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BREAKTHROUGHS

**The Historic Breakthrough by Marx,
and the Further Breakthrough
with the New Communism**

A Basic Summary

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CONTENTS

<i>A Brief Explanatory Preface</i>	1
Karl Marx: For the First Time in History, A Fundamentally Scientific Approach to and Analysis of Human Social Development and the Prospects for Human Emancipation.....	2
The Breakthrough With Marxism.....	5
Marxism as a Science—Dialectical Materialism, Not Utopian Metaphysics	17
The New Communism: The Further Breakthrough with the New Synthesis	23
The Science.....	25
The Strategy...For an Actual Revolution	40
The Leadership	56
A Radically New Society on the Road to Real Emancipation	67
Notes	73

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A Basic Summary

By Bob Avakian

A Brief Explanatory Preface

In what follows, many of the concepts that will be gone into are of necessity dealing with things on a high level of theoretical abstraction. I have done my best to make this accessible to people who do not yet have even a basic familiarity with these concepts, in order to provide them with a “way into” what is alluded to in the main part of the title, while for those already familiar with and partisan to this, the aim is to deepen the grasp of this and the ability to work with and wield this in contributing to the revolution, and the ultimate goal of communism, which this theory points to as possible, necessary, and urgently required for a profound leap in human emancipation. This is, in one important dimension, an elaboration on *The New Synthesis of Communism: Fundamental Orientation, Method and Approach, and Core Elements—An Outline*.¹ At the same time, as indicated in the title, it is a “basic summary,” because, even as a comprehensive exposition of much of what is addressed here is contained in the book *THE NEW COMMUNISM*²—and important elements of this are included in the selections in *Basics*,³ which can, in important ways, serve as a handbook for revolution—there is also a need for a distilled discussion of the theory, strategic orientation and objectives of the communist movement as this was developed from the time of Marx and with its further development and synthesis with the new communism. It is also a “basic summary,” rather than an attempt at a complete and final summary, because the development of the new communism is a work in progress, an important part of which is continuing to learn from and further synthesize what has come before, in the first great wave of communist revolution, beginning with the historic breakthrough by Marx.

Karl Marx: For the First Time in History, A Fundamentally Scientific Approach to and Analysis of Human Social Development and the Prospects for Human Emancipation

In *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx points to the essential limitation of bourgeois political economists: They regard capitalist economic relations, and the society based on the capitalist economy, as the only “natural” form of economy and the highest and final point of human social development. Or in the words of Marx himself: “this definite, *specific*, historical form of social labour, as it appears in capitalist production, is proclaimed by these economists as the general, eternal form, as something determined by nature and *these* relations of production as the absolutely (not historically) necessary, natural and reasonable relations of social labour.”⁴ [Emphasis in original] Their thoughts, Marx explains, are “entirely confined within the bounds of capitalist production.”⁵

This is the fundamental blind spot and failing of all bourgeois theorists, theories, and commentaries regarding human existence and its historical development—and possibilities—and all reformist projects and schemes proceeding in accordance with this bourgeois worldview.

An example of this: *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity* (Part 1)⁶, contains a polemic against Karl Popper and his attack on Marxism as not being a science. As part of that, I refuted Popper’s attempts to discredit the whole Marxist analysis of surplus value and the understanding that value is determined by the socially necessary labor time that goes into the production of something, and Popper’s insistence that instead it was supply and demand that set the value. But the fact is that a thorough refutation of this very argument was done by Marx himself in *Theories of Surplus Value* (and elsewhere). People like Popper are just lazy, besides everything else. They don’t even bother to speak to the refutation of this by Marx, including in *Theories of Surplus Value*.

But, beyond someone like Popper, to a large degree, the essential limitation that Marx speaks to is so much an operative assumption that those who speak on behalf of this system (or in any case in accordance with its principles and values) have internalized, or “inherited,” this as part of the “common wisdom” of bourgeois society, often without even thinking about it or being conscious of it at any given time. And this is also completely bound up with the *parasitism* of contemporary capitalist imperialism, most especially in the U.S.: the fact that an increasingly globalized capitalism relies to a very great degree for production and for maintaining the rate of profit on a vast network of sweatshops, particularly in the Third World of Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia, while capitalist activity in the capitalist-imperialist “home countries” is increasingly in the realm of finance and financial speculation, and the “high end” of (not the production of the basic physical materials for) high tech, as well as the service sector and the commercial sphere (including the growing role of online marketing). As Lenin phrased it, this puts “the seal of parasitism” on the

whole of societies such as the U.S.; and the theories and observations of those who, again, assume that bourgeois production relations are the natural, final and eternal relations of social labor, are but the intellectual manifestations of those bourgeois relations, marked as they are today with the high degree of parasitism of a country like the United States. They are a manifestation of the inability to see beyond what Marx characterized as the narrow horizon of bourgeois right—right as defined by, and delimited within the confines of, bourgeois production relations and the corresponding social relations.

And this is often expressed in terms of a kind of magical “democracy” which at one and the same time is inextricably linked with capitalism yet somehow does not have social and class content—is a metaphysical “pure” democracy—when in reality (as I will speak to more fully later) the democracy that is being spoken of and exalted in this way is a form of class dictatorship that facilitates and enforces capitalist production relations and the overall capitalist system of exploitation and oppression.

Here are some contemporary illustrations of this—out of the seemingly endless source of such examples.

In “A Renaissance on the Right”² David Brooks, a conservative commentator (but opponent of Donald Trump), cites the theories of John Locke as a major inspiration for what Brooks hails as the great success of American democracy and capitalism. Locke, an English philosopher in the period of the rise of capitalism several centuries ago, is a champion of the individual—the individual as individual, with the capacity for social mobility, who is to be judged according to individual merit and not according to the social caste into which the individual is born. This, Brooks declares, repeating a well-worn bourgeois nostrum, is the basis for human equality and for democracy and capitalism, of which the U.S. is the supreme and shining model. In reality, Locke was, above all, a proponent and theorist of the individual as the *owner of property*. I examined this in *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?*, where I pointed out that “the society of which Locke was a theoretical exponent, as well as a practical political partisan, was a society based on wage-slavery and capitalist exploitation”⁸—which, it should be noted, is a society marked by profound *inequality* and social relations of oppression. And, as I also pointed out about Locke:

...it is not surprising that, while he was opposed to slavery in England itself, he not only defended the institution of slavery, under certain circumstances, in the *Second Treatise*, but turned a not insignificant profit himself in the slave trade and helped to draw up the charter for a government headed by a slave-owning aristocracy in one of the American colonies.⁹

Here we see another of the glaring “blind spots” of theorists and apologists of bourgeois society, and in particular those who sing hymns to American capitalism: they regularly ignore the role of

slavery in the “great success story” of American capitalism—when, in fact, as I pointed out in *Basics* 1:1, **“There would be no United States as we now know it today without slavery.** That is a simple and basic truth.” There is a profound reality that is concentrated in that statement. As I pointed out in *Revolution—Nothing Less!*, Adam Goodheart, in his book *1861*,¹⁰ “cites this fact: in the period leading into the Civil War, the total money value of slaves in this country was greater than the total value of all the factories and railroads.”¹¹ [Emphasis added] (And we can also refer here to *The Half Has Never Been Told*,¹² by Edward Baptist, which goes in depth into the crucial role that slavery played in the development of the American economy, and the unspeakable horrors this involved.)

David Brooks particularly hails the great economic expansion that occurred in the U.S. in the period 1860 to 1900 (which was also celebrated in extravagant terms by Ayn Rand). But, again, this was carried out on a foundation that, to a great extent, had been built on slavery; and in the period after the Civil War, along with the continuing extreme exploitation of masses of Black people in conditions barely better than slavery (and still incorporating some elements of it), this economic expansion was bound up with the territorial expansion to the West, involving the further slaughter of the Native Americans and the grand-scale theft of their land (repeatedly breaking treaties in the process), and the extension of the railroads to the West, involving, among other things, vicious exploitation of Chinese immigrants, accompanied by brutally oppressive discrimination. It is also a basic and simple truth that, as I put it in *THE TRUMP/PENCE REGIME MUST GO! In The Name of Humanity, We REFUSE To Accept a Fascist America, A Better World IS Possible*: “The USA is a country which established its territory and built the foundation of its wealth through the armed conquest of land, genocide, slavery, and ruthless exploitation of successive waves of immigrants to America.”¹³

A more crass example of wielding philosophy on behalf of bourgeois aspiration is found in the article “Philosophy Pays Off” by Robert E. Rubin. Rubin credits a philosophy professor at Harvard in the 1950s, Raphael Demos, who, as Rubin describes it:

would use Plato and other great philosophers to demonstrate that proving any proposition to be true in the final and ultimate sense was impossible....

I concluded that you can’t prove anything in absolute terms, from which I extrapolated that all significant decisions are about probabilities. Internalizing the core tenet of Professor Demos’s teaching—weighing risks and analyzing odds and trade-offs—was central to everything I professionally did in the decades ahead in finance and government.¹⁴

It is not accidental or coincidental that the Robert E. Rubin who is propounding here this kind of anti-scientific relativist sophistry (it is not possible to prove anything definitively, and instead one

must proceed by weighing risks and analyzing odds and trade-offs) is the same Robert E. Rubin who was Secretary of the Treasury during the presidency of Bill Clinton, and who wrote (in an article in the *New York Times Book Review*) that, in the founding of this country and the adoption of its Constitution:

Disagreements about the extent of federal power and the design of our democratic institutions were resolved through long arguments and, ultimately, principled compromises.¹⁵

In “On ‘Principled Compromises,’ and Other Crimes Against Humanity,”¹⁶ I called attention to the fact that a salient and egregious example of “principled compromises” adopted by the founders of this country was the acceptance of slavery, with the proviso in the Constitution that slaves would be considered three-fifths human beings. And, as I also pointed out in *THE TRUMP/PENCE REGIME MUST GO!*: this Constitution actually institutionalized mass rape along with slavery. All of the “founders”—and not just the slave-owning ones themselves—are responsible for these monstrous crimes. It is often argued, by way of rationalizing all this, that if such a compromise had not been made, then it would not have been possible to unite the colonies into a single country with a single government. But here the question arises, the mere posing of which should strongly suggest the answer: Why was it necessary, and in what way is it justified, to found a country *on the basis of institutionalizing slavery and the attendant atrocities*—why would it not have been far better to *refuse* to found a country on that basis?

Here stands out in very sharp relief not only the blindness—willful or otherwise—but the utter bankruptcy of someone like Rubin, and more generally of the intellectual camp followers and apologists for capitalism and more particularly U.S. capitalist imperialism.

The Breakthrough With Marxism

In contrast to what is put forward in these various expressions of bourgeois philosophy, political theory and social theory (or the commodification of philosophy, as in the case of Rubin), the scientific approach embodied in what Marx brought forward recognizes and emphasizes that the fundamental and essential relations that people in society are part of, and the key to understanding how an economy and society function, are the *production relations* of the given society and its corresponding social relations. (This is something that Marx captured in a formulation that has come to be called the “4 Alls,” to which I will return later.)

These relations are not “accidental” or “coincidental,” or arbitrary—they are grounded in the material reality that any society is fundamentally a way that human beings interact, with each other

and with the rest of nature, to meet the material requirements of life and in order to bring forward future generations. And there is the essential insight of Marx that in any given society people enter into definite production relations, which are *not of their own choosing* but are *fundamentally determined by the character of the productive forces* (including land, raw materials, buildings and other physical structures, technology, and people with their knowledge and abilities) at any given time. **And, as the productive forces are continually being developed, through human initiative and action, within any given system a point is reached at which the production relations become more a fetter on the productive forces, than an appropriate form for their further development, and a revolution becomes necessary to resolve this contradiction. This revolution is made in the political realm, in a concentrated way in the overthrow of the old political power and the establishment of a new system of political rule whose fundamental requirement is to transform the relations of production in line with the way in which the productive forces have developed.**

As Marx pointed out, one of the distinguishing features of reformists—including reformist “socialists”—is that, insofar as they identify the economy as the source of inequality and other social maladies, they tend to locate the problem in the sphere of *distribution*, whereas the fundamental source of the oppression and inequality that characterize an exploitative society, such as capitalism, resides in the sphere of *production*, and more specifically the *relations of production*.

Now, in regard to the relations of production, it is worth reviewing Lenin’s identification of the different components of the production relations. Production relations, he said, are made up of these three parts: ownership of the means of production; the role in the overall social division of labor; and the consequent share in the distribution of the social wealth. So, if you think about it, if you’re a big corporation or financial institution, a big capitalist, you own a lot of means of production (factories, machinery and other technology, land, and so on). If you’re a small-scale capitalist, a petit bourgeois, you might own a few of these things, but not a great deal of them; you won’t own capital in the millions or billions of dollars—maybe a much lesser amount. So, that’s the first—and Lenin identified this as the most fundamental—aspect of the relations of production: ownership or non-ownership of the means of production, and how much of those means of production a person (or a corporation, etc.) owns.

The second aspect or component of the relations of production is the role in the social division of labor. For example, someone who may not own means of production, *per se*, but is possessed of a rare skill may be able to command a lot of remuneration for that skill even though they don’t own means of production. And people who generally have acquired a high level of education, people in the professions for example, also are in a different position than people who own no means of production and have no highly developed skill (and all they have with which to live is their ability to sell their ability to work, their *labor power*). So people in the professions and similar situations,

along with the owners of small-scale means of production (or small-scale means of distribution, like a small store owner or shopkeeper) make up the middle class (the petite bourgeoisie) as opposed to the big bourgeoisie, the capitalist ruling class.

In terms of the petite bourgeoisie—and significant differences that exist between particular sections of this class, as well as what they fundamentally have in common—these observations by Marx, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, are extremely insightful and relevant. One must not imagine, Marx writes, that the democratic intellectuals

are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven from earth. What makes them [the democratic intellectuals] representatives of the petite bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter [the shopkeepers] do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter practically.

The petit bourgeois democratic intellectuals (people in capitalist society whose social position and mode of life is based on working in the realm of ideas, of one kind or another) mainly tend to the “left” side of the bourgeois political spectrum (the “liberal” or “progressive” position), while much of the “shopkeeper” strata (or, in broader terms, the owners of small-scale means of production or distribution) will often incline to the right, even the extreme right, of this spectrum (although at least some small-scale entrepreneurs, as well as many in the “gig economy,” seem to be an exception to this). But what is true of both the shopkeepers (broadly understood) and the democratic intellectuals is that, spontaneously, they remain confined within the constricting limits of capitalist commodity relations and the corresponding conceptions of bourgeois right.

