

# What Humanity Needs

## Revolution, and the New Synthesis of Communism

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### Hip-Hop: The Need to Wage a Fight

**Brooks:** *One thing, both related to that but also that I would ask you about in its own right, is hip-hop, because obviously there's an influence of hip-hop in the spoken word piece, "All Played Out," and I know you've spoken before about hip-hop as a tremendously creative art form and that, in its origins, there was a tremendous amount of political consciousness, and it was, to a large extent, the music of the oppressed. And there is still some of that, but then there's also so much shit on the radio, and so much crap in terms of mainstream hip-hop. And obviously it's not limited to hip-hop, but I didn't know if you had any thoughts on that, either in its own right or kind of as "All Played Out" polemicalizing against that, too, and kind of putting forward something more inspiring in terms of that form, too.*

**BA:** So, you've got someone like Ice-T, who goes from "cop killer" to: "oh, let me play a cop in a movie, and let me be a cop on TV." You've got LL Cool J playing an LA pig on the TV now. And how many of these rappers, especially the male ones, have not played pigs, at one time or another?

Well, that's not just them. Shame on them. But it's higher up and more powerful forces in society who are consciously saying: "Let's recast this culture and make it serve something different, let's make it serve our interests. Let's have it reinforce the oppression of the people rather than, at least in some significant element, drawing forward opposition, rebellion, defiance against the oppression of the people."

So there's a real struggle that needs to be waged. Yes, way back in the early days, when I first became aware of hip-hop, and particularly rap, back in the '70s, I was drawn to it—as were, obviously, many, many other people—because it had a fresh spirit, artistically, as well as a rebellious thrust to a significant degree within it. And there's a need to wage a fight—not to give up—to wage a fight to bring that forward more fully and, again, make that part of the radical revolt against this revolting culture, which far too much has taken over a lot of the different realms of hip-hop.

### This Is Serious... Humor and Fun Is an Important Part of It

**Brooks:** *And there's also the role of humor. I know in your memoir you have this line about a good pun is worth ten points any time, and the first question in the Q&A of the Revolution talk DVD is responding to whether people will be allowed to smoke weed under socialism, and you talk for a while about that... and then say: "what were we talking about again?" [Laughs] So I wondered if you wanted to speak to the role of, and actually the importance of, humor and fun in making revolution and transforming society, which I think you were starting to a little bit just now.*

**BA:** Well, look, let's start with this. The basic thing that we're all about is emancipating humanity from thousands of years of tradition's chains, from the darkness that's been imposed on masses of people for millennia now, and from all these different forms of degradation, oppression, domination and exploitation over masses of people by a small handful of oppressors. So we're aiming for the emancipation of the masses of oppressed people in the world and, ultimately, all of humanity from all of that, as well as the wars and all the antagonistic relations that give rise to these wars in the world, which are rooted in these systems of exploitation. So, if that's the goal, that's a very inspiring thing. And, at the same time, you can't conceive of emancipation that doesn't have fun and play in it. What kind of emancipation would it be, if we got to a whole new world and there were no fun and no play? I don't call that emancipating. I'd call it just the opposite. [Brooks laughs]

And, similarly, all along the way, our movement—the movement for revolution aiming for that ultimate goal of a communist world and the emancipation of all of humanity—should have humor, fun and play. Not because it's a duty, but because, if you want to put it that way, it's an organic part, a natural part of what we're aiming for. This should be full of liveliness and humor and, yes, play and fun, even while, at the same time, it's deadly serious. It should have both of those elements. It should be grounded in the fact that this is all very serious—and the whole basic dividing line here is whether the world is gonna remain fundamentally unchanged or whether it's gonna be radically changed. Fundamentally, time and again, it gets back to that. If the world

stays fundamentally unchanged, as was pointed out in the polemic against Alain Badiou's political philosophy (which I referred to earlier), then the machinery of capitalism-imperialism continues humming in the background, crushing lives and destroying spirits, and the exploitation goes on unabated. That's intolerable. So the world needs to be radically changed, and it needs to be radically changed in the way that it can be, and a way that's emancipating—and that's through the revolution aiming for communism. But, as part of it in that sense, there should be liveliness. There should be humor. As we talked about earlier, there should be joy, even while we are, once again, recognizing this fundamental question and dividing line that the world needs to be radically changed and not stay as it is, and even as we're deadly serious in that sense.

