasn't ballet just something for those who were better off. Something the masses wouldn't give a damn about.

Here you have someone professing to be some kind of revolutionary explicitly calling for turning out the lights if revolution were to be made in a country like this. This won't be our problem, but we will have to ensure that we don't end up turning out the lights in the name of focusing our attention and society's resources on meeting the needs of the masses and carrying out the reconstruction

that will be necessary. And that we don't mishandle maintaining the allegiance of the intelligentsia and/or the class struggle in ways that could end up affecting our ability to keep the lights on. Because it won't be the case that the revolutionaries will be able to bring forward all the cultural expressions that will need to be out there in the new society. This isn't just a matter of keeping people from getting dissatisfied with the new society, but making the new society one where the relationships between people and between people and the state is continually being transformed in the direction of communism.

There will need to be cultural expressions developed on the basis of communist principles that are out there impacting public opinion. But there will also need to be other cultural expressions out there contending with them, with other people bringing forward things that interrogate what the revolutionaries are producing and are themselves being engaged by the masses broadly. Some model works will be needed, but if all the masses have access to are the model works, then people will be saying, as I said above, "things were better off before the revolution."

When people actually consider what's involved with all this, one thing that we've heard is that you might intend to run things in this way, but when push comes to shove, you'll grab for what you have under your control. Meaning we'll unleash the organs of the state to make sure things don't get out of hand, and maybe add to that unleashing the masses who are down with the revolution to coerce those who are straying off in the wrong direction (especially among the intelligentsia) to get back in line.

There will be a need to do some of this at certain points. After all, part of the synthesis that Avakian has brought forward includes involving the masses broadly in the administering of the new society and going about things in a way that consciously works toward eliminating the need for a state structure to be above society directing it. Without unleashing the revolutionary masses, you can't be acting to carry those parts of the synthesis Avakian has been developing. But the aim of doing this can't be to keep everybody marching in line in the same direction. And there will be key times when the revolutionary authority will have to hold back from unleashing the revolutionary masses exactly because doing so would shut down a process or processes that are going off in some directions not directly in line with what the revolutionary authority has in mind or doesn't contribute directly or immediately to the goals that this authority has given highest priority to.

Handling all this will be complex. Here we are in a wealthy society like the U.S. where anti-intellectual sentiment is very widespread. Think of how intense such sentiment could be in a poor society in other parts of the world. Where people have lived their lives on the edge of survival, there would be every reason for people to rally to the cause of revolution, but also to bring with them intense revenge sentiments directed at those who had lived more comfortable lives in those societies. Attention paid to winning and maintaining the allegiance of intellectuals in the course of preparing for revolution in such societies and in carrying out socialist transformation in those societies could be sharply contested. And such attention would also be sharply contested in a society like this one, partly due to the night and day difference between the intellectual and the shopkeeper, and the impact populist, anti-intellectual strains have historically had on sections of the people in this country. And also due to the revengism that will be a part of what comes forward as the idea of revolution becomes something that's back on the map for people and is frankly already there with some of the masses who have already been attracted to the revolution.

This brings me back around to the misunderstanding of the phrase that I raised in the beginning. It's Bob Avakian's re-envisioning of communism and how to realize it that give us a shot at keeping the lights from being turned out on the communist project. Without it and the cultural revolution he has

led in our Party, this vanguard would've continued its march to the revisionist swamp and with it would've gone the potential for revolution to become once more a pole of attraction for masses in this country. And the potential for a revolutionary communism that has identified the key questions on which the previous experience of revolutionaries in power had to become a pole of attraction among communists, and masses who yearn for a way out of the hell imperialism has inflicted on the planet, worldwide.

At the same time, this synthesis is what gives us the potential to bring into being a society where the lights don't go out once the revolutionaries are in power in a society like this one, or in any kind of society. One where people are not only allowed to engage in questioning and dissent, but encouraged to do so. One where, on the basis of having brought forward a solid core on the basis of revolution and communism, an elasticity is unleashed that has people going off into different directions, digging into a variety of different arenas and bringing forward a variety of expressions. Keeping the lights from being turned out in both ways rests on the wielding of the synthesis that Avakian is bringing forward.

Nine:

WHEN THE LIGHTS WENT OUT...REALLY WENT OUT

FURTHER FINDINGS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE 1930s

Dear Friend,

I recently undertook more research into the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Some of this was related to going at the "Stalin-was-the-same-as-Hitler" charges—in particular, being able to speak to the actual scale of repression (purges, arrests, and executions) and the larger political-international context. There was need to sort out fact-based historical findings and analysis from Black Book-type historical distortion.

Some of the information regarding the numbers of executed and time-line of repression went into the reply to the attack on the tour in the Hyde Park newspaper—along with popularization of how Mao and Avakian have analyzed Stalin's errors and methodological problems, the Cultural Revolution, and what the new synthesis, building on yet going beyond the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, tells us about the kind of society socialism must be.

Your request prompted more research and thinking about the situation in the Soviet Union in the 1930s: the amplitude of repression and the calcification in society. The wave of arrests and executions of 1936-38 was not the culmination of an ascending arc of repression—on a surface level, the three years before were ones of "loosening," including the promulgation of constitution enlarging rights. Further, the repression was not the sum total or even essence of the lights going out, although it marked a terrible leap that exacted enormous and long-term ideological cost.

Clearly, as we have emphasized, historically contingent factors—escalating international tensions and domestic threats—were presenting new necessity. But, as we have also emphasized, how this was understood and acted on was influenced by the motion and development of revolutionary transformation and by the outlook of leadership.

The understanding that Bob Avakian has been bringing forward about contradictions and unevenness in socialist society as a motor of development, the need to bring forward emancipators of humanity from all quarters of society, and how this relates to solid core with a lot of elasticity—this opens new pathways for grappling with how the lights could and did go out in the mid- and late 1930s and how this was connected with preceding conditions and a mix of factors.

What follows are some findings and reflections.

The new Soviet state power was interacting with a vast and multifaceted society. It was unleashing and leading change and responding to change. There were enormous stresses in society. Just to name a few:

*Class strata dissolving and new ones forming, a phenomenon of the Civil War and the NEP (New Economic Policy) that took new forms with breakneck industrialization/collectivization, etc.;

*Unprecedented population movements, some planned and encouraged and some out of control—but in both cases presenting leadership with unanticipated and destabilizing phenomena;

*An economy and society of persistent shortage (owing to real needs of accumulation, excessively high rates of capital formation and transfer of surplus from the countryside, and military claims on social expenditure);

*The center's recurrent difficulties in applying and "enforcing" policy, and in monitoring and assessing the effects of policy—the more so the further away from the cities—and a modus operandi of resorting to ad hoc and emergency measures to deal with how this situation seemed to be presenting itself;

*New contradictions emerging from social transformation and cultural change—with some forces seeking more radical solutions and more radical experimentation, and others seeking to "settle in."

These phenomena were interpenetrating with real security threats to the new state power and the emergence within the party and society of oppositional and new capitalist forces. At the same time, leadership was confronting a complex international setting filled with great danger and threat to the new socialist state but also filled with potential for world revolutionary advance.

All this posed enormous challenges to leadership: the need to prepare for war; to wage the class struggle; to revolutionize the new state so that it was indeed a radically different type of state power; and to transform relations between leadership and led.

The question of unevenness looms large in trying to make sense of how social reality was presenting itself to leadership. In some respects, the unevenness of Soviet society relative to pre-1917 Russia was intensified: by the combined effects of the revolutionary transformations that had taken place and the emergence of new contradictions linked to incomplete transformation. Moreover, consolidation in the face of difficulty and new necessity was conceived and carried out in ways that tended to freeze and aggravate differences, like those between town and country, rather than providing a foundation for further advance.

The social contradictions arising out of unevenness, e.g., dissatisfaction among different sections of peasants, tended to be viewed by leadership through the optic of the potential for further dissatisfaction and counterrevolution. I don't know exactly how to assess this, but several studies I have examined, as well as some of the archival materials now available in translation, indicate a leadership

that at times seemed overwhelmed by the "unanticipated." As the international situation worsened, leadership deployed ideological fetters, like patriarchy and nationalism, as mechanisms for stabilization and mobilization.

And here is an important fact. Some of the more interesting historical research done by scholars working with new materials reveals that there was more popular support than had been previously understood to be the case for the conservative consolidation beginning in 1934 and for the repression of 1936-38.

On the one hand, there was genuine desire to defend the new society, and there was receptivity to quashing those segments of society publicly identified as founts of counterrevolution. On the other hand, among broad sections of society, there also seems to have been widespread unease about political instability, the danger of renewed internal disintegration, and a certain desire for cohesion. This seems to have been especially pronounced among sections of the urban working class and the new professional-technical strata—which were becoming a kind of stable "socialist citizenry" (my phrase) enjoying rights and social protections.

1). Fear of Losing Control Versus Being Willing to Go to the Brink.

The socialist offensive of 1929-32 produced seismic social and economic changes—in terms of the socialization of industry and collectivization of agriculture. Stalin and the leadership were responding to and acting to overcome the objective constraints and obstacles thrown up by the New Economic Policy (NEP) to carrying forward socialist transformation, solving the food problem, and countering renewed class polarization. They were responding as well to mass sentiment (especially from the young and more downpressed) for more radical social change, for arresting backsliding and holding to the unfulfilled promise of the revolution.

On the other hand, as we know, this offensive had strong top-down character—"military-style" campaigns, especially in the countryside, where the collective farms were in the main organized at the village level by forces sent in from cities. But this was truly radical change. There is overwhelming, and inspiring, evidence of real initiative and involvement by the masses, including women in the countryside.

There was real social revolution: the struggle against veiling and Sharia law, and a historically unprecedented project to overcome national inequalities (all discussed in the material I wrote up in the summer of 2008). The dictatorship of the proletariat meant something, meant something liberating.

By 1932-33, a new social order had been forged based on the leaps in social ownership, vastly expanded social production and the extension of social benefits to growing sections of the urban population, and what leadership was calling a cultural revolution (conceived in part as the modernizing assault on cultural backwardness and in part as the bringing forward of new proletarian-socialist culture, values, and discourse).

Not surprisingly, the swirl of change also led to considerable disorder, opposition, and confusion. In 1932-33, there was also famine; growing peasant opposition to state procurement policies; acts of urban sabotage, populations moving around the country in unfathomable ways (young males from the countryside seeking and being drawn into employment in the cities, kulaks and suspect middle strata being expelled from villages and resettling in others, etc.); the resurgence of religious (even millennial) belief.

Politically, student groups were issuing incendiary pamphlets against the government; letters were coming into the center complaining of mistreatment at the hands of local party officials; regional party leaderships, as in the Ukraine, were pulling in different directions (and some, again in the Ukraine, seeking to break away). At the party center, Arno Mayer suggests that, "judging by Mikhail Ritutin's remonstrance [protesting the pace and thrust of collectivization and industrialization] and Sergei Kirov's assassination, political dissension and opposition were very much astir during the first half of the 1930s." Party members were writing opposition platforms. There were kulak terrorists and murders of collective organizers.

The situation in the Soviet Union during the socialist offensive of the late 1920s and the 1930s was hardly monolithic. A contemporary Russian scholar notes: "Literally in every sphere of social life and the economy (to one extent or another) there were forces contradicting the aims of the regime and challenging the direction of policy."

Lewis Siegelbaum offers this methodological injunction "Much of the recalcitrance and disorderliness has come to be seen by historians of the period as evidence of resistance [and]...on the basis of recent archival research it has become clear that practically every major state initiative of the 1930s was accompanied by some form of popular resistance." But, he adds, resistance is not a self-evident category: "What or against whom did the peasants think they were resisting? Was it primarily individual authorities, their abuses of power, the entire project of collectivization, the Soviet government, or the apocalyptic Antichrist?"

These things in fact had to be sorted out. In the countryside things were changing in ways that broke down old divisions and created new ones: divisions between collective farmers and independent farmers, and between peasants who had joined the collectives during the first wave of collectivization and those who had entered late; new occupational divisions, including the development of new white collar professions, like agronomists.

Women made extraordinary gains through collectivization (half of the rural teachers were women) and poor women peasants were among the social base for collectivization. But there were continuing gender-based differences within the collectives, including around work and family responsibilities. This actually fed reactionary trends and movements seeking to capitalize, from a reactionary side, on the incomplete nature of the transformations and the new strains this placed on certain segments of the peasantry).

A number of studies working from inner-party materials and correspondence have described a situation in which the central leadership was driven by the desideratum of gaining (or regaining) control over what it perceived to be a chaotic situation carrying with it the danger of counterrevolution.

Clearly, there was need for the center to take hold of the situation. But there seems to have been strong tendencies for the immediacy of problems to swamp leadership, and for these problems to be dealt with in ad hoc and impromptu ways—again from the standpoint of asserting control over disorder and threat. This was not blindly reactive—for instance, as the center became aware of lower-than-anticipated grain output and a mounting food crisis in late 1932 and early 1933, it made adjustment in procurement quotas and gave assistance. But it was highly reactive-assertive, flattening complexity.

Methodologically, the way the Chairman has talked about the multi-leveled, multi-colored, multi-textured map in terms of what leadership is interacting with, seeking to mobilize and realign, to learn from, etc.—seems so relevant in evaluating a lot of this.

Leadership's main line of response was to reassert and strengthen centralization, to seek to rein in centrifugal forces, to impose discipline and punishment, and to muzzle dissent—in order to cope with problems that might endanger the survival of the new state. It seems that leadership tended to look at tensions and eruptions as signs precisely of "recalcitrance" and "disorderliness."

This was not a solid core with a lot of elasticity: of leadership guided by an overall and long-term orientation of where society needs to be going, that this will be marked by the new and unexpected, and that leadership needs to be unleashing elasticity, leading and learning and combining centralization with decentralization, and bringing forward emancipators of humanity.

Issues of culture and ideology tended to be treated reductively, in relation to the immediacy of politics and political exigencies. One manifestation of how this was playing out acutely in the ideological realm concerns religion. From a 2002 article by historian J. Arch Getty:

“The Bolsheviks’ fear of religion was real. The 1930s were a time of privation and severe social stress, and in such times people often gravitate to movements or ideas that involve salvation, improvement, release, and opposition to the status quo. Russian religious movements, both Orthodox and sectarian, promised all these. After all, religion was the other millenarian idea competing with communism for the hearts and minds of the population. Like communism, it was the other encompassing set of beliefs that sought to explain the world and that promised salvation in the long run. Despite relentless persecution by the Bolsheviks that included closing churches and mass arrests of priests, religion was still a potent force in Soviet society in the 1930s....In some places, Orthodox cantors were elected to collective farm chairmanships instead of Communists...and [local] Bolsheviks worried that the new freedom of religion promised in the constitution would provide cover for antiregime political organizing and propaganda.”

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the revolution had launched campaigns against religion—and youth were very much in the van of this. There was the mass propagation of atheism. In the countryside, literacy campaigns were launched and a new “proletarian” and “scientific” culture promoted. Local, reactionary church authority was confronted—but generally this focused on the church as an institutional-political obstacle to collectivization, including in its accumulated wealth.

There was a kind of political de-churching and dispossession, with ecclesiastical properties being confiscated as part of collectivization. Some of this was highly publicized to puncture church authority. It was linked with mass mobilization, especially of young people. But it seems that religion was not deeply engaged, precisely as a contending “universalism”—ideologically and existentially, involving issues of morality, meaning and purpose, etc.

But the political dimension was interpenetrating with “the spiritual”: religion and religious movements were vehicles for and vessels of reaction and counterrevolution. In 1937, there was a resurgence of religious and kulak opposition—a nexus between them. It has been suggested that Stalin perceived opposition in the countryside as the seeds of wartime opposition. There was a great challenge to sort all this out.

In the 1937-38 repression, regional and local party authorities hit religious forces hard, very hard, through waves of arrests and execution, as part of the “mass campaigns” against counterrevolution.

But here is the rub: the attack on religious un-enlightenment was actually part of a wider societal assault against streams and forces, including in the professions and arts, which were far from un-enlightened but giving vent to heterodoxy and dissent, and seen as fostering “disorder”: favorable ground for counterrevolution.

And we know that not long after, and in the name of forging an even higher unity, there followed the ugly conciliation with Russian orthodoxy in the pre-World War 2 and war years.

Some things that stand out about this juncture in the Soviet Union:

*The more I study this, thinking about the multi-leveled map of and approach to social reality, the more it seems that the center did not have a clear sense of the mood of different sections of the masses, nor a nuanced ability to distinguish major from minor matters, what was subversion and what was not, etc.

There was both a distrust of “disorder” and problems with actually “knowing the situation.” The system of reporting was not providing the kind of picture really needed. A lot of the reporting was marred by political truth and rivalry—reflecting real divisions, differences, and the class struggle at different levels of society. The archives also indicate that “knowledge” of the contradictions and motion of society, of popular support and discontent, was often gained and sifted through the filter of intelligence and security.

There was an “information problem” for the masses as well. The information available to the masses about what was going on in society was limited. There were, obviously, objective difficulties: the size and complexity of the new society, limited means of communication, and issues of levels of mass education. But there was also a tendency on the part of leadership to restrict the dissemination of information. The Soviet press had actually been quite lively and informative in the 1920s, but this was no longer the case. This reinforced the role of rumor and word of mouth in society, (e.g., people from the countryside bringing with them information to the cities).

But there is a far bigger question. What, at all levels, are you trying to discover about society? What does this have to do with understanding the depth of transformation, new contradictions emerging, new and arising forces propelling change, what is standing in the way of change, including lagging understanding on the part of leadership? How is the social experience, and how are the insights and disagreements and, yes, opposition, of diverse strata, contributing to new understanding and new paths of transformation? And what happens when intellectual life is stunted...indeed, what happened in terms of the atmosphere in society.

NOTE: One of the criticisms of the "avant garde" in this period (linked to the critique of formalism) was that it was not representing or interested in representing social reality as it was, i.e., the immediacy of socialist construction. This is what it meant to faithfully reflect reality. But the need for art to explore and, as Ardea Skybreak says, "skew" and re-represent reality—and what that says both about different levels of reality and how reality might be different—this too was viewed with suspicion. It was not just that these artists were being suppressed, with the effects this had on artistic creation and on the larger atmosphere, but new things were being squandered.

*The ways in which the masses could express themselves were limited. They could speak out about local conditions, contradictions, and problems; managers and collective farm leaders were called out for malfeasance and corruption. Indeed, the center was often besieged with letters about developments in and wrongdoing at the local levels. Many of these were penned by the newly literate,

including, significantly, women in the countryside. There was a kind of institutionalized criticism of cadre and administrators. But there was not the same ease of mind when it came to taking up and debating larger questions of policy (and some of this was self-imposed, that is, both out fear of saying the wrong thing and for fear of "strengthening class enemies").

*It seems that with the promulgation of the new Soviet Constitution in 1936, there was, for a period of time, a major opportunity, a discourse, through which people were able to and did in fact express themselves on a broader range of issues—and to interrogate the structures and role of the state and new governing procedures being proposed, including contested elections (which Stalin had been calling for).

On Stalin's part, there seem to have been three motivating factors: to regularize and normalize the system of rule through the adoption of a constitution; to use the discussion of the Constitution as a way to draw people into political life, including criticism of local officialdom, whose reliability was increasingly a matter of concern; and to assess the mood of society.

The mass discussion of the Constitution was genuine (not the sham as generally described by mainstream scholars). Still, that begs the point of the content of the constitution and content of the discussion. The discourse focused on issues of rights and benefits, to whom they should be extended (for instance, peasants were demanding the social protections guaranteed to industrial workers). The question of how the state serves the overall revolutionization of society and the world towards the abolition of the 4 AIs, how it must empower the masses to take responsibility for the direction of society, including revolutionizing the structures of the state, and how state power must serve to overcoming the division of society into classes—these kinds of issues did not figure in this discourse.

Of course, this was not the theoretical understanding of the international communist movement. Not least, the new constitution enshrined that there were no longer antagonistic social classes in Soviet socialist society. And so when new chaotic phenomena emerged, against the backdrop of escalating international tensions, the response was desperate: towards feverish campaigns of repression.

*The central leadership had launched the major public political trials and the massive purges. It created the political and extra-legal framework for a repression that was swift, wide-ranging, and, in its three years of fury, unbounded by protections and rights for the accused.

But local and regional party officials were not in any sense a counterweight to the excesses of the period. On the one hand, they were targets (Stalin was concerned about their reliability). On the other hand, local and regional officials were key figures in the repression. New studies and evidence show that many local and regional officials were in fact putting pressure on the center to impose a crackdown. These studies also indicate that many such officials felt that the mass discussions and implementation of the new constitution threatened to open space for counterrevolutionary maneuvering.

Central directives were issued, but local officials were in control of what were called "mass operations" against kulaks, criminal elements, etc. And these campaigns and executions spun out of control and even turned in on themselves (though it cannot be ruled out a priori that counterrevolutionaries were not also intriguing and planting false evidence). In all, between 1936 and 1938, some 680,000 people were executed. This three-year total accounted for 87 percent of all executions carried out between 1930 and 1950.

One of the issues requiring more attention is how Soviet society was turned into a structure of categories and ascriptive behavior. Targets (for arrest and execution) based on numbers and social categories of people. Often, individual biography—what people actually did and did not do—mattered less than who they were, in terms of fixed social category. The Chair's insights into the relations between classes and individuals merit close attention in this regard.

The problem was not over-centralization as such. It was line. It was the atmosphere in society that had been fostered. And, frankly and without ceremony, it can be said that the party was barely a lofty vanguard. It had become increasingly instrumentalized as a policy, administrative, and enforcement machine.

You need solid cores, at all levels of society, grounded in an understanding of where society has to go, towards achieving the 4 Alls, and the maximum elasticity required to get there and that has to be led to get there—with all the wildness, unexpectedness, and danger built into this. You need to combat counterrevolution, but how and towards what end?

2). Social Base in this Period: Two Points of Investigation

Bob Avakian's discussion in "Ruminations..." about social base for revolution—before and after the conquest of power, and what he describes as "changing social and class composition" under socialism bears greatly on this discussion. That is: the social base for revolution is a dynamic and contradictory phenomenon; it shifts in the socialist period in relation to the unevenness of transformation and change; and if social base is reified, it can become an obstacle to revolution.

A). "Shock Forces" of Revolutionary Transformation Becoming a Social Base for Repressive Stabilization

What Avakian is pointing to is essential in probing and understanding how it was that the "lights could be turned on," involving the heroic and tradition-challenging efforts of a certain social base—and how it was, as society underwent change, this force could subsequently become a base for for "turning the lights out."

This passage, again from Siegelbaum, about the Soviet social formation in the late 1920s and 1930s is suggestive:

This support [for the regime] was located in distinct social groups, particularly within a generational cohort to whom the prodigious expansion of state power under Stalin appealed. Whether inspired by the lofty aim of marching in step with progress or the more selfish motive of rising rapidly up the social scale, young, mostly semieducated workers provided the shock troops "from below" for collectivization, industrialization, and cultural revolution. The turn toward social conservatism, evident from the mid-1930s onward, could thus be explained in terms of the consolidation of power of these *vyd-vizhentsy* ("promotees").