And then there are people who neither own means of production, nor do they have any highly developed skill or high level of education with which they can rise to a middle position in society and its overall division of labor and, therefore, they are at the bottom of society and either selling their ability to work and being exploited in that way, or they are unable to sell it, and consequently are either starving or having to hustle in one form or another, often engaging in what amount to petit bourgeois activities—peddling or things such as that—in order to live.

So you can see that the division of labor is interconnected with ownership or non-ownership of the means of production, but it's not entirely identical with it because of the question of education, skill, the professions, and so on. And you can also see how ownership (or non-ownership) of means of production and the division of labor of society relate very closely to the participation in the distribution of society's wealth. If you own means of production with a value of millions or

billions of dollars, unless you're terrible at what you do, or you just get eaten up by the anarchy of capitalism, you're going to make a lot of profit and some of that is going to be siphoned off to you as personal income, in large amounts, even if you reinvest most of it as part of the competitive drive of capitalism. If you're in the professions or you own a certain amount of means of production (or distribution), but not a lot, you are going to get a middle share, so to speak, of the distribution of society's wealth. And if you own no means of production and lack a high level of education or highly developed skills, then you will get the smallest part of the distribution of social wealth.

An interesting and important point here: A shopkeeper, for example, might be poorer than someone who works for a wage in a factory or in a similar situation (a hospital or warehouse, etc.). Still, shopkeepers are in the *petite bourgeoisie*, because they are owners of small means of production, or means of distribution, whereas the person who might have a higher income, but has no ownership of means of production, nor even any highly developed skills, but merely lives by selling their labor power, is in a different class, the *proletariat*. This is important because, in this country with all the populism, there is a crude identification of class simply with economic status or income. So we frequently hear that "the working class"—and the bourgeois commentators often forget to put the word "white" in there, when that is clearly what they are referring to—"the working class voted for Trump because they were doing so poorly economically." But, along with the fact that social relations and "values" were more of a factor than income in regard to whether people voted for Trump or not, a lot of this "working class," whether they are doing poorly or not so poorly economically, is actually part of the *petite bourgeoisie*. So it's important to understand these things scientifically. It's not just a matter of arbitrary categories. It makes a real difference in terms of what your outlook is if you're actually in business and aspiring to succeed and perhaps become a larger-scale businessperson, or if you're someone merely selling your ability to work—that has real consequences in what your life is like and also what your outlook is, even spontaneously. (And I'll talk later about the limits of spontaneity.)

This is an important analysis by Lenin, delineating these three component parts of the production relations, and how they are interconnected and influence each other and can't be totally separated from each other even as each is significant in its own right and the first component (ownership of means of production) is overall decisive. So, while production relations are not the only significant relations among people in society, they are the most fundamental and ultimately determining, and this analysis by Lenin gives us a scientific approach to understanding where people are situated in society, and what their role is in the overall society—and even, to a certain degree at least, what their spontaneous inclinations are in relation to various things that happen in society and the world (again, understanding, as I'll come back to later, the definite limitations of spontaneity). And the point is not simply that there are these fundamental and essential relations in society, but to understand that these are, as Marx emphasized, independent of the will of individuals. They are

real social categories that have real meaning. It's not just an arbitrary intellectual exercise to group people in these categories—it reflects actual material reality that has real consequences and profound influences on people.

When Trump comes out with some of his fascist diatribes and rabid attacks, you'll hear these Democratic Party hacks complain: "He's not uniting us, he's dividing us"—as though everybody could be united if the president, instead of raving in a rabid fashion, were to say the right honeyed words. And (going back to Locke, for example) this is all part of attempting to act as if everybody in society is *just* an individual. Of course people are individuals, but they are not *just* individuals—they are, beyond that, part of social relations and, most fundamentally, production relations, and this has real consequences in how they live, how they perceive things spontaneously, and how they act, to a significant degree. These things are built into this society, and you can't just supercede them or wave them away by saying honeyed words "to unite us instead of dividing us."

As I alluded to, the production relations in society, as important and as fundamental as they are, are of course not the only important relations in society, and it would be wrong to reduce everything to those production relations. There are also very definite and significant social relations, which are also objective and not just arbitrary categories or things in the minds of people. For example, there is the social relation—an unequal relation of oppression—between men and women. There is the relation between oppressor and oppressed peoples or nations within this society (as well as on a world scale). For example, if you're white, you're in one position in this society, objectively; and if you're not white, if you're part of what is popularly referred to as "people of color"—Black people, Latinos and others—you are in a different position, you are objectively maintained in an inferior and oppressed position. It is not that you are inferior as a human being, of course, but you are part of a category of people that exists objectively in terms of the social relations in the society, and is treated and maintained in an inferior position, even though you are in no way inferior as a human being. And there is an ideology developed to rationalize this which says that you are part of a group of people that is inferior. Such oppressive social relations correspond to the exploitative production relations.

It is very interesting: when these dark ages reactionaries started directing their attacks in the realm of education recently in Arizona, for example, one of the things they did was to move to get rid of Chicano studies. And I heard one of the people in the state education institution responsible for this decision declaring: We can't have education that tells people that they're part of a group in society that's oppressed; we have to have education that tells people that they're all just individuals.

Now, life would be much simpler if you could actually eliminate social oppression by refusing to talk about it. But, in the real world, these categories of people—these social relations, to put it a better way—exist objectively. They are part of the historically evolved relations in this society. You

can't just wish them away, and you can't eliminate them by refusing to allow anyone to talk about them. (Of course, the purpose, and certainly the effect, in refusing to allow people to talk about these things is not actually to eliminate them but, on the contrary, to perpetuate and reinforce them.)

Understanding scientifically the character of society and the need for revolution obviously involves an understanding of the limitations of someone like Martin Luther King, but it's very interesting to see how right-wingers, and even some liberals, treat his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. To paraphrase, Martin Luther King said, I have a dream where *one day* the descendants of slaves and the descendants of slave owners will all be able to get together and treat each other just as individuals and they will be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. Remember now, Martin Luther King says, "I have a *dream*"—it's a *dream*, or a hope, or a goal—that *one day* this will be the reality. And then these right-wingers and some liberals come along and say: "Martin Luther King said this is a society where everybody is judged not according to the color of their skin, but according to the content of their character, so quit complaining about being oppressed as Black people."

Well, this is another attempt, in line with what was declared by that fascist Arizona education official, to obliterate relations of oppression (or, rather, to obliterate *recognition* of these oppressive relations) by not allowing people to talk about them, or to distort what they say when they do talk about them. The aim is obviously to maintain that oppression and intensify it. So, this is very important, the question of social relations. Obviously, these social relations are interconnected with the fundamental production relations in society, but they also have a life of their own, and have tremendous consequences. And, once again, the important point here is that these relations are historically evolved and exist objectively. You couldn't have a United States of America without white supremacy. That is another simple and basic fact.

To go back to what I said earlier, look at how they put together the country, the "great founding fathers"—and, yes, they were *fathers*. They put the country together on the basis of a "principled compromise"—a "principled compromise" to institutionalize slavery. That is built into this society, and it has a real consequence. Slavery is not just an abstraction. Slavery is a real thing that affects real people. It's a mode of life: it's a way of producing things; it has its own dynamics, it interacts with production and exchange in other parts of the society and on a world level—it's a real thing. And then, when they had the Civil War, and the North defeated the South, as a necessary part of defeating the South, the North had to abolish slavery, first in the Confederate states, and then overall—that's what they were forced to do, Lincoln and the rest.

But then, how did they put the country back together? They weren't willing to have half a country. That's why Lincoln went to war in the first place. He said: We can't allow half the country to

secede, you can't have a country if half of it can walk away. So they weren't willing to have half of the country and have all these European powers making alliances with the other half of the country that broke loose, seceded. So they had to put the country back together as a whole country, and the only way they could do that, given the prevailing production relations and social relations, was to make all kinds of "principled compromises," once again, with the Southern aristocracy, the large landowners, who were, to a very large degree, former slaveowners. So this is why Reconstruction was reversed, before very long after the Civil War, and the masses of Black people were betrayed again.

What all this reflects and illustrates is that these are historically evolved relations. If they had attempted, let's say, to completely suppress the former slaveowners who led the Confederate revolt—who had tried to secede and waged a war in the attempt to do so—if they had come down fully on them, they could not have put the country together again as a capitalist country. It would have torn the whole country apart, and they would probably have been unable to maintain little, if any, of it in the end. So these social relations and their interconnection with the prevailing production relations have real meaning and real effect.

The oppressive relation between men and women has historically evolved over thousands of years, and now has taken particular form within the framework of capitalist production relations and the capitalist system overall (not just in a particular country but on a world scale). This is not just an arbitrary thing, or merely a question of people's attitudes. And this leads to the question of the family, which under capitalism is, and is bound to be, an oppressive patriarchal institution. It involves economic but also social relations—it's an economic unit of society, and a social relation which is ultimately determined and shaped by the more fundamental production relations prevailing in the given society, even as it has a life and a dynamic and impact of its own.

So the point that needs to be driven home here is, once again, that these production and social relations are historically evolved, they are deeply embedded in the society at a given time, including a society like the U.S. at this time. And, on the other hand, in contrast to what is put forth by all these bourgeois theorists and (to be charitable) philosophers, while historically evolved, these relations are, at the same time, *not permanent*.

In relation to all this, speaking to the social mobility that is often raised as one of the great features of capitalist society, Marx, in another major work of his, the *Grundrisse*, pointed out that *individuals* may change their social and class position within a society like this, but the *masses of people* can only escape from oppressive production and social relations by *revolutionary* means—by *overthrowing and abolishing the system that is founded on and embodies those relations*.

Here a point I have given great emphasis, in developing the new communism, is highly relevant:

*Ultimately, the mode of production sets the foundation and the limits of change, in terms of how you address any social problem, such as the oppression of women, or the oppression of Black people or Latinos, or the contradiction between mental work and manual work, or the situation with the environment, or the situation of immigrants, and so on. While all those things have reality and dynamics in their own right, and aren't reducible to the economic system, they all take place within the framework and within the fundamental dynamics of that economic system; and that economic system, that mode of production, sets the foundation and the ultimate limits of change in regard to all those social questions. So, if you want to get rid of all these different forms of oppression, you have to address them in their own right, but you also have to fundamentally change the economic system to give you the ability to be able to carry through those changes in fundamental terms. To put it another way: *You have to have an economic system that doesn't prevent you from making those changes, and instead not only allows but provides a favorable foundation for making those changes.*¹⁷ [Italics in original]*

In polemicizing against the utopian reformist of his time, Proudhon, Marx discussed how on Proudhon's part there was a poverty of philosophy (this was a play on the title of Proudhon's work, *The Philosophy of Poverty*). On the part of the current day bourgeois theorists, commentators, etc. (contemporary apologists for capitalist imperialism) there is a striking poverty of imagination—as well as morality—and, most fundamentally, a poverty of **science**.

By contrast, Marx established the analysis of human society and its historical development on a scientific foundation and with a scientific method.

It is worthwhile digging into this statement by Marx, in the same part of *Theories of Surplus Value* from which I quoted earlier:

But in the same measure as it is understood that labour is the *sole* source of exchange value and the active source of use value, “*capital*” is likewise conceived by the same bourgeois economists...as the regulator of production, the source of wealth and the aim of production, whereas labour is regarded as wage labour,...**a mere production cost and instrument of production** dependent on a minimum wage and forced to drop even below this minimum as soon as the existing quantity of labour is “superfluous” for capital. In this contradiction, [bourgeois] political economy merely expressed the essence of capitalist production or, if you like, of wage labour, of **labour alienated from itself, which stands confronted by the wealth it has created as alien wealth, by its own productive power as the productive power of its product, by its enrichment as its own impoverishment and by its social power as the power of society.**¹⁸ [Boldface added]

It is here that Marx goes on to say that “this definite, *specific*, historical form of social labour, as it appears in capitalist production, is proclaimed by these economists as the general, eternal form, as something determined by nature and *these* relations of production as the absolutely (not historically) necessary, natural and reasonable relations of social labour.”¹⁹ Let’s examine this crucial analysis more closely, especially the part I gave particular emphasis to (boldfaced) here.

For example, I emphasized the phrases where Marx says that the bourgeois political economists regard wage-labor as a “mere production cost and instrument of production.” In other words, they turn reality on its head and treat the process of production, and the production of profit, as something that flows out of capital and out of the role of the capitalist, rather than where it resides in reality—in the exploitation of wage-labor. And this gets to the crucial point which I have emphasized before, and which can’t be emphasized too many times: Capital is a *social relation*—a social relation of exploitation, and oppression—not just a “thing.” It’s not just machinery; it’s not just land; it’s not just raw materials; it’s not just buildings—it’s a social relation. This is very important to grasp, and it is continually covered over. Today, they not only talk about capital as machinery and other inanimate objects, they even are so brazen as to talk about “human capital,” to talk about people as “human capital,” which should provide a hint as to the nature of the system, reducing people to “human capital.”

This social relation, the exploitation of *wage-labor*, is the particular form of exploitation under capitalism, and is the source of surplus value and profit in this system. It is the actual role that labor, being applied in the process of production, plays in creating more value than the value that is paid to those who are working in this way as wage laborers. It is *that* which creates the surplus value out of which the profit comes, after you deduct the other expenses. And, with capitalism, there is not only the generalization of commodity relations—everything being increasingly turned into a commodity—but there is also the crucial particularity of *labor power*, the ability to work, as a commodity. This is a particular kind of commodity: unlike other elements of production (other instruments of production, to use Marx’s phrase), labor power as a commodity, utilized in the process of production, can create more value in its employment in the process of production, than the value that is equal to its wage, to put it simply. This is why Marx referred to this as *variable* capital, as opposed to constant capital: The capital invested in labor power can lead to the creation of *more* capital, more wealth, surplus value—whereas constant capital refers to machinery, raw materials and other things which are mere “inputs” (mere “instruments” of production) which do not increase the value of the product in the process of production; they merely pass on value that they already have into the new product.

Along with this, it is important to understand that, contrary to the prevailing notions of bourgeois economics, value is not “added” in the commercial sphere, through the sale of the product; instead, what happens through such commercial transactions is the *realization* of value that has *already been created* through the application of *variable capital*, that is, the *exploitation of wage-labor*, in the *process of production*.

So this labor power as variable capital applied in production is not just another “production cost,” another “input”; and the source of “economic growth” is not the owners of such “inputs” (the capitalists) and their “innovation,” or their “entrepreneurial genius,” but again is the exploitation of those whose labor creates the “alien wealth” that Marx speaks of, and who are, in his words, confronted by the wealth that they have created as “alien wealth”—confronted by what has been produced by their own productive power as the “productive power of the product” which in fact they have created through their labor.

