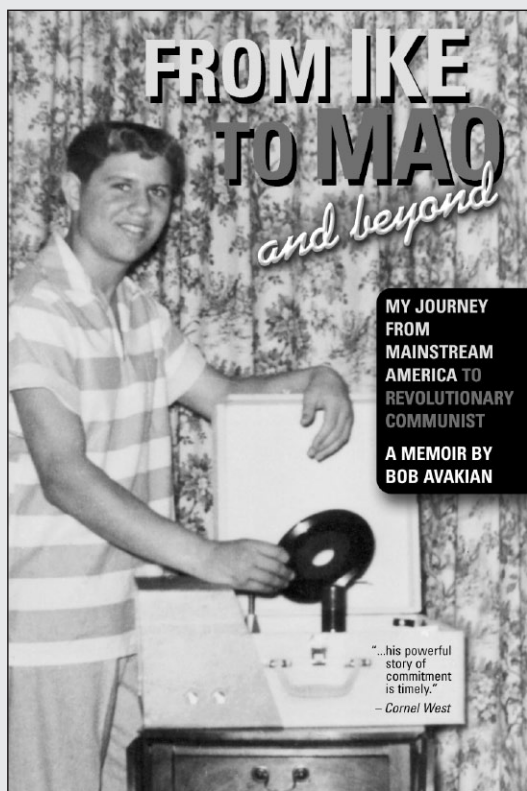


WHAT HUMANITY NEEDS



From Ike to Mao and Beyond: My Journey from Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist

A Memoir by Bob Avakian

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and of itself. You need to go to somebody who has the science of medicine, in that case—who can analyze deeply what the problem is and therefore what the solution is. And, of course, a person with that medical knowledge, that medical science, has to have a good method to learn from the patient. They have to ask the right questions and listen carefully, draw the patient out to really understand the symptoms, how the patient is feeling, how that's different than how they normally feel, when these symptoms appeared, what other things might have been going on that were related to the symptoms, and how do you sort out what might be related to the symptoms and what's coincidental. All that is part of being able to apply a scientific approach. But you need to then make another leap beyond just understanding what are the symptoms to get to the real cause.

And, again, that's where leadership comes in—with the question of transforming society, making revolution, uprooting oppression and exploitation, ridding human society of antagonistic conflicts, enabling human beings to have an entirely different relationship with the rest of nature, with the environment, to be fit caretakers of the earth. That requires the science of communism—as it's been developed from the time of Marx to now, and is continually being developed—in order to get a scientific understanding, to dig beneath the surface and get to the root of things, and come up with a real, a correct—or essentially correct—analysis of the problem and the solution: what's the cause and what needs to be done to uproot the cause of all these different things, in the case of ridding society of exploitation and oppression, wars, devastation of the environment, and so on.

Theory and Reality...

Knowing and Changing the World

Brooks: Well, carrying forward with some of what you were just talking about, I wanted to get a little bit more into this point about the importance of theory and line, including because I think this is sometimes something that the younger generation doesn't give enough weight to. I mean, obviously, it's not just the younger generation. But, when I was re-reading your memoir, one thing that came through is that in the height of the '60s there were all kinds of different lines and programs out there, all different kinds of understandings that were being put forward about the problem and the solution. I know that you speak a lot in that memoir to the importance of theory and line, in terms of navigating through all that, and it is clear that there was importance to polemics, in taking on incorrect lines. It seems like that becomes all the more important when things are sharpening up and a lot of people are becoming politically awake and trying to figure out what the problem and solution is.

So, I wondered if, in relation to these times right now, when there is all this stuff going on in the world and people are kind of raising their heads—and, as the RCP's statement "On the Strategy for Revolution" puts it, questioning and resisting what they usually accept—how you see the importance of line and theory, and polemics, in that context.