To causally impute the turn toward tradition-bound social conservatism to this stratum is one-sided. It downplays the larger societal and international environment. But there is dynamic interplay between how leadership mobilizes a base, and how this base then reacts back upon and influences "agenda"—and what are seen to be the parameters within which "agenda" and policy are formulated and enacted.

The “cohort” to which Siegelbaum is referring—skilled cadre workers, civil war veterans, shock workers, factory activists, etc.—was very much at the center of the socialist transformation of industry. At terrific personal sacrifice, and fired by a sense of great urgency and purpose, they also volunteered to go the countryside to implement the radical transformation of Russian agricultural and peasant life. Lynn Viola’s book *The Best Sons of the Fatherland* vividly chronicles the mentalities and enthusiasms of these “shock forces” in the struggle for collectivization.

Collectivization was very much skewed towards industry and the cities. The new planned economy had as a critical hinge a particular, subordinate relation of agriculture to industry—which contributed to the expansion of this social base. In addition, on the basis of industrialization, more than half a million communist workers moved from manual to white collar occupations in 1930-33 alone, becoming engineers, administrators, managers, etc.— part of what Sheila Fitzpatrick called the “Brezhnev generation.”

The material position of these strata, in the context of a revolution defined very much in terms of socialist economic construction, brought with it certain material interests and sensibility.

In the mid-1930s, this base was receptive to calls for discipline and regularization, as the industrial-agricultural material foundation and ownership relations of socialist society were secured. This base embodied many of the defining characteristics of the socialist order as it was being constructed and legitimized—and derived benefits from it. It evinced narrowness, suspicion, and distrust towards both traditional and radical-experimental intellectual life.

There was a “settling in” involving a certain kind of new “vested” interest. This coincided with what leadership saw as the exigencies of regularization and stabilization.

There were material-ideological factors bringing this base into alignment with a certain conservative turn. And to some degree this base was propelling this turn, though how leadership was reading and responding to the situation is not a direct derivative of this base. But it was a base. Robert Thurston in *Life and Terror in Stalin’s Russia* writes:

For the bulk of the urban citizenry, who formed the economic and political center of gravity.... Stalinism provided important means of *upward social mobility, participation, and criticism* (my emphasis).... More often than fearing the government in the late 1930s, people supported its campaign to root out enemies.

This is another expression, going back to “Conquer the World” and other writings by Bob Avakian of the period that the proletariat changes under socialism and has “something to lose”—and not just from counterrevolution. It has something to lose that can come into contradiction with the advance of the world revolution. And particular social bases have “something to lose”—not least in the structural-ideological shake-up of normalcy—with the further advance and deepening of socialist transformation.

Stalin was not without support in “rooting out enemies.” This begs another question: who the enemies were. Stalin and the revolutionary leadership failed to correctly distinguish between contradictions among the people and contradictions between the people and the enemy. People were being trained in this methodology; and conspiracy was increasingly seen as the hand behind disorder and dissent. But that is not all. The broad brushstroke of enemy had a certain valence for this social base. The enemy was perceived to some degree as being what was disruptive of a new status quo,

of a new normalcy that did have those features of mobility, participation, and criticism.

B. Women's Liberation: Social Base and Two Maximizings

There is more to understand about social base, the play of different class forces, and continuing transformation in the countryside (and the particularities of this in the minority regions).

In the 1917-20 period, educated urban women, both within and outside the party, agitated for radical policies on the woman question. They truly were a major impetus and force for decisively attacking the subordinate status of women. They helped ideologically and politically catalyze efforts in the countryside that would lead up to the *Hujum* (Attack) on such customs as veiling and bride-wealth in the late 1920s. Some of these women, both immediately following the seizure of power and in the late 1920s, went on dangerous missions to the countryside.

In the late 1920s, in some of the minority regions in particular, there was tension between, on the one hand, the project of breaking down traditional family structures and freeing women from the constraints of custom (the unveiling campaigns, etc.), and, on the other, leadership's desire, both centrally but especially locally, to build up a reliable base of support for the new regime.

Local and indigenous communist leaderships put a premium on winning the allegiance of the poorer segments of the economically active peasantry—largely men. But the assault on traditional family practices and gender roles often provoked a visceral reaction among these same social forces. Reportedly, poor women in some of the indigenous areas were initiating divorces on a scale that began to be perceived by poor peasant men as an all-out threat to the male-headed household.

In Uzbekistan, the unveiling campaign starting in 1927 took place within a setting of great social upheaval. It was soul stirring. Women activists who had been at the forefront of this had, as the campaign continued, agitated for a formal ban against veiling. But, evidently, the center decided against this. What was behind both the call for legislation and the rejection of that is not clear. But it seems that the need to secure the support of a particular social base began to set certain constraints on social revolution in the countryside.

Collectivization was seen by leadership as a way to resolve some of these contradictions revolving around economic transformation and the rights of women. Before collectivization, women challenging patriarchal authority found themselves with political backing from the state but often isolated by the atomized organization of production and stigmatized by the weight of community tradition. Collectivization was indeed essential.

In the new collectives, women enjoyed full individual membership. Women's rights were strongly emphasized. Peasant women were encouraged to become tractor drivers and move into other spheres of male activity. Leadership gave support to women challenging husband and parental authority. But all of this was centrally bound up with removing social-ideological obstacles for pushing forward production. In urban society, women were receiving education and entering professional careers. But this was happening in the context of a new assertion of "socialist family values" in relation to the needs of production and social stabilization.

Issues that had been previously brought to the fore by radical middle-class women in the earlier period, revolving around the right to abortion, women's independence, new values, the radical rethinking of family and sexuality were pushed into the background and seen as diversion. Not just these issues, but these women, were hemmed in. The banning of abortion was an act of putting out

the lights for women.

Similarly, where earlier, some of the radical science fiction and experimental cultural works of the early years of the revolution were radically reimagining social-family relations—this was no longer the case.

This positive and negative experience underscores the importance of the “two maximizings” under socialism. It sharpens the question of what forces were being looked to as the cutting edge of change and forward motion? It brings into sharper relief the need to mobilize all positive factors and to lead all-sided struggle from the standpoint of bringing about the “two radical ruptures.”

So that’s it for now.

With a warm and affectionate new year’s hug...

Ten:

“Making Revolution, Emancipating Humanity” emphasizes that the new synthesis is not the mere “pasting together” of that experience on the one hand, and the criticisms on the other hand. Running the good plays and discarding the bad plays. “It is not an eclectic combination of these things, but a sifting through, a recasting and recombining on the basis of a scientific, materialist and dialectical outlook and method, and of the need to continue advancing toward communism, a need and objective which this outlook and method continues to point to—and, the more thoroughly and deeply it is taken up and applied, the more firmly it points to this need and objective.” There is continuity with the first stage, and it builds upon the tremendous achievements, but there is also a significant rupture with shortcomings in the first stage of the communist revolution. As the Manifesto concentrates and points out, the Chairman has brought forward a whole theoretical framework for the *renewed advance* of the communist revolution. Without all communists the world over steeping themselves in and carrying through on this new synthesis, there will be no way to initiate and then carry through on the next stage of the communist revolution.

“And the world stays fundamentally unchanged. Capitalism-imperialism continues humming in the ‘background,’ crushing lives and destroying spirits in its meat-grinder of exploitation. And the horrors continue unabated.”

This is our standing and powerful refutation of every other trend in the world. On the other hand, the way that a lot of people look at what we’re about—and not entirely without justification—is: “Here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party’s over.”

There are a lot of ways to come at this, but to begin...

One thing this passage initially brings to mind is the point made in “Dictatorship and Democracy”... the statement from abroad “I firmly uphold those societies, but I wouldn’t want to live there.” (I don’t have the exact quote in front of me.) During the Cultural Revolution in our Party, this point was perverted and distorted to serve a (bourgeois democratic) vision of socialism as utopian idealism/flowering of individualism, but the point itself was getting at both the great achievements and the actual, and serious, shortcomings and errors. Why do a lot of people look at our project this way: “here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party’s over”? First, there is the continual

onslaught of verdicts about the disaster and failure socialism has been. And this intersects with certain illusions people have in this society. This is a system where the imperialists accumulate vast amounts of wealth based on the superexploitation of people world over, a certain portion of that wealth is able to be, and certain resources are, devoted to research and intellectual work (including through grants and such). On this basis, there is an illusion of being able and a certain freedom to experiment, work with ideas in this society. And where this exploration and work isn't allowed, when it is suppressed and thwarted, the answer people look to is framed within and stays within the confines of commodity relations, and the extension of bourgeois right. That the answer lies within the confines of capitalism and the world as it is.

But, leaving that aside for the moment, there have also been serious errors at the same time as there have been great achievements. Particularly with regard to intellectuals and intellectual work. The linear, march-in-lockstep approach to transforming society and moving to communism, which gave rise to the stifling and strait jacketing of thought in many instances, limited and circumscribed the unleashing of the masses (especially the intellectuals and artists) and held back (or prevented) their going off in different directions in terms of working with ideas, experimentation and creativity. Directions which might have been counter to the main ways in which the genuine communists were struggling to lead things...and which certainly did not serve or appear to serve the immediate goals at any given time. I remember a story someone from China told of a close friend of his, a graduate student in mathematics, who was active in the '60s and '70s in support of the revolution in China, but left the movement. His reason: that in China work wasn't being done in his field of theoretical mathematics; it was not seen as so immediately useful—and his friend disagreed. But in actual fact this work is very valuable and part of getting to the truth. Of knowing the world and transforming it. There were definite tendencies to class truth, but truth has no class character. And people's class outlook and line does not “naturally” correspond or have more validity because of their class background. The Lysenko example still stands out—and there is much to learn from the errors of this instrumentalist approach and what was done to the whole way of thinking came off of that. In contrast to the epistemological breakthroughs concentrated in the new synthesis.

As the Manifesto says, there was a pronounced tendency in the first stage of the communist revolution to see the intellectuals as a problem—and not to recognize the *essential* contributions they will bring to the revolution and to the new society and transformation of that society. (Though that too will not be linear, but full of contradiction and it will pose great challenges to us.)⁵ And

⁵ “As you move to uproot the soil that gives rise to capitalism and move beyond the sphere of commodity production and exchange—the law of value, the great difference between mental and manual labor, and all the production and social relations and the rest of the “4 Alls” characteristic of capitalism—you are going to run into conflict with the interests of intermediate strata. And how to handle that, through the whole long transition from socialism to communism (which, again, can only happen on a world scale), is going to be a very, very tricky question and one that's going to require a consistent application of materialist dialectics, in order to be able to win over, or at least politically neutralize, at any given time, the great majority of these intermediate strata—and prevent the counter-revolutionaries from mobilizing them, playing on grievances they may have, *or* playing on and preying on the ways in which things that you objectively and legitimately need to do may alienate sections of the petty bourgeoisie at a given time. And here again there is a real contradiction—which can become quite acute at times—between the necessity that you are, in fact and correctly, imposing on the petty bourgeoisie, while not exercising dictatorship over it, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the countervailing spontaneity and influence of the larger social and production relations which exist and which you have not thoroughly transformed—and, along with that, there is the larger world, which at any given time may be mainly characterized by reactionary production and social relations and the corresponding superstructure. You are not going to be able to deal with all this in such a way as to not only maintain the rule of the proletariat but to continue the advance toward communism, unless you can correctly handle the principle and strategic approach of solid core with a lot of elasticity.” (Basis/Goals)

this went together with the reification of the proletariat (and oppressed).

The discussion in the new talk [Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces For Revolution] about the intellectuals and the solid core you are forging speaks to a very important dimension to this question of the intellectuals (coming from different backgrounds) in the leadership/core of the Party and beyond. There is the need for us to become on a higher level the political and literary representatives of a class. And more than that to bring forward a solid core (in essence intellectuals) both drawn from the proletariat, but also from those who are already in the intelligentsia. We face the need to win over a section of intellectuals acutely in making revolution today...and this is only a glimpse of the necessity in the future!

While holding firmly to the solid core—and not giving up state power—and constantly working to expand that solid core (through many channels), as much as possible, diversity and room to breathe must be given to the intellectuals, artists, and others. There is the attraction of the positive rights as discussed in *Making/Emancipating*.⁶ Bringing forward and aspiring to people's desire for a better world...in which people do confront necessity and will be struggling to wrench freedom out of that, but where this will no longer be done through class, exploitative and oppressive relations. Where 4 alls will be no more.

While the twists and turns to reaching this society will be many—and will be wrenching—and will *require* going to the brink of being drawn and quartered, many times—this is the kind of society where everybody would want to live...

⁶ “What about the ‘right’ of the masses of people in the world to explore scientific questions? What kind of economic structure and culture—what kind of production and social relations, and what kind of superstructure—is necessary for that, and does that correspond to? Again, only a communist world. With the kind of division of labor that has existed in and has characterized every form of class-divided society—and in particular societies ruled by exploiting classes—there is *no real right* for the masses of people, for the great majority of society, to explore scientific questions. It doesn't exist for them. A few individuals here and there may emerge from among the masses and change class position, if you will, and be able to do that as their life's work and avocation. But for the masses of people there is no such right. The very functioning of the economic base, in dialectical relation with the superstructure—the dynamics of capitalist accumulation and the workings of the corresponding political system, the educational system, and the dominant ideas propagated throughout society, along with the division of labor that's bound up with all this—make it impossible for the masses of people to have the “right” to explore scientific questions.

“And what about those who presently do have the ability to do this? What about their ‘right’ to explore scientific questions in a whole new social context and framework, where much greater numbers of people are increasingly being freed and enabled to do this as well? What about the ability of people—even those who are presently conducting scientific work—to carry this out in a much more unfettered (not absolutely unfettered but qualitatively more unfettered) way, freed from the constraints imposed by exploitative and oppressive relations in society and the corresponding ways of thinking? What about *that*? What about having a situation where you're not scrounging around for grants on the basis of having to vitiate your own scientific project by presenting it in a way that meets the requirements of the ruling class—for example: ‘This will help the Defense Department.’ What about *that* ‘right’?”

“The point is not that in communist society everybody will do everything—or will want to do everything—all with the same emphasis, or passion, or in the same way. There are and there will always be differences among human beings, and certainly this will be so—and will be consciously recognized and given expression, in a qualitatively greater way than ever before—in communist society. Not everyone will want to be engaged in science all the time, or in politics all the time. But the barriers and social divisions that presently exist and are characteristic of exploitative society will have been overthrown and surpassed.”

One thing I have been thinking about is the question of the united front all the way through...with the orientation, method and approach of solid core and elasticity at the heart of forging that united front. Forging and leading the united front will be a process and go through waves. My thoughts are not well worked out...and I think I have been viewing this in a pretty mechanical way...so this is pretty limited and initial. The united front will need to encompass and comprehend the maximum amount of elasticity, on the basis of an (expanding) solid core. And it will be a process which takes different forms—and goes through waves. And while there will be all the way the application of the first mouthful sentence, what I mean by viewing this mechanically is that carrying through this united front all the way through is not reducible to advancing this or that program and uniting people around it. Though certainly there will be plenty of times when there are concrete challenges posed to society as a whole or to large sections of society, and “united fronts” around given programs forged, but applying the approach of unleashing the maximum elasticity on the basis of the solid core. Of leading a whole broad process of mobilizing people to understand and transform the world, and finding the ways to put our arms around all that. All existing within a specific (and changing) world/international context.

There will be the particularity of the parachute closing in a revolutionary situation—when many different strands and streams of protest and rebellion, of opposition to the current order are drawn together around the revolutionary leadership and core—and unite around a practical program for radically changing society and meeting the felt needs of people diverse political trends and/or are neutralized and in disarray. And, while socialism should not be viewed as a linear process, with a succession of cultural revolutions, there will no doubt be revolutionary junctures in the transformation of society towards communism where there will be some aspects of the parachute closing. But the parachute will also open up and things spread out with all the differences, diversity, and contradictions. There will be the unresolved contradictions, on many levels, which will help to drive things forward. There will be demands for society to actually change and meet people’s economic, cultural and social needs (a monumental task.) There will be different strata with different ideas about what society should be and there will be great diversity and people going off in different directions. And, at the same time, when the parachute opens there will be the pulls to settle in.

Leading all this will be challenging and complex. And absolutely requires the multi-leveled, multi-layered map. I have returned many times in the past months to the section in “Basis and Goals” on Living with and Transforming and continue to wrangle with this. Correctly applying solid core and elasticity, of grasping this dialectic, will be at the heart of moving ahead.

* * *

The more you wrangle with the content of the new synthesis—in all its aspects—the more what we are—and *need to be*—doing today comes into sharper relief. This is life and death. We must take this out into the world and make this a powerful material force, ideologizing revolution and communism onto the scene, on a higher level. We must initiate that new stage for real. It brings into sharper relief the need to actually *make* the links between today and tomorrow. To proceed on the basis of—and to bring to people that vision of how the world could be. And to more firmly grasp the role that bringing this vision to people plays in bringing them forward. The content of the new synthesis and the actual contradictions and vexing problems it is addressing, are the framework from which we must be proceeding and doing our work today as well as in the future. How must we go about making these great leaps? What is concentrated in solid core with a lot of elasticity must be grasped and applied all throughout this process of making revolution. It is not a approach for later or some catch phrase. It must be a living application of the new synthesis (as concentrated in the Manifesto).

The objective situation—and the obstacles we confront—is what it is...and there is no point in trying to make out like it is different. It is what it is—and it can be transformed. As the “Driving Forces” talk discusses, when you grasp the multi-leveled nature of reality, and the importance of the unevenness in things, then you can work on those contradictions to move all of that forward.

Making revolution is not a linear process at any stage. There *are* many channels through which the world changes. And through which people will come to revolution and communism. Communism springs from every pore and people will gravitate to revolution in many different ways. And we need to work on all these levels, and be able to put our arms around all that and lead it forward. And the process of bringing people through the OHIO is not a predetermined (or one size fits all) path. Even as there are questions of orientation and approach—and lessons—to sum up. Enriched What-Is-To-Be-Done-ism comprehends all our work...*it is an ensemble*. Fighting the power, and transforming the people, for revolution. (Though, within this, and as a part of summing up and learning from what we have accomplished thus far, one thing I feel we need to continually return to is that we can never underestimate the importance of ideology and ideological work.)

How are people going to be mobilized, and come to confront reality as it actually is, learn about the world—and the future that is possible? How are they going to be unleashed to make revolution? Is it through dogmatic lecturing to “set people straight” or revisionist spoonfeeding? (“here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party’s over”) Or is it through opening up space for people to advance ideas and to have them discussed. Space for people to wrangle (and at times sharply struggle) over the nature of society and the world and how to analyze and understand different developments in the world and the interests and programs of different classes? And discussion of big questions of line and outlook and epistemology? And how to make revolution? And all the while finding the ways for them to contribute to the revolutionary movement. And it has to involve the masses themselves increasingly—including collectively—taking responsibility for being a part of—and unleashing and leading—the contestation, contention and struggle—and for bringing others forward. It is a good thing when the masses jump into the struggle and join things with each other. We should encourage that and let it rip, rather than, having the comrades jump in to make the ‘more correct’ argument (which is not always more correct at all); it is in the course of struggling things out in these ways that people learn and also forge some comradeship.

We urgently need and must work for a scene that is alive with revolution. Where people who are working with us are actively engaging with all the big questions...and where there is (systematically and consciously) a multi-leveled Grasp Revolution, Promote Production approach. Holding firm to—and expanding the solid core in and around the Party—and on that basis unleashing a lot of things.

In forging a core now, we should appreciate the unevenness in things, which, as the Chair emphasizes, is the basis and potential for change...in this case, within the collective of people who have stepped forward in different ways (as well as in different individuals themselves), the questions that are being raised...the debates that people do want to engage in—and find the ways to not only work with people and draw them into making revolution. One young person concentrates challenges worth thinking about. On the one hand, he is clearly attracted to the revolutionary thrust of our work (and fighting the power); he speaks often of the power and importance of the Message and Call. But, he is also heavily—and very consciously—into metaphysics. And he is trying valiantly to reconcile these two opposing world views. And politically he is coming from identity politics (not in contradiction to the metaphysics) and argues for a postmodernist approach to looking at the different narratives. There is a lot of struggle ahead over many, many questions, but this must be done not by tailing him, or by proof-texting or just dismissing his thoughts. Not just stomping on

them. But by frankly listening to what he has to say and his ways of looking at the world. And then, proceeding on the basis of the solid core of our line joining the questions on the highest level possible, comparing and contrasting these opposing world views. Both in a sweeping way, and in their particularity. And, this means study and work on our part. However things end up developing with this person, there are some lessons here.

The unevenness among people being drawn towards us, which is objective, is a source of motion and development that we must work on. It is not a problem that different people come at things from different places, look at things in different ways, go off in different directions, and work things out with each other. And every contribution people make on many fronts (as well as the criticisms and differences they have) will not be “predictable” or stereotypical and need to be recognized. And as we lead this process, we should be good at learning (including seizing on opportunities to unleash wrangling and contention) and promoting this mix. Of understanding more deeply how people think—and why they see things the way they do. And we need to be good at knowing when to pull the reins in tight in today’s conditions (although this is on a whole different level), and insist on a particular analysis, position or way of approaching and doing something—and when to let the reins play out. This process is full of tension, but I think we are learning that the more we put the big and small contradictions (when appropriate) before those we are working with, and give them a sense of what we are trying to figure out and why, the more they themselves take up trying to solve problems (and are trained in the process). This is one element of grasping revolution and promoting production. Of course, there are far bigger questions involved in making the revolution, but this is a glimpse how we can and must put those questions before the masses and enlist them in collectively finding the solutions. It will and should be full of twists and turns, but it should also be a rich, living process that enables us to get at the truth. And it cannot be a “happenstance” process, where spontaneity just takes its course. It must be led, systematically on the basis of the solid core, but not in this dry and lifeless way that takes all the excitement out of discovery and changing the world.

What I feel is a pressing necessity is to have a more scientific understanding and evaluation of the people we are working with and, from a strategic perspective and with a strategic approach, to systematically work to bring them through the OHIO. And we have to think in those terms—not running “hot” or “cold” on people depending on how they are responding to us. To do the work if you will. This will not be a linear or predetermined process, but neither should it be left up to spontaneity. And it cannot be accomplished from the “inside of an area of work” out. There are all kinds of critical questions which do come up in the course of putting out the paper (big questions and big questions of line) which we do and should be even more putting before people, but this is still not sufficient. All these people are on different levels...and coming from different experiences and we have to pay attention to that and to unleashing a positive dynamic between and among people (as a whole), but there are also some threads to grab ahold of—and there should be systematic work around the Manifesto with all those who are stepping forward.

So those are a few thoughts...