This is another way of saying—another very important point that Marx brought to light—that under capitalism *dead labor dominates living labor*. What does this mean? It doesn’t mean that you go into a factory and you find dead people there! Of course, nobody spontaneously thinks of it this way in this kind of society now, and bourgeois political economists do not generally talk in these terms, but the very phrase “dead labor” points to a correct understanding of things, because what is any actual object that’s a product of production *other than* the product of *labor*? Yes, raw materials go into it—but where did the raw materials come from? They are also a product of labor. It was pointed out in “On the Possibility of Revolution”²⁰ (a very important document from the Revolutionary Communist Party) that things such as land and raw materials are, so to speak, “provided by nature.” They are there whether there are any people there or not. But, in order to make them part of the process of production, they have to be worked on by people. For example, gold or silver or other minerals have to be mined. Land has to be worked. They have to become part of a system of production. Under capitalism this is done by wage-labor, overwhelmingly—not entirely, but overwhelmingly. So, what you have, when you look at raw materials, for example, is dead labor—labor that’s already gone into the process—you don’t see the labor being done right there because it’s already been done. This, the capitalists and the bourgeois political economists regard as a mere instrument of production. But, as Marx emphasizes, what is actually involved is the congealing of labor that has gone into making these things: mining the raw materials, or working on those raw materials to make a machine which in turn is used to make another machine, which in turn is used to make a finished product to be sold as a consumer product.

So, when we say that under capitalism “dead labor dominates living labor,” this means that, when the wage workers come to the production process, they are basically treated as an appendage of the machine, and they are dominated by that machine—which is itself the product of previous labor.

Everyone who's ever experienced speed-up in a factory, for example, knows what that means. (Or you can look at the famous *I Love Lucy* episode, where the Lucy character and her friend Ethel are working on an assembly line and they can't keep up. Well, they're being dominated by dead labor, machinery.) This is what happens under capitalism: The class of people who created this machinery are in turn dominated by it, which is an essential expression of their exploited condition.

The generalization of commodity relations under capitalism, and the crucial particularity of labor power as a commodity—a particular kind of commodity which, unlike other elements of production, can create more value in its employment in the process of production (variable capital, as opposed to constant capital)—this is the distinguishing feature of capitalism as a social relation. And with the generalization of commodity production and exchange and the particularity of labor power as a commodity, we have the *fundamental contradiction* of capitalism, the fundamental contradiction between socialized production (as opposed to individualized production) with huge numbers of workers being organized into systems of labor, often thousands under one roof, but part of an overall process involving millions and ultimately billions of people—labor which is done not by the owners of the means of production, but by people employed by them as wage workers—you have that *socialized production*, and yet at the same time *private appropriation* in the hands of not just individual capitalists, but especially today, whole aggregations of capital in the form of corporations and other similar associations of capital. As opposed to social appropriation where the wealth belongs to society as a whole, instead it goes in aggregates to particular associations of capital—sometimes individuals, but predominantly in today's world, corporations and other associations of capital often controlling billions of dollars of capital, not just in one country, but internationally. That's what is meant by private appropriation—it isn't appropriation by society as a whole, but appropriation by competing capitalists. And that word, “competing,” is very important, because this private appropriation means that there will be competition between the different groups of capitalists who privately appropriate the socially produced wealth.

And this leads to what? *Anarchy*—anarchy in production, and anarchy in the capitalist system as a whole. Engels, in *Anti-Dühring*, discussed the motion of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism between socialized production and private appropriation. He pointed out that the working out of this contradiction assumes two different forms of motion that go into the dynamic process of this fundamental contradiction's motion. Those two forms of motion are, on the one hand, the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat that it exploits, and the other form of motion that Engels identified, importantly, is the contradiction between organization and anarchy, the organization of production on the level of, say, an enterprise—which may be *highly* organized, with lots of calculations going into it, market estimates and all kinds of things, and may be very tightly organized in terms of how the actual process of production is carried out on the level of the particular capitalist corporation, and so on—while, at the same time, this is in

contradiction to the anarchy of production and of exchange in the society as a whole (or today in the world as a whole, today more than ever in the world as a whole). So you have these two forms of motion—and I'll come back later to a crucial distinguishing aspect of the new communism: the importance of identifying the second form of motion of this fundamental contradiction, that is, the anarchy/organization contradiction, or the driving force of anarchy, as overall the principal and most essential form of the motion of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism.

With all this, Marx did what all bourgeois political economists and exponents of political and social theory, have failed—or refused—to do, at least in any essential and consistent way: situate capitalism and its essential relations of production in a larger historical context, revealing that *this is not in fact the end point and highest expression of human social development*—“the general, eternal form...the absolutely (not historically) necessary, natural and reasonable relations”—but is only a *particular, historically-conditioned, and temporary* form of such relations, which could and should be superceded by socialist and ultimately communist economic and social relations (and the corresponding institutions and ideas) which embody the abolition of all relations of exploitation and oppression.

Now, it is true that some specific predictions made by Marx and Engels by observing the tendencies in capitalist society during their lifetime, in particular that capitalist society would continue to be more and more divided into two antagonistic classes—the bourgeoisie (capitalist exploiters) and the masses of exploited proletarians—with the middle class shrinking, have not been borne out, particularly with the further development of capitalism into an *international* system of exploitation, capitalist *imperialism*, involving the colonial plunder of the Third World and the super-exploitation of vast masses of people there, in a global network of sweatshops. Bourgeois critics of Marxism (such as, once again, Karl Popper) have seized on the difference between the predictions of Marx (and Engels), about the polarization in capitalist society and what has actually taken place there, with the development of capitalist imperialism, to attempt to discredit Marxism and its claim to be scientifically valid. But such “critics” ignore, or seek to dismiss, the scientific analysis, begun by Engels toward the end of his life (toward the end of the 19th century) and carried forward by Lenin, of how colonial depredation by capitalist imperialism has provided the spoils which are to a significant degree the material economic basis for the bourgeoisification of a section of the working class and the growth of the middle class in the “home countries” of imperialism, including such countries as England and then the United States as the leading colonial (or neo-colonial) power, with a vast empire of exploitation.

So, while definite tendencies within capitalist society that were observed by Marx have been mitigated, or even reversed to a certain degree, in the capitalist-imperialist countries, and even as the middle class has also increased in many Third World countries over the past several decades, massive impoverishment in those countries remains a major phenomenon, and the basic

polarization that Marx identified—“Accumulation of wealth at one pole of society is therefore at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole”²¹—definitely still applies, but now most essentially on a world scale. And, of fundamental importance, *the scientific method and approach that mark the profound breakthrough made by Marx in regard to the analysis of human society and its historical development not only remains valid in an overall sense but provides the basis to analyze and synthesize, scientifically, the changes that have occurred since Marx’s lifetime, including changes which Marx may not have anticipated.*

Marxism as a Science—Dialectical Materialism, Not Utopian Metaphysics

As Mao so pungently put it, Marxists are not fortune-tellers. Marxism is a *science*, which must be continually applied, in a living way, to reality which is in the process of continual motion and transformation, the recognition of which is one of the fundamental elements of Marxist *dialectical materialism*.

Marx (in a letter to Joseph Weydemeyer, in 1852) made this important succinct summation. He said:

As to myself, no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society, nor yet the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this struggle of the classes, and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes. What I did that was new was to prove: 1) that the *existence of classes* is only bound up with *particular historical phases in the development of production*; 2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*; 3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*. [Italics in original]

A lot of people say, “Oh, Marx, he’s all about the class struggle. He thought he did a big thing by discovering that classes exist and classes struggle.” And yet, here’s Marx, in 1852, explaining that this was not the essence, and the importance, of what he did that was new—it went far beyond merely speaking to the existence of classes and class struggle.

Regarding the word “necessarily”: I have to say that it is not entirely clear to me exactly what Marx meant by “necessarily” in this context, but the relation—and in particular the difference—between “necessity” and “inevitability” is a very important question. I will speak to this further in more directly discussing the new communism, but for now let me cite this very important statement from the polemic “Ajith—A Portrait of the Residue of the Past”:

Inevitability means “cannot be avoided.” It indicates a fixed trajectory of development with no other possible outcome. *Necessity* is different; necessity determines, structures, and limits potentials and pathways but does not always produce a single result. The concept of necessity involves causal laws, there are “cause and effect” relationships, but it is not linear and predetermined—it is a dynamic process.²² [Emphasis in original. This is in Part VII, “COMMUNIST REVOLUTION IS NECESSARY AND POSSIBLE BUT NOT INEVITABLE...IT MUST BE CONSCIOUSLY MADE,” and specifically in the section “Marx and Avakian on ‘Coherence’ in Human History.”]

Again, I will have more to say about this later, but let’s turn here to the question of dictatorship—and democracy—because Marx talks about how the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat. To begin with, democracy under capitalism is a form of *dictatorship*, the dictatorship of the capitalist class (the bourgeoisie): it is democracy *under the conditions of capitalism and the domination of economic, social, and political life, and the realm of culture and ideas, by the ruling capitalist class*. This gets to the essence of what a dictatorship is. It is not an individual pounding on the table saying “You will do what I say!” Dictatorship is the dictatorship *of a class, dictatorship in the interests of a class and in the service of a particular system of which that class is the essential and concentrated expression*. The essence of dictatorship—any kind of dictatorship, of whatever class—is the monopoly of political power and the exclusion of others from any real exercise of that political power. And this, in turn, is concentrated as the monopoly not just of armed force and violence in general, but of what is deemed “legitimate” armed force and violence. Hence, when the army goes to war, that’s the extension of that dictatorship, and its “legitimate” armed force and violence, internationally. Somebody robs a store—that’s illegitimate force and violence. A cop shoots down a Black person in the street—the ruling class wants to declare that legitimate armed force and violence and tries to pass that verdict whenever and wherever it can, whereas if someone defends themselves against that, that’s “illegitimate” force and violence. All of this is a reflection not of some abstract categories of legitimate/illegitimate, somehow fallen from the sky (or eternally existing), but of actual social relations, and fundamentally production relations, and the corresponding system of rule, that is, the dictatorship of the capitalist class.

Again, dictatorship is ultimately and fundamentally dictatorship of a *class* in the interests of a system of which that class is an expression, not dictatorship of an individual or just a small group that rules by merely imposing its will, independently of and aside from the actual underlying production and social relations.

And here we get to another important component of Marxist scientific understanding: the relation between the *economic base* of society and the *political and ideological superstructure* (the political structures and institutions, and the dominant culture and ideas). Ultimately—not in the

mechanical sense that everything can be immediately reduced to this, but ultimately and fundamentally—the superstructure of society has to correspond to the underlying production relations. The economic base of society, the “mode of production”—how society actually carries out the production and reproduction of the material requirements of life and enables people to reproduce—that sets the terms for what the political institutions and processes will be and what the prevailing ideas and culture will be. And I’ve made the point, for example in *Birds Cannot Give Birth to Crocodiles, But Humanity Can Soar Beyond the Horizon*,²³ that if the superstructure is in any significant way and over any period of time out of whack with, in conflict in any essential way with, the economic base, society will grind to a halt. This is very important to understand, it has everything to do with how society functions, including what the role of elections is in a society where there are elections. The whole way in which people are *shaped* by this society, by the mere functioning of society, as well as the prevailing political and ideological superstructure, actually conditions, in a fundamental sense, how they respond politically, and what ideas prevail in their own thinking. There is an interconnection between the two; there is a certain “life of its own” to the ideas and culture of society and to the political institutions and processes, but they are also interwoven closely with, and ultimately determined by, the production and social relations.

Once again, if the superstructure is in any essential way and over any period of time out of whack with the underlying production relations, it will cause society to grind to a halt, and then forces will intervene to try to restore “order” by one means or another, including by the most extreme means. Imagine, for example, if a political party got elected in capitalist society and said, “We are going to gradually transform the fundamental contradiction of capitalism between socialized production and private appropriation by incrementally taking over all the capitalist enterprises and making them the property of society as a whole through the state,” and they began to implement that. Even if there weren’t immediately a political, and military, revolt by the capitalist class and its armed representatives, there would be chaos in society, because the underlying base would be operating in a certain way, and then there would be these political moves to try to change that, piecemeal, but it wouldn’t be done on the basis of seizing power from the bourgeoisie and having an overall plan to actually transform the economic base as well as the social relations. Having, instead, the government (or parts of it) in the hands of people who attempted to carry out such a transformation, or some aspects of it, incrementally, and without smashing the state power of the capitalist class—this would not only be immediately countered by bourgeois forces politically, and militarily, but would in any case throw everything into chaos, because the society would be “somewhat this way and somewhat that way,” it would be even more anarchic than the “normal functioning” of capitalist society.

Recently there was the TV series *Occupied*, which revolved around the scenario where a government in Norway moved to eliminate production of oil and natural gas—and the country was quickly occupied by Russia, acting in collusion with the European Union. This Norwegian

government was unable to maintain its decision to cut off production of these fossil fuels—or to maintain its sovereignty—because these other capitalist-imperialist countries could not function without the oil and natural gas that had been produced by Norway, so they moved to force Norway to continue this production. Although in the realm of fiction, and involving no small amount of fantasy (envisioning a capitalist Norway whose economy could function without oil and natural gas), this does illustrate the ways in which a political decision, even by the government of a small capitalist country, which is in conflict with the basic dynamics of the world capitalist-imperialist system—in which the economies of different capitalist-imperialist countries, as well as those countries they dominate in the Third World, are closely interconnected and interdependent—would lead to a chaotic situation and to the intervention by more powerful imperialist states to force this country back into the established framework and dynamics.

What this also illustrates is that you can't do this piecemeal—you can't transform society without seizing power in the superstructure, by defeating and dismantling the institutions that violently enforce the dictatorship of the capitalist class, and establishing new revolutionary institutions that provide the means to transform the economic base thoroughly, beginning with expropriation of the major capitalists and socialization of the major means of production, and to defend the revolution against attempts, from foreign and/or “domestic” forces, to reverse this revolution. And if you try to do this partway and piecemeal, you're just going to make a mess and create chaos, and then other forces will step in to “put things right” on a capitalist basis.

As another illustration of the way in which the political and ideological superstructure must be in fundamental conformity with the underlying economic base, I have used the example of the “right to eat”—a right which does not exist, and in reality cannot exist, under capitalism (a right which, even if it were to be proclaimed and enshrined in law, could not actually be implemented in such a society). Let's extend this beyond just the right to eat, to include all the basic necessities of life: Imagine if the political system and the laws decreed that people could simply take whatever they required as basic necessities of life, without paying for them. If this were done, while the economy were still functioning according to the principles and dynamics of capitalism, where things are produced as commodities for which other commodities (and in particular money, in some form) has to be exchanged (in short, where things have to be bought), then the economy would obviously collapse rather quickly. This is so readily apparent that many people would immediately object that “of course” you could not do this, and it is ridiculous to suggest such a thing. But such a response is itself fundamentally a reflection of being so conditioned to acting and thinking within the confines of capitalist commodity relations that it is difficult to conceive of a radically different society and world, a *communist* world, where in fact things could and would be distributed to people on the basis of need—where commodity production and exchange (and, with it, money as the universal equivalent of commodities) would have been surpassed and eliminated, and the communist slogan “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs” would be the operative

principle.