BA: Let's not mystify science. Science means that you probe and investigate reality, by carrying out experiments, by accumulating data, and so on; and then, proceeding from that reality and applying the methods and logic of rational thought, you struggle to identify the patterns in the data, etc., you've gathered about reality. If you're approaching it correctly, you are striving to arrive at a correct synthesis of the reality that you've investigated. And then you measure your conclusions against objective reality to determine if they are in correspondence with it, if what they sum up and predict about reality is confirmed in reality. That's the way breakthroughs in science have been made—whether it's in the realm of biology, like the understanding of evolution, or whether it's things about the origins of the universe (or the known universe), like the Big Bang theory, or whatever. That's the process that goes on, and the question is: is it scientific? That is, does it, in its main and essential lines, correspond to reality?

And, particularly for people who are seeking to change the world—which, in fact, all scientists are in one way or another, but especially when you're seeking to change things in the political realm, when you're seeking to change society in a major way—then the question is not just does it correspond to reality, although that's fundamental, but can it actually lead to changing the world, and is it actually applied to changing the world? And then, in the process of that, is there more raw material gathered, so to speak, from which to learn more and to develop further your scientific understanding, about particular things and overall?

When People Are Falling Into Bullshit, They Should Be Told So: The Need for Sharp, and Principled, Struggle

Brooks: I know that, in terms of your own development into a revolutionary communist and in terms of your relation to other people in that process, the role of struggle has been really important—people struggling with you during

your development, and then you, at different points, very sharply struggling with other people.

BA: If people are saying—either our Party or anybody else—that they believe they have an understanding of the fundamental problem humanity is up against and the solution to it; if we say that the problem is the capitalist-imperialist system, and the answer is communist revolution to bring into being an entirely different world without exploitation and oppression, without antagonistic conflicts among humanity or between humanity and the rest of nature; if people are saying that, that's obviously a very big deal. That's very serious. It matters a tremendous amount to the masses of humanity. If the people saying this are right, it's a very big deal; and if they're wrong, that is a very big deal. But your responsibility, if you're newly encountering this and you're ignorant about it—that is, you don't know because you have just encountered it—don't get sidetracked by what "everybody else" says about it. If you're serious—and this is serious—dig into it and learn about it. That's your responsibility.

The Culture, the Principles, the Standards We Need

Brooks: What do you think is the responsibility—particularly of revolutionary forces but, even more broadly, of anybody who's serious about or even questioning about whether the world could be different? Isn't there the responsibility of setting whole new standards and taking on this vicious culture of gossip and slander, setting the standards that you're talking about, where people are proceeding from what it's actually gonna take to change the world? How do you see people's responsibility in terms of that?

BA: Well, again, people have to fight to make the focus of things: what is the way we're gonna actually understand the world and change the world? If that's what we're setting out to do, if that's what we really wanna do, then we're gonna proceed from the need to get a real understanding of what it is that different people and groups actually are for and where it would actually lead. What is their line, and what are the implications and the consequences if that line is carried out and if people are mobilized around that line, as opposed to another one? And it is a fight to make that the focus.

There's also a fight to have the standard be: That other stuff—that "tabloidism," that low-life gossiping, slander and rumor-mongering, the personal backbiting, and the rest of that—we don't want that, that doesn't go here. We're about something serious here, we're about trying to make a new world, and that other stuff is part of the old world we need to get rid of. If you have a criticism of somebody, let's raise it up to the level of things that really matter.

This Is a Gigantic Leap... and It Makes All the Difference

Brooks: For people who are kind of advanced, who have been around this movement for revolution for a while and consider themselves revolutionary and communist-minded, or very supportive of the idea of revolution or communism, or are very drawn to BA and what he represents and this movement for revolution or, in different ways, have been around for a while and are kind of weighing what would it mean to join the Party: What is that next leap that they have to take, what difference would it make to be in the Party? What are some of the things that you might say to people who are weighing that?

BA: Do the right thing. [BA and Brooks laugh.] I would say, it makes all the difference. The Party needs to grow. It needs to