Eleven:

Comments on “The world must not stay as it is and yet... Here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party’s over”

This contradiction has been circulating in my mind ever since it was first presented in this somewhat

stark form. It is very much to the heart of what we need to be wrangling with now—as we fight to establish the beginning of a new stage of communism—and projecting into the future. There is a lot that is involved in this. It is easy to say that we don't want it to be true that what we are about will result in “turning out the lights, let's get down to business, the party's over.” We don't want to be, and should not want to be, those kind of people, or that kind of political party, but all too often this has been a definite feature of the communist movement, even the very best. It cannot be merely a matter of bad intentions, but more a matter of conception and method that frame how the problems of making the radical rupture from thousands of years of class society to one that is based on completely different relations among people have been viewed. Of course, this really goes to the heart of the new synthesis of Bob Avakian, and the re-envisioned socialism and communism, and is something that Avakian has been working on and addressing for many years in different ways.

It is one thing, and very important, to sum up that there have been problems of economism and reification in the experience of the first stage of communist revolution. But there is a great deal involved in bringing a different approach to addressing these problems, which the new synthesis is the essential foundation for. Making revolution, making proletarian revolution, must usher in a whole new stage of human experience and relations that rest on a whole different foundation: economically, socially, ideologically, etc. It is not just a matter of making revolution and bringing new people into power, and setting up a new kind of government and institutions that are free from exploitation. Emancipators of humanity is not just a nice slogan but a basic orientation and goal. Getting beyond the “Four Alls” is a complex process, that involves transforming people and institutions, and ideas. As discussed in “Views on Socialism and Communism” and “Making Revolution, Emancipating Humanity,” human needs and wants are socially determined and what seems normal, necessary and desirable today will change as society changes. Conceptions of freedom and what human beings are capable of have to be transformed, new ideas and conceptions have to come to the fore and all of this has to be led, but not straitjacketed. Thinking about this has provoked me to read once again *Dictatorship and Democracy and the Socialist Transition to Communism*, and the talk to comrades on Epistemology in *Observations*, as well as more recent talks by Avakian.

Why does “Dictatorship and Democracy...” begin by discussing the importance of working with ideas, and the struggle in the realm of ideas? What is the importance of this realm in its own right and the work that is required to be good at this? This is a theme that is repeatedly returned to for good reason. It does seem that there is a very strong trend in the previous and existing communist movement, as part of the concept of class truth, to regard the sphere of working with ideas, and those who engage in this, with suspicion and to want to shut out any ideas that are not deemed “beneficial” to the working masses, to the downtrodden, or to the socialist agenda at any given moment. The question is raised, “Can you actually work with ideas in a critical and creative way and be a member of a vanguard communist party?” This also poses the questions of how such critical and creative thinking can be part of a society led by communists.

I believe this is also related to the point on (not having) an official ideology in socialist society even as the leadership of the revolution is guided by communist ideology. I am thinking of an experience a few years ago when I read the book *Reading Lolita in Teheran*, which describes the underground circle of women who gather to read novels from Western culture in the living room of a professor who was once part of the general movement to overthrow the rule of the Shah, and returned to teach at university in Iran, only to be forced out because of her views that were opposed to the official ideology of the current regime. Without discussing the merits one way or another of the particular books they were reading, all of which I frankly do not remember—*Lolita* was one, *Great Gatsby* was another—what stood out to me in that book was the contrast between the intellectual grappling that was going on clandestinely in the living room, against the law, and what was not allowed

in official society. The ruling ideology of Islam did not allow for any exploration of literature and themes that fell outside their closed system of thought. It made me think about what happens, and what kind of society you have, when people have to sneak around to be able to talk about books they want to read. What are the larger implications of this for innovations, for individuals having ease of mind, for social interaction and engagement over ideas, and for ultimately being able to transform society to achieve a communist society? This was but one small example, but it provoked me to think about this.

And yet how different is this from the views in socialist China toward “Western” films, music, etc. Besides the obvious nationalism that was involved in this, there was clearly a view that there were, in both form and content, those things that corresponded to the working class outlook and other things that did not, and the latter should be kept away from the masses. There is a lot more involved in this, which I will return to later, but it is striking that even with entirely different ideologies between the Islamic theocracy in Iran and revolutionary China, there is something to poke at.

But with regard to *Reading Lolita*... shortly after I read this book, I had a discussion with someone whose take on this book was very different. Their approach was to focus on the bourgeois character of the books that were being discussed in that book, and how much of a problem the influence of those ideas are in Iran today. What struck me about this was that instead of being challenged, as I was, by the contradiction that reading this book provoked in me, this person wanted to put their efforts to countering the influence of “alien” ideology that might be spread by this author. I don’t know what kind of influence this particular author was having, but it seems that communists should want to learn from the negative experience of the reactionary “official ideology” of Islam practiced in the Islamic Republic of Iran today, in thinking about what kind of liberatory society we are trying to lead in bringing into being.

How do we envision experimentation and probing in the realms of literature and art, including those things which will inevitably represent and even argue for worldviews that go against a dialectical materialist understanding of the world? Is there actual value to society in having this be fostered, as opposed to just being tolerated? Does everything have to be evaluated and categorized according to “proletarian criteria”? Clearly in the experience of the first wave of proletarian revolutions there were periods when there was a lot of flowering and experimentation that was part of revolutionizing society, but then the lights did go out to a certain extent, both in the Soviet Union and in China (even if in different ways), to my understanding.

Partly this came from a wrong conception that because society was being led by communists that everyone in the society had to and was going to ascribe to communist ideology. That was going to set the standards, and therefore everything had to conform to that ideology. The parachute analogy helps to provide a more correct understanding of the actual process that goes on, and the contradictions that those who are trying to lead society to a communist world are confronted with. Things are going to be more contradictory, and there are different channels that are going to contribute via different tributaries to the larger stream of social transformation. Communist leadership has to involve advocating and struggling for those things that it knows to be true— like a scientific understanding of evolution—and countering views and programs that contribute to the further exploitation and oppression of people, but doing so without creating a suffocating atmosphere. Moreover, there are going to be important ways that communists are going to need to be challenged by the thinking and wrangling in the realm of ideas coming from many sources.

But beyond this, there is the contradiction that communists have a fully worked out worldview that embraces but does not replace other spheres, while those who are not communists do not—and there

can be a way that the communist comprehensive worldview can be “brought to bear” in ways that shut down views that are less fully formed, or contradictory, creating a stifling atmosphere. Besides the important fact that any given communist, or even a genuinely revolutionary communist party, is not going to be correct all the time, there is the point that people need air to breathe or there will be no vitality in society, no freedom to think, feel and experiment, and new things will not be able to arise and flourish. This is a real contradiction that has to be understood, not shined on, and then worked with—how can this provide a positive dynamic that propels further advance, but not in a linear and reductionist way.

What is the necessity that imposes itself once having embarked on making revolution and then taking up the task, once having won the revolutionary war, of rebuilding society in such a way that does not go back to the past? What are the actual contradictions that are confronted and how does this tend to pull away from a situation where there is liveliness and intellectual ferment? This has been discussed quite a bit in terms of what was faced by the Soviet Union at its inception, and then in the face of very real war directed toward it by Germany and others. And China also faced tremendous necessity at the beginning and throughout. It would be easy to let 100 flowers bloom, to let 100 schools of thought contend and see where it all leads, if there were no necessity to deal with actual enemies of the revolution of all kinds who are working to destroy the new society, if there were no needs to put the resources of the society toward solving the very real problems of changing the conditions of people’s lives, if there were no forces external to the society that had to be contended with via wars and in other ways. So to act like there is no necessity doesn’t help resolve this. But Mao Tsetung did try to experiment with this in different ways, including the unleashing of the GPCR (Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution). Still, despite the ways in which things were opened up, the right solution in relation to the intellectuals was not found. And even beyond that strata, there still was a constricted, and frankly reified, conception of what kind of ferment was encouraged or allowed. The fact that there is necessity does not free us from the need to transform that necessity into freedom in ways that actually open things up to get at truth and advance society.

Why did Mao abandon the idea of relying on a section of the intellectuals, as discussed in “Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution”? It is not hard to imagine that many of those who had been part of the initial revolutionary struggle—who were attracted to the ideals of communism, even— were not entirely reliable spontaneously when it came to facing the difficulties of actually transforming society. But what was involved and what was the effect of giving up on this, and reaching for a more reified conception of successors? It seems to me that besides the idea that was carried forward from the Soviet Union’s experience of bringing forward intellectuals from the oppressed masses as the solution to this, there was a downplaying or narrowing in conception of the importance of wrangling in the realm of ideas, of really letting 100 flowers bloom and then knowing what to do with that.

There is another angle of this that has been brought to mind in thinking about this. How does actual initiative get unleashed in the fullest sense on the basis of a solid core? How do you foster the ideas of cooperation, and serving the larger interests of society without negating individuality and the different ways that human beings are going to want to relate to each other and the whole society? How do you embrace diversity and not impose everyone has to have the same opinions and like to do the same things in the same way, while struggling for a different conception of freedom that is not just everyone should be left alone to do their own thing? How will people be encouraged to play and love, to experiment without being “clocked into” the socialist agenda. Even having these questions brought forward to be considered is only possible from the framework of the new synthesis, where previously these kinds of things have been ruled off the agenda. Very importantly, the necessity that will be imposed to “get things done” should not be allowed to trump the need to do things that are not always on the

official agenda. What role does initiative at the local level play in contributing to new things and innovation? The need for centralization and overall planning of the economy, and structure of society, as well as coordination of objectives and necessary leaps is clear but how does this not contribute to a stagnant and lockstep society? Clearly this has been a problem in previous socialist societies.

Recently, in thinking about the movie *Avatar*, I was provoked to think about how under a socialist society we would regard the kind of creative innovation of technology that was developed in that movie. Of course, the problem of the kind of resources to produce such a movie immediately arises, especially in a world that is not relying on imperialist exploitation of the rest of the world. But beyond that, there is scientific and artistic innovation that will be developed if there is the freedom to do so, that will not have any immediate narrowly conceived social value in terms of either particular political objectives or the improvement of life of the people. These kinds of things do have social value on a number of different levels, including in unanticipated ways, affecting the vibrancy of life, of work. But in relation to dire necessity and other pressing social needs, will these be viewed and disallowed because they are deemed frivolous or socially unnecessary? How does society decide this and how does the leadership lead in creating the right atmosphere and environment that fosters creativity and new things coming to the fore?

A lot has been written by way of overall orientation toward these problems, and learning more deeply about the experience—and conceptions guiding—the previous socialist societies will help flesh out both the problems but also the ruptures that need to be made in the framework of the new synthesis. This is not just something that will arise sometime in the future, but also has everything to do with how we conceive of our work and relation to society, with different strata of masses and in bringing forward the forces for revolution.

Twelve:

“the way that a lot of people look at what we’re about and not entirely without justification is ‘here come the communists—turn out the lights, the party is over’”

Introduction

Why is it that a lot of people are looking at and saying, “here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party is over”? Or another way to put it might be why don’t people see our arrival as the “the life of the party.”

By the “life of the party” I mean being seen as a really vibrant new social force in society which captures people’s imagination, in various dimensions, as an alternative revolutionary moral and intellectual energy in the world. A party, the individuals in it, and its method and style of work which stands out and is perceived by others in the society not only for its great passionate intensity for revolution and communism, but also for its “novel” insistence that communism is a science and for its dynamic, creative scientific method and approach to communism and the road to get there.

In terms of how communists are viewed this is a complex mix of factors. On one level, separated from the line, method and approach of communists there are some real difficult objective contradictions which we face. The basic analysis in the “*House and the Experience of Socialist Society So Far*” section in *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, Part 1, speaks in basic terms to contradictions we face in how socialism and communism is understood and as part of this how people look at communists. Further, the essence, in a universal and general sense, of bourgeois intellectual

(speaking generally of intellectual trends in the bourgeois epoch) opposition to communism is captured in the Karl Popper polemic (also in MREH, Part 1) to a large extent; though the basic Popper critique and approach is further particularized in relation to critiques of the Soviet Union and Mao's China and some of this is also wrapped in various other forms of relativism (post-modernism, etc.) of the last 40 years or so. Also, there is the whole reactionary imperialist bourgeois and petty-bourgeois chorale projecting the whole communist project and especially communist leadership in an "*Orwellian portrayal of a power-hungry, faceless bureaucracy terrorizing the masses in whose name it is supposed to be ruling*" (Badiou polemic). And this reactionary and false "narrative" in some manner informs the thinking of virtually all, from whatever viewpoint, who engage communism.

Without being linear or mechanical about this, the end of the first stage of communism, then the end of the cold war and the development of a U.S. dominated imperialist globalization and the dynamic of the two outmodeds which has developed, has in various ways, both materially and ideologically, "poisoned" (in the sense of confusing and demoralizing) the orientation and thinking of various sections of humanity. Large swaths from various strata have become almost caricatures of social relations of commodification, both in the sense of what is important in their lives and how people relate to each other socially; there has been a wholesale seduction and demobilization by relativism; and related to both of these phenomena (comodification/relativism) the most malignant forms of individualism and solipsism. And in basic ways, even while people are reconciling with some of the worst crimes of imperialism, very related to this, people are rejecting revolution and the chaos and upheaval this would mean in the world and to their lives. In a very concentrated way a lot of this is spoken to in the section "It Is What It Is—And It Can Be Transformed" in *Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution*.

As spoken to in the "*House..*" section, it is true that there were very real problems and mistakes coming out of the first stage of communist revolution. Problems which stemmed from the very difficult terrain of unleashing and leading such revolutions, but also problems in approach and policy reflecting significant errors in the practice and concepts guiding those revolutions. These problems, in various ways and dimensions very much haunt us today (including how this interacts with the fact that the bourgeoisie has had decades to basically petrify their lies and distortions into "accepted knowledge"): both in how such revolutions are evaluated and, very importantly, in terms of how many communists today have not recognized or ruptured with these problems and as such still "represent" for a communism which does not appear to be "very appetizing", i.e. does not seem "desirable" or "viable." And all of this further feeds the anti-communist/anti-basic-transformation-of-any-kind mill, and is at times even expressed in a supercilious "been there, done that" dismissive attitude towards communism.

The point of the above is that there are a variety of significant objective contradictions we face in making some breakthroughs with our project. And further these objective factors in various ways underlie different trends of "oppositional" politics and ideology which when distilled to their core would leave the world as it is. And where we are coming from in trying to break out of all of this cannot be separated from the revisionism in our own party; that this did have very negative consequences and collateral damage in terms of how those who may have been drawn to us and came into contact with us have viewed us for many years.

It is not a mystery that what is very off putting to many people is what in various ways is perceived as the religious side, the reified side and the epistemologically closed side of communism: forms of genuflection to a revolution in the image of THE PROLETARIAT as it is now or even perceived to be when "transformed"; reification in the sense of a revolution to mete out revenge to non-proletarian classes which have exploited or benefitted in some way from the exploitation

of the proletariat, with a Party/DOP [dictatorship of the proletariat] dedicated to such a process; reification (and related to this reductionism and dogmatism) in terms of a flattening out of an analysis of the complexities of such a revolution (both humps) and related to this a sense of some kind of historical inevitability which pretty much closes out any process of scientific inquiry, exploration and discovery; related to this a sense of our invitation to “join us” as being: join “our thing”, it’s all figured out, we just need to “do it” (versus the spirit of “a team of scientists” and all that is concentrated in that); *as well as incorrect tendencies in relation to the contradiction between individualism and the individuality of people*; a real fear that when confronting critical issues and problems that the process will “close down” and the ferment and “space” to experiment, the unleashing of creativity and individuality as part of this, to understand and change the world (through a many channels perspective and process) will become restricted, confined and compressed to the immediate necessity facing the revolution and in effect the elasticity we promote will be “shut down”, resulting in repression and oppression, i.e. not the kind of world one would want to live in. And with this type of epistemology and methodology such communists, especially in a country like this, soon find themselves rudderless in terms of any materialist grasp of the basis and means for making revolution, and become agnostic or worse; their thinking and their social practice becomes very non-revolutionary.

The kind of “communists” that this type of revisionism produced or synthesized were people who seemed very cultish in the sense that they did not convey an aura of intellectual excitement or exploration, a sense of engaging society in a very dynamic or substantial way, they proceeded in narrow ways from “their thing”; and even when these “things” were in fact very important to the world and humanity, it was often, for a number of reasons, “presented” in linear and dead ways. When these communists would come around, even if you appreciated their intent and could get with the particular issue they might be fighting for, your relationship with them would be very tactical, but you would not want to hang around them, you would not see them as a source of intellectual and social energy, a source of humor or enjoyment. You might get the sense that beyond their “political thing” that they did not have a lot of interest in the dynamics of the broader world or what your thinking was about anything beyond how to get some things “done”. Or if they did like to talk about broader cultural things, they would either reduce everything to some linear and reified “communist analysis” or what they would say would seem to be not at all influenced by a dynamic revolutionary communist perspective, but seemed to dabble within the same thinking and framework of everyone else. You would not look to these communists as a dynamic source to engage and understand the world, in its various dimensions; nor would you have confidence in their vision of transforming the world. You would not view these communists as a vanguard in society—and this also, along with other ideological inclinations you might hold, would reinforce a negative view of the whole concept of a vanguard and communists.

For a long time, for a lot of people who came into contact with our Party, a lot of this is what they have come away with. So all of this, directly and indirectly (even with new people we come into contact with) is part of what we are dealing with.

Yes, on one hand, all of the above paragraphs speaks to the various dimensions of objective problems underlying why there isn’t a lot of spontaneity around revolution and communism; but the world is still really hurting and a lot of people do see the need for change, but yet even most of the best of them are not seriously engaging the new synthesis and communism; and worse, in one form or another, are opting to accept “the world as it is”.

Moving on, even with the all of the above in mind, to me the heart of the dilemma we face is this: Bob Avakian has very frontally and with great depth and intellectual integrity spoken to the heart of the truly liberating advances and to the mistakes, limitations and errors of our project, and has in fact brought forward this new synthesis which (without elaborating here) really is both a very challenging and inviting project. Comprehended in what is a firm theoretical and programmatic framework is the sense that this is a very young project/work in progress (versus an historical inevitability), with tremendous transformative potential, in the realm of ideas as well as in the practical sphere. The rhetorical question to raise is why aren't more people, all over the world, just really excited about this new vision of what socialism and communism is and exhilarated by the prospect of being part of the multi-dimensional process of getting there; and why isn't there more of at least an incipient mass revolutionary communist movement based on this new synthesis, its liberating methodology, its rich and textured body of work, the transformative prospects it opens up for humanity? Even with an understanding in relation to the objective contradictions, both among communists in the world and the larger society (spoken to above), it still drives me crazy and is befuddling why a not insignificant group of academics and scientists would not be "exhilarated" by the scientific method and approach which is the core of Bob Avakian's work, even if they had differences and/or strong objections to the arguments and conclusions, including around the basic party/state paradigm. This new synthesis stands out in stark and refreshing contrast both to revisionism in the world and the utter hopelessness about the possibility of transformative change to better humanity in the broader intellectual discourse.

Or another dimension of this same problem: all of our major works from the beginning of the "coming out swinging" period [Summer-Autumn 2005, when the Manifesto, the Party Constitution, *Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy*, the special issue of *Revolution* on the Black National Question, and the speech "Making Revolution in the USA" were all put out] have dramatically and powerfully posited the darkness and horrible conditions of most of humanity and how liberating and transformative making revolution and establishing a revolutionary communist led state power can be; positing a very dynamic view of the new synthesis, including illustrating the laboratory of methodology involved in approaching all of this. So again, why, even in incipient ways is our vision, line and approach not taking some kind of qualitative hold as expressed in this becoming a controversial pole in society, in drawing forward a broader (even if small) solid core excitedly engaging and promoting this?

Some Discussion

I am really trying to wrestle with and to understand why the party (and Bob Avakian because of the party) is still to a significant extent viewed through this "the party's over" prism. How do we break through both the societal prejudices/"conventional wisdom" re communism and our own revisionist line which was expressed in a non-revolutionary method and style of work? Is it the case that even today we are viewed as some kind of narrow "political organism": which promotes Avakian; which here and there sometimes may have something to say; which has a political newspaper (something people run into here and there); a group which is perceived by people to be on the periphery of what is "happening in the world", or even in "their world"? While this may be too simplified/absolute in terms of how the Party is perceived as a social force, is there is an essential truth to this? And how much is this the case because this, in some ways, is still, on the ground in each area how the Party comes off?

Exploring this from some different experience, what really stands out is that the above does not seem to be how prisoners who write us see the Party, and especially Avakian and his role in the world. One gets the sense that these prisoners are really excited by what Avakian is bringing forward, and that while they can speak powerfully to the raw oppression they face and have faced in

life, that beyond this there is also a sense of ferment among those who write, that they “get into” understanding the world in its many dimensions and wrestling with the need to transform it in many dimensions. That they really do appreciate the liberating methodology and epistemology Avakian has brought forward and think that this matters in the world, that it not only is a method to understand the world to change it in some narrow sense, but that humanity engaging, understanding and changing the world in this way is an important part of the humanity we want to create, essential to what socialism and communism has to be about—central to how the people have to be transformed, for revolution. This is the spirit one gets, in different ways, from some of the prison correspondence.

Does this difference between how a certain critical mass of prisoners and those in the society more generally engage Bob Avakian come down to the fact that “revolution is not a dinner party?” That the idea of a revolution with all the upheaval, chaos and sacrifice in many dimensions is in itself still a party stopper, for a variety of reasons, not only to the intellectual and middle strata, but also to many at the bottom of society? That only those prisoners with really no illusions (beyond of course the religious ones which many are into) of reforming the system or bettering their own status within the system can see such upheaval and chaos and sacrifice as “worth it” if it means getting humanity to a whole other place? Or from another angle, why is that it seems that these prisoners are really taking in and studying what Avakian is bringing forward versus reading it and then quickly filtering it through both ideological prejudices and/or “what it means for me now” calculations? Another question in relation to this: are the prisoners, to the extent this is true, more “getting it” because they are getting Avakian raw and “unfiltered” so to speak, that is not filtered through how it might be presented by those in the Party? I realize that this “prisoners vs. others” comparison can become reductionist and very simplistic, but there does seem some elements to explore here. And of course even the prisoners we are speaking about is not a huge number, but a number of them do correspond and it seems that their correspondence is richer and more “appreciative” of Avakian than other correspondence to the newspaper.

“.....Away from the feel and flow of life for so many years”

Again, does our work, how it is envisioned and organized and carried by most of the Party still amount to a narrowly conceived “political organization” with a (reified) GOAL, a (rarely promoted) PROGRAM, a newspaper and a series of initiatives and campaigns to do our political work, work carried out by areas and individuals without perspective in terms of actually attempting to “conquer the world”, correctly understood? The Chair has spoken to the question of creating a whole new Party life and culture and this being the solid core and living expression of how we go out into the world as a vanguard and how we see what this vanguard is. How, within the Party, and the Party engaging the broader society do we bring forward the type of culture we have been talking about? It is not like this has not been envisioned and spoken to exhaustively, but by way of contrast to where the Party still seems to be, I would like to explore a couple of angles on this.