(As for the argument, which might be raised, that it is not a matter of individuals striving to meet their basic needs through just taking things, but a matter of the government providing for these basic needs: In “Preliminary Transformation into Capital’...And Putting an End to Capitalism”—in particular the sections “The Government Cannot ‘Regulate Away’ the Fundamental Dynamics of Capitalism” and “Why ‘Life is Not Fair,’ Under Capitalism...Why the World is the Way It is, and How It Could Be Radically Different”—I analyze why, even if there were a government that attempted, under this system, to utilize government revenues to grant the “right to eat,” or more broadly to meet the basic requirements of life, for the masses of people, *the fundamental relations and dynamics of capitalism, not just within a particular country but on a world scale, would limit, undermine and ultimately undo any such attempt.*)

Or, think about what would happen if you actually tried to elect a party that said, “We are going to abolish white supremacy.” Look what’s already happened in the U.S., for example. Minor concessions to the struggle against white supremacy and male supremacy have been a major factor in calling forth a fascist form of rule, a fascist being elected through the system of the Electoral College—elected to the highest office—and the Republican Party, which is in essence a fascist party at this point, dominating the governmental structures: all this to a large degree in response to even minor concessions in some of these realms of gender and sexual relations and white supremacy. So you can see what would happen if the superstructure were really radically out of step with the underlying production and social relations: it would be chaos, and you would give impetus to forces whose mission is to restore order, of a fascist nature, as has already happened in the U.S. today.

The point of all this is that democracy is not some great idea that exists in the ethos and in the heads of great men from the ancient Greeks to modern American society, with some unfortunate interruptions, feudal and slave societies, along the way. Democracy is actually part of what? The superstructure. It is part of what is ultimately grounded in and determined by the economic base of society. And the particular form of democracy in any given society is conditioned by what the character is of the underlying production and corresponding social relations. So, if you have a capitalist economic base, you are going to have a capitalist form of democracy. In other words, you are going to have bourgeois democracy. You’re going to have democracy on the terms of the capitalist system, corresponding to the interests of the capitalist class which dominates in that system of production and social relations.

Bourgeois democracy—which is in reality the democratic form of bourgeois *dictatorship*—is, in “normal times,” the form of rule that may be most suited to capitalist society because it enables the ruling capitalist class to maintain the illusion among the people that they are the governing force in

society when, in fact, it is the bourgeoisie that is ruling over and governing them. So it is in the interests of the capitalist class, in more “normal times,” to maintain this form of rule, and to allow the people to vote to determine which group of capitalists will administer the rule of the capitalist class over the masses of people and maintain and serve the interests of the underlying capitalist system not only in the country, but internationally, including through wars.

But, as I have pointed out in speaking to the need to drive out the Trump/Pence regime through nonviolent but sustained mass mobilization: In the context of profound and acute contradictions that assert themselves in ways that tear at the very fabric and deepen cracks in the foundation of society, at the same time as the ruling capitalist class is facing serious challenges internationally, fascism is one possible resolution of this, *on the terms of this system and its ruling class*, even as this is a horror for humanity. Fascism is *open, blatant* dictatorship by the capitalist class, which tramples on and abolishes the “norms” of bourgeois-democratic rule, including the rule of law and formal civil and legal rights, and in general involves the paralyzing and/or crushing of more “mainstream,” ruling class forces by the ascendant fascist section of the ruling class. (This can be seen in the experience of fascist Italy and Nazi Germany after World War I; and in more recent times the Trump/Pence regime in the U.S. and similar regimes and forces in Europe are striking examples of ruling or rising fascism.)

The crucial necessary first step, or leap, in moving beyond all this is the *overthrow* of bourgeois dictatorship (in whatever form) and its replacement, in country after country, by the dictatorship of the proletariat—whose fundamental goal is the achievement of communism, throughout the world, with the abolition of all relations of exploitation and oppression and the corresponding social antagonisms. This proletarian dictatorship is fundamentally the opposite of bourgeois dictatorship: it is a democracy for the broad masses of people in the context of a socialist system, which in the realm of economics, politics, social relations, and ideas, is carrying forward the transformation of society toward the goal of communism.

As Marx stated, in a very concentrated way, in *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850* (in a formulation that has become known as the “4 Alls”), this dictatorship of the proletariat is the necessary transit to the abolition of all class distinctions; the abolition of all relations of production on which those class distinctions rest; the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to those relations of production; and the revolutionizing of all the ideas that result from those social relations. And if you “reverse” this formulation of the “4 Alls,” and insist on the maintenance of the prevailing capitalist production and social relations, ideas and culture, and class distinctions, it should be very clear why you cannot have a base and superstructure that are completely out of whack with each other, because again the production and social relations are going to dictate a certain way that society has to be run, and this fundamentally dictates how people will respond to events in society. So long as this system is in power and in effect, even if people gravitate toward a

more radical program that would move toward abolishing the exploitative and oppressive relations of this system, they are going to be pulled back, away from that, by the operation of the system itself, and that will be presented to them in a concentrated way by representatives of the ruling class, who are going to say: “You can’t do that under this system. If you do that, you’re gonna cause chaos. If you do that, you’re not gonna have a job. If we move to abolish male supremacy and white supremacy altogether, it’s gonna create chaos in society and we’re just gonna get fascism. So you better vote for the Democratic Party and maintain things as they are.”

So you can see how all this is interwoven together—these “4 Alls”—the class distinctions, the production relations on which they rest, the social relations that correspond to those production relations, and the ideas that go along with those social and production relations. It all interweaves, and it’s either one or the other: either you are moving in the direction of abolishing all that—the first great leap of which, once again, is seizing power away from the capitalist class and abolishing the bourgeois dictatorship—or the influence and operation of these “4 Alls” under the present system (the prevailing production and social relations, class distinctions and ideas) will constantly pull people back toward reinforcing the existing system. So when people go to the polls, the realistic thing to do, under this system, will be to vote for things that reinforce the system. Otherwise, there will be chaos that people will suffer from, and there will be no shortage of bourgeois politicians who will be very quick to point that out to them. This is why there has to be the complete overthrow of this system, which then makes possible the transition and the struggle to transform those “4 Alls.”

The historic breakthrough by Marx is the foundation on which the development of scientific communism has been carried forward, as the theory guiding the living struggle to achieve the “4 Alls” and advance human society to a whole new era—not a utopia marked by the absence of contradiction but a society, a world of human beings freed from social antagonism and the predominance of the corresponding ideas and the way in which all this has fettered and disfigured human social existence and human interaction with the rest of nature. It is on this scientific basis and with this scientific understanding that Marx famously said that the proletariat can only emancipate itself by emancipating all humanity.

The New Communism: The Further Breakthrough with the New Synthesis

Here I want to speak to what I have done that is new, building on Marx and the whole first stage of communist revolution and socialist society but going beyond this in important aspects.

In *Bob Avakian (BA)—Official Biography* the point is made that the new synthesis of communism (also referred to as the new communism) “is a continuation of, but also represents a qualitative

leap beyond, and in some important ways a break with, communist theory as it had been previously developed.”²⁴ And this official biography cites the first of the Six Resolutions of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA on the crucial point that the new synthesis:

represents and embodies a qualitative resolution of a critical contradiction that has existed within communism in its development up to this point, between its fundamentally scientific method and approach, and aspects of communism which have run counter to this.²⁵ [Emphasis in original]

Many years ago now, in *Conquer The World?*²⁶ in the early 1980s, and in other works since, I have gone extensively into the history of the communist movement and socialist society, from the time of Marx (and Engels), and spoken to the fact that Marx and Engels were extremely far-sighted, in many ways and in a fundamental sense, while also, not surprisingly, limited and even in some ways naive, in certain secondary though significant aspects—which, if you think about it, is true of all scientific approaches and methods, as opposed to metaphysical outlooks, such as religion. And, speaking of metaphysical and religious outlooks, when *Conquer the World?* first came out, there were some people in the international communist movement who said this was presenting communism as a tattered banner; and there was even the attitude that to talk not only about mistakes that were made but problems with some of the conceptions and approaches of the genuinely great leaders of the communist movement, including its founders, Marx and Engels, was somehow forbidden—it was essentially treated as sacrilegious. Well, this kind of attitude and approach runs completely counter to, and would have been met with disgust by, Marx and Engels themselves, to begin with. In any case, there has been the first wave of communist revolution, leading to the experience of socialism in the Soviet Union (from 1917 to the mid-1950s) and then China (from 1949 to 1976) which was reversed with the rise to power of bourgeois forces and the restoration of capitalism, first in the Soviet Union and then in China after the death of Mao in 1976. This first wave of communist revolution and socialist society needs to be deeply learned from, but it needs to be learned from with a critical scientific orientation, method and approach, as opposed to a religious one. That is what I started to do in *Conquer the World?* and have continued to do in various works since. And this has been a major component and impetus in the development of the new communism.

The concentrated expression of much that is new in the new communism is found in *The New Synthesis of Communism: Fundamental Orientation, Method and Approach, and Core Elements—An Outline*. Here I will speak to some of the essentials of this, using the title of the book *THE NEW COMMUNISM*—its full title, *THE NEW COMMUNISM, The science, the strategy, the leadership for an actual revolution, and a radically new society on the road to real emancipation*—as a basic framework and guide in doing this.

The Science

Once more, communism is not only not a religion, it is not a philosophy or an ideology in the wrong (that is, the subjective, unscientific) sense, something unmoored from and ultimately in opposition to a scientific method and approach. It is fundamentally and essentially a scientific method and approach for analyzing and synthesizing human social development and its prospects. But there have been unscientific tendencies that have developed within communism, which to a significant degree have run counter to its fundamentally scientific foundation. *Populism* and *populist epistemology*: whatever people think—either the majority of people or a particular social group that you’ve invested with a special ability to divine the truth (and I use the word “divine” deliberately here)—whatever they think, at any given time, is the truth, or the functional equivalent of the truth. That whole notion of populism and populist epistemology has to a significant degree found its way into, and in some significant ways vitiated, the communist movement and its need to be scientific. Along with this has gone the worship of and tailing the spontaneity of the masses, and the concept of “mass line”—taking the ideas of the masses and then concentrating them and returning this to the masses in the form of line and policy—which was something formulated by Mao but which, as I’ve pointed out before, was not actually how Mao proceeded in a basic sense in developing lines, policies, and strategies, and in determining which contradictions were essential to concentrate on at a given time, in carrying forward the revolutionary struggle. That was mainly done by Mao on a scientific basis, and not by drawing from and then concentrating the ideas of the masses and returning that to them.

Along with this has also gone *reification*, that is, taking the general phenomenon of the proletariat (and other oppressed groups) and reducing this to how it supposedly resides in individual proletarians or individuals from other oppressed groups, as though, once again, they have (to invoke the parlance of the times) a special purchase on the truth, that there is something inherent in this or that oppressed group that enables people from that group to spontaneously arrive at the truth, or at least a “narrative” that is an acceptable replacement for the truth. This goes along with another very wrong and harmful notion, which has had currency in the communist movement, that truth has a class character—that there’s bourgeois truth and proletarian truth. This even found its way into guiding directives of the Cultural Revolution in China and ran counter to its overwhelmingly positive character as a mass revolutionary struggle being led on a communist basis. Then there’s the concept of “political truth,” which goes along with the notion that truth has a class character; “political truth” is a form of “convenient truth,” the idea that whatever is thought to be good for the perceived interests and objectives of the communists, or certain communists, at any given time, is true—whether it is actually true or not. And this has sometimes taken the form of very crude “realpolitik” (which I’ll talk about later).

In terms of the new synthesis—the new communism, and the further development of communism through this—it is important to focus on *epistemology*, the theory of knowledge. The question of what your theory of knowledge is and how you proceed to determine the truth—or whether you even think there is such a thing as objective truth—is obviously pivotal and central to whether or not you are going to have a scientific approach to things. This statement of mine, which is found in *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy*, concentrates a great deal, including fundamental dividing lines in epistemology and the overall approach to reality and its radical transformation: “Everything that is actually true is good for the proletariat, all truths can help us get to communism.”²⁷

Some people have reacted to this by saying “What’s the big deal, so-and-so says you have to go for the truth—everybody does that.” One opportunist said: If you walked into a college campus and said, “We’re gonna go for the truth, we think everybody should go for the truth,” do you really think that would be a big deal? Well, first of all, yes. As we pointed out in answering this opportunist, on college campuses these days the idea of pursuing objective truth is not exactly the idea that has the most currency. There are all kinds of ideas in opposition to it, all kinds of relativist notions in the service of identity politics and so on—arguments that there are different narratives and different “truths,” that there is no objective truth, and even the idea that there should be no such thing as objective truth. So, yes, first of all, that would be a point of intense controversy on most college campuses these days.

But, beyond that, the insistence that we should consistently seek the truth by scientific means—strive to correctly understand material reality as it actually exists, and as it is moving and changing—as important as that is, it is not the whole and not even the essence of what is concentrated in this statement of mine. Let’s look again at what it says: “Everything that is actually true is good for the proletariat, all truths can help us get to communism.” There is a definite aim being pointed to here. This is a statement not just about going for the truth—although it is that, and that is very important. It’s a statement more fundamentally and essentially about *the relation between going for the truth and carrying forward the struggle for communism*. It’s a statement about epistemology and its relation to radically transforming the world. And it’s important to understand that this is a very complex process, going for the truth and advancing the struggle for communism. There are a lot of truths—what I’ve referred to as truths that make us cringe—that, in the short run, get in the way of the struggle for communism. But what’s being emphasized here is that even things that reveal shortcomings or negative aspects of the struggle for communism, or in what our current thinking is, can provide important insights, can be part of our getting a deeper grasp of reality, which in turn can enable us to better carry forward the struggle for communism, because you can only do that, in fundamental and ultimate terms, on a scientific basis.