### No Wonder They Slander Communism

**BA:** If you step back and think about it, no wonder they slander communism so much. If you presided over a system that has such glaring, howling contradictions and disparities in terms of how people lived, a system which denied a decent life to the majority of humanity, and weighed them down with tremendous oppression and superstition and ignorance, while a relative handful in a few countries lived a life of unbelievable luxury—but, more than just luxury, they continued to accumulate capital while they fought with each other over who would beat out the other through this exploitation and accumulation of capital—if you stood back and looked at that... Imagine if you said to somebody: go to a drawing board and draw up the way you think the world should be. And imagine if somebody went to the drawing board and painted a picture of the way the world is now, and they said: this is the way the world should be. I mean, there would be tremendous howls coming from all quarters of humanity, saying: What the fuck—that's the way you think the world should be, with these tremendous disparities and people, little children, dying of cholera and malnutrition and other things that could be prevented easily, while a small number battle each other to accu-

mulate more and more wealth from the suffering of this mass of humanity—that's what you think?!

Anybody who would actually draw that up on a board should actually be—and would probably be—rightly accused of criminal insanity. And yet, here's a class of people, the capitalist-imperialist class, that presides exactly over a world that way, and argues it's the best of all possible worlds. The only reason that people don't—masses of people don't, right at this time—say, "this is criminal insanity" is because they've been propagandized and conditioned to believe that, in fact, this is the only possible way, and that the radical alternative to it that does exist, namely communism, has somehow been a horror and a disaster. And it's not hard to see why the ruling class of capitalist-imperialists would employ a lot of people to propagate that idea everywhere they could. If you presided over such a criminally insane system, you would undoubtedly do the same.

### Democracy—Yes, We Can Do Better Than That

**Brooks:** *I wanted to, on this point of objective reality—what people think is part of objective reality, but objective reality is not determined by what people think—ask you about some of the conventional wisdom and pervasive ways of thinking out there in the ideological terrain that keep people—stand in the way of people being able to understand the world in order to transform it. Or, as you put it in "All Played Out," "keep people in chains suffering unbearable pain." We've talked about some of those things already in this interview, not the least of which is all this anti-communist slander, and we've talked about elections and things like that. One of these pervasive ways of thinking, in the conventional wisdom, that I wanted to ask you about is on the question of democracy, 'cause I know that, about 25 years ago now, you had this book Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That? And yet, a lot of the dominant thinking out there is continually—even among progressive people, is continuously returning to putting everything in terms of democracy, or "perfecting democracy," or things like that. So I wondered if you wanted to talk some about that.*

**BA:** Looking with more historical sweep, the point is that **democracy is an expression of the fact that human society has not yet reached the**

**stage where it has gotten beyond division into exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed.** It is a mechanism through which institutions are supposed to guarantee rights to people in conditions where people are divided into slave masters and slaves, or exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed. It is an institutionalized mechanism which reflects those divisions and which is supposed to guarantee rights to people, on the terms of and in the conditions where those oppressive and exploitative divisions exist and in fact characterize society and its fundamental functioning and dynamics.

And when we get beyond the division of society into classes, into exploiters and exploited, the concept of democracy will no longer have meaning in the sense of the protection of the rights of a minority—or an institutionalized means through which the rights of the people are supposed to be protected—because there will no longer be sections of society ruling over and oppressing the greater part of society. And so there will not be a need for institutions and institutionalized means for protecting the rights of parts of a society against other parts which would exploit and oppress them, or deny them rights, and so on, and so forth.