One angle to get at this, is I have read books dealing with physics, both in the period of the birth of quantum physics and recent years where scientists have been struggling to unify classical (especially general relativity) and quantum physics. And what stands out is that these were times when there was a great excitement and intellectual ferment around the great challenges and complexity of the challenges, and that those involved, in all parts of the world, really did function as a “team of scientists” in the sense of getting into the fact that there are some really intractable contradictions in understanding reality, but understanding the importance of this for humanity and getting great joy in working through all the contradictions etc. Of course all of this was not without contradiction, nor

was it free of political contradictions (especially in relation to the German physicists and the rise of the Nazis), but the general point of the dynamics of a social group generating great excitement and intellectual ferment (yes it was pretty internal to that group, though Einstein's general relativity did penetrate broader into society) with great bearing for the world still applies. I do not get the sense that there is this cultural ferment in the Party or that this is "infecting" others. There is some anecdotal feel of this here and there, but not anything that seems to be a significant trend.

Another angle is the Black Panthers, the VH1 special on them (as part of the "Lords of the Revolution" series) really captured the soul-shaking impact they had not only on the masses of Black people, but also in society very broadly. Yes, there was a particular social formation and dynamic in the society with a particular historical development and consilience of social dynamics coming together, but at the same time, even with their limitations, the more advanced actions of the Panthers, their agitation and propaganda and how they presented themselves was a reflection, concentrated and taken to a higher level, of the "feel and flow of life" at that time. As controversial as they were in the broader society, within "the movement" and broader progressive circles, they, more than any other force, did set the terms and provided a revolutionary framework and energy for the broader public intellectual and social ferment of the times (including in various ways playing an important role in the launching of a new communist movement, even if they were not part of it for very long). All of these various forces (Mike Ely types as well as anarchists and youth more generally) who hold up the Panthers' reformism (or even reduce the patrols they carried out to a reformist plank) miss the point by a wide mark when they think that these reformist things are the essence of what drew the masses (including broader sections of society beyond Black people) to the Panthers. The essence was that the Panthers ideologically, again with significant limitations, captured people's sense of the unjustness of the system, that there was a right and need to rebel against this, and that the Panthers sharply and defiantly called out and held accountable the system and its representatives and apologists, putting themselves forward as an alternative revolutionary moral and political authority.

Achieving a higher, revolutionary communist synthesis of all this is what we are trying to do, but this is not where the Party is at right now. The leadership given through the cultural revolution and the period since then (initiated with the "Coming out Swinging" period) should have put us on this path. But from what I can see, this does not seem to be where the whole Party is at in any consistent way.

Why?

On one level, at times it seems that the Party membership in how it "takes in" and synthesizes the line and guidance from leadership is a little like that prisoner (from *The Capeman*) who was just released from prison and who has "*been away from the feel and flow of life for so many years.*" (I do see the irony of this in relation to the discussion earlier on how it seems that some of the prisoners "get it"; though they also will face this contradiction in different forms and for the same and different reasons when they come out.) One outstanding hallmark of revisionism, related to the view that "we have seen all the revolution we are going to see" and/or a very linear and reified view of the revolutionary process was that comrades did not see any reason to really understand the "raw material" of human social relations and thinking, including on a world scale, which would underlie revolutionary work in a non-revolutionary situation and out of which a revolutionary situation could emerge. There was little serious study on a scientific and exploratory basis, from both a macro and micro view, of the intellectual and cultural trends, the thinking and the moods of the society and different sections of the society. Either comrades just merged with the prevailing society, being part of it and viewing it from the viewpoint of the "radical" petty-bourgeois/"worker" revanchist critic (and this would become petty and not very uplifting or insightful) or else comrades just seemed very ignorant, on many levels of the thinking and trends that were out there. If comrades have

not ideologically and epistemologically made qualitative ruptures with this view and approach to revolutionizing society, even if they genuinely understand and are making some ruptures in relation to certain elements of line and are grappling more seriously with the new synthesis, this is still going to be a “retrograde” drag on their thinking and ability to grasp line on the most scientific and dynamic basis. While there are different dimensions on how this manifests itself, the particular dimension, for the purposes of this assignment, I am focusing on is how dynamically comrades are grasping this campaign (in its whole scope/stakes and three objectives) and going out into the world with it, including as central to this, how comrades are “leading” with the role and contributions of Bob Avakian. And this has several dimensions to it.

In a very basic way, it gets back to the thread of the three questions asked during the cultural revolution: is what Bob Avakian bringing forward have anything to say to or connect with what is happening out there? To me it is just not clear how one can go out and be a revolutionary if one is not leading with B.A. If one is proceeding from the goals of the campaign around “The Revolution We Need...The Leadership We Have” this is inseparable from on whatever level or from whatever angle, from bringing forward the role and substance of what B.A. has brought forward. This is a question of his role, the substance of the new synthesis (in all dimensions) and the whole method and approach to society and revolution which should come out around questions of various kinds all of which in one way or another, directly and indirectly bring forward a revolutionary communist perspective which in some way contributes to people’s understanding of what we are trying to bring down and what we are trying to bring into existence. As one comrade put it, its like swiss cheese: wherever you cut you are cutting into holes. Meaning that from whatever angle you are engaging people around society, revolution and communism (broadly speaking), without being religious or contrived, it should not be difficult to be bringing forward Bob Avakian in various dimensions. There is a dynamic link between engaging the feel and flow of life and being compelled to immerse oneself in and draw from what Avakian is bringing forward; and visa versa. And the point here is that if this is being done on a correct basis, this should be attracting people to communism and communists; versus people’s eyes beginning to gloss over and reinforcing their negative views of communists.

Another dimension of how this presents itself: there just seems to be so little initiative in advancing and carrying out the basic line and orientation of the Party (aside from what comes from leadership) and where it does seem like comrades are trying (some of this has come through during the campaign and some local fund-raising initiatives) it still seems so new, like comrades are rediscovering very basic things on how to go out in mass ways to the masses, and finding creative forms for doing so. My point of “rediscovering” is not that comrades have “forgotten” these things, but this seems to be a reflection that many comrades still have not completely ruptured out of the “ghetto” of a reified view of the class struggle (away from the feel and flow...) and how one sees the process of making revolution. To the extent that there are still remnants of a linear view of the relationship between the Party and “the masses”, both in terms of a reified view of the strategic role of the proletariat and correspondingly looking at other strata, including intellectuals (broadly speaking) in either a negative or “holding one’s nose” view, then what is the substance of any “feel and flow” of life? How can we create a new culture within the Party if there is a trend to not think it is very important to engage in a dynamic way, from a revolutionary communist viewpoint, broader cultural patterns and trends; or to put it another way how can we be literary and political representatives of the proletariat (understood correctly) if we are not, from the viewpoint of the class struggle and a revolutionary communist perspective, engaging the broader ferment, in many dimensions, in society? In turn things like tactics and plans for campaigns, if in their conception are cut off from a sense of what is out there in the culture (without tailing this) this will also lead to very uninspiring and unimaginative ways of getting

out to the masses and uninspiring ways of being able to develop a dynamic and imaginative Ohio process. That is the Party is not able to create waves of orbits where from different perspectives and via different channels there are masses who gravitate towards and become part of, broadly speaking, the process of where the Party is leading.

The slogan “Fight the Power, and Transform the People, for Revolution” does capture a lot if correctly grasped and transformed in the world. Correctly grasped and engaged it is a reflection of on a strategic level of taking responsibility for the whole thing, proceeding from the “feel and flow of life”, on a number of levels: there is the “I can’t live another day with this system doing what it is to people” and being a living embodiment of this in every encounter one has with others (tactical issues aside); there is representing with a defiance of the system and what comes through as a dynamic and real life dedication and commitment to give ones life to getting rid of this system and bringing forward the revolutionary communist road; there is the being among the masses, of various strata, and knowing both their mood, including their backwardness and the wellsprings of this, as well as the things which continually draw them into having to confront the system and us getting an ever more intimate sense of this dynamic and being able to recognize and engage all of this around key contradictions in various ways. All of this is captured more comprehensively synthesized by Bob Avakian, speaking of “*being attuned to and in a real sense [my emphasis] part of the life of the larger society and world, including not only the realm of politics but also the intellectual and culture ferment, on whatever level and in whatever forms they exist at any given time—while at the same time not ourselves adopting or tailing spontaneous tendencies or outlooks in the broader society and world, even the more positive ones*”. Is this how the whole Party conceives of what we are about and is going out, in a myriad of ways, and thinking/doing? Very much related to this, in the main are comrades stuck in “division of labor plus bring forward new synthesis when talking to people” kind of mindset. Everything we are doing should flow from seeing ourselves as striving, at the highest level, to become “*the political and literary representatives of a class and of the revolutionary struggle which embodies the fundamental and highest interests of a class, and in particular the proletariat at this stage of history and in this revolution we’re talking about.*”

In terms of this being expressed in a revolutionary method and style of work, this is the core out of which everything else springs and enables us to “lively up ourselves” on the right basis: it is the springboard which pushes us to go back again and again and study Avakian, struggling to get the whole synthesis as well as how to approach particular vexing questions and real-world contradictions (and in this way also contribute to deepening our grasp of method and approach); it is the basis in which in a living way we grasp and integrate particular tasks or initiatives in a way that proceeds from the overall goals and strategic process; it is what pushes us beyond getting “blocked” by the aspects of backwardness of the masses, to figure out the way to engage people or to sharpen up our agitation and discussion so as to bring out the best in people and/or bring forward the “better people”; it is what enables us to recognize the various “channels” to be able to grab hold of and engage people and trends (on large and small questions) and do so from a revolutionary communist perspective; it is the basis for consistently coming up with creative and energetic forms of political (broadly speaking) work and organizational means of various kinds and on various levels.

On this basis we will become an attractive force, others will want to and be compelled to be around us, will want to engage us in a variety of ways.

This has to be everyone’s orientation and approach, whether in any particular initiative your specific task at the time is to be part of the saturation initiative or representing more formally for the Party; whether speaking at a bookstore event, organizing for it, or speaking from the floor;

whether organizing newspaper distribution or writing for the newspaper; whether editing the paper or working on the layout or website; etc. I would hope that playing a “barefoot doctor” role, or mainly getting out leaflets does not bring with it a mindset of having less responsibility for the whole thing. The “life of the party” versus “turn out the lights....” dimension of how the Party is perceived by others is expressed in everything that the Party does. The *“being attuned to and in a real sense part of the life of the larger society and world, including not only the realm of politics but also the intellectual and culture ferment, on whatever level and in whatever forms they exist at any given time..”* is given expression in how we approach, do active social investigation, develop plans for and carry out everything we do. This speaks to how we approach and develop plans for “saturation”; how we approach promotion and popularization of Bob Avakian (especially this); distribution of the newspaper, developing articles for the newspaper, ideas and contributions to the website, etc., etc., etc. Whether or not our work, large or small, reflects the “feel and flow” is both a reflection of line and approach, and is also picked up on by others. Tactics and plans are a reflection of a scientific, exploratory, creative approach of people who are serious and are seriously attempting to reach and influence others—this will effect how people in the short and long run engage what we are doing—and this is true of friend and foe.

For a number of reasons there will be uneven development in how comrades can engage and contribute to various initiatives and the overall—but the point is that all comrades have to be proceeding from becoming political and literary representatives of a revolutionary class and historical dynamic; proceeding from being attuned to the feel and flow of life; and proceeding from this approach engaging in a scientific, dynamic and creative way in all dimensions of the Party’s work. In this way not only will comrades be perceived as the kind of communists we need to be, but this will also carry over to how all of our work, large and small, is perceived by others.

I think it is beyond the scope of this assignment, nor do I have the basis or would it be appropriate to go more deeply into line issues being posed through this campaign, but I think a couple of comments are in line. Clearly underlying a lot of this is an expression of reification, in different dimensions, of the revolutionary process which undermines the “many channels” and “feel and flow” approach to revolution. Related to this, I don’t get the sense that flowing from this basic approach comrades are striving to become *“the political and literary representatives of a class....”* In every major work, from so many dimensions, the Chair has been joining these questions, but clearly there needs to be some deep re-grounding in this orientation. And, again, not to get deeply into this, this opposition or continuing primitiveness in this regard, is also very related to the orientation and questions spoken to in different documents on “correctly putting forward Bob Avakian.”

Thirteen:

Dear Bob,

I hope this finds you well. Much appreciation for “Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution.”

Great assignment—right to the heart of the heart of the matter:

“And the world stays fundamentally unchanged. Capitalism-imperialism continues humming in the `background,’ crushing lives and destroying spirits in its meat-grinder of exploitation. And the horrors continue unabated.”

This is our standing and powerful refutation of every other trend in the world. On the other hand, the way that a lot of people look at what we're about—and not entirely without justification—is: “Here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party's over.”

In persistent and profound ways, precisely this contradiction presents itself as the core question of whether or not there is another way the world can be.

A range of issues are posed. In broad thematic strokes: 1) What are lights that must not be turned out? 2) Why is overcoming the lopsidedness, the inequalities, the depredations, the oppressive social relations linked to “not turning out the lights?” Is this just a matter of history and a current need to address the “negative” perception of communism—because people popularly have a certain (mis) understanding of communism as the fight against inequality full stop (and particularly in the economic sphere) and have also imbibed the dominant ruling class summation of the first revolutions—or, does the relationship between common abundance and a political, cultural, & intellectual vibrancy reflect something more at the root of the transformations that need to be made, in people and circumstances? 3) “Bringing into being a world as vibrant politically, intellectually and culturally as it is abundant materially for the billions of human beings that make up that world” conveys a broad and inspiring vista of a world to want to live in and struggle to achieve, and this poses the great need and potential to popularize this vision—arrayed against the real horrors of the world as it is, as well as the paltry vision for humanity of bourgeois democracy and bourgeois ethics that underlie the present world. This concentrates the attractive and compelling force of the vision and morality of communism. 4) How did the first socialist states do on this account? Both the slanderous, erroneous summation of this experience and the real shortcomings pose sharply the question of: “at what cost?” What historical experiences do we need to excavate more deeply? 5) How can we do better the next time? How can we understand even more deeply and scientifically our freedom and constraints in leading humanity all the way through socialism to a communist world?

First off, without the New Synthesis the questions don't even get on the table. Objectively, they are. But, as questions to be seriously grappled with and acted on, not at all. This is at once reflects the encirclement and the stakes. It concentrates why it is that the new synthesis is truly the source of hope of daring today.

More, the method and approach of the new synthesis, in their full and multi dimensions in epistemology and philosophy—in its deepened and new understanding of dialectics reflect a deepened scientific approach to reality, and, on that foundation a more comprehensive, inspiring and materially grounded morality and ethics; all of which are a revolution in human thought. While there is continuity with the essential methodological breakthrough of Marx, as further developed by Lenin and especially Mao, the new synthesis is not a matter of course correction and/or addition, but when taken as an integral whole, indicates new pathways for social imagination, thinking, and transformation of consciousness and the material world.

On a personal note, in many ways, I am at a juncture of just beginning to be able to take all this on board in a comprehensive and integral way. I say this not for reasons of modesty, but to indicate that when something this new comes along but because it takes working with the new to really comprehend the profundity of the rupture, and, because it is a continual struggle against prevailing methodologies. The new always has to fight against the old. This is new, and we have the exciting, and very high stakes, responsibility to clear the path for this to take root and flourish.

I have been thinking a lot about the continuity and rupture of the new synthesis. We are picking up

on and continuing the fight for a communist world. We are not setting out to lead a different revolution. It's an incredibly inspiring legacy to build on. You have led in deeply interrogating and learning all we can from the breakthroughs as well as the shortcomings of the first stages of communist revolution. Revealed in just this approach, the deepened scientific core of communism is more firmly grounded.

In this context, the Cultural Revolution Symposiums and the Raymond Lotta speaking tours are of enormous political significance, and the process they have begun must be geometrically broadened and deepened. There is the basis for social movement among scholars and others in defense of the first stage—but, it is clear that these efforts will be incapable of learning more deeply what needs to be learned and thus contribute to launching a new era of revolution, if not led and undergirded by the scientific framework of the new synthesis.

But, what has been striking me on a whole new level of late—particularly in thinking about beginning a new stage of revolution, building on and scientifically understanding the previous stage, and at the same time considering all of this in the context of the present world with its increased inter-knitedness and acute and very deep contradictions—is just how radical a rupture the new synthesis actually is. There is no other way, or at least no other way that leads anywhere but back to the horrors of this world and retreat into relativism and agnosticism and to political and ideological complicity with imperialism, to understand the world as it is and as it could be without the breakthroughs in method and approach, in epistemology and philosophy, that are concentrated in the new synthesis.

Here, I can say that I (and probably a wider we) are at the beginning of [a] really internalizing the liberating and more scientific conception (and reassertion of) of freedom as the recognition and transformation of necessity, and [b] working with and swinging with the new understanding of character of contradiction as unevenness and the implications of that on how to understand the motion and development of contradiction as concentrated in your article “The Crises in Physics, Crises in Philosophy and Politics.” Comprehending this provides a much deeper materialist understanding of the multi-layered non linear approach to change, particularly to comprehending the complexity of revolution, now and under the DoP (dictatorship of the proletariat). Also in this regard, once the cul-de-sac and instrumentalism of class truth is ruptured with, along with thoroughly breaking with the accompanying reification of the proletariat, then possibility opens up for a proletarian revolution and dictatorship that could actually get to communism.

A last introductory comment on leadership. Now, and implications for a society where great elasticity is possible but only on the foundation of a solid ideological leading core. Speaking of today first, the new synthesis provides the theoretical framework; there are particular breakthroughs on key questions ideological, political, strategic; and there is the continuing political/strategic guidance provided. But, there is the tangible intangible that comes from having a revolutionary leader who embodies and concentrates not just these necessities for the revolution, but more whose heart is with the people; it's palpable, this too, is a source of hope and daring. This is not the paper to reiterate the goals of the campaign, “The Revolution We Need... The Leadership We Have,” but in fighting for people to even consider revolution, which today seems so impossible, if not implausible to them, underlines the centrality of projecting this leadership as intrinsic to making a new beginning at this time and place. Jeff Haas, Fred Hampton's lawyer, makes the point in his book, that Fred Hampton made everyone around him do better and reach farther than they otherwise would, or would even conceive they could. In a far greater dimension, and on a whole other level than 21-year-old Hampton, this is what we have in Bob Avakian, and it is at this moment in history totally bound up with whether or not there will be a revolution and more, a revolution not only does not turn out the lights,

but creates a new state and new society through which a communist world can be fought for.

These points are not just prefatory to a discussion of a communist revolution that does not signal “lights out,” but are essential to its realization—including that the more broadly the New Synthesis & BA (Bob Avakian) are popularized, and in that context getting out there with our full ensemble, the more that new forces, and broad forces, can be brought into the process.

Here I am only going to be able to begin getting into the issues posed. The question here has everything to do with a materialist understanding of human nature—can people change and how does that happen; how to effect that change in a way that leads to flourishing of all of humanity; why and how is it possible for humanity to fight for a world of freely associating human beings, a communist world where people consciously and voluntarily transform themselves and the objective world? Why is this not a violation of human nature, but instead a path that humanity could take for its own transformation as part of transforming the material conditions of the world through revolution? Why are changing circumstances and changing people possible and dialectically linked?

* * *

What are the lights that mustn't be turned out? When I have raised this contradiction in conversation, people seem to know just what I mean. That we are raising this contradiction, in this way, is refreshing and provocative. Curiosity is piqued—is there a way to overcome the horrific forms of oppression in the world without “turning out the lights?” The people who I most intersect with—public intellectuals, writers, and even more often the broad audience attracted to Revolution Books (including students, young professionals and even some more basic working people)—all express wanting a world with vibrancy, color, light, community—indeed, a full life. Especially here in the U.S., with mass culture and entertainment, people of all strata can imagine this, even if they do not live it; and indeed they feel dissatisfied, often empty, and alone (this is especially so for the advanced). And, yet, communism is, as Sunsara Taylor put it, the farthest thing from their minds,

When you get more deeply into this question, different people, different social groups and ultimately different classes have different views of what a vibrant individual and social life could and should be.

For some, not turning out the lights means being left alone—the negative freedom described in *Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy*. Being free to pursue self interest. In this paper I will need not spend time excavating this strain of libertarian/anti-totalitarian, Arendtian thought.⁷ This has been done incisively in *Democracy Can't We Do Better than That?* and elsewhere. However, the strains of this are also woven through the sentiments of people who attempt to come at this question from a more social and progressive point of view as well—particularly when weighed against the absolutism of the fascistic elements of U.S. society, *and* against the (mis) understanding they have of the previous socialist experience. Adding complexity to the argument is that while it is fundamentally false that the revolutionary period in the Soviet Union and especially the Chinese Cultural Revolution were “lights out” societies, they were deeply limited, at times

7 2 asides—[1] In a recent New Yorker profile of John Mackey (Whole Foods CEO) as an admirer of Ayn Rand he critiques her for bad branding by telling people its all about selfishness, when the term: “enlightened self interest” would afford better marketing. [2] At Revolution Books and at conferences I have run into more younger people than before with various strains of libertarian views—a product of not just political phenom like Ron Paul, but it seems to be around and about in the culture and the arts, more than in past decades.

tragically so, on exactly this point.

An individualist “don’t tread on me” understanding of and approach to this matter is not only a tendency of the petite bourgeoisie, but is broadly expressed by the basic youth, no where more so than in the pop culture: music/video games/movies—and, given the situation the system puts people in, and the ideological crap thrown at the youth, it takes the form of not just “leave me alone,” but of aggressively having to fight for every inch of turf and self against everything and everyone else.

There is at the same time, a deep yearning and impulse towards a society characterized by cooperation and quest for something higher. The resonance of John Lennon’s “Imagine” gives testament to this—even as it can be maddening to watch NYC’s Bloomberg preside over the Times Square New Years Celebration while this song is played for the million gathered and 100 times that watching on TV. [The appropriation of, and contradictory impact, of art is not the subject here.] The seeking of relief, community and purpose in religion, underlines the decisive importance of boldly taking it on, criticizing its reactionary content and crippling ideological impact and counterposing it to the far more inspiring morality of sense of belonging and living a life that matters that revolutionary communism represents.

I particularly like the following from “The Role of Dissent in a Vibrant Society;” [from the book *Observations*] as an encapsulation of communism:

“... it will no longer be a question in society about whether one group of people is going to oppress and dominate another. We will have moved, both in material reality and in the thinking of the people, beyond the point where that is even a possibility, because the economic and the social conditions have been brought into being and, together with them, the political structures and culture have developed in such a way that the idea of one person, or one group of in society, exploiting and oppressing another will be understood to be outrageous, absurd—and impossible.”

And, as you have put it, the revolutionary process of getting there must and can be truly liberating and a far better society than this. This must characterize the revolutionary movement today, to the maximum extent possible — including as we ceaselessly popularize and embody a revolutionary craving for state power and fighting edge of preparing for the time when revolution will be possible. Certainly, everything we project now about the radically new state power must convey it’s liberating character—including popularizing that this is revolution that must continue to communism, as a viable entirely new form of human social organization. And, the character of the revolutionary struggle must also embody our goals, even amidst all that will confront it. We should underline (ie, further popularize) the beginning of the Appendix of the Constitution that: “Communism is both a science and a revolutionary political movement. It is also a goal—not a utopia, but a liberating goal whose potential basis lies within the situation that confronts humanity, a situation where a leap is possible to radically different and much better world.”