What's being spoken to here is the dialectical, and sometimes acutely contradictory, relation between going for the truth and carrying forward the struggle for communism, and the insistence that even when, in the short run, going for truth might cause you to suffer setbacks and cause you more difficulties, you still have to do that because otherwise you're never going to get to the goal of communism. This gets to the relation between being scientific and being partisan to the cause of communism (which I'll speak to shortly). The whole point here is that the search for the truth and the advance toward communism are *fundamentally* in unity, but there are contradictions and sometimes, in the shorter term, they are in opposition, at times even acutely, and you have to fight through that, you have to maintain the orientation and the method of going for an understanding of reality as it really is, and as it's moving and changing, or you will never be able to advance toward communism—any temporary gains you make will be reversed and you'll be further set back if you go off the correct path and take the shortcut of trying to finesse the question of truth, or invent truths, or create “political truth,” i.e., convenient truths that aren't really true at all.

The statement that everything that's actually true is good for the proletariat is not always true in more immediate and narrow terms. Things that are true might be bad for us in the very immediate and narrow sense, but they are necessary—coming to grips with those truths, grasping them scientifically and incorporating that into our overall understanding of the world, and our struggle based on that, is crucial in order to be able to advance toward communism, and you will never do it without that. So a very full statement is being made here which is concentrated in a pithy way in this one formulation: “all truths can help us get to communism.” Well, there are some truths about the history of the communist movement that aren't very pleasant. But they can still help us get to communism if we actually approach them scientifically, and thereby we can deepen our grasp of both the scientific method itself and its application to the world to transform it in the direction of communism.

I referred earlier to the fact that on the campuses and elsewhere, particularly among the intelligentsia (using that term somewhat advisedly) there's the notion, a pretty widely-held notion, that the very concept of *the truth*, as opposed to different narratives and different “truths,” is a totalizing and fundamentally totalitarian concept—the idea that anybody can have *the truth* is totalizing and verging on, if not actually already in, the province of totalitarianism. Well, something is being smuggled in there, which is an unscientific idea of what the truth is. What's really being said here, or objectively what's reflected here, is the notion that the truth is just another narrative and that when you say you have the truth, you're trying to impose your narrative on somebody else's, and nobody should be trying to impose their narrative as the narrative that encompasses everything. What is at issue and at stake here is precisely: What is the truth? The truth is an actual correct reflection of reality, including in its motion and development. And, of course, it is true that nobody can ever have all of the truth. That's part of understanding reality correctly, part of the scientific method. But, as opposed to these absurd (and self-serving) denials

by people like Robert E. Rubin, it is true that you can come to definite and definitive determinations about the reality of many particular things, even while you always have to be open to learning more, and to the possibility that some of what you thought to be true may not turn out to be true, or new developments occur which mean that the world has changed in such a way that your understanding has to be modified. That's all part of the scientific method as well. When we talk about the truth, we're not talking about THE TRUTH as an absolute and final truth, but we are also not talking about a narrative. We're talking about a scientific approach to understanding reality and then, on that basis, transforming it. And the scientific approach to that process of analyzing and synthesizing reality can come to important definitive conclusions, even as this is an ongoing process which is never complete because you can never grasp all of reality—including because it's constantly changing and because there will always be aspects of reality that human beings will not even have penetrated at any given time, let alone come to understand. So this idea of truth as a totalizing and totalitarian concept is smuggling in a whole bunch of concepts and approaches that are themselves unscientific, untrue.

But let's go back to the statement that "Everything that is actually true is good for the proletariat, all truths can help us get to communism," and contrast it with its opposite. The actual meaning and importance of this can be understood more fully if you pose it in relation to its opposite, that is, "Everything that is good for the proletariat is true, everything that helps us get to communism is true." And if you look at it that way, if you contrast everything that is good for the proletariat is true, with the actual correct statement that everything that is actually true is good for the proletariat, you can get an even better sense of the profound importance of this. One formulation has to do with the scientific method and its application, and the other is profoundly unscientific and subjective and will ultimately lead to all kinds of errors and even, in some cases, horrors.

It is important to examine the "liberals" and the fascists in terms of the truth. A striking example of this is provided by some comments by former FBI Director James Comey at a Town Hall he did on CNN in the first part of 2018. He was talking about how Trump constantly lies—which, of course, is true. And, in talking about how Trump constantly lies, Comey took on, in his own way, the instrumentalist method of first determining a goal and then "structuring the facts" (my phrase) to serve that goal. Comey argued that this is not the way you should proceed—you should actually look into the facts, the evidence, and then apply rational thinking to see what the facts and the evidence point to. So what he said was correct, up to a point. But Comey proceeded to talk about how it's really wrong to attack the law enforcement and intelligence agencies and armed forces of this country, because they've always been a force for good and they've always been seeking out the truth! So here, on the one hand, he lays out a more or less correct approach, and then completely contradicts it and rips it to shreds in a statement like this (we could spend, I don't know how much time, but much more time than we have, just making a beginning list of all the lies that have been perpetrated by law enforcement, the intelligence agencies and armed forces of the U.S., and all the

war crimes and crimes against humanity that they've carried out all over the world).

Here we see something outlined in sharp relief: Liberals, and in particular ruling class “liberals,” will talk about the truth, but they will repeatedly lie and distort when reality is “inconvenient” and runs counter to their cherished “narratives” and objectives, even though, at times at least (and particularly when the flouting of the truth is done in a way that they find offensive and harmful, and this is particularly pronounced), they will strongly profess adherence to the importance of truth and proceeding from facts and the evidence, etc. At the same time, the fascists openly and repeatedly defy and trample on science, the scientific method and the pursuit of the truth on this basis. So this is important to understand because, particularly in the context of the Trump/Pence regime coming to power, you hear people repeatedly talking about the importance of truth. CNN does an ad: “This is an apple, it’s always an apple, there are lots of apples, apples are apples.” In other words, facts are facts—facts matter, truth matters. But then you’ll see them lie about and distort all kinds of things whenever the interests, as they perceive them, of the ruling class of this system are really at stake. Then, if lying serves those interests, they will lie with a flourish. This is the kind of “political truth” which unfortunately some communists have fallen into and with which we communists need to fully and finally break. It’s not that we won’t make mistakes—of course we’ll make mistakes, everybody makes mistakes. But, as a crucial point of orientation and method, we have to thoroughly break with the notion that what might be advantageous at a given moment is as good as the truth—you lie to people, you cover things up because that way you’ll get people to do things you want them to do and it will all be good in the end. No! We have to thoroughly rupture with that whole notion, and that whole approach.

So, an important part of the epistemology of the new communism is, as I’ve been speaking to, its opposition to relativism and “truth as narrative.” And here are two statements from *BAsics* that are very important. The first is *BAsics* 4:11:

What people think is part of objective reality, but objective reality is not determined by what people think. [Emphasis in original]

That’s a very important statement. What people think is part of the reality that we’re dealing with, the reality that exists objectively. And if you don’t recognize that, you’re not going to be able to recognize the need to transform a hell of a lot of what people think, because most people, under the influence of bourgeois relations and the bourgeois superstructure, don’t know shit and have their heads up their asses. This doesn’t mean they can’t learn, but that’s the present reality. It is important to recognize that this is part of objective reality, what people think; you have to understand that and struggle to transform what they think wherever it’s out of line with actual reality—which, to a very large degree, spontaneously it is. But, again, objective reality is not determined by what people think—it’s not like, “Well, that’s your truth and I have my truth, and

you can't say your truth is better than my truth." There's no such thing as anybody's truth. Truth shouldn't go with a possessive. Truth is objective.

And then there's *Basics* 4:10:

For humanity to advance beyond a state in which "might makes right"—and where things ultimately come down to raw power relations—will require, as a fundamental element in this advance, an approach to understanding things (an epistemology) which recognizes that reality and truth are objective and do not vary in accordance with, nor depend on, different "narratives" and how much "authority" an idea (or "narrative") may have behind it, or how much power and force can be wielded on behalf of any particular idea or "narrative," at any given point. [Emphasis in original]

This is extremely important as well—the relation between relativism and "might makes right." Say, for example, that you are part of an oppressed group. You have a narrative about your oppression. But if the very righteous and just struggle against this oppression—against the police murder of Black and Brown and Native American people, for example—is reduced to a matter of narrative, to a matter of what amounts to a subjective view of the world ("We know what this means, we know where it comes from and what to do about it because we experience it, as part of our particular group identity")—if that's the epistemology that you're putting forward, well, then, what happens when you run into a group with more power than you? Like the police—they've got their epistemology and their narrative too: "You are all a bunch of animals, you have to be confined; and if you in any way provoke us, we have the right to kill you." That's their narrative. This racism is written right into the law of this society and its bourgeois dictatorship. What do I mean by that? Well, what does the law say in most states? If the police have "a reasonable fear" of either harm to themselves or someone else, they have a right to use force, including deadly force. Well, then, you've got racism written right into this, because almost all police regard Black people, particularly young Black males (not only them, but particularly young Black males) as a threat, as a danger. So the rationale for police killing Black people is built in, they've written racism into the law. That's their narrative—and their narrative has the backing of the state, which is why they almost never get indicted, let alone convicted, of these murders, time after time after time.

And then there's the military of this system. They've got a narrative, too, about how they're a force for good in the world, and they need to wield this force to impose order because that is for the greater good. And they've got their military power to back up that narrative. So, if it's all a bunch of narratives, then whoever's got the most power behind their narrative is going to ultimately prevail.

This gets to a point from Mao that is important in its own right and also has important application here. Mao said that striking a pose to intimidate is a very common tactic among

certain people. In confronting the enemy, he pointed out, it's absolutely useless, and among the people it does great harm. Think about this: If you're in these narrow circles where the currency is identity politics, maybe you can get over by insisting on your narrative over somebody else's. But in the broader world, and in particular up against the enemy, the ruling class, they don't give a damn about your narrative, they don't give a damn about your identity. They've got their interests and they've got a lot of force behind their interests, and your posturing with your identity is absolutely useless, it's worthless, up against that. And this is all the more the case with the fascist regime that is now in power. Of course, it is not the case that fascism arose and came to power because of identity politics and the corresponding epistemology. The point is that these fascists want to reinforce and intensify the oppressive relations that identity politics is seeking to address in a distorted and ill-founded way, and these identity politics disorient and disarm people ideologically and render them less able to deal with this. Such identity politics, and in particular the posturing that all too often accompanies it, is only "useful" among people who will be intimidated by this, and in fact such intimidation does a great deal of harm. That's what Mao meant when he said this kind of thing does great harm among the people. Intimidating people rather than winning them to a scientific understanding of reality, and what needs to be done about it, can only do harm among the people, and it's absolutely useless against those who have real power.

So, once again, there is a great deal that is concentrated in *BAsics* 4:10 in terms of the relation between epistemology and advancing beyond a state in which might makes right. To further illustrate the important questions of principle and method that are involved, let me cite the following from my "Discussion with Comrades on Epistemology" drawing from the historical experience of the communist movement:

One of the big questions is "are we really people who are trying to get to the truth, or is it really just a matter of 'truth as an organizing principle'?" Lenin criticized this philosophically—"truth as an organizing principle"—and you can criticize it to reject religion and opportunism which you don't find particularly useful, but you can end up doing this yourself in another form....

I'm talking about a new synthesis—a more thoroughly materialist epistemology. Lenin wrote *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* where he argued against these things [like "political truth," or "truth as an organizing principle"] but sometimes the practical Lenin got in the way of the philosophical Lenin. The political exigencies that were imposed contributed to a situation where some of the way Lenin dealt with contradictions had an aspect of Stalin.* There are many examples of this in *The Furies* [a book on the French and Russian revolutions by Arno Mayer]. In some instances, the Bolsheviks had a kind of "Mafia" approach in some areas, especially during the civil war that followed the October 1917 Revolution. In some cases, when people would be organized by reactionaries to fight

against the Bolsheviks, the Bolsheviks would retaliate broadly and without mercy. Or they would kill people not only for deserting the Red Army but even for dragging their feet in fighting the civil war. While sometimes in the midst of war, extreme measures may be necessary, overall this is not the way to deal with these contradictions....I read Lenin on this and thought, “this is not right.” There’s epistemological stuff bound up with all this as well.²⁸

**Note added by the author: The reference here to “an aspect of Stalin” is a shorthand way of speaking to the negative side of Stalin—in particular his tendency, in dealing with what were very real and often acute contradictions, to rely on state repression, including capital punishment, instead of ideological struggle (combined with an insistence on adherence to discipline, and lesser punishment for violation of discipline, in situations where that was required).*

And here we see the close interconnection between epistemology and morality. The orientation and principle that “Everything that is actually true is good for the proletariat, all truths can help us get to communism” is not only extremely important itself but is also closely related to the fact that the new communism *thoroughly repudiates* and is determined to root out of the communist movement the poisonous notion, and practice, that “the ends justifies the means.” It is a bedrock principle of the new communism that the “means” of this movement must flow from and be consistent with the fundamental “ends” of abolishing all exploitation and oppression through revolution led on a scientific basis.

Now, in terms of the new communism and political economy, as part of the scientific approach to reality and its transformation, I touched earlier on the question of *anarchy as overall the principal form of motion of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism*. This has been a very contested question among self-proclaimed communists because, along with reification and tailing after the masses of people, is the idea that central to everything has to be the struggle of classes (or, more generally, the struggle of the oppressed against their oppressors). Now, of course, class struggle, and the overall struggle against oppression, is a driving force in society and its transformation. But the question is: What is this rooted in, what does it arise out of? What are the material conditions that give rise to, and influence and shape, this struggle, and toward what ends can this struggle be directed, on the basis of the actual contradictions that it’s rooted in? In other words, this is a question of materialism and materialist dialectics vs. idealism (cooking up ideas in your head which don’t have any real relationship to reality) and metaphysics (the notion of absolutes that are unchanging). According to certain so-called communists, you always have to say that the key thing

is the class struggle, the struggle against oppression, in a way that divorces this from any material foundation. Once again, it's not that the class struggle (broadly understood) is unimportant or is not a driving force in the transformation of society; but if that is treated as a thing unto itself, without a material foundation, then it once again becomes a matter of religion (an outlook and approach that is tantamount to a religious dogma) rather than a scientific approach to actually leading that struggle toward the abolition of class oppression and all other forms of oppression.