Democracy literally means "rule by the people." But when—think of it this way: everything in a certain sense exists in terms of its opposite. There's no high without low; there's no up without down; there's no big without small; and so on. These concepts exist only in terms of their opposites. So, rule by the people—that is, democracy—what meaning does it have, when you have moved beyond the division of people into exploiters and exploited, when there is only the common association of people? Yes, there will be contradiction and struggle, but there will not be social relations and institutionalized forms through which one part of society will be dominating, ruling over and exploiting and oppressing other parts of society. So what meaning, then, is there to "the rule of the people" when there is just the people, with their common association, without the need for and without the existence, in fact, of instruments of suppression of one part of society by another?

It will just be the way society is, when you get to communism.

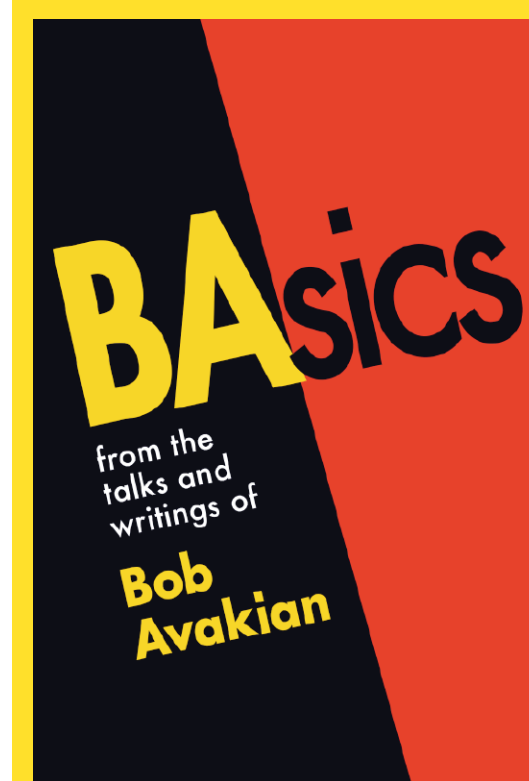
### Basics: Concentrating Key Principles and Objectives, Rearing a New Generation of Communist Revolutionaries

**Brooks:** *One thing I wanted to talk about is: this past year Basics came out. This is a concentration of more than 30 years of your work, and it's a concentration of the new synthesis that we've been talking about, and a lot of people have made the analogy between Basics and the Red Book in terms of the role that the Red Book played in rearing a whole generation of revolutionaries in the 1960s, and then speaking to the role that Basics can play in raising a whole new generation of revolutionaries now, on the basis of an even more advanced understanding. So I didn't know if you wanted to speak some to how you see the role of Basics and the importance of it coming out.*

**BA:** Well, I think you hit on much of the essence of it. It is intended to serve a purpose analogous to what the Red Book, the *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung*, served in relation to the movement and the upsurge of the 1960s: *Basics* starts off with some exposure of the actual history of the U.S. and of slavery as crucial in the development of the U.S.; and then it speaks to the alternative, the socialist revolution and the goal of communism; it talks about the revolution that is needed and the strategic approach to that; it goes into questions of epistemology, that is the theory of knowledge, how you know about the world, the method for knowing the world; and it speaks to morals in relation to revolution; and then gets into the revolutionary potential of the masses and the responsibility of leadership and the vanguard party.

So the point is to give people a basic grounding in some of the fundamentals of communist analysis, communist principles and methods, and communist objectives, in a way that people can get into—in a "digestible form." In other words, a lot of things have to be addressed with a lot of complexity, because reality is complex, and many aspects of the problems of making revolution are very complex. You can't get where you need to go, if you don't engage and wrestle with that complexity. If you just try to water it all down to something simple, you're not gonna get where you need to go, because the complexity

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