* * *

One point I have been trying to make in speaking to this question of “not turning out the lights” is that the communist ethos, the vision of the DoP (dictatorship of the proletariat), the vision of communism, are not only poles of attraction but are integral to its realization. This communist ethos is a powerful and transformative force. It needs to find expression today, with the new

revolutionary state power on a whole other level—both in its propagation through many different means and mediums—art, theory, discussion and debate, and it needs to inform and to the maximum extent possible undergird all the different forms of social organization from the schools, to the community, to workplace, and the army and governing institutions. There is much to learn from the Chinese Cultural Revolution, but with the New Synthesis all of this look and be qualitatively different.

A core methodological point is that while the foundational principle or goal of communist morality is consistent, of achieving a world where “From each according to their ability to each according to their need” is realized, the forms and expressions that lead in that direction under socialism will undergo change through the course of changing the material conditions and transforming the world outlook of people. In the discussion with Bill Martin the point is made that “serve the people” itself will evolve as the class configuration and class struggle progresses under the DoP. And, this must be battled out through intense ideological and political struggle in the course of making the underlying changes in all the institutions as well as in how society produces its material requirements, including how it does so on a world scale without exploitative relations.

Socialism and the state power must lead in the transformation of the relations of production—breaking down the enslaving division of labor to the maximum degree at each point. Making radical transformations in social institutions and social morés—from breaking down divisions among different nationalities and between men and women. Radically transforming education—access to it and the form and content of teaching. Unleashing the masses of diverse strata around all of this—not only the formerly suppressed and oppressed masses from the bottom of society, but unleashing the professional strata as well. And, all this requires state power to back people up, including up against opposition—open, as well as in the form of different groups and strata expressing a lack of enthusiasm for the new changes, or who exhibit an alienation from the political and social spheres, and/or evidence a desire to just settle in. We have to wield this state power in a way that unleashes the suppressed as well as the latent creative power of the masses to re-build society on a whole new basis and in a new way without at the same time throwing everyone else up against the wall, and without at the same time, letting the opposition or even the inertia lead to losing it all. This requires going at these contradictions in the new way indicated by the new synthesis. Will there be no role for campaigns that do, at times, potentially hold the balance of the future of socialism within them? Indeed, but getting the right relation between leading, and even the positive compulsion of different forms of persuasive coercion as well as matters of law, and not compressing everything into the current imperative while maintaining in even acute situations an atmosphere of real dissent. This is new, and needs to be worked on more today.

Backing up a bit again to the role of communist and socialist morality and methodology—foundational to the communist ethos is a materialist understanding of how the world works, and as an expression of this, the broad propagation of science and a scientific approach at the core of the leading force in society. The more that this methodology in its living dimensions is taken up and propagated it too can become a material force in forging the new in an atmosphere of great engagement and contention. Again, a society that comprehends and values that freedom lies in the recognition of necessity and its transformation, and not an ethos of my interests calculated and adjudicated against your interests is the highest good, is essential to leading through the complexity of all this.

The pursuit of truth about the world in all its dimensions—the desire to know the world as part

of the process of transforming it and its people, is a foundational principle of the new socialist society—one that leads to communism. Curiosity, science, and imagination projected and finding real expression in policy and as core values is essential for a vibrant society.

These values, this method and approach does not take place in a vacuum, but in the crucible of acute struggle. I have presented this ethos and methodology as motivating, and as a powerful ideological forces — as expressions of as well as means towards a society where indeed the lights are not out, but where there is lots of air. Yet, discussing these important ideological factors their mainly in their own right, can somewhat flatten the actual dynamics of socialist society, and can evade the real crux of a vibrant socialist society that is on the socialist road to communism.

* * * * *

The most common fear, or concern expressed by people today, which is not without justification (as the assignment put it), is that in the crucible of the continuing class struggle—to further uproot the old institutions, habits, and thinking, all of which will for some time take place in a world of hostile forces, traditional thinking and habits, and, in this country on a whole different, initially far more limited material foundation than the parasitic imperialism afforded — there will be a tremendous pull for the ruling vanguard party to say, and enforce, its “our way or the highway” (if not worse). This goes along with the adage that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. [Here I am not going to dissect the bourgeois-democratic outlook and methodology of that. And, people express concern that there will be an atmosphere where even those who disagree with the direction or policy, feel compelled to agree — either to get along, or even, as reflection of their agreement with overall goals of the revolution and out of a self sacrificing motivation (as with many in the purge trials), and who will then not speak out and fight for what they understand to be true. And, there are concerns that there will be no room for private or civil space—and that this too, would be a society without air, hence, life.

While today these concerns get expressed and people’s vision of socialism is filtered through the lens of the present world—well within the confines of bourgeois right, nonetheless, these are essential concerns that from the vantage point of getting to a communist world, cried out to be addressed.

The new synthesis is an incredibly powerful and radically new approach to all of this. Again, it strikes me anew that this is not, as it is put in the Manifesto a mere adding on to what already existed, but a new synthesis—an integrated whole, providing a basic approach and structure within which to tackle and work on many of the acute contradictions that are posed beginning now, and developing a core that can lead and unleash others to work on this all the way through.

I have been thinking about ferment—and the type of ferment and dissent needed under the DoP to get a rich process going where lots of ideas are flying, where not only are divergent ideas exposed so people can learn from the debate, but where the new can be discovered. There is a deep strategic, and foundational epistemological understanding concentrated in the point that dissent should not just be tolerated but fostered. And, all the more when we understand that this is not a debating club, but actual class and social forces fighting to expand and break down the barriers that have long held down and which now must be shattered, to raise up those formerly locked out and locked up, while at the same time restricting various expressions of bourgeois right to the maximum extent possible, and that all of this occurs against a backdrop of real and at times conflicting needs and desires on the part of different sections of the people. In this context, I found the point you went into in more depth this past year about the contradictions posed by the fact

that the proletariat is no longer the oppressed class under the DoP, and that different class and social alignments will emerge and be required in the course of the struggle to realize the 4 Alls, very provocative—in terms of how to recognize and mobilize all positive factors for continuing the revolution—unleashing and leading these forces, while comprehending that class struggle will not diminish and the danger of counter-revolution remains.

In thinking particularly about the unresolved contradiction of women's oppression and its centrality to the emancipation of humanity, in light of Part 3 of your new talk, the truth concentrated in the slogan: “unleash the fury of women as a mighty force for revolution” will continue to be a positive dynamic that must be real under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Being a person who finds concentration of slogans extremely helpful in organizing my thoughts, I am thinking of the Clash lyric: “Anger can be power if you know how to use it.” This is certainly a crying need right now—on *our* side—a lot more anger up against acquiescence. But, this must have expression and value in socialist society.

We will need a dynamic in society and a culture and an ethos that is constantly bringing forward the untapped and suppressed fury and creativity of those people stemming from the contradictions that have been long suppressed, and the righteous anger and deep concerns about how things are (and have been), and how people think they could or should be. And, all of what people think and want will clearly will be pulling in lots of different directions, some not positive at all. The value of dissent is it's unleashing of all of that, both enabling people broadly to learn to discern policies and proposals different world views expressed through art and other expressions and wrestling with where they lead (ultimately, and sometimes not so ultimately, the road back to capitalism or the socialist road forward). At the same time, this dissent also holds the potential to reveal the new—that which hasn't yet been discovered or understood. We need an atmosphere in which the crucible of really engaged ideological and political struggle (taking place in new mass forms as well as through contested mass elections) is recognized by the leadership and increasing wider sections of the masses as being essential to providing the air for discovery.

What brings in the air may well be in the form of outrage, even against those leading this. And, at times it may well be wrong—including when people you want to rely on, and maybe have relied on, now disagree.

How to let that process go, having the air for that discovery (and even that rage, perhaps directed against you) without being quick to correct, let alone suppress, without losing a grip on where society needs to go, and certainly without losing state power. There will be a need to be setting basic terms of where things need to go, giving support to those who want to go there—struggling to uproot and abolish the old social and class relations and traditional thinking—while doing so in a way that combines the ethos, energy, enthusiasm, and excitement of society where the collective and common good of all is forged and modeled by a core with a conquering scientific spirit infused with the vision and imagination of communism. This core will need to model and help forge a climate where a critical spirit and materialism that deeply comprehends and critiques the material, social and ideological ties that bind to the past with a firm grasp of the future potential.

All of this is a radical rupture from the discourse in today's world—including for the intelligentsia that today values ferment and rational and scientific discourse, as well as has a broad vision of the value of art and the life of the mind. But, today this process can only (or, at least, overwhelmingly) takes place through structures and processes, as well as the corresponding outlook that views and is constrained by ideas as intellectual, private property. [Much more use has to be

made now of the short polemic on the free market place idea in the *Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy* pamphlet—in the context of the whole work, and I believe it stands up and is extremely important in its own right].

Today, the new forms of communication and dissemination of information—the new media—are changing with incredible rapidity, influencing and shaping for better and worse how people receive and process information. This new media and forms of networking—even when they strain to break free of the prevailing economic and social relations that have previously dominated the distribution and sharing of knowledge—are constantly and fundamentally constrained by the outlook and structures of this system. In a new society, all of this can have a radically new form and content. Today the new media has made people more connected on a world scale than ever before, yet simultaneously, never more acutely atomized.

Here, I have been thinking that there is at least an aspect where we should view this new technology as, in part, productive forces that are constrained by the prevailing relations that revolution will be re-forged and unleashed in unimagined ways under socialism.⁸ At the same time, the new digital media and networking function as integral to the superstructure and will be an important forum for ideological struggle, and in new ways with real potential under a re-envisioned DoP.

There are many within this world whose social imaginations, including in this arena, should be tapped right now—for revolution and for communism—contributing to making revolution today, including working with the party on a vision of this in a whole new society. The “Wired” utopian internet thesis need to be critiqued, but the people comprehended and brought forward around the potential that is concentrated in the new synthesis [These people who can be involved and unleashed now we need to approach not just to help us by building/designing our web sites and helping catch us up on new networking technology—but more fundamentally unleashed to the new synthesis, Bob Avakian, and the whole Communist movement — including working and theorizing in that sphere, and then, yes, working with on effectively and imaginatively using the new technology as part of the revolutionary movement today].

* * *

Well I set a time limit for writing this and I have exceeded it, yet I feel I have just scratched the surface. For one thing, there is a lot more playing with and working through the 4 tasks of the solid core. What does that look like as it unfolds? Second, in “Views On” there is a whole discussion of law and the Constitution—really understanding why that is so essential for there to be liveliness and ease of mind, while at the same time understanding that as the revolution develops, the old constitution will become outmoded. This will not be a process of simply making amendments—modifications to a static core that corresponds to existing production and social relations—but, will at intervals require radical ruptures and new constitutions, whether or not the product of new cultural revolutions. And, related to this is the scope for individual rights, and the flourishing of individuality within a new collective framework. Third, really having a society that is led with the modalities, structures, and methodology of solid core with a lot of elasticity, a new state that is led by a party with a solid ideological core and that is determined and focused on advancing on the socialist road, but which understands that this will not happen without an approach which comprehends embracing and be prepared to let things really rip as part of the

⁸ I did not have time to go back and look at Notes on Political Economy and your talks from that same period, where I seem to recall you may have said something similar in the context of a criticism of not taking a fresh look at this new information technology.

process of moving towards the abolition of the state in line with advancing on the realization of the 4 alls. What are the implications of this in relation to things like pacing, tempo, and the emergence of junctures that may require all out cultural revolutions? And, what will these junctures and future Cultural Revolutions look like, with the method and approach of the New Synthesis? Fourth, how do you know (and of course, you can't know for sure) when you are at the brink of being drawn and quartered, and not past it? Back to the professors question of—you say you want to do it this way, but when it comes down to it, you won't be able to. We have said that we can't get to communism any other way, yet and still, the contradiction is perhaps the most acute we have to anticipate.

I must close. Know that you have my warmest affection and appreciation.

My best wishes for the New Year in every way, including particularly that we succeed in our campaign. This decade, at last, with our party revitalized on a revolutionary foundation, has the potential, to birth a new revolutionary force on the planet that will bring about a world that will set humanity on a course towards its full emancipation.

Best,

Fourteen:

These are some initial thoughts but in actually writing this I realize there is much much more provoked by this exercise than I had initially thought and much more to grapple with and think about. Also, given the new aspect to this contradiction, I wanted to get some foundational framework points in and then proceed to examples of the real-world contradictions to grapple with but time has proved short. But I am going to think and write more on this in coming months.

“And the world stays fundamentally unchanged. Capitalism-imperialism continues humming in the `background,' crushing lives and destroying spirits in its meat-grinder of exploitation. And the horrors continue unabated.”

This is our standing and powerful refutation of every other trend in the world. On the other hand, the way that a lot of people look at what we're about—and not entirely without justification—is: “Here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party's over.”

I think the first point to recognize is that this view of “Here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party is over”—while significantly colored by bourgeois prejudice, slander and disinformation—is “not entirely without justification.” The first wave of socialist experiences and the international communist movement more broadly has been marked, to a significant degree, by an approach that radically transforming the world has an attendant social cost of ‘turning out the lights’—even if to a degree.

Is it the inevitable cost of radical social transformation? Is this what the world needs to go through to get to communism?

The second point is that the answer to these questions above was: yes ... till now. Till the new synthesis, there was no approach to this contradiction of transforming the world without the attendant social cost of 'turning out the lights' ... to a degree, and yes, secondary to the real accomplishments that did mark the first wave of communist revolutions and socialist societies. And with the perspective of the new synthesis, there is an even greater scientific understanding and appreciation that the previous approaches as a whole — the means taken, within the previous constrained and limited framework — would not ultimately get to communism. In fact, without striving to 'keep the lights on' in a framework and process that is radically changing the world, if you will, there is no getting to communism. With this framework of the new synthesis, there is a communist approach to the contradiction (not bourgeois democratic) that then needs to be grasped and popularized by growing cores of leadership and the masses, grappled with and applied, including in particular, and developed further through this process.

The third point is that, in grappling with this, it seems that all of the new synthesis, the entirety and the coherence of it, would be needed to approach this contradiction correctly—i.e., you need the full package, so to speak—principally, the approach of the solid core with a lot of elasticity, with the interrelated further scientific developments of living with and transforming the middle strata based on a more materialist and dialectical understanding of what Bob Avakian has called the 'parachute' point; a profound understanding and appreciation of the leadership on 'going to the brink of being drawn and quartered' in this process; a more materialist and dialectical understanding of freedom and necessity, and of social reality as a multi-level multi-textured map with many channels for transformation; ruptures with class truth and reification of the proletariat; a communist approach of 'embraces but does not replace' to realms 'in their own right'; fuller ruptures with nationalism and economism in the ideological sphere, and aiming for nothing less than the emancipation of humanity; and fuller ruptures in the philosophical and methodological sphere with positivism, pragmatism, and mechanical materialism.

With all of this, it is still a lot of very hard work, including actually grappling with the real contradictions involved (let's not be utopian here; it is a unity of opposites—not letting the 'world stay as it is' and not 'turning out the lights' to a degree—flowing from real-world contradictions in what it will take to change this fucked up world) and 'how do we do this', both using our science and stretching our imagination and creativity. [Imagine what a communist revolution and socialism would do to the ideological tenor and how that affects, influences, recasts what artists think and therefore what art they 'spontaneously' will be driven to produce, what people find beautiful and what peoples' cultural needs are, what it would mean to 'keep the lights on'—all as opposed to a static transposition of the art/culture of bourgeois society into socialism—I'm still trying to get my head around this! On the other hand, imagine being taken to and going to the 'brink of being drawn and quartered' with all of what is unleashed if we do this right!]

Mudbone, Richard Pryor's character, says "the truth is gonna be funny, but it's gonna scare ... folks." While Pryor's main reference is to those avoiding confronting the reality of the horrors of this world, and those lying and obscuring this reality, including reactionaries, there is a way in which this statement has some applicability to communists and this contradiction, both in looking at the historical experience (I don't know about 'funny' in this regard) and in concentrating this contradiction historically because what constitutes 'keeping the lights on' encompasses

truths, whether in the political, intellectual or artistic realm, (some 'that's gonna be funny') but that causes problems for communists in power, especially in the short term and in relation to immediate objectives. At one level of reality, what constitutes 'keeping the lights on', what makes society vibrant and a place you'd want to live in, appears as—and is fact, often truly—oppositional; or at best a distraction or irrelevant for the communist project of the revolutionary transformation of society.

It is important to understand that this is not manufactured by the communists, a product of our power-hungriness, our desire to impose our will on society and turn out the lights or anything of the like but rather a contradiction that arises from material reality itself, the vestiges of class society that have to be transformed to get to communism. The bourgeois prejudice, slander and disinformation obscures what underlies this contradiction, attributing it to authoritarian leaders, dictatorial vanguards, totalizing ideology, condescending view of the masses, social engineering, and the like, instead of a scientific view that identifies and grasps the real material contradictions in reality that underlie this.

This contradiction is profound. It is not simple. There are strong and real material pulls that lead to an approach and create conditions where the lights objectively get turned out, where in the face of necessity, there is a 'circle the wagons' mentality that leads to the air, the color and the vibrancy being sucked out of society. 'Keeping the lights on' will necessitate giving room to and even fostering scenes and new movements of art and culture (without the party's leadership) and some of this will be informed by bourgeois content in the early stages of socialist society and potentially even at times of crises, and can be fostered by the bourgeoisie and used to its ends; some will 'compete' for social resources and funding with meeting the basic needs.

As historical experience has shown and as Bob Avakian has pointed out repeatedly, the necessity is very real and often very severe, whether from external threats or capitalist restoration, resistance to socialist transformations or problems in meeting the basic needs of the people, among many.

To take just the last instance, even with unlocking the revolutionary initiative, energy and enthusiasm of the masses, and the level of advanced productive forces in an advanced imperialist country like the U.S., we cannot underestimate the degree to which meeting the basic needs of the masses is going to pose severe necessities, coming through a revolutionary struggle for power with its attendant destruction of productive forces, rupturing a country like this out of imperialist and exploitative relations with the rest of the world, embargoes from imperialist and reactionary powers, to say nothing of how to produce the necessities of life without relying on exploitation of the masses here, the potential resistance of formerly privileged sections of workers and experts, the impact of rationing on the middle strata, and many such et ceteras.

These necessities, especially concentrated in the need to hold onto state power in the face of the dangers of imperialist invasions and capitalist restoration, are the context and a correct starting point for understanding this contradiction, the profundity and the material bases for it, and for clearly demarcating from a bourgeois democratic approach to it. For example, this becomes really clear in talking to folks from the middle strata, including sincere people who do want to see a different world, however inchoate their understanding and vision of it may be. In approaching this from a spontaneously bourgeois democratic standpoint, not grasping the necessities faced and therefore the contradiction posed, the response often is 'what's the problem?' of course we

need dissent, largely unrestricted flourishing of the intellectual and artistic realms, experimentation, etc.'

In the context of these necessities, and a learning curve approach, our historical experience of the first wave of communist revolution and socialist societies has been marked with both errors and shortcomings in method and approach concentrated in narrowing the perspective to the immediate level of reality, what serves the revolution in its immediate goals and objectives, blinding oneself to and reducing whole layers of a multi-leveled, multi-textured reality thereby constricting the channels through which to affect the transformation of society *towards communism*. These pragmatic and non-scientific approaches have been coupled with secondary tendencies towards the reification of the proletariat, reification of socialism, nationalism and economism.

Communism is a science, a revolutionary political movement and a goal of emancipating all of humanity, of getting beyond the 4 A's. Tendencies that cut against any of this, philosophically, methodologically or ideologically, will lead to constricting the atmosphere and a degree of 'turning out the lights.' This is another way of saying that the degree of 'turning out the lights' has a lot to do with how far up the mountaintop are the actual contradictions on the ground being approached from. For example, drawing from historical experience, notions of class truth, reification of the proletariat, nationalism or economism will blind you to truths that emerge from whole sections of the people, if not outright censorship.

There was too much of a tendency to view art and the world of ideas in terms of what immediately served the revolution.

In Mao's approach to intellectuals (on which I am working on a paper—comparing and contrasting the historical experience and approach with Avakian's approach to intellectuals), it seemed that overall there was some dualism in how intellectuals were viewed—an ideological 'distrust' (flowing from their actual class position and real unreliability in terms of revolutionary objectives; but not enemies as another line goes) on one hand, and a need flowing from their role in dealing with the mental-manual contradiction and in making contributions to the construction and advance of socialist society (not to the search for truth in the largest sense). This was compounded by class truth and the reification of the proletariat. All of this led to a significant constriction both in their role in the search for truth in its own right, and in playing a much greater role in sparking intellectual ferment and in the mental-manual contradiction than merely as 'educators.' Very critically, experimentation and inquiry into realms that did not serve the revolution were significantly curbed in favor of initiatives to meet revolutionary objectives and pre-set and pre-determined goals. The resolution of the mental-manual contradiction was seen in too linear and narrow a framework of educating 'the manual', and to a degree, 'manual-izing the mental'—ultimately all becoming the worker-intellectual.

Curbing of experimentation and new things not anticipated is a profound methodological error that leads to some of 'turning out the lights.' Mao himself was very firm on new truths emerging and being in the hands of the minority, needing to fight to survive and establish against conventional wisdom but as overall socialist state policy this was curbed, reinforced by the class position of most intellectuals (reification and class truth), their methods of inquiry (not dialectical materialism) and realms of inquiry that were not immediately useful to the revolution. Mao's education policies, out of necessity, had a very 'polytechnic' approach—and therefore most of the education, intellectual inquiry and experimentation was geared to actual material problems

faced by the revolution. The issue is not that this is not critical but it was almost exclusive. An example is the horse vs. cow example from *Breaking With Old Ideas*.

In a similar vein, model operas with close attention from high-level leadership played an extremely important role in the revolutionization of society and breaking with feudal and reactionary outmoded culture but were promoted to the almost exclusivity of other art and culture. To be clear: it's completely correct to struggle against the reactionary feudal outmoded art and culture that were dominating the cultural life of the masses and society decades into socialism. I would like to learn more if there were other new movements and scenes that did emerge organically from the masses during this period but were suppressed. The suppression of jazz music and the essays on the class content of instrumental music are illustrative of these methodological problems of nationalism on one hand, and a very reductive and class-reified approach to art on the other (a non-reified approach to instrumental music would be interesting for Wagner still makes me cringe!).

Socialist societies so far have had a problematic relationship with truth and beauty. Truth has no class content, but was viewed as having such. Beauty definitely does have class content but was often viewed in narrow and reified terms, reducing realms of art and culture which have an 'in its own right' higher-than-reality dimension to merely reality and therefore assessed in narrower and reified ideological and political terms than should be synthesized within the larger revolutionary transformation of society towards communism.

Without a correct scientific and dialectical materialist approach to truth and beauty, and their role in the revolutionary transformation of society, there will inevitably be a constriction of the environment in which the lights do get turned out to a degree. In this, the notion of class viewed in reified terms has been a singular methodological culprit. Through this prism, what filters as proletarian ideas and truth, art and culture is way too narrow—and scientifically incorrect. Truth, beauty and social relations are among the substance of the 'lights' to constitute a vibrant society of intellectual, artistic and political ferment, of science, love and humor ...