To go a little further into this, as I spoke to earlier, Engels in *Anti-Dühring* identified the two forms of motion of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism—these two forms of motion being the class contradiction and the anarchy/organization contradiction. In this regard, in the article “On the ‘Driving Force of Anarchy’ and the Dynamics of Change,” Raymond Lotta cited this statement of mine:

It is the anarchy of capitalist production which is, in fact, the driving or motive force of this process [of capitalist production], even though the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and proletariat is an integral part of the contradiction between socialized production and private appropriation. While the exploitation of labor-power is the form by and through which surplus value is created and appropriated, it is the *anarchic relations between capitalist producers, and not the mere existence of propertyless proletarians or the class contradiction as such*, that drives these producers to exploit the working class on an historically more intensive and extensive scale. This motive force of anarchy is an expression of the fact that the capitalist mode of production represents the full development of commodity production and the law of value.²⁹ [Italics in original]

And then there is this very important passage:

Were it not the case that these capitalist commodity producers are separated from each other and yet linked by the operation of the law of value they would not face the same compulsion to exploit the proletariat—the class contradiction between bourgeoisie and proletariat could be mitigated. It is the inner compulsion of capital to expand which accounts for the historically unprecedented dynamism of this mode of production, a process which continually transforms value relations and which leads to crisis.³⁰

As I pointed out in the discussion of this in *THE NEW COMMUNISM*, there is a great deal packed into this (beginning with the first sentence of the above quote), and this goes directly up against much of what has become the “conventional wisdom” and prevailing prejudices within the communist movement. What is involved, once again, is the fundamental question of whether the communist movement is going to be based on a scientific, dialectical materialist analysis and

synthesis of reality as it actually is, and as it is moving and changing on the basis of the contradictions within that reality, or a distorted and vitiated communism is going to proceed on the basis of unscientific—and in fact *anti*-scientific—attempts to *impose on reality* precepts, dogma, and what do amount to ungrounded utopian schemes.

This is extremely important, and it involves so much of the rupture with reification and related erroneous tendencies. For this reason, I want to focus in particular on the statement: “Were it not the case that these capitalist commodity producers are separated from each other and yet linked by the operation of the law of value they would not face the same compulsion to exploit the proletariat—the class contradiction between bourgeoisie and proletariat could be mitigated.”

What does it mean that they are separated from each other and at the same time bound together by the law of value (“linked by the operation of the law of value”)? Well, separated from each other refers to the fact that they accumulate in separate aggregations of capital—it isn’t all one big pile of capital that they all share in. There is private ownership of different segments of the capitalist economy, and these aggregations of capital are in competition with each other. They are separated from each other in that way. And yet here’s the other part: they are linked by the operation of the law of value. What does that mean? What is the law of value? The law of value expresses the fact that the value of anything is determined by the socially necessary labor that goes into its production. Here I cannot go into all this, but Marx began his major work *Capital* by examining the commodity. He traced its historical development, how commodity production in very early society took place in certain kinds of barter and then it developed to where things like cattle would be a stand-in for a bunch of other commodities—but then that was too limited because, after all, cattle die and there are other problems. So eventually it evolved to where gold, because it was a precious metal and wasn’t easily destroyed, became, in effect, the universal equivalent of all other commodities.

In Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, in one of the episodes (the adventures of Gulliver) he goes to this society where, instead of having a more universal language that people speak, they have words on these big tablets, and people have to carry these heavy tablets around when they want to communicate with somebody else, which is obviously very cumbersome. The analogy I’m making here is to commodity exchange. Imagine if in every exchange of commodities, instead of using money (or the credit equivalent of money) you had to carry the commodities around that you were objectively exchanging—it would be very cumbersome and practically impossible. So historically—not by somebody sitting down and making a decision, but historically, through trial and error and so on—it evolved that gold became the universal standard. And money became an abstraction of gold. And now you have abstractions of money—it becomes all very parasitic and complicated—but basically, over a whole period of time, gold became the stand-in for all the other commodities.

As I pointed to in *THE NEW COMMUNISM*, what are people actually exchanging when they exchange commodities? They're exchanging the amount of labor—socially necessary labor—that goes into producing those commodities. If you can make something very quickly and somebody else takes two weeks to make something, if they exchange that equally with you, pretty soon they're going to be in a very bad state. So socially necessary labor is what's being exchanged, even though it's hidden in every day commodity relations, especially now with this highly parasitic financial speculation on top of financial speculation on top of financial speculation (with bitcoins on top of the rest of it). But this is what's underlying it—the exchange of labor. And you can't have an economy function and people can't survive if, over any period of time, the exchanges of labor are completely out of whack.

Underneath all the financial speculation, and everything bound up with it, the law of value is unifying all the production and exchange. And it works out that, even with the interference of monopolies and all kinds of political regulations and tariffs and all the rest of it, there's a general tendency for capital to flow into those areas which are more profitable and for the rate of profit to get evened out, because if something is more profitable for a while, then more capital will come into that sphere, and then there'll be more competition and the profit rate will get lowered. So there's a general tendency for the rate of profit to be made uniform, even though this is constantly disrupted by the anarchy of capitalism. Behind the backs of the capitalists, so to speak, or even with their calculations, the law of value is constantly asserting and reasserting itself, but this happens through the very anarchy of capitalist production and exchange. That was one of the things also cited in the Raymond Lotta article, that Marx made the point about capitalism that *its total disorder is its order*. And this constantly causes the capitalists to try to produce more profitably by more intensively exploiting the proletarians, by speeding them up to produce more in a certain segment of time, by moving investment from one part of the world to another where they can more intensely and cheaply exploit people, by introducing technology which enables the productivity to increase to produce the same amount, or even much more, with fewer workers.

All this is, once again, extremely contradictory because now we are back to constant capital and variable capital—as soon as you introduce new machines (constant capital), if the proportion of machines to labor power increases, then the part of capital (variable capital) out of which you can get surplus value has diminished. That will lower your rate of profit, and then you have to try to take countervailing measures to offset that. And, again, all of this is being directed by capitalists who are separated, but have to compete with each other *ultimately*—not necessarily in their immediate calculations but *ultimately*—on the basis of the law of value.

This is what drives them to intensify the exploitation of the proletariat. This is why you can work for them for 25 years and you're out the door the next day. This is why they can promise you one thing today and then tomorrow maybe not, in terms of health benefits, for example. This is why

they come to the workers and say, “If you don’t take a pay cut then we’re gonna have to lay you all off, or if you don’t give up this health benefit then we’re gonna have to lay off half of you.” This is what causes them to constantly seek new sources of variable capital, and in particular people who can be exploited more intensively and more cheaply.

All this flows from anarchy being the driving force. This is what’s meant by the statement that if they were not bound together by the law of value while at the same time being separated into privately appropriating aggregations of capital, they wouldn’t have to exploit the workers so much, they could mitigate that. They could say, “Sure, we’ll give you a lifetime guarantee of a job. Sure, we’ll pay you a living wage with which you can actually have a decent life.” In the U.S. during the heyday of unions, and so on, for a period after World War 2, a significant number of wage workers had a house, two cars, a boat, a camper. Well, for a lot of people, that’s gone now because of the operation of capitalism today in an increasingly globalized international arena.

This “disordered order” is not some “neutral” process—it has terrible consequences. As I emphasized in “The Problem, the Solution, and the Challenges Before Us”:

the brutal reality is that this disorder...causes tremendous suffering on a world scale of people and of the environment, which this system and its internal dynamics have brought to the point where the very future and existence of humanity is seriously threatened. And then, on top of all that, there is a massive destruction brought about by the wars, the coups, and other bloody actions which are carried out in every part of the world to enforce this system’s oppressive rule.³¹

This is very important to understand. Simply thinking that the way you abolish capitalism is just to have the class struggle, ignores the foundation on which that class struggle is taking place. It ignores the constantly changing conditions of the masses of people that you have to deal with in order to win them and mobilize them to the fight in their own fundamental interests through the revolution they need.

So, once again, it is a matter of whether you’re proceeding scientifically or whether you’re proceeding on the basis of subjective ideas and just the notion that the class struggle itself, divorced from any material conditions underlying that struggle, will be able to lead to the necessary resolution. Look at the very different class and social configurations in this country today as compared to three or four decades ago. Look at the different material conditions of the people who need to be mobilized for this revolution. What about the people who worked at U.S. Steel in Gary, Indiana, and now are completely out of a job, with that massive steel plant closed down and Gary basically a ghost town? You think you can just say, “class struggle,” “class struggle,” “class struggle”? Where are the proletarians to carry out the class struggle? Well, they’re in a different

situation now. And it won't do to act as if we don't need to think about that, we just need to say, "class struggle, fight for socialism." Well, that will not lead to anything good. In that way you will not even get to the first great leap of overthrowing this system, and you certainly will not be able to transform society in a way that will deal with those "4 Alls," including class distinctions and exploitation.

The objective basis for the proletarian/communist revolution is not the inherent desire of the proletarians to struggle against and overthrow the bourgeoisie. Rather, it is the very nature and functioning of the capitalist system, the major contradictions that are fundamental and essential to this system but which are not resolvable under it—and the misery that the masses of people, all over the world, are subjected to as a result. But this must be understood in a broad, and not simply in a narrow and economist, sense. In the statement of mine cited in the Raymond Lotta article that I spoke to earlier, it says this anarchy-driven process of capitalist production and accumulation constantly transforms value relations and leads to crisis. The "crisis" that capitalism repeatedly leads to is not simply *economic* crisis; and, contrary to much common misconception and distortion, the scientific understanding of communism is not that capitalism will "collapse" on its own—it must be *overthrown*, through the revolutionary action of the masses of people whom it subjects to constant misery and to manifold and varied crises, including wars and environmental devastation, which are rooted in the basic contradictions and dynamics of this system.

Proceeding further with regard to the new synthesis and its development of communism on a firmer and more consistent scientific basis, I want to return to the question of *necessity and freedom*. Mao, in criticizing a statement by Engels that freedom is the recognition of necessity, made the point that something needs to be added—you have to understand freedom as the recognition *and transformation* of necessity. There has to be struggle waged, Mao said. This is a very important point. And with the new synthesis the understanding of the relation between necessity and freedom has been further developed.

Let me start with another statement of mine that's cited at the beginning of Ardea Skybreak's book *Of Primeval Steps and Future Leaps*:

Neither the emergence of the human species nor the development of human society to the present was predetermined or followed predetermined pathways. There is no transcendent will or agent which has conceived and shaped all such development, and nature and history should not be treated as such—as Nature and History. Rather, such development occurs through the dialectical interplay between necessity and accident and in the case of human history between underlying material forces and the conscious activity and struggle of people.³²

Let's break this down a bit. *Accident...*and necessity. This relation has to do with the infinite nature, and motion, of matter. Strict (that is absolute) determinism—the argument that, ultimately, there is no such thing as “accident” but only causality (and if you had the capacity to do so, you could trace the causality of everything that has happened—and, by extension, everything that will happen)—this leads, logically, to a “first cause,” to *god*. In response, and by way of refutation, let me offer this as food for thought. *Particular forms* of matter, in motion, have a beginning and an end, but if matter itself were to have a beginning, that would require something “before” matter, something “outside” of matter, something (god) that brought matter into being (creation). The infinite existence of matter, with no beginning or end, is something very hard for a human mind (even one largely unfettered and uncluttered by bourgeois idealism and prejudice) to conceive or even think about (it makes your head hurt!). But it is the only conclusion that can be arrived at by applying a scientific, dialectical materialist, method and approach. It is the only conclusion that flows from and corresponds to what there is actually ample evidence for—the existence of matter—and what there is *no* objective evidence for—the existence of non-material and specifically supernatural forces (including a god or gods). And if matter (by which we mean whatever has material existence, in whatever form, including for example energy) exists infinitely, and exists continuously and infinitely as matter in motion, repeatedly undergoing transformation—and taking into account that there are different levels and forms of matter in motion, which have relatively discrete existence and are marked by their particular defining contradictions, at any given time—from all this it follows that there is not, and cannot be, one single “unbroken chain of causality.” So, in material reality there is causality, but there is also accident.

As for the other part of this statement, concerning the relation between underlying material forces and human activity and struggle, this goes back to Marx's statement that people make history but not in any way they wish. They make it in the context of society as it's been handed down to them, in particular the economic base of society, the productive forces of society at hand and the corresponding production relations. And they make it through radical leaps, revolutions in human society, where they transform those underlying conditions. But they do so on the basis of what exists, and not by conjuring up some kind of change out of their imaginations. Here again is the analogy that is made in *Birds and Crocodiles*—the analogy to evolution in the natural world. Natural evolution brings about constant change and qualitative transformation, including the emergence of new species, but it does so on the basis of the material that already exists, and not by something being injected into the process by some outside force—which, once again, would be god, or an “intelligent designer” (or whatever you want to call it). The same holds for the historical development and transformation of human society. People do make history, but they make history by acting on the material reality that they're confronted with, by transforming that material reality, and not by conjuring up in their imaginations an idea of how they would like society to be and then imposing that on reality.

In *Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy*³³ I examine how there is a definite strain in bourgeois political theory that essentially regards *negative* freedom—freedom *from* something, such as coercion by the state—as the only *positive* freedom (forgive the play on words that I could not resist!). Such bourgeois theory regards the attempt at positive freedom—people being motivated to act *for* certain objectives—as inherently, or at least ultimately, coercive, and tending toward totalitarianism. This is a fundamentally erroneous understanding, devoid of and in conflict with a scientific, dialectical materialist approach to reality, including human social relations. Without going into this more thoroughly here, it is correct and important to emphasize that there can be—and with socialist, and still more with communist, society there definitely will be—a very *positive* positive freedom. This is bound up with the relation between necessity and freedom once again—correctly understanding, and acting in accordance with a correct understanding of, this relation.

The following from *Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy* speaks to some essential aspects of this:

Fundamental to a correct appreciation of this is the understanding that there never has been, and never could be, a society or a world—there never could be human existence—without necessity and, for that matter, without coercion in one form or another. The question is: What is the relation between necessity and coercion on the one hand and freedom on the other hand, and between self-conscious emancipation on the one hand and the underlying material conditions on the other hand?...

Along with this, there is the reality that, at any given time and in one way or another, “terms are going to be set.” This is another way of speaking to the existence and role of necessity. “Terms will be set” by objective reality in the larger sense, and they will also be set, yes, through the conscious actions of human beings—as individuals, but more essentially, and with greater impact, as social forces. This is expressed in many ways in capitalist society. There is the necessity, on a basic level, for people to find work, in order to be able to live....