As we are grappling with now, equality was fought for within social relations between people, especially between men and women, and this is very important. But at the same time the overall conception of these relations, including in the realm of love, sexual relations and sexuality, was marked by feudal morality and even Puritanism (don't talk about it at best! Even though it concentrates so much!). This was rationalized as serving the revolution, again reducing the 'in its own right' dimension which actually correctly understood, should get enriched within the larger context of subordinating to and serving the revolution. A communist approach to this question was not forged in line with an overall under-emphasis so far in the international communist movement on theoretical work on this question.

The new synthesis comprehends two over-arching philosophical points which are supremely relevant here:

First, that "freedom does lie in the recognition and transformation of necessity. The point is that this recognition and the ability to carry out that transformation goes through a lot of different 'channels,' and is not tied in a positivist or reductionist or linear way to however the main social contradictions are posing themselves at a given time. If that were the case—or if we approached it that way—we would liquidate the role of art and much of the superstructure in general. Why

do we battle in the realm of morals? It is because there is relative initiative and autonomy in the superstructure. And the more correctly that's given expression, the better it will be, in terms of the kind of society we have at a given time and in terms of our ability to recognize necessity and carry out the struggle to transform necessity." [Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity] What poses as necessity, how to change the world without 'turning out the lights' actually affords freedom, more and different channels for the further transformation of society IF we recognize and approach this correctly.

Second, the points contained in "'Crises in Physics,' Crises in Philosophy and Politics" which are a further development of dialectics and "the unevenness within things—or within a given level of matter, with its relative identity—that holds the potential, and in fact provides the material bases, for change within those things."

In terms of conscious forces and our actions, what is the influence on other art—and the transformation of the whole scene—of something like a model opera (using this more metaphorically for a work led closely by the vanguard or brought forward among the masses but promoted by the vanguard because of its very high ideological content and artistic quality)? This is not the 'free marketplace of ideas' but how will it change what the masses 'spontaneously' desire after this?

Without the approach of solid core with a lot of elasticity, and all of what is comprehended in that, there is no approach through this contradiction. There are many different aspects to this:

First, a dialectical approach and understanding of the solid core, including in its relation to the elasticity on the basis of the solid core. In this regard, I found the following from Bob Avakian really helpful: "with regard to the aspect of solid core itself, you can't say, 'well, we have to have an absolute solid core before we can allow for any elasticity and initiative.' On the other hand, there is a real problem if the elasticity is not, in a fundamental sense, on the basis of the solid core—if in effect, the elasticity and the initiative that is taken amounts to, or results in, substituting *some other* solid core for the that that is actually, objectively, needed. But again, you can get metaphysical and absolutist about this: You can't say 'only when we have some "absolute" solid core, and everybody has exactly the same level of understanding and agreement with regard to that solid core, can we then have any elasticity.' First of all, you'll never achieve that kind of absolute certainty and absolute unity, you're never going to overcome all unevenness; and second of all, your solid core will dry up and turn into its opposite, into dogma. It will become lifeless and turn into its opposite, and it won't even be a solid core any more, in fact. There has to be space and life, even within a solid core; there are certain solid core things *within* any solid core, around which other things, within that solid core, are less solid and have more elasticity, if you will." ["The Basis, The Goals, and The Methods of The Communist Revolution"]

Second, the notion of unleashing a process vs. the linear fly-fishing model of everything extending out as a line from the party. In this regard, I found the following really helpful: "Yes, in an overall sense, it is necessary for the party to lead the masses, as long as there is a need for a vanguard party; but it is a very complex and contradictory process that I think we have to envision and that is envisioned in this new synthesis, which has to do with unleashing a lot of mass upheaval, turmoil, tumult, debate, dissent, and thrashing it through among and together with the masses, in order for the masses, in growing numbers, to synthesize what's true and correct and revolutionary out of all that. And yes, on that basis, to suppress what actually needs to be suppressed, but also to carry forward what needs to be carried forward, and to deal correctly at any

point, with the two different types of contradictions ... This is a different way, a not so linear way. It's not like you're fly-fishing and throwing a line out—it's much more 'throwing out' a process that goes in many different directions and then working through, together with the masses, to synthesize it, without letting go of the core of everything. And that's the very difficult part, to do that *without letting go of the core of everything.*” [“Views on Socialism and Communism: A Radically New Kind of State, A Radically Different and Far Greater Vision of Freedom”]

What I found myself further thinking/understanding in rereading this recently is that the “lights” do not all metaphysically reside in the elasticity (which is what is often conventionally understood) but in the actual dialectic between the solid core and the elasticity on the basis of the solid core. What I mean by that is how the ferment and “unleashing a lot of mass upheaval, turmoil, tumult, debate, dissent, and thrashing it through among and together with the masses, in order for the masses, in growing numbers, to synthesize what’s true and correct and revolutionary out of all that” describes the dialectic of how the solid core expands and enriches (does not become dry and brittle dogma). It would be a fallacy to think of absolute categories like “model operas = solid core” and “other art/culture movements = elasticity” but rather that in this process there is relative solid core/elasticity in and within each (with obviously the model operas being much more solid core) and the interaction between each and within the larger process unleashed is what further revolutionizes society, expands and enriches the solid core. After all, in socialist society, with revolutionary transformations underway, and model operas led by the vanguard in play, what emerges as “organic” spontaneous scenes of art and culture—in this context — will be heavily influenced/informed by these in various ways and take these as reference points. There will for sure be oppositional works, but there will also be revolutionary works and works in between which in the process of thrashing it through and among the masses, helps further clarify two roads (socialist and capitalist), and synthesize what is true and revolutionary out of all that. [On the oppositional work—and things of cardinal import: After all the play *Ha Jui Dismissed From Office*, and the criticism around that as a political attack on Mao—correctly—was part of launching the Cultural Revolution—nothing wrong with that! Also, there are aspects of the ‘unleashing a process’ vs. the ‘fly-fishing model’ in how the Shanghai Commune and the Rev Committees arose among the masses (in relation to Mao) in relation to the contradiction of bringing in and training the masses to rule and run society—and what was synthesized was the revolutionary committees]

I used to go often to the Nuyorican Poets Café Open Mic night. As one can imagine, the poetry is vastly diverse, mixed and with contradictory influence by revolutionary nationalism, identity politics, and religion/spiritualism (there does seem to be more of the open God than the ‘Spirit’ these days unfortunately). But in thinking about this question, I was thinking what would happen to this scene (in terms of ideological influence) in socialist society or even as society today acquires a more revolutionary ethos, and revolutionary politics/leadership/culture became a reference point? What would come to dominate? Then another thought: you actually need this whole scene even for someone like Saul Williams to come through, to hone his art. The notion of a scene/movement in art/culture is very important ... this is what gives the 'lights' substance and this is also what lends it ideological influence and weight. This is also what is going to take us to the brink of being drawn and quartered ... The scenarios for these are actually quite real, for example certain movies or movements (like the Beats) may just 'take off' without ‘us having a chance to struggle this through’ and then all of a sudden it is a mass phenomenon with mass following and influence, and it may not be very good ... such as a movie among more middle-strata youth that seemingly portrays rebellion, but the underlying ideology is of 'rebels without a cause'. This can get turned against the vanguard and leadership and if at a time of external crises when we need to rally the masses, and this gets very very hairy very very quickly. This gets even

more compounded if the spontaneous inclinations/tendencies of the proletarian masses towards 'the first shall be last; the last shall be first' and other revenge-ist and economist/nationalist tendencies are rallied against the youth by sections of our social base. This is no easy contradiction to handle.... Need some very 'big arms' to lead this all ... Also, in terms of times when the reins need to be pulled in more tightly (as will necessarily happen, as when under threat from imperialist invasion, etc), how to do this by bringing the masses into this orientation, and therefore without a BIG CHILL that then sows distrust or causes lack of ease of mind going forward?

[One of the major challenges in all of this is the struggle with our social base for this ... within them on questions of social relations, and within them and other strata on other aspects of this—all in the overall process of revolutionizing society. I was thinking of legitimacy questions in this regard and at the brink of being drawn and quartered if the solid core is not strong enough, how do you hold onto power? How do we assess this—with science and art? This is no easy question. Therein the last sentence of the previous excerpt: "And that's the very difficult part, to do that *without letting go of the core of everything.*" If a wider social base for revolution has not been won over to this method and approach, how do we sustain this?]

Critical to 'keeping the lights on' is that the 'in its own right-ness' of different realms has to be recognized, within the overall context of the transition to communism. One of the shortcomings in our historical experience in this regard has been the under-emphasis and sometimes even negation of this aspect—especially in the realm of social relations, such as on questions of love—not recognizing how within an overall revolutionary and correct context, this is actually further strengthening of the solid core for revolution, instead of undermining it.

A few days ago, I saw a production of the play *Twelve Angry Men* which is about a jury deciding the case of a boy accused of murdering his father. Briefly, the premise is that the evidence against the boy seems overwhelming and convincing, eleven of the twelve jurors being convinced he is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, but one juror stands out against this, both because he has doubts of the evidence and case made for the boy's guilt, and he feels a decision of this magnitude merits serious consideration. Taken from one perspective, he could have been determinist and given up against the odds, especially given the 'passionate intensity' (going into thuggishness and crude racist backwardness through the play) of some who are racing to convict the accused boy. But this juror, taking the stakes into account, initiates a process, playing a leadership role in putting forth his doubts and making a case for 'reasonable doubt.'

The play, in critical aspects, manifests how unevenness can be a source of transformation, the role of leadership, and an expression of solid core with a lot of elasticity. This lone juror (I think Juror #6) constitutes the initial solid core and through a whole process unleashed by him, of debate and thrashing it out with the others, eventually (spoiler alert!) succeeds in winning a 'not guilty' verdict. But the process itself is rather illuminating, as it unfolds in reality (the play's constructed but very believable reality). Initially an older juror supports Juror #6 because he respects people who stand against the odds and are a minority: 'it's not easy to stand up for what you believe in'. Then the game is on. With this, he starts sowing doubts in the prosecution's case. As he does this, there are jurors who slowly begin to express doubts and join his side, and an opposing solid core constitutes against him, and this polarization constitutes the heart of the debate. Through this process, others contribute in bringing to light their insights and observations, even while asking further questions on other aspects they are not convinced about, there is a vacillating middle, and the polarization becomes sharper. What is remarkably shown is the unevenness in the jurors' viewpoints, understanding and approach and how that becomes a source of struggle and transformation. At one nodal point, the 'guilty' solid core being put on the spot to make their

case, makes a case not on the actual evidence but on pre-conceived prejudices and sentiments, including some crude racist backwardness. This tilts the whole case.

For me there was a whole application of how the solid core is forged and expands through this process, the tremendous unevenness within the solid core through the whole process, but that it could not have expanded without all of the debate and thrashing out of ideas. It still is fundamentally changing of what and how people think, which does not occur in a linear process but through the contestation and thrashing out of ideas, and assessing and synthesizing what is true and not true in a collective process—without letting go of the core.

In terms of the mirror opposite pulls: of bourgeois-democracy on one hand (elasticity not on the basis of the needed solid core) and dry dogma ('turning the lights out') on the other (all solid core). The first point to emphasize here is the correct understanding and relationship between the two aspects ... need the solid core and the elasticity on the basis of the needed solid core, but cannot get absolutist about the solid core .. which itself is a moving dynamic thing, full of unevenness and contradiction. There are pulls to both wait for that absolute solid core (which ironically, in the absence of the elasticity, cannot and will never cohere to any degree) and to then let go if it completely. There is some science and some art to this, and a lot of practice to get this right.

In this regard, there is the critical point of basic orientation that is supremely relevant here:

“If we try to embrace, encompass and explore non-communist people, ideas and perspectives ever more widely and flexibly (which we should do) *but do so the basis of something other than a truly solid core and strategic grounding in OUR project and objectives*, we will at one and the same time fail to harvest as much as we could from these wider explorations and initiatives AND, most unconscionably, we will LOSE THE WHOLE THING!”

The Arthur Miller article (Issue #4 + the PEN report) was a spectacular example of this ideological and methodological error. There is an analogy here of (big D to small d) ‘if you try to get the democrats to be what they are not, (and never will be—this is a little different here!) you will end up becoming more like what the democrats actually are’ and casting Arthur Miller into what he is not (‘theatre to change the world’) we become bourgeois-democrats, “losing the whole thing” while at the same time definitely failing to harvest as much as we could...including, in the particular context of this discussion, how someone like Arthur Miller can actually in reality play a role in the revolutionization of society from his standpoint and his perspective, as part of the larger process unleashed by the communists.

Very interrelated is the concept of living with and transforming the intermediate strata in the transition to communism. “This is a very profound point, and both aspects of this are important; this is once again a unity of opposites—*living with and transforming* the middle strata. If you set out only to live with them, you will end up surrendering power back, not to the petty bourgeoisie but in fact to the bourgeoisie; things will increasingly be on their terms. On the other hand, if you seek only to transform the petty bourgeoisie (speaking broadly, to refer to the intermediate strata of various kinds), you will end up treating them like the bourgeoisie and driving them into the camp of the bourgeoisie, seriously undermining the dictatorship of the proletariat, and you will end up losing power that way, also.” There are many applications of this to the contradiction at hand, from the most obvious being the class origins and spontaneous inclinations of the vast majority of progressive intellectuals and artists as we make revolution from bourgeois society to

the underlying methodological points of how to approach ideas, art and social relations that reflect petty bourgeois outlooks, and are and will be part of the necessary ferment and sub-strata if you will of 'keeping the lights on.' Two important points here are (a) that the concept of a united front approach all the way through instead of an official ideology in socialist society is critical; (b) the notion that if someone wants to just go play and have time to if you will "fuck around" and play, this is afforded room, including going off and trying to write poetry without committee or immediate oversight/supervision. This is the application of the 'unleashing a process' vs. 'the fly-fishing model'.

Two short concluding points on this:

First, this is an entirely different model than what was done in China — within the overall principal aspect of continuity, of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the institutionalized leading role of the vanguard party. There are some aspects in common, especially as things erupted during the GPCR, but as a framework for leading society ... a whole new framework. Within the old framework of how vanguard leadership was conceived of and exercised in socialist society, with shortcomings of reification, class truth, etc. the 'turning off the lights' does come as attendant social cost of radically transforming the world.

Second, all of this is really hard work.

A few questions I am grappling with, from serious to more mundane and humorous (thinking 'outside the box' of the China model, and with approach of the new synthesis):

How does the mental/manual manifest in an advanced imperialist society like the U.S.? It is crazy criminal that there are whole sections of functionally illiterate and those whose "curiosity is crushed by third grade" (Kozol) in the public schools of the inner-cities, but what is the particular full extent, scope, nature and texture of this contradiction? How does it impact how we will go about transforming this in the framework of the new synthesis? How does it impact transforming the world without 'turning out the lights' to any degree? [For example, art/culture for whole sections is Jerry Springer type reality TV (talk about 'skewing'), and this cuts across classes, but there is particular intersection with the mental-manual.]

What are social relations between men and women going to be like in a socialist society that is forged out of a bourgeois-democratic society (as opposed to out of feudal relations with remnants carried over) and with the approach of the new synthesis and its further theoretical work on the woman question. This is a big part—with the romance and the love on a different basis—of keeping the lights on. In the sixties, China had semi-feudal mores on this and the sixties struggle inspired by China had attempts at liberating women's sexuality and a whole lot of experimentation (like May '68 in France) (though not fully rupturing out of the realm of male right), though as the recent talk points out, there is now traditional roles and domination of men that have reasserted themselves. What sort of new art and culture will be produced by the struggle to end women's oppression and how will it be different and more advanced than the model operas in China breaking with feudal roles and putting women on center-stage? A friend yesterday at dinner posed the question of what the gender roles are going to be in socialist society with a new approach to the woman question. I cannot stop thinking about this now. At an extreme, given the biological (non)basis for gender, what is the social distinction going to be, if at all?

I have been rereading Skybreak's series on "Some Ideas on the Social Role of Art" and am very provoked by a communist approach to art that suggests further development from the 'best of the GPCR' (Art and Science was particularly humorous and thrilling, as illuminating was the point about breaking with the worship of spontaneity when it comes to the arts). Within the framework of the new synthesis (especially the Dictatorship and Democracy talk) which draws from the "Working with Ideas and Searching for Truth: A Reflection on Revolutionary Leadership and the Intellectual Process" there seems to be a coherent approach to the disciplines and the interrelationships between science (natural and social), art, religion (pretending to be reality but decidedly not; as opposed to science in correspondence to reality; and art as higher than reality) and the humanities (philosophy especially, including epistemology and ethics/morality) that is a further leap in approach to realms of intellectual inquiry and resultant policies in socialist society (curricula: core curricula on communism and dialectical materialism, on history but also other philosophies interrogating Marxism from without!).

I am still trying to get my arms around the recasting of all of U.S. academia and intellectual inquiry as we make revolution and go through to socialism. Currently, a lot of intellectual inquiry in the U.S. today rests on the spoils of imperialism including certain disciplines of scientific inquiry now, such as molecular biology (genome research) which involve billions of dollars of equipment, labs, etc and draw people from all over the world—but which is very useful for human knowledge and in saving lives. Thousands are involved in extremely esoteric research such as in fields of pure mathematics which only involve 1-2 people in the whole world (this is Goldbach conjecture to the nth degree, if you will). How is all of this going to be approached in socialist society and recast in socialist society under the approach of the new synthesis? This essential question is posed more sharply in "Materialism and Romanticism: Can We Do Without Myth?" I'm thinking of this a lot now.

Good humor and comedy are oppositional to the system—Pryor, Lenny Bruce, George Carlin, etc and what we like of comedy today. In socialist society, comedians should—as solid core—have a field day in making fun of backward ideas and social relations as they need to be transformed further ... but Avakian has made a point that they should also extol socialist society and its changes. I have posed the question to some of my comedian friends and have been thinking of what that will look like? (mainly we need to get them to a better place on the woman question—god!!! And have them resist. The other day, I was hanging out with someone who is still on the circuit and he said to me that the manager of a club said he 'ain't getting paid if there are no dick jokes') But returning to point, there is a strong prejudice that non-oppositional humor cannot be funny. We need to help comedians break with this (and get with Mudbone). [I'm working on it!!!]

Fifteen:

“And the world stays fundamentally unchanged. Capitalism-imperialism continues humming in the `background,' crushing lives and destroying spirits in its meat-grinder of exploitation. And the horrors continue unabated.”

This is our standing and powerful refutation of every other trend in the world. On the other hand, the way that a lot of people look at what we're about—and not entirely without justification—is: “Here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party's over.”

In a basic sense, what this contradiction captures is that while only revolution leading to communism can put an end to the horrors of this world, for large numbers of people there's a sentiment, or verdict, that the dop [dictatorship of the proletariat] is not somewhere people, and in particular (but not only) the broad middle strata, would want to live. Whatever people think of the 'ideal' of communism, in practice they think it's bound to lead to a stifling of critical thinking and dissent, creativity, initiative, individual expression and individual rights; to the imposing of an official ideology which, if not professed, means being shut out of any significant input into or influence over affairs in politics, culture, science, etc.; to an instrumentalist approach to reality that substitutes "political truth" for a genuine search for the truth; and to a place where exploring new directions and avenues in science and art, particularly where that goes off in tangents or is seen as or actually is oppositional to the main ways that society is being mobilized, is looked on as not worthwhile, as a problem, or something dangerous.

A few examples of how this gets expressed, particularly among artists and intellectuals:

One professor, who organized a discussion on *Away With All Gods*, made the point at a brown bag discussion of the book we did earlier that he feels communists are better at critiquing capitalism than running society; essentially that they have played a better role when not in power than when in power. In his case I think this is related to his feeling that communists downplay the extent to which "human nature" is an obstacle to transforming people. He thinks it would take "saints" to handle these contradictions correctly. (On the other hand he has shown an appreciation for the work of Bob Avakian, and has been engaging with it for some time.)

Someone like Susan Jacoby is dismissive of the experience of socialist societies, focusing on some of the same errors that the Chair has identified, but drawing very wrong conclusions. In *The AGE of AMERICAN UNREASON*, she characterizes "Soviet power" as the "social pseudo-science of communism at the heart of the most dogmatic interpretation of Marxism," and points in particular to the experience of "Stalin's anointed biologist," Lysenko.

Michael Slate has described the extremely negative impression that many progressive artists have of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China (GPCR) because of the impact of the film "Farewell My Concubine" and its depiction of the way artists were treated during the GPCR. (This was raised and addressed in his interview with Avakian.)

And one intellectual of conscience wrote me after reading Ray Lotta's Open Letter to Tony Judt that this style of "political radicalism" put him off. While "the issues of how to assess communism are complex and a positive reassessment might to some extent be justified, criticism is far from consisting only of 'lies and misrepresentations.'" And "Beyond this, Raymond Lotta gives the fundamentalist impression that only he and Bob Avakian are in possession of the truth of our age. Again that sets off alarm bells."

As the Manifesto speaks to vividly in the analogy to the suppression of evolution following the seizure of power by Christian fundamentalists, this widespread negative summation of the experience of the first stage of the communist revolutions is principally the product of the "shark-like frenzy among reactionary forces" with their distortions and slanders of this revolution in a relentless ideological assault. And yet it is also true that the way a lot of people look at what we're about is "not entirely without justification."

In the context of the current campaign and the momentous stakes in achieving our 3 inter-related aims, this “turn out the lights, the party’s over” evaluation points to a significant obstacle we continue to confront fairly broadly among progressive masses, and particularly among the intellectuals. At the same time, all of these criticisms, to the extent that they find their roots in the weaknesses and errors that were a part of the first stage of communist revolution, are a part of what the Chair has been sifting through, recasting and recombining in bringing forward the new synthesis. The potential the new synthesis represents for transforming this situation is stressed at the end of Part 1 of *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*:

...it is very important not to underestimate the significance and potential positive force of this new synthesis: criticizing and rupturing with significant errors and shortcomings while bringing forward and *recasting* what has been positive from the historical experience of the international communist movements and the socialist countries that have so far existed; in a real sense *reviving*—on a new, more advanced basis—the *viability* and, yes, the *desirability* of a whole new and radically different world, and placing this on an even firmer foundation of materialism and dialectics. This new synthesis is bound up with and interpenetrates closely with key ruptures in the realm of epistemology—ruptures with instrumentalism and *apriorism*, dogmatism and religiosity, positivism, empiricism and pragmatism, as well as nationalism in the realm of how we view the whole process of advancing to communism.

And it goes on,

So, we should not underestimate the potential of this as a source of hope and of daring on a solid scientific foundation. In the present period in the U.S., revolution has once more been “ideologized” off the scene. And in the world as a whole, to a very large degree, revolution aiming for communism and the vision of a communist world—this has been “ideologized” off the scene—and with it the only road that actually represents the possibility of a radically different and far better world, in the real world, one that people really would want to live in and would really thrive in. The new synthesis has *objectively* “ideologized” this back on the scene once more, on a higher level and in a potentially very powerful way.

But what will be done with this? Will it become a powerful political as well as ideological force? It is up to us to take this out everywhere—very, very boldly and with substance, linking it with the widespread, if still largely latent, desire for another way, for another world—and engage ever growing numbers of people with this new synthesis in a good, lively and living way.

We need to be fostering a collective spirit within the party and among those becoming a part of the communist revolution, of “living in,” grappling with and applying this new synthesis and popularizing its scientific method and approach as we’re taking this out everywhere boldly and making the link with this widespread desire for another way, another world.

We and the emerging core of advanced have to be able to do this in ways simple and complex (not scholastic or facile), plunging into the questions, contestations and debates that it should

unleash. The Chair makes the point in *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, “we need to be much more consciously and, yes, resolutely—but in a good and living way, not in a dogmatic way—struggling with people over these things.” (Things such as the view of “human nature”.) “To do this takes a grasp of the essential materialism and dialectics. You can’t do it with religion, or religious dogma, or with utopian and idealist notions of how we’d like the world to be. We have to leap and rupture, and bring forward more and more people to leap and rupture—beyond that.”

While this “turn out the lights, the party’s over” verdict can be found among many different intermediate strata, I want to focus here on the intellectuals, in light of the importance of the “transfer of allegiance” of a section of the intelligentsia in repolarization for revolution. The *Manifesto* points out that the Chairman has criticized the one-sided view that sees the intellectuals only as a *problem*, and not giving “full recognition to the ways in which they can contribute to the rich process through which the people in society overall will come to a deeper understanding of reality and a heightened ability to carry out an increasingly conscious struggle to transform reality in the direction of communism.” You can see concentrated in this criticism, proceeding from the theoretical framework of the new synthesis, the unity between reification, “political truth,” and disdain for the intellectuals and for working with ideas.

This comes through fairly strongly in re-watching *Breaking With Old Ideas*, where the reification of the working masses goes hand in hand with a disdain for intellectuals, as represented by that one professor; or with suspicion, when the student decides to read the books Principal Lung is studying, but only to do “reconnaissance.” And I have heard in others who mainly uphold the GPCR a hint of the tendency to see the intellectuals mainly as a problem.

The new synthesis recognizes that transformation goes through a lot of different “channels,” and isn’t tied in a one-to-one way to how the main social contradictions are posing themselves at a given time. And that the work of intellectuals, to the degree that they are contributing to a deeper understanding of reality, in whatever field they’re engaged, can help humanity get to communism.

An aside: In this morning’s *L.A. Times* a physics professor at UCSB wrote about the importance of the successful testing of the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) in Geneva, and posed the questions “What will it discover, and why should we care?” He says the collider is poised to unravel “vexing mysteries” facing physicists; that it could “open new frontiers in understanding space and time, the microstructure of matter and the laws of nature.” After describing many of the “mysteries” it could unravel, he points to the way in which such esoteric knowledge has contributed to things like MRIs, PCs, the GPS system, etc. And then he goes on to conclude:

But beyond practical considerations, we should ponder what the value of the LHC could be to the human race. If it performs as anticipated, it will be the cutting edge for years to come in a quest that dates to the ancient Greeks and beyond—to understand what our world is made of, how it came to be and what will become of it. This grand odyssey gives us a chance to rise above the mundane aspects of our lives, and our differences, conflicts and crises, and try to understand where we, as a species, fit in a wondrous universe that seems beyond comprehension, yet is remarkably comprehensible.

Shouldn't the new synthesis be sending such a scientist dancing in the streets?!!

But the critique of the treatment of intellectuals is part of a much more fundamental critique of the weaknesses of these first socialist societies overall. In pointing to the need for more room for, openness toward and welcoming of contestation and dissent, and the understanding of the multi-layered and multi-colored “map” of social reality, the new synthesis has the potential to fundamentally change the character and the *spirit* of the socialist transition to one that people will welcome and *want* to get to.

A glimpse of this vision comes through strongly when the Chair asks in *Making / Emancipating*—about *positive* rights. For instance, he asks about both the “right” of the masses of people in the world to explore scientific questions, and about those who presently do have the ability to do this having the “right” to explore scientific questions in a whole new social context and framework. These “rights” can only be realized with a different economic structure, a different (communist) set of production relations, and the culture conditioned thereby. The contrast between “turn out the lights, the party’s over” and this glimpse of a whole radically different kind of society that the new synthesis opens up, should stand as a challenge to break out of the confines imposed by this system.

At the same time, this re-envisioning of socialist society in transition to communism has to be unleashed while “state power is maintained and further developed as a *revolutionary* state power serving the interests of the proletarian revolution”—or the new synthesis would be a recipe for bourgeois democracy, and the restoration of capitalism. Yet as the Chair puts it, being at the core of leadership of this kind of process, and leading it not as a tightly controlled process but with people “running in all kinds of directions,” means there will be tremendous pressure and tension pulling on you; because you can neither let go of the reins, nor hold them too tightly. You have to keep it all going toward the objective of communism, but without keeping things tightly under your control throughout the process. And if we’re handling all of this correctly, doing what we should be doing, we will repeatedly be drawn to the brink of being drawn and quartered.

Individuals and Social Relations

Another, very important question the Chair has been analyzing and developing a deeper understanding of, and that is bound up with “turn out the lights, the party’s over,” has to do with the contradictions -

that are bound up with the fact that on the one hand people exist as individuals, while on the other hand their existence is a social existence. Individual existence is part of material reality—it’s not something people invent as a bourgeois individualistic device...” (*Ruminations and Wranglings*)

For the “anti-totalitarians,” this has been perhaps their greatest ideological trump card and their most effective argument for the “superiority” of bourgeois democracy with its notion that the “rights of the individual are sacrosanct.” In contrast they portray the experience of the socialist societies of the first stage of communism as a horror because they “liquidated” individual interests and individual “rights”; expressed gruesomely in *1984* and, at least objectively, in *Farewell My Concubine*.

The Chair has addressed the bourgeoisie’s distortion of the socialist experience, and contrasted it

with the reality of “individual rights” and “individual interests” in bourgeois / class society. Principally what the bourgeoisie ignores and suppresses is the reality that the pursuit of individual interests takes place through the social and class relations of bourgeois society, which shapes and essentially determines how people even perceive their interests, and how to pursue them. Why, in other words, an individual’s choices are obscenely different depending on where they were born in the world.

But there were not just excesses but serious errors made, grievous ones in Stalin’s case, but also in the GPCR, that have contributed to people’s view that on this very ‘personal’ question, with the coming of the communists, “the party is over.”

It is a part of material reality that people do exist as individuals. And any attempt to ignore this, the Chair says, will be disastrous politically and in regard to any attempt at positive radical social transformation. This is a contradiction we’re going to have to continue to understand more deeply; how to handle in the best way possible the reality of, and the relationship between individuals and classes—in the context and framework of moving to the abolition of classes—that social existence is principal, but that people’s existence as individuals is part of material reality as well and cannot be liquidated.

The theoretical framework of the new synthesis comprehends the existence of this contradiction, including in its concentrated expression as “solid core with a lot of elasticity.” It doesn’t view the existence of people as individuals as a “problem.” The Chairman makes the point that this contradiction between individuals and social relations makes for a great diversity and richness to human society, and is another expression of the “multi-layered and multi-colored map.” But there is an objective contradiction; there is necessity; and there are objective constraints that confront individuals as members of society, ultimately rooted in “right can never be higher.” This will always be true, including in communist society.

Sixteen:

A few thoughts on the necessary epistemological roots to energize, and sustain, a communist movement doing significantly better in leading through the contradiction expressed in “and the world stays fundamentally unchanged” and “here come the communists; turn out the lights, the party’s over.”

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In ruminating on this, aspects of what could be called the ‘personal history’ of both Mao and Chiang Ching in relation to the woman question and the “jazz question” came to mind as expressive of the contradictions in the communist movement thus far, even its most advanced expressions. There are sharp contradictions, and even certain “ironies,” involved in these examples.

Mao, before he became (and as he began to become) a communist, and later a Party leader, was a remarkably radical thinker on the woman question. There are many stories about his outrage, passion and convention-shattering focus on this question in his early writings and actions. And then there was Chiang Ching—in her “pre communist leader” days, a radical young woman in Shanghai, in that city’s wild (and, yes, Western-influenced) cultural scene—a history (including in its likely sexually liberated dimensions) which was used by some communist leaders to constrain and suppress her—and Mao—in the Yenan days, a personal history later viciously used by the revisionists

against her in the “last great battle.”

This—and certain ironies and deeper contradictions—came to mind as I was reading again Avakian’s recent comments on the lack of an embrace, even any real “welcome,” by the revolutionary leadership in China of what was coming from the “western” women’s movement, including what it was raising about women’s sexuality, and the “heavy” atmosphere and sense of repression with regard to sexuality. And ditto on “jazz”—yes, a “no go zone”, including in Shanghai, at the height of revolution there in the 60s and early 70s.

To be clear, the leadership Mao, and Chiang Ching, gave on the woman question when they became top level communist leaders resulted in levels of emancipation, in thinking and action, that were unprecedented—yes, in fundamental ways, far exceeding their “pre communist” days. And there were huge breakthroughs in exciting and emancipating culture. So can we really say that Mao (and Chiang Ching) were “less radical” than in their early, even “bourgeois democratic revolutionary” days? No. But (and it’s hardly an unimportant “but”), in the sense described particularly in “Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution” there was a significant aspect in which a radicalism was not carried forward and deepened, and was even “dimmed”, from those “early radical days.” That should not be, and does not have to be. But the contradictions involved in that DO take the method and approach of the new synthesis to really address.

And Bob Avakian’s breakthroughs in epistemology (along with his related “many channels” point)—further ruptures from apriorism and instrumentalism, as well as positivism, are at the center of being able to make this necessary leap, and much more correctly understand the contradictions involved in leading a continuing, deepening, revolutionary transformation of “the world as it is”, while NOT turning out the lights, but rather increasing the vitality of the communist movement and of socialist society. (And this has everything to do, too, with maintaining and strengthening “our solemn sense of purpose and our sense of humor”.)

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Below here, in sketchy form, a few thoughts related to this:

The following from Avakian’s “Making/Emancipating” is very related to this problem and its expressions, and to these epistemological breaks:

This involved—once again, qualitatively more so in the Soviet Union than in China—a constriction, or a tendency toward constriction, of the process of socialist transformation; and, insofar as this tendency exerted itself, it led to some mishandling of the relation between the goal and the process, so that whatever was happening at a given time became, or tended to be identified with, the goal itself—rather than being understood as part of a process toward a larger goal. And, along with this, there was a constriction of the relation between the necessary main direction, in fundamental terms, and what were objectively “detours” or departures from—but were seen and treated as dangerous deviations from—that main direction. This, to a certain degree and sometimes to a considerable degree, led to a stifling of creativity, initiative, individual expression and, yes, individual rights in the overall process, especially when these appeared to conflict—or actually did conflict, in the short run—with the expressed goals of the socialist state and its leading party.

Here, there is much to ponder—it is a tremendously concise synthesis of major conceptual, as well as programmatic, tendencies in the history of the communist movement broadly, as well as the history of the socialist states. Most acutely so in the Soviet Union, but also in China, even as Mao led a great initial break from Stalin’s tendencies toward mechanicalism and rigidity.

Now it should be noted that Bob Avakian’s criticism above of this methodological tendency toward “constriction” in the history of the communist movement is a sharply different synthesis from anarchism or utopianism. It does not at all downplay the need to lead in transforming “the world as it is”, including the important role of a “necessary main direction” in that transformation. But it concentrates a lot about HOW to lead, and different understanding of the relationship between a “necessary main direction” and many things going off in different directions—embracing all that, and leading that whole broad process in the direction of communism.

To return to Mao and Chiang Ching here: There were definitely “necessary main directions” to the struggle against the capitalist roaders in the Cultural Revolution. And it is clear that what were seen as “influences from the West”—including in progressive cultural streams, in the sexual liberation explorations of the women’s movement, etc—were clearly seen as being in significant conflict with the main direction of that struggle. All the more so because an “opening to the West” was a major element of the Deng/Chou “modernization” program, which was locked in fierce struggle against Mao’s revolutionary line on socialist development and transformation. What these feminist movements were raising around sexuality, for example, was certainly different from what the revolutionary leadership in China was focused on!

In one dimension, these radical currents of feminism would have been seen as just “too much to handle” in a very high stakes situation—and all the more so since these currents in these radical (“western”) feminist movements were most definitely taking significantly different directions than the ways and forms in which important struggles for the emancipation of women were being waged in China—and certainly would have also involved criticisms of definite elements of “puritanism” within China’s revolutionary current. The tendency to see this important aspect, at least, of the feminist movement in the West as “very problematical” would have been intense, to say the least.

Especially when faced with such an intense situation, an outlook of “class truth”, of reification of the proletariat, along with nationalism, could only feed a tendency to “shut down” and “freeze out” such movements and ferment, to see them as more as a problem than as part of potential solutions.

While there are indeed many dimensions involved in all this, here I want to highlight this new understanding of the problem of “constriction,” and what is unleashed by a more dynamic understanding of the relation of “detours and departures” to the overall process of making and continuing revolution—including recognizing and unleashing new forces for that revolution.

This is not, fundamentally, a matter of “it’s necessary to tolerate diversions.” And that kind of understanding and approach won’t hold up, anyway, in the face of intense pressures from other major necessities, real and/or perceived. And, speaking of “turning out the lights”, nothing shuts down voltage and vibrancy quite in the way that kind of condescension does. This is something very different—and very related to the recognition of potential radical force within unresolved contradictions.

Epistemologically, this is a question of understanding these phenomena as a key part of a whole process of discovering NEW WAYS of meeting social needs, and making social transformations (even discovering the need for whole new areas of transformations—and/or different angles on them.)

Dissent...and do you REALLY want to be challenged...and to stick with that orientation...when dealing with ALL THAT?

The above example is principally a matter of a recognition and an unleashing of potential new forces and streams for making and continuing revolution. But it is also clear that the same developments, including ruptures, in communist epistemology—are essential to a new understanding of the role of dissent in making and continuing the communist revolution, and as a new source of vibrancy. And, in particular, these ruptures are critical to being able to maintain this orientation toward dissent and contending views as a characteristic of the communist movement, and a socialist society—and critical to not “turning out the lights”, but persisting in that basic orientation, when faced with big necessity, obstacles, and opposition.

Particularly critical here are the breaks with class truth, and with the tendencies to instrumentalism and apriorism in the communist movement. As Avakian has expressed this break (in his 7 talks, among other places): Do you really see the importance of getting to the truth, or do you want to get in a position where you can do what you think is right? And he’s pointed out that carrying through on the former is not necessarily easier in the short run.

It seems relevant here to recall contradictory elements of understanding of these questions on Mao’s part...AND to think about the necessary and powerful role of the actual forging of a new SYNTHE-SIS on this, as Bob Avakian has done, in the ability to decisively break through on these contradictions, and to persist especially in the midst of great pressures and necessities.

One aspect of Mao’s thinking on this is expressed pretty well when he reportedly said to his niece who asked him about how to “inoculate” herself against the Bible: “Just go deeply into it and you’ll come out the other side”. This was expressive of an important basic orientation; but it can be said that Mao was not able to thoroughly put that orientation into effect. Mao also had the view that “the proletariat has its truth and the bourgeoisie has its truth.” Mao hardly invented this “class truth” understanding, but he didn’t fully, systematically, and scientifically break from it and ‘connect’ this to his important advances in an understanding of socialism as a very tumultuous, non linear, period of transition to communism.

So, expressed in these two statements by Mao, there were objectively different epistemological ‘threads,’ and this was not broken thru on in a qualitative and synthesized way at the time. When faced with the “full court press” of the very real necessities of making revolution, it has required a much fuller epistemological break, a more synthesized and robust scientific epistemology that’s capable of more consistently and broadly giving impetus to what Mao voiced to his niece...and to much broader ferment, contestation of views, etc. As Avakian has put it, the more deeply you ‘get’ this epistemology, the MORE you want to be challenged. This is the basis for the principle of “wanting to repeatedly go to the brink of being drawn and quartered”...as the only way to get to the truth, and get to communism.

This understanding is pivotal to a different understanding, and to forging a different approach, to the real contradiction expressed in “and the world stays fundamentally unchanged” and “here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party’s over.”

Briefly, a few other related thoughts, in an even more “sketchy” way:

—Returning to the point in the “Discussions with Comrades on Epistemology” on ‘Guppies and Sharks’

In light of the above points, there is more dynamism to be found, than historically appreciated in our movement, in the contradiction expressed in “and the world stays fundamentally unchanged” and “here come the communists; turn out the lights, the party’s over.” There is indeed real contradiction, and as one expression of this, there is real necessity for leadership, including, as the Party Constitution (appendix) puts it “identifying times and circumstances when clear and firm conclusions can and must be drawn, and leadership given directly and very decisively”. We can see trends in the world around us (identified clearly in the Manifesto), when communists create “bad necessity” for themselves by not doing so...(And, as Avakian has put it, we’d be idiots NOT to teach evolution as a fact in an education system in socialist society when we have the freedom to do so. This has scientific basis and great consequences for the ability of the masses to increasingly come to know and change reality, in many spheres...moving on the road to communism.)

But, it seems there can also be another expression of communists creating negative necessity for themselves (their goals), by not maximizing the elasticity to the greatest degree possible, based on that solid core of going for communism, the “four alls.” And this takes a particular expression in Bob Avakian’s point that if you REALLY get this epistemology, you want to be challenged...the only way to get to the truth and get to communism. This thinking is further developed, too, in “unresolved contradictions, driving forces for revolution”.

So it now seems not so “bi-polar”; there is capacity to change the world as it is by recognizing the dialectic between solid core and elasticity, and for leading better in that way, including through doing better in NOT turning out the lights. This is a key breakthrough in the new synthesis.

In this light, there is relevance in returning to the following from a comrade quoted in the discussion on epistemology: “Some questions come from the wrong place, but you can’t determine that apriori. The waters are choppy, and there are sharks, but it turns out a lot are toothless guppies....we can’t tell the difference between sharks and toothless guppies if we don’t get to the truth of things.”

—Mao and the intellectuals:

In “Unresolved contradictions, driving forces for revolution”, Avakian points out that, in seeking to forge a solid core of successors, Mao first tried to do so from among intellectuals, but found them unreliable and mainly turned elsewhere in that effort of forging a core of successors in leadership. This is not without basis, as Avakian points out. But Avakian’s overall point is that we have more work to do on that. Older conceptions have had shortcomings in relation to maximizing the potential for “transfer of allegiance of the intellectuals”—including the forging of a core who are ardent advocates and fighters for communism. This involves, as BA puts it, being “deeply grounded in and firmly grounded in taking up and applying...the scientific communist outlook and ideology”. And, especially at this challenging crossroads in history, that means firmly grounded in communism’s most developed synthesis thus far.

—The important difference between an actual scientific method and approach, and what is sometimes called “scientism” (an actually non-scientific approach, very related to positivism). And the relevance of this difference to NOT turning out the lights.

There have been such methodological tendencies (some even under the name of science) in the history of the communist movement. A “scientific” approach where the party identifies one after

another problem, works at it, and solves it...this is much more akin to pragmatism and a mechanistic view than to science, and a more thoroughgoing understanding of matter in motion (and making revolution!) as “the ceaseless emergence and resolution of contradictions,” as Mao put it. And even how to understand THAT (ceaseless emergence and resolution of contradictions) should not be seen like this: one contradiction emerges, is resolved, then another, and so on. The further developments of materialism, and dialectics that are expressed in a multilayer, multilevel understanding of reality, and of the processes of reality’s transformation; these are among further new synthesis developments in a scientific method. Here, again, the importance of “embraces but does not replace” and “solid core, with a lot of elasticity” can be more deeply understood and come to the fore.

Seventeen:

Dear Friend,

We have been asked to correspond on the following question:

“And the world stays fundamentally unchanged. Capitalism-imperialism continues humming in the `background,’ crushing lives and destroying spirits in its meat-grinder of exploitation. And the horrors continue unabated.”

This is our standing and powerful refutation of every other trend in the world. On the other hand, the way that a lot of people look at what we’re about—and not entirely without justification—is: “Here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party’s over.” (My emphasis)

This is an important question which goes right to the heart of the new synthesis, concentrating, as it does, a much more thoroughly materialist epistemology.

In thinking about this question—here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party is over—an example which came to mind in relation to all this is the whole Lysenko Affair, which had a very negative impact in the field of genetics and science more generally in the Soviet Union (and beyond). This is an example which Bob Avakian has repeatedly referred to in his writings and for good reason. The fallout from Lysenko continues down to today with books and articles being written about it. During the Bush regime, there were references to Lysenko in the context of criticisms of Bush’s policies on science, including in major scientific journals. Moreover, as is pointed out in the speech “What IS Bob Avakian’s New Synthesis?”: “Anti-communists traditionally point to the Lysenko saga as proof that communism is bound to distort the truth...and to suppress intellectuals”... At the same time, as that talk goes on to point out, “some comrades in the international movement “disassociate themselves from Lysenko in a facile way, and others just ignore it,” failing to come to grips with this experience as part of deeply engaging the new synthesis and the radical rupture in epistemology that Avakian has made.

Yet another dimension of the whole Lysenko thing is not only a reified view of the proletariat but a view that truth has a class character. There is, of course, no such thing as bourgeois or proletarian truth; truth itself is objective.

The Lysenko saga reflects and concentrates very serious problems philosophically and methodologically –apriorism, pragmatism, empiricism and instrumentalism—which were not fully identified and ruptured with prior to the qualitative theoretical breakthroughs that Bob Avakian has been making.

And this has contributed in negative ways to the whole view of “here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party is over.” As has been pointed out in “Making and Emancipating”:

We must be engaging reality on as scientific a basis as we possibly can, at any given time. And, in this process, we are interacting with other people who are applying different outlooks and different approaches with different objectives. Their thinking, their objectives, their inclinations and their ideas—some of which may actually better reflect reality than our understanding at times and with regard to certain phenomenon, lest we forget—this is also part of the larger objective reality that we need to engage. It is necessary to have a scientific approach to that as well. We need to have a systematically, consistently, and comprehensively scientific approach, to everything—and the communist outlook and method provides the means to do that, if we actually take up and apply it, and don’t corrupt it with religious or philosophically idealist and metaphysical notions and approaches. (p. 17)

In thinking about all this, I found it helpful to return again to the Skybreak piece on “working with ideas,” including what she describes about the intellectual process and how it differs, for example, from someone building a house. At the same time, she points to weaknesses in the communist movement in terms of people not, as I would put it, [being the very best at working with ideas].