To illustrate this further, let’s take some of the better aspirations of some of the more progressive people. They don’t like—in fact, they are disturbed, perhaps deeply disturbed, by—many social inequalities that exist: between men and women, in the oppression of minority nationalities, and in other ways. But these terms have been set, these relations are established and enforced, as a result of the very nature and through the dynamics of this system, and people don’t get to just “choose” to abolish them because they hate them, even if they do. People are forced to respond to conditions and terms that are set and imposed on them by forces above and beyond them as individuals. In fact, this will always be true for human beings in any society. The difference is that, in communist society, class divisions

and other oppressive social relations will have been eliminated; these relations, and the outlook that goes along with this, will not stand as an obstacle to and interfere with the efforts of human beings—individually and, above all, cooperatively and collectively—to respond to the necessity they face at any given time. But at present we are still in the era of human history where any individual’s or any group’s attempts to respond to necessity not only have to confront that necessity in a general sense, but in attempting to do so face obstacles imposed *by social and class divisions and the corresponding ideas and outlooks.*

The essential difference with regard to communist society is not that we would no longer face necessity, or that no terms would be set—not only by nature but also socially—but that human beings, individually and above all collectively, would be able to confront and approach the transformation of this necessity *without the hindrance of class divisions and other oppressive social relations and the corresponding ideas, including the ways in which an understanding of reality is distorted through the prism of these antagonistic social and class relations, and the ideas and outlooks that correspond to them.*

In conclusion on this point, communism does not simply, or most essentially, envision and encompass “negative freedom”—that is, ways in which people, in socialist society as well as in communist society, will be able to pursue particular individual inclinations without interference from the institutions of society, so long as this does not do harm to others, or to society overall, in a way that has been socially-determined to be unacceptable—but, beyond that, communism envisions and will embody a whole new dimension of *positive* freedom: people pursuing, and effecting, individually but above all in common and through their mutual interaction—including through non-antagonistic struggle—the ongoing transformation of society and of nature (and the relation between the two) to continually enhance the material and the intellectual and cultural life of society as a whole as well as of the individuals who comprise society.³⁴ [Boldface and italics in original]

The Strategy...For an Actual Revolution

The goal of communism, the necessary process leading to that—revolution and the thorough transformation of society, and ultimately the world as a whole, to achieve the “4 Alls”—and the possibility (not the inevitability but the possibility) of this revolution: all this is established not through some kind of subjective, and utopian, fantasy but on a *scientific* basis, through analyzing the basic contradictions of the existing system of capitalism-imperialism, viewing this in the context of, and examining its place within, the larger development of human society and the motive forces of such development, and in this way recognizing the basis and the potential forces

for making a radical leap beyond this and all previous systems and relations of exploitation and oppression. Here, as indicated in the observation contrasting possibility with inevitability, is a crucial distinction and a profound question of methodology. In the history of the communist movement, from the time of its founding, there has been a tendency to “inevitable-ism”—the mistaken belief that historical development will inevitably lead to the triumph of communism—which has been more or less pronounced, at various times and in various expressions, but which in any of its expressions has run counter to the fundamentally scientific method and approach of communism, from its founding in the work of Marx (and Engels). In this regard, as well as in other key dimensions, the new communism represents and embodies **“a qualitative resolution of a critical contradiction that has existed within communism in its development up to this point, between its fundamentally scientific method and approach, and aspects of communism which have run counter to this.”**³⁵ [Boldface in original]

The scientific approach of the new communism emphasizes that the basis for this revolution resides not in the thinking of the masses of people at any given time, but in the defining contradictions of this system that cause continual misery for the masses of humanity while at the same time these contradictions are built into the very structures and dynamics of this system and cannot be resolved or eliminated within its confines.

This finds a concentrated expression in the “5 STOPS”:

STOP Genocidal Persecution, Mass Incarceration, Police Brutality and Murder of Black and Brown People!

STOP The Patriarchal Degradation, Dehumanization, and Subjugation of All Women Everywhere, and All Oppression Based on Gender or Sexual Orientation!

STOP Wars of Empire, Armies of Occupation, and Crimes Against Humanity!

STOP The Demonization, Criminalization and Deportations of Immigrants and the Militarization of the Border!

STOP Capitalism-Imperialism from Destroying Our Planet!

You can see how very relevant and immediately urgent are these “5 STOPS” and the contradictions to which they refer.

So what about the question of an actual revolution in a country like the U.S., and how it’s based, once again, in these defining but unresolvable contradictions built into this system and its basic

structures, functioning and dynamics?

In “On the Possibility of Revolution” and “HOW WE CAN WIN, How We Can **Really Make Revolution**”³⁶ (another very important document from the Revolutionary Communist Party), not only the need for this revolution but also the strategy for actually building a movement toward and then carrying out the overthrow of this system, when the conditions for that have been brought into being, is spoken to. Here, I am not going to go into this extensively and in depth—I have done that in “Why We Need An Actual Revolution, And How We Can Really Make Revolution,”³⁷ in particular the second part, dealing with the strategy for revolution—which elaborates on what is put forward, in a concentrated way, in “HOW WE CAN WIN”—speaking to what we must do now to *hasten while awaiting* the emergence of a revolutionary situation and a revolutionary people in the millions, to prepare the ground, prepare the people, and prepare the vanguard for that situation, when it will be possible, and necessary, to fight all-out to win—to overthrow this oppressive system, dismantle its forces of violent suppression and the other institutions of its rule, and establish a radically different economic and political system, aiming for the complete and final abolition of all relations of exploitation and oppression. But I do want to strongly emphasize the importance of actually *making real* what is presented, in a concentrated way, in “HOW WE CAN WIN,” and elaborated on more fully in “Why We Need An Actual Revolution, And How We Can Really Make Revolution” (and, in this connection, *Birds Cannot Give Birth to Crocodiles, But Humanity Can Soar Beyond the Horizon*, in particular Part 2, is also very relevant, including the discussion there about ways in which the principles discussed in “On the Possibility of Revolution” may have application more generally in the revolutionary process in different types of countries).

Rather than elaborating extensively on the various aspects of revolutionary strategy that have been developed with the new communism, including significant ways in which this represents a break with what has been the “conventional wisdom” of the communist movement, I want to provide, once again, a basic summary of key aspects of this.

First of all, there is the decisive question of *internationalism*. Along with referring people to the polemic “Communism or Nationalism?”³⁸ by the Revolutionary Communist Organization, the OCR of Mexico, in *Demarcations* #4, Winter 2015, and to the discussion of internationalism in *THE NEW COMMUNISM*, Part II, I want to touch briefly here on the material and the philosophical basis for communist internationalism and the further synthesis of this in the new communism.

The material basis lies in the development of capitalism more fully into an international system of capitalist imperialism and the various features of that, including its investment and exploitation much more fully on an international scale (rather than in the earlier stages of capitalism where production took place mainly in the home country and the search was carried out for markets for

those products internationally). The process of production has been much more fully internationalized, increasingly so in the last several decades. This is one overall system with many different component parts and dynamics to each of those component parts within this overall system. The dynamics of this system as a whole on a world level—not solely, but principally and in dialectical relation with the situation within particular parts of the world and particular countries—is the main factor in setting the objective stage for the revolutionary struggle in particular countries. And when, through this dialectical process, the contradictions assume a particularly acute form in particular countries, that can lead to the emergence of a revolutionary situation there. So you have the dynamics within the particular countries but it's not only, and not even essentially, out of that, that the material conditions emerge which influence the development of the revolutionary struggle and which can ultimately lead to the emergence of a revolutionary situation in those particular countries.

Grasping that also interpenetrates with the philosophical understanding that is necessary for a correct approach to and application of internationalism. As is also discussed in the polemic “Communism or Nationalism?” by the OCR of Mexico, this has to do with the different levels of organization of matter in motion. There are relatively discrete levels in all different kinds of matter (in motion): there are different organs within the human body, and then there's the human body as a whole, which encompasses all those organs, and there are the dynamics within and between them; there are particular regions within a country, there are particular countries, and then there's the world as whole. And so on. Each of these different and *relatively*—I stress *relatively*—discrete levels of matter in motion have their own dynamics, their own internal contradictions; but, in turn, they are part of a larger system, just as the organs of a body are part of the larger body, and it is that larger body itself and its interaction in turn with the larger environment that ultimately and fundamentally sets the terms for what happens within that body, including within the different organs of the body—although at times what is happening within a particular organ can influence, or even be determining in, what's happening to the body as a whole, which is obvious if you have a heart attack, for example. So that is the materialism and the dialectics of all this.

And the same applies to the relation between countries and the world and the world system as a whole. There are discrete levels of matter in motion that constitute countries, just as there are discrete levels of matter in motion that constitute different regions within a country. But, in turn, those countries, even with their relative identity and discreteness and the contradictions that are particular within that, exist within a larger dynamic which (as I have pointed out before) is different than something like the relation between the earth and all the galaxies in the universe. In other words, yes, the earth is part of a solar system, which is part of a galaxy, which is part of billions of galaxies, and so on; but that relation doesn't have the same operative meaning, in terms of social transformation, that the relation between countries and the dynamics of the imperialist system, as a world system, has in this era.

It is the fundamental dynamics of this overall world system which, to cite one profound phenomenon, has been responsible for two world wars. As was pointed out in that OCR polemic, World War 1 wasn't caused simply, or essentially, by the internal dynamics within each country, which then somehow spilled over into other countries. Obviously, the internal dynamics within different countries played a part in that, but it was the larger world stage and the contradictions on that level that led to that war. And that's why, for example, in one of his better statements, Stalin said that the reason that they could succeed in the revolution in Russia—or why the conditions were more favorable for revolution there than in some other places—is that the contradictions of the world imperialist system became concentrated and focused within Russia to a large degree at that time. So that's another example of the correct understanding of the relation between countries and the world situation as a whole.

If you don't get that relation right, if you reverse that relation—as is done by people who proclaim themselves communists but actually uphold nationalism in the name of communism and become, at best, radical nationalists, which ultimately devolves into bourgeois nationalism—you're just proceeding on the basis of the internal dynamics of the country and you see that as the most important arena that you're operating in. And that can become posed against another country with its own internal dynamics. Your internationalism becomes a form of international “intersectionality,” to use the parlance of the times, which can easily be turned into antagonisms between different “sections” that are “intersecting.”

There were tendencies in Mao to proceed “from the nation outward,” even in advocating and practicing internationalism—tendencies to eclectically combine nationalism with internationalism—even as this was definitely secondary to Mao's fundamentally internationalist orientation. But these secondary tendencies in Mao have been made into a principle by certain “Maoists” (including someone like Ajith) who, in doing so, have effectively replaced internationalism with nationalism.

So it is fundamentally important to grasp the material and the philosophical basis for a correct approach to internationalism: seeing the world arena as fundamentally decisive while correctly grasping and dealing with the moving relations between the contradictions and dynamics within a particular country and other countries—and all that in relation to the capitalist-imperialist system as a world system.

There are definite practical implications to this, as I spoke to in *THE NEW COMMUNISM*, including that whatever socialist countries exist at any given time have to be approached as, above all—not solely but above all—as base areas to advance the world revolution, or else they're ultimately going to be pitted against the advance of the communist revolution in the world as a

whole; and, in fact, the basis for overthrowing and reversing the revolution in the particular socialist country will be strengthened. This is not a matter of proclaiming a glorious principle—“Internationalism, be above all a base area for the world revolution”—in some sort of abstract or almost religious sense. This involves a great deal of complexity because, more than has been recognized previously in the history of the communist movement, there can be very acute contradictions, which have the potential to be turned into antagonisms, between a socialist country that exists and the revolutionary masses and the revolutionary struggles in other countries. There are many ways in which imperialist and reactionary states and forces in the world will try to impose on the socialist country necessity to adopt policies and actions, in the effort to preserve itself, that are against the fundamental interest of advancing the revolution toward communism on a world scale. And if the revolution does not continue to advance toward communism in an overall sense, it is going to be set back overall, including where socialist countries have been initially brought into being.

So you're dealing here with very complex, and at times very acute, contradictions. And without the correct approach to grasping the material basis and the philosophical basis for communist internationalism, you don't even have a chance at approaching correctly, let alone dealing in the real world with, these very profound, and at times very acute, contradictions in a way that actually advances the overall world revolution. Someone once flippantly said, about the loss of socialism in China: “Well, easy come, easy go.” Millions of people suffered and died in order to bring socialism into being in China, and millions of people around the world supported that and to a very large degree, and largely on a legitimate basis, had their hopes riding with socialism in that country. It was a terrible setback when socialism was overturned and capitalism restored there. It is very important to preserve, and in fact to advance, socialism wherever power is wrenched out of the hands of the imperialists. At the same time, however, if the preservation and advance of a socialist state in any particular country is not handled correctly in relation to—and especially if it actually undermines in any essential way—the development of the overall world revolution, then it's on the road to being reversed as well.

There is the whole question of communism really being communism, and this has been further emphasized with the new communism—communism really being communism and therefore really being internationalist in the way I've been speaking to this, as opposed to nationalism in the name of, or eclectically combined with, communism.

Next, I want to touch on *the basic approach to building the movement for revolution*, which is captured in the formulation “Enriched What Is To Be Done-ism.” Here it is worth noting and touching, even if briefly, on the fact that, while overall leading the newly-born Soviet Union on the road of socialism and contributing in some important ways to the development of the international communist movement, at the same time Stalin actually “reversed” Leninism on a number of

important questions. On *internationalism*, for example—and this was strikingly so during the period immediately leading into and during World War 2, when the interests of the Soviet Union as a state were, on a rather nakedly nationalist basis, put ahead of the overall advance of the world revolution, in what were very acute and intensely contradictory circumstances, just to be clear. Lenin had emphasized that the proletariat in the different countries, in particular imperialist countries, had no “fatherland” to defend (and even though capitalism had not yet developed into capitalist imperialism as it had in Lenin’s time, this basic stand goes back to Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, where they said the workers of the world have no countries and they called on the workers of the world to unite, which was a very important internationalist stand and declaration to the world). But, under Stalin’s leadership in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and 1940s, when they felt the impending war coming—and then, as a key part of that war, there was a massive attack on the Soviet Union by Germany, which had become Nazi Germany—there was explicitly a revising of the notion that the workers have no country and no basis and no interest in supporting the imperialist “fatherland.” Communists actually said things like, “That was true back when the workers had nothing, but now they have trade unions, seats in parliament, and so on, so now they have a stake in the fatherland.”

This was a rather grotesque reversal of the correct position that had been very strenuously and intensely fought for by Lenin, especially in the context of World War 1, in opposition to so-called “socialists” who were rallying to their various “fatherlands” once World War 1 broke out. So, with the approach of and then during World War 2, with Stalin there was a direct reversal, explicitly and rather crudely, of a basic principle and application of internationalism. They were facing very acute circumstances, but you can’t throw out principle just because there are acute circumstances. This is related in important ways to the statement that everything that is actually true is good for the proletariat.

Lenin put great emphasis in his important work *What Is To Be Done?* on not tailing the spontaneity of the masses, not worshiping the posterior of the masses, but instead bringing communist consciousness from “outside” their own experiences and daily struggles. Lenin stressed that the working class and the masses of people could not spontaneously develop communist consciousness—that they might gravitate toward it, but there were stronger forces in society pulling them back to (as he put it) a striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie.