It is important, even while concentrating on important things, to be consistently paying attention to new things developing in various spheres. You have to find the time, even during every intense times, to step back and struggle with things like the “Crises in Physics” piece and other important developments in culture and art, science and other spheres. From a scientific point of view, taking a sniff at everything and being open to new things that are developing. This is something that Avakian is modeling that we all need to learn from and apply. Actually, I was struck in reading Cornel’s new memoir, *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud*, by his constant quest for knowledge of all kinds of things, from music to art to literature and poetry to philosophy. He seems to be engaging all kinds of things, including Bob Avakian and communism (though he doesn’t mention either in his memoir), with a certain outlook and method. And, of course, this is not someone who has a lot of idle time. (Speaking of music, I had a long discussion about new things in music recently with relatives in their 30s who are progressive and sympathetic to where we are coming from. It was not so much a discussion but rather an attempt on my part to learn what I could about the music that they like, especially given they are really, really into the music scene. While walking on the beach, they talked about a lot of the music that they like, mainly a lot of underground music. They really like Thievery Corporation, which I had not heard of previously. But what struck me, in addition to their extensive knowledge of underground music generally, is that they like Lil Wayne, arguing that he is the best rapper out there. There is, it seems, a lot of bad stuff in Lil Wayne and rap more generally but the point is that I have never bothered listening to Lil Wayne despite encouragement to do so from a few quarters. But shouldn’t we know about Lil Wayne if he is having such an impact on the hip hop scene, applying a scientific approach to that as we do to everything. So, as is obvious from what I have written, I plan to spend some time immersing myself in Lil Wayne’s body of work. What is his appeal? What is he doing that is good and what is he doing that might be negative and harmful? But the point is that we need to be engaging and learning from all kinds of things—something that Bob Avakian models—even when we are intensely focusing on other important things.)

In thinking further about the main question under consideration in this letter, I think there is much to learn from what is summed up about the women’s movement and the response to that movement on the part of the new communist movement:

The women's movement coming out of the '60s, and specifically the contributions as well as some shortcomings both in what it brought forward and how that was responded to by the broader movement as well as the broader society...

Extremely important questions were being raised and grappled with, particularly by the more radical forces within the women's movement that emerged out of the 1960s and into the 1970s, even though this was not on the basis of, and in some significant ways was objectively in opposition to, a consistently scientific approach. But economist influences and related tendencies within the new communist movement that emerged in that period, including the RU and then the RCP, worked against the correct scientific assimilation and synthesis of very important things that were being raised by the women's movement. Valuable insights and important elements of a more advanced understanding were squandered by the communist movement at that time, as a result of economist and other erroneous influences. (My emphasis)

Given the purpose of this paper, I don't want to get into all the truly rich and textured discussion of the new synthesis and the woman question in the new talk. My point here is to suggest that the metaphorical reference to "here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party is over" seem to be applicable to the approach of the new communist movement in relation to the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. As Avakian argues in the quote above: "Valuable insights and important elements of a more advanced understanding were squandered by the communist movement at that time, as a result of economist and other erroneous influences." And what about the approach to the woman question in the Soviet Union and in China, both positive and negative, and the influences of the communist movement internationally on the new communist movement in this country? And in terms of the question of homosexuality, this is not a question that has been taken up in the history of the communist movement internationally. Our Party was able to make a qualitative breakthrough on the question of homosexuality through a convergence of struggle on all levels of the Party, while at the same time delving deeply into the theoretical work on the subject, combined with methodological grappling as part of a developing new synthesis. As Avakian sums up in Marxism and the Call of the Future: "As a result of all this—as well as methodological grappling we were doing in general, and further summation of shortcomings in the history of our movement internationally (with Stalin, the whole Lysenko thing, for example) and trying to understand more fully what led to these very serious errors of instrumentalism and reductionism and so on—all that kind of came together and we saw that, with regard to the question of homosexuality, we've been vulgarizing on many different levels." All of this, I believe, has relevance in terms of what I am responding to in this letter: "here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party is over."

Eighteen:

"And the world stays fundamentally unchanged. Capitalism-imperialism continues humming in the 'background,' crushing lives and destroying spirits in its meat-grinder of exploitation. And the horrors continue unabated."

This is our standing and powerful refutation of every other trend in the world. On the other hand, the way that a lot of people look at what we're about—and not entirely without justification—is: "Here come the communists, turn out the lights, the party's over."

The heart of the problem, it seems to me, is the need to carry out revolution without “turning out the lights”. And this contradiction is not in any way easy to resolve. It is quite easy to argue for the full flowering of intellectual curiosity, debate and dissent “so long as” it does not interfere with the actual process of revolutionary transformation and, in particular, in the building and further socialism under the proletarian dictatorship. I believe this was a principal criterion of Mao’s “Hundred Flowers” campaign.

The difficulty with “keeping the lights on” is not only that counter-revolutionaries will surely seize upon any opening provided. It is also that the class position and outlook of many of the artists and intellectuals can in many instances lead them to want to act upon the petit bourgeois democratic illusion that society does not require a dictatorship of one or another of the contending classes. For many of them at least, the revolutionary transformation itself can appear as “turning out the lights”. The problem is that in the past this view was “not entirely without justification”. While the centrality of struggle between different viewpoints was sometimes stressed, most especially by Mao, failing to see the united front aspect and the “solid core with lots of elasticity” would lead to a one-sided, heavy-handed and harmful conception of the remolding of intellectuals. Certainly there was little understanding that the clash of worldviews can be part of the unresolved contradictions pushing the whole revolutionary process forward.

This brings to mind the scene from *Reds* when John Reed and Emma Goldman dispute the assessment of the Bolshevik revolution. If I remember correctly, in response to Goldman’s categorical denunciation of the revolution Reed argues something to the effect that they both had had a vision of society but he had come to understand that it could not be accomplished without, among other things, “firing squads”.

Reed’s response captures how most communists had previously considered this contradiction. Put simply, the requirements of seizing and holding power “trump” all other considerations. And while Reed is no doubt correct in his basic refutation of Goldman, nevertheless the same logic of “the end justifies the means” can and was later carried to an extreme and used not only to justify those horrors that marred our project but to denature the “end” itself and later serve as a justification for revisionism and even social imperialism.

It is necessary to deeply grasp how the New Synthesis provides a basic answer to how revolutionary transformation can take place without “turning out the lights” and the powerful attraction that this can have to those actually seeking such transformation. But this basic answer is by no means a simple solution because the problem itself is so deeply rooted in the contradictory nature of the proletarian revolutionary process itself. I have seen some who argue that the New Synthesis and its critique of the experience of the 20th century is excellent “except” for what is perceived as a failure to appreciate the necessity that was facing the socialist states. The point is the necessity was real indeed just as the necessity that will face future revolutions will also be formidable. Any proposed “solution” that is based on denying or wishing away the necessity cannot but collapse when confronted with the realities of the class struggle and the international situation. Most will concede that internationalism is laudable but will argue that it must give way to the imperatives of the defense of a socialist state, or for example that ultimately women need to be liberated but in the meantime it is fine if they are forced to be breeders if the regeneration of the population requires it.

In a recent discussion of the Manifesto from the RCP, an interesting debate took place with some who were arguing most strenuously for the dogmatic and “reified” version of the “mirror opposites.” They conceded that the proletariat must free all humanity but insisted that this was only a byproduct of its own struggle for emancipation against those who argued that the emancipation of

humanity is the proletarian mission. Although I would like to go back and look at the various references from Marx and Engels in relation to this, I suspect that a certain ambiguity is present all along in how they understood the proletariat as the vehicle for revolutionary transformation. (And how do we see Lenin's discussion of the proletariat as a class "for itself" in this regard?) Not only is the argument of "byproduct" false, it has within it the seeds of betrayal and tragedy when one considers that the interests of the proletariat "for itself" (if this is understood in any sense other than the struggle for human emancipation) will surely contradict the interests of given sections of the population and no doubt at times its own long term interests as well. The "byproduct" understanding is based on the false assumption that there cannot be a contradiction between the needs of a section of the population who happen to be the proletarians and the needs of the proletarian revolution itself. But we have seen that not only are such conflicts possible, they are inevitable, and all the more so when we consider the international dimension and the contradictory role of proletarians benefiting from the construction of a given socialist state and the role of the proletariat as the agent for revolutionary transformation on a world scale.

When reading the excerpts from some of the diaries of Soviet citizens in the 1930s ([Revolution on My Mind, Writing a Diary Under Stalin](#)) it is clear that some people had concluded, consciously, that it was necessary to "turn the lights out" if the world was going to be transformed. And this included at least some intellectuals as well who seemed persuaded that whatever reluctance or reticence they felt about some of the direction and policies of the Soviet party and state could be and should be attributed to their own "bourgeois" worldview which they felt compelled to fight against and restrain. As often as not, even policies that we would, in the light of the New Synthesis, consider heavy handed or flat-out wrong were often accepted even by many who suffered directly from them as the necessary price of revolutionary transformation. It is interesting that a subjectivist tendency toward introspection can go hand-in-hand with a rigid and mechanical approach to social transformation.

The contradictory unity between "unity of will and discipline" and "personal ease of mind and liveliness" would seem to have a lot to do with keeping the lights on and the party going. But while this was recognized in words at least by the Chinese comrades it seems that in that experience in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) also it was not so easy to find the correct relationship between the individual initiative and creativity and the overall collective class struggle.

What constitutes "a party" and what "lights on" means will, of course, depend to a great degree on class outlook. The bourgeoisie can be expected to denounce any dictatorship exercised over it. The problem is there is no great wall between the bourgeoisie and the petit bourgeois intellectuals and the latter will tend to gravitate toward a "classless" definition of "lights on" which can easily be incorporated by the capitalist class (old or new). It seems to me that the GPCR really was, despite serious and real shortcomings, an example of a genuine party. Nor was this only true for the broadest masses who really did, many for the first time, become real participants in "the party". The GPCR also attracted and unleashed the energies and hopes of important sections of the intelligentsia as well, at least its youthful section as seen especially in the Red Guard movement. But wrong tendencies toward "reification" and one-sided policies seem to have made it difficult to sustain and develop this united front or class alliance.

It is worthwhile to consider how it might have been possible to effect a different class alliance in China. The counter-revolution took place to no small degree under the signboard of the "Party of Order". While part of this was promising an end to the "horrors" of the GPCR, the central point of appeal seems to have been the promise of more consumer goods while relying on the fatigue and declining enthusiasm of the middle sections of society in the face of turmoil and uncertainty.

Perhaps a less reified understanding on the part of the revolutionary headquarters could also have led to a different and potentially more favorable polarization in the socialist society. Would it have been possible for at least some of the sentiments and energies that later exploded in the Tiananmen Square events in 1989 to have been expressed not as an appeal for bourgeois democratic liberties (seen in contradiction to both the revisionist rulers and Maoism) but rather as strivings against stultification and revisionism, energies that could have been coalesced with revolutionary communism? Of course, it is impossible to answer that question with any degree of certainty. But it does seem that the New Synthesis provides a framework not only to critique the shortcomings of past experience but also to glimpse how a different approach could bring about a more favorable realignment of forces.

In the post-coup Maoist movement the repeated tendency in summing up the loss in China was toward some version of the Hoxhaite critique of Mao's "liberalism." There was no real belief that the initial rupture between Mao and previous (essentially Soviet) experience could be built upon and deepened further. Instead, there was a constant effort to "rein in" Mao's breakthrough and to "recast" it in light of the old understanding (aided by the contradictory nature of Mao's own thinking as it diverged with but still incorporated significant aspects of what was wrong in that previous understanding).

As we have seen particularly sharply in the last few years, it is the openly bourgeois or social-democratic "answer" to the conundrum of how to maintain political power while keeping the lights on that is more likely to be the final resting place for ex revolutionaries. But it is important to keep in mind the crucial observation in the Manifesto concerning the "mirror opposites" and the basis for one error to flip into another (or, as we can also observe, the construction of ever more creative "composite errors"). Class truth, reification of the proletariat, and "identity politics" have a great deal in common.

In short, it seems that many in the communist movement believe you have to choose between "turning out the lights" and the abandoning of any attempt at real revolutionary transformation of social conditions—all that remains is to debate which alternative is worse or which spontaneity is more attractive. On the other hand, the New Synthesis argues that there is no other way to achieve communism except through the approach of solid core with lots of elasticity. The dichotomy of the "mirror opposites" is thus refused and a real way forward indicated through the recognition and working out of contradictions. The recognition of necessity that the New Synthesis represents enables the transformation of that necessity, through struggle. Again, it does not make revolutionary transformation easy and can offer no guarantees. Indeed, it has shattered previously accepted "guarantees" such as the "inevitability of communism" or the belief that somehow the understanding of a reified proletariat would necessarily lead in a positive direction ("the main stream of the mass movement is always correct"). But the very recognition of the contradictory, difficult and uncertain nature of the socialist transformation can speak to those who really would want to see the world "rise on new foundations" but who want to know if it is possible to do so without "turning out the lights". It won't be enough simply to work to dispel the lies and ignorance concerning the first wave of proletarian revolution. To the extent that we can identify the real contradictions of the whole process and in that sense at least chart out a basic approach of how we envision transforming conditions and transforming people our project will be more compelling and attractive.

Throughout most of the past of the international communist movement (ICM) the contradiction between the "forcible overthrow of the existing conditions" and "keeping the lights on" was not perceived as a unity of opposites. This was related to the flattening out of contradictions, a mistaken and reified view of the historic mission of the proletariat and a misunderstanding of communism

itself (Mao's unfortunate reference to the "Kingdom of Great Harmony" captured something even as he was developing a different understanding). If communism is correctly seen as an unleashing of the full human potential unfettered from "the four Alls" why would it even be possible to conceive of achieving it through a stultifying and narrow "second model" revolution?

The New Synthesis has been accused of humanism precisely by those who insist on clinging to the past of the communist movement. I think it is fair to say that many cringe at hearing the very words "the emancipation of humanity". Humanism ignores the centrality of the cleavage of society into classes, or in any event rejects the forcible overthrow of the ruling classes, the resulting proletarian dictatorship and the whole historical process of eliminating the Four Alls. We can delineate ourselves from humanism without giving up humanity. The insistence on the unity between ends and means and the emphasis given to communist morality is a big part of the answer to why and how struggling to "keep the lights on" will be a central feature of the coming stage of proletarian revolution and in the new socialist societies that emerge from it.

Nineteen:

I have been reflecting on what it means when people are turned off by the prospect of communist revolution and think, not entirely without justification, "Here come the communists, lights out, the party's over." These sentiments are in response to what have been some real shortcomings of the previous socialist experience—shortcomings which while secondary to the unprecedented and truly liberating achievements of socialism, nonetheless were serious in nature and contributed to the loss of state power and the restoration of capitalism, first in the Soviet Union and then in China.

For decades, Bob Avakian has been wrestling with what is a world historic challenge: how to hold on to state power while at the same time leading and unleashing the necessary tumultuous process required in making the two radical ruptures that define the communist revolution, the radical rupture with traditional property relations and the radical rupture with traditional ideas. He has been coming at this contradiction from different angles and directions, and in the course of this developing a new synthesis that has been encapsulated as "solid core with a lot of elasticity." This has provided a theoretical basis for the reenvisioning of socialism as a society that is far more wild, far more vibrant and creative, far more alive with intellectual ferment, than any society that has existed thus far in history. This is a socialism where human beings would truly flourish.

There are many different dimensions of the new synthesis which are relevant to a discussion of this "lights out" characterization of previous socialist societies. However, for the purposes of this letter, I would like to focus on the question of whether under socialism, communist ideology should be the official ideology, a question which I think has direct bearing on this discussion of the character of socialist society and the challenges of leading the state and the revolutionary process.

Several years ago in the talk *Dictatorship and Democracy, and the Socialist Transition to Communism*, Avakian posed the question of whether under the dictatorship of the proletariat, there should be an official ideology. As part of a longer discussion of this topic, he stated:

"With regard to the question of the party, I think two things are definitely true. One, you need a vanguard party to lead this revolution and to lead the new state. Two, that party has to have an ideology that unifies it, an ideology that correctly reflects and enables people to consciously change reality, which is communist ideology.

“But more broadly, should everyone in society have to profess his ideology in order to get along? No. Those who are won over to this ideology should proclaim it and struggle for it. Those who are not convinced of it should say so. Those who disagree with it should say that. And there should be struggle. Something has to lead—the correct ideology that really enables people to get at the truth, and do something with it in their interests, has to lead; but that doesn’t mean everyone should have to profess it, in my opinion. And this is just my opinion. But it’s worth digging into this a bit, it’s worth exploring and wrangling with the question.”

To be honest, until Avakian raised this, I had never questioned the concept of communist ideology being the official ideology under socialism. It seemed so much an intrinsic feature of past dictatorships of the proletariat that in a certain sense I took it for granted. Avakian’s comments prompted me to look at this more closely and with fresh eyes. I have been turning this over in my mind and finding that the more deeply I have studied the new synthesis, the more my thinking on this question of official ideology has shifted. In the spirit of exploring and wrangling with this question as Avakian has called for, I wanted to offer some initial thoughts, by no means fully developed, on how I am now looking at this, based on reflecting on the history of socialist society and the dictatorship of the proletariat so far through the prism of the new synthesis.

In the context of tremendous strains on a fledgling socialist state, emerging out of war, surrounded by hostile imperialist forces, I could see the necessity that would motivate communists to declare communism the official ideology. By giving communist ideology an official imprimatur (with the social approbation that would naturally accompany this), I think that communists were attempting to neutralize elements that were antagonistic to socialism and create more favorable conditions to win the masses to this ideology and cohere them around this as part of consolidating the new socialist state and advancing towards communism. However, as I have tried to look all-sidedly at this question of official ideology, I have come to suspect that this may have had the opposite effect and caused more harm than good.

Let me start by speaking to some bedrock principles. I agree with the comments by Avakian that it is essential for the communist party to be cohered ideologically around communist ideology, otherwise it will be incapable of leading the state and the revolutionary process towards communism. I also agree that in regards to socialist society as a whole, communist ideology has to be the leading ideology in order for society to stay on the revolutionary path and advance towards communism.

What I found provocative in Avakian’s comments was the distinction he drew between communist ideology being the leading ideology and its being the official ideology.

To me, it seems that declaring communist ideology the “official” ideology amounts in essence to imposing this ideology on people, many of whom have yet been won to it on their own volition. The effect of this is to artificially paper over differences and diversity in thinking and to tone down ideological struggle and debate by keeping it within prescribed parameters. I find this troubling on a number of counts.

First of all, this short-circuits the process of knowing and understanding what is true. Communist ideology can’t grow and deepen in a sterile hot house environment. As with all science, it is through being challenged that those aspects that are not in accordance with reality can be recognized and discarded, while what is true can be deepened and enriched. A recurrent theme in Avakian’s body of work is that it is by being receptive to ideas coming from outside the Marxist framework that

Marxism itself develops and that what is true can be determined. He therefore puts great weight on the open contestation of ideas, including within socialist society, where he has argued that even ideas that are oppositional to those in authority must be welcomed into the intellectual ferment.

Secondly, there is a world of difference between people being won to voluntarily take up communist ideology (and the radical transformation in consciousness that this represents) and being mandated to accept it. As Avakian noted in the passage quoted above, by declaring communism the official ideology, people may feel social pressure to profess this ideology, even when they don't believe it. This contributes to ideological differences festering beneath the surface of society instead of being out in the open where they can be struggled out and through this process, consciousness can be genuinely transformed. In this regard, I think it is helpful to look at how the new theoretical journal "Demarcations" describes its purpose: "to compare and contrast various theoretical perspectives and programs and to draw a broader audience into a deeper understanding of engagement with communism, as a living and developing science, and its most advanced expression in the new synthesis." This type of ideological debate and engagement is a vital component of the proletariat preparing or "fitting" itself to rule, a process that is beginning now as part of making revolution, and must become society-wide under socialism.

(While this is in the realm of speculation and requires both further thought as well as some actual investigation, I also wonder whether establishing communism as the official ideology in China might have contributed to the blurring of the distinction between the party and society, and in turn might have led to lowering the ideological bar, so to speak, in relationship to the party. This may have factored into the political and ideological disorientation in the wake of Mao's death, where many party members were unable to distinguish between communism and revisionism and ended up siding with those who staged the counterrevolutionary coup to restore capitalism.)

To expand a bit more on the problems with declaring communist ideology the official ideology, I think it might be helpful to come at this from another direction and consider why, for those intellectuals who genuinely uphold critical thinking and intellectual integrity, the notion of an official ideology—of any sort—tends to rankle them. They equate an official ideology with promoting unquestioning acceptance of ideas and the dampening of critical thinking. While this view may be influenced by illusions that in this society, they are "free thinkers" somehow immune to the way that capitalism and bourgeois ideology shape and condition people's thinking and the very framework in which ideas are explored, nonetheless do they have a valid point? Or to put it another way, does this criticism of official ideology still hold when the official ideology in question is communist ideology which provides, in an overall sense, the most consistent, systematic, and comprehensive means for arriving at the truth?

I think that this criticism has validity, and that making communist ideology the official ideology in a socialist state is antithetical to the heart and soul of this ideology, which is not some religion based on blind faith but rather a living science, whose very lifeblood is questioning and challenging ideas. Making communism the official ideology ends up giving it the trappings of dogma.

But if one recognizes that this question of making communism the official ideology does not arise in a vacuum and if one is serious about confronting the acute contradictions and challenges involved in holding state power under socialism, one has to ask: In the absence of communism being the official ideology, wouldn't there be a danger that people would spontaneously gravitate towards bourgeois ideology, which after all has the weight of tradition behind it? Wouldn't this in turn contribute to centrifugal pulls and strains on the new society? At the same time, wouldn't counterrevolutionary forces attempt to take full advantage of any openings in intellectual ferment in order to spread

opposition and discontent, with the objective of overthrowing the socialist state and reinstating capitalism?

All of these risks are indeed very real. But I think that the resolution to this dilemma does not lie in resorting to bureaucratic methods, which is what I think declaring communism the official ideology amounts to. What the new synthesis points to is a different path: finding ways to unleash ideological debate and ferment but firmly leading it with communist ideology. This gets back to a cardinal point of orientation, and a thread, which runs through Avakian's writings and talks, namely that when it comes to providing communist leadership and holding on to state power, there is no playing it safe and no easy or pat answers. This world historic endeavor is fraught with risks and dangers; one has to fly without a safety net (to borrow Avakian's analogy). State power can be lost by too much firmness (as reflected in trying to clamp down on or keep tight control over dissent and ferment) as well as by too much flexibility (as reflected in opening the floodgates to bourgeois democratic currents). Trying to achieve the right synthesis—"solid core with a lot of elasticity"—in an ever-changing objective situation where the stakes are so high is a constant challenge. It seems to me that making communism the official ideology reflects an unwillingness "to go to the brink of being drawn and quartered," as Avakian puts it—to take the risks that are so necessary to the revolutionary process of advancing towards communism.

The more that I have thought about this question of an official ideology under socialism and the more deeply I have grasped the new synthesis, the more it seems to me that making communist ideology the official ideology is strikingly dissonant with the reenvisioned view of socialism that Avakian has brought forward. In my opinion, it runs counter to the type of society we are striving to build and the intellectual ferment which must run through it. As a result of this, it also works at cross purposes with the crucial challenge of winning over a section of the intelligentsia to communism.

So those are some beginning thoughts on this question of an official ideology.