But Stalin, as early as the 1920s, reversed some of this, too. I remember way back in the day when someone brought an essay by Stalin into one of our meetings in the Revolutionary Union, even before the Revolutionary Communist Party was formed. This was a time when we were trying to get oriented to go to the working class—to bring revolution to the working class—and somebody brought in this essay where Stalin said, we should go among the workers and be the best fighters for their immediate interests, and then they’ll see that we’re fine fellows and they’ll want to listen to

us about our socialist and communist convictions.

This was extremely crude and was definitely a recipe for the economism that Lenin had polemicized against—the whole notion of reducing the struggle for socialism to something that supposedly evolved out of the daily struggles of the workers around their economic conditions—and it conformed more generally to the revisionist orientation that “The movement is everything, the final aim nothing.”

So, there was a reversal of some crucial principles that Lenin had fought for in *What Is To Be Done?* and other works. An ironic commentary, on how important Lenin’s *What Is To Be Done?* is, was made by Donald Rumsfeld during the course of the 2003 Iraq war, when he made an analogy, a very perverse analogy—he was talking about the reactionary Islamic fundamentalist forces, and how “we” (the imperialists) should have stomped them out right away, and he made this analogy: Back at the time when Lenin published that little pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?*, if we had known then what it would lead to, we would have stomped it out right then. So, in a perverse way, that shows you the importance of “this little pamphlet” by Lenin and how serious it was that this was undermined to a significant degree after Lenin’s death, including in things directly done and led by Stalin.

One of the key things in *What Is To Be Done?* and one of the key things Lenin was fighting for overall—one of the key lines around which he’s attacked repeatedly—is the concept that, rather than just passively reacting to objective conditions, you should be actively “pushing on” them, actively seeking to transform them (“pushing on” is my phrase, not Lenin’s, but it does correspond to what he strongly emphasized). The accusation is made that all kinds of horrors started with Lenin because, instead of just letting the material conditions ripen more or less on their own and allowing the people to spontaneously arrive at what to do about those conditions, Lenin insisted that you need a vanguard to lead the masses, and a vanguard needs to bring communist ideas from “outside” the experience and spontaneous thinking of the masses—that you couldn’t just wait for the masses on their own to come to communist consciousness, with the idea that perhaps socialism could be achieved peacefully because there would eventually be so many people in favor of it that the bourgeoisie would just stand aside on the basis of the popular will. This is an intense attack on Lenin, and in particular Lenin’s *What Is To Be Done?*, that is made by all kinds of pseudo- and self-proclaimed “socialists,” as well as regular bourgeois forces. But Lenin was absolutely correct: You do need to “push on” objective conditions to move things toward the point where an actual communist revolution, to *overthrow* the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, becomes possible; you do need the organization of a vanguard force that brings the understanding of the need to do that to the masses of people and struggles with them to take that up.

And, in a real sense, in the new communism “What Is To Be Done-ism” has been “rescued” and

“enriched.” Here again is the question, which I referred to earlier, of hastening while awaiting the emergence of a revolutionary situation. In this regard, I want to make reference to the first six paragraphs of Part 2 of *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*,³⁹ where important aspects of hastening while awaiting are discussed, including important discussion about the relation, the dialectical relation, between the objective and subjective factor—the objective factor being whatever the objective conditions are at any given time, including in their changingness, and the subjective factor referring, not to people who are subjective, in the sense of being emotional or half-cocked or something like that, but in the sense of the conscious subjects, the conscious forces, acting on the objective conditions. There, in those first six paragraphs of Part 2 of *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, is important discussion of not only the dialectical relation between objective and subjective factors in a general sense but also, more particularly, the way that they can be transformed into each other.

What does that mean? It means that what’s out there in the world, especially as it’s correctly reflected in the minds of people, can become part of the consciousness of the subjective factor, the conscious forces, who can then act on the basis of that consciousness to advance the revolution. In that sense, the objective becomes transformed into the subjective. And the subjective can be transformed into the objective in the sense that, on the basis of an essentially correct reflection of reality, you can go out to change the objective conditions, and thereby what was subjective (what was part of your consciousness) interacts with and changes the objective conditions, and in that sense becomes part of them. So, rather than, “There are the objective conditions out there and all we can do is passively respond to them,” it is a matter of consciously setting out to continually *transform* those objective conditions in the direction toward revolution, on the basis of a scientific method and approach.

Another important point to briefly touch on here, in these first six paragraphs of Part 2 of *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, is the fact that the conscious forces—the subjective factor in that sense—doesn’t just react on the objective situation in some abstract and unchanging, and sort of metaphysical, sense. There are objective factors that are constantly changing in the natural world—for example, look at something like Puerto Rico and what happened there with the hurricane and the aftermath of that (there are objective conditions that are constantly changing in that sense)—and then, as is emphasized in these six paragraphs, there is the constant interaction with the objective situation of other *social* forces, ultimately representing different class interests, all of whom are trying to operate on and transform the objective situation in line with how they perceive the interests that they represent. And there can be “unintended consequences” in what other class forces do that might actually lead things to become more favorable for revolution **IF** the communist forces correctly respond to that. So, it’s not just a matter of “OK, we have the objective conditions in some static unchanging sense, and we can ignore all the other social forces out there operating on those conditions and how that is influencing things.” The point is made, in

opposition to that, that everything that's going on with all these different forces—not just “the forces of nature” changing the objective situation, which they do in important ways that interact with social forces, but there are also all these different forces in society representing different class interests, ultimately and fundamentally, which are acting on the objective situation—at a certain point, all that can lead to a situation which you might not have been able to anticipate two months, (or perhaps even two weeks) before, which begins to head toward a revolutionary crisis—*IF*, once again, the revolutionaries, the conscious communist forces, on a constant basis and in a consistently scientific way, have been transforming the objective situation to the maximum degree possible in line with where things need to go to make possible the overthrow of this system.

This is not something aimless, or something in itself and by itself. There is a whole process that needs to go on of continually transforming the objective situation toward the goal of revolution, and accumulating more revolutionary forces at each point in that process, so that you're *hastening* while awaiting, which means you're actually *changing* the objective conditions. Pivotal within all this, you are changing the way people think, in response to those changes and in an overall sense: you're struggling with them—not just ones and twos, here or there, but *masses* of people—to transform their thinking. Here is the importance of the slogan: **Fight the Power, and Transform the People, for Revolution**. In this process, transforming the thinking of the people is pivotal and the key link overall. So, even as you're uniting with people to fight against the outrages and abuses of this system, where many of the people don't yet see the need for revolution, you're struggling to transform their thinking in line with the objective need for revolution. And again, this process is not something aimless (in line with the revisionist notion that “The movement is everything, the final aim nothing”). No, it is a process aiming for, and building toward, something very specific: **Revolution**. This must be brought forward and popularized at every point in this process.

And then, as an important part of “Enriched What Is To Be Done-ism,” there is the principle of putting the problems of the revolution before the masses, while, at the same time, struggling with them to take up the outlook, methods, principles, and program of this revolution. Why is this important? It's not because, in accordance with a tailist orientation, you think the masses are going to spontaneously have the answer to these problems. If they did already, then we would have a much easier time, we wouldn't even need a vanguard, they could just make the revolution. So what is the point here? The point is involving the masses, with leadership and with struggle, in the process of identifying and solving the problems of the revolution, rather than a kind of opportunist approach of trying to hide from the masses the problems of the revolution or, with “political truth,” trying to convince them: “Everything's really going great; all you need to do is get involved”—in which case they're likely to say, “Well if everything's going great, why should I get involved, it requires a lot of struggle and sacrifice—you're doing great, go ahead, let me know when you've got everything lined up and then maybe I'll get involved.” Correctly understood and applied, it is a very important principle that, in a fundamental and ultimate sense, revolution is

made by the masses. That is not, and should not be taken as, a recipe for tailing the masses and their spontaneity. But they are the ones who have to make this revolution and they need to be involved, at every stage, in grappling with and contributing to the process of coming up with the means for struggling through and transforming the contradictions you face, the problems of the revolution, in order to make breakthroughs and advance. This is a very important principle and it's something which should not be identified with tailing the masses and thinking that, in a reified sense, all wisdom resides in the masses and all you have to do is tell them what a problem is and they'll immediately come up with the solution. It is a matter of involving them, in increasing numbers, on a scientifically-led basis, in the process of struggling to confront and transform the contradictions that have to be fought through on the road to making the revolution.

In connection with all this, I want to speak briefly to the separation of the communist movement from the labor movement. I referred to Lenin's struggle with the economists of his time and the emphasis in *What Is To Be Done?* that socialism would not be brought about as the extension of the economic struggle of the workers, and reducing the struggle for socialism and communism to that would lead to the continuation of the situation in which the masses are chained within the existing system—the understanding, emphasized by Lenin, that the masses of people, proletarians and other oppressed people, will never gain communist consciousness just out of the immediate struggle with their employers and the struggle overall for their immediate needs, as important as those are. And, going back to what I said earlier about the development of capitalism into capitalist imperialism, and the changing of the class configuration in the imperialist countries, Lenin made the important analysis that, with capitalism's development into capitalist imperialism, there was what he called a split in the working class, between certain sections that were more bourgeoisified—bribed, as he put it, from the spoils of imperialism and colonial depredation in what we now call the Third World—and those he referred to as the lower and deeper sections of the proletariat that remained intensely exploited and were the basis for an actual revolutionary movement. This represented an initial rupture of the communist movement from the labor movement—Lenin's fight against economism and his recognition of a split in the working class in the imperialist countries.

And then, as the communist struggle shifted increasingly to the Third World for a period of time, particularly after World War 1, Mao developed a model in China of a peasant-based people's war, which obviously was not based on the labor movement. In the early struggles in China, in the 1920s, they tried to base the communist movement in the labor struggles in the cities—and they were devastated and massacred by the ruling forces and their vicious repression. So, obviously, with this peasant-based people's war there was a further separation of the communist movement from the labor movement.

To take this further, in terms of how it has been developed with the new communism, I want to

repeat a formulation that I used one time to drive home this point about the separation of the communist movement from the labor movement. I said, we're seeking to make "a proletarian revolution with a proletariat that does not exist!" Now, I was being deliberately provocative to drive home an essential point: Not that, in reality, there is not a proletariat, but this was a provocative way of saying that this movement is not going to be an extension of the labor movement, not going to be done with the economist vision of the working class fighting against its employers as the pivotal means for advancing to socialism, *and* it was not even going to be done by just going to the lower and deeper sections of the proletariat in a country like the U.S. and trying to overwhelmingly base the revolutionary movement there, although masses of people in that position in society obviously need to be involved in and play an important role in this revolution.

Clearly, there is in reality a proletariat, including in countries like the U.S.—there are masses of bitterly exploited wage-workers, within the U.S. itself and on an even greater scale internationally. But the point, and what I was getting at with this deliberately provocative statement, is this: The proletarian revolution will not, and cannot, come about as an extension of the struggle between wage-workers and their employers; the abolition of the rule of capitalism will not come about through some kind of general strike of labor; nor is it necessary, nor even likely, that the main fighting forces in the battle to overthrow the armed repressive force of the capitalist state (the bourgeois dictatorship) will come mainly from employed wage-workers, and it certainly will not come from among the better-paid and more bourgeoisified strata of the working class.

So, what are the backbone, or potential backbone, forces for revolution, particularly in a country like the U.S.? Well, they are the impoverished and bitterly oppressed and repressed masses who do exist in their tens of millions in this country; and this interpenetrates to a great degree with people among the oppressed nationalities, although it is not limited to that. We do have to recognize, at the same time, that there is a phenomenon among many of these masses of what could be called "deproletarianization"—people who were themselves formerly exploited as wage-workers (or the previous generations of whom were exploited in this way) but who now can't even find themselves in that position (can't find a job, to put it simply). This has been accompanied by a lot of what could be called "petit-bourgeoisification," as well as "lumpen-bourgeoisification," among sections of the oppressed masses—people who get into small-scale activity, which is essentially petit bourgeois in the sense that it involves small scale ownership and trading, and things like that, and people who are into the life of crime, including those who rise to fairly powerful and wealthy positions within that, even though their situation is often and generally very precarious.

There are these phenomena, and there is the phenomenon that in the realm of culture, for example, a certain, relatively small but influential, section of people has managed to rise from within these masses to basically a bourgeois position. The reason I refer to "lumpen-bourgeoisification" is that this includes people who have not only utilized the realm of culture but

also in some cases the realm of crime to wrench out a position in which they become quite wealthy, and then they invest in lines of cosmetics and clothes, and so on—they become real bourgeois, even as many of them are part of an oppressed nation or people. And they have the corresponding outlook to a very significant degree. I won't even talk right now about Kanye West! But, more generally, there's the phenomenon where you are witnessing a profound silence on the part of many of these cultural figures and others on some of the burning issues for the masses today. Some may tweet about different things, but they don't step out and take a strong stand in response—as a phenomenon there are many who do not step out and take a strong stand around glaring acts of oppression and injustice against the masses of people. And that's because their position has changed. Not only is there a fairly significant “petit-bourgeoisification” among oppressed masses but there is also the “lumpen-bourgeoisification” that I referred to—and there is a culture which mirrors the extremely individualistic and acquisitive character of the dominant culture as a whole.

There is the phenomenon of what could be called “Reaganism among the masses of people,” the whole “ethos” that came in with Reagan in the 1980s, this extreme individualism—and not just individualism in the abstract, but one that is posed in terms of antagonism toward everybody else: “You can't trust anybody else; nobody else cares about you; you gotta get over on other people before they get over on you.” To a significant degree, this has become a model for the masses, even though (once again going back to Marx's statement in the *Grundrisse*) in their masses they are totally incapable of following this path, only a few can do that. In fact, there are millions of talented people in sports, in the arts, and so on, but only a tiny number of them can ever rise to a position of wealth and prominence. Nevertheless, this is held up as a model. Not only is this held up as a way out for people, it is more generally upheld as a model for people to follow and a way that people should think and conduct themselves. This does pose a real problem—and, more than that, it is an acute expression of a much larger problem in terms of the prevailing culture that has to be struggled against. People's thinking in this regard has to be radically transformed.

At the same time, with all this, there is the poverty and immiseration, and the relentless injustice and oppression, to which masses of people are continually subjected and which, to go back once again to Marx in the *Grundrisse*, they have no way out of other than by overthrowing the system. Even short of revolution, all this to which they are continually subjected causes people to rise up against the system and its outrages, and provides a powerful part of the objective basis for masses, particularly (though not only) those who catch the worst hell under this system, to be won to, and to play a decisive role in, the revolution that is required to meet what are in fact their fundamental needs and interests. But this will require a tremendous amount of ideological struggle, transforming the thinking of masses of people, while uniting with them in fighting the oppressive powers-that-be, winning them to become, not people out for revenge and out for themselves, but emancipators of humanity, and in this way to act as backbone forces for the proletarian-communist revolution.

As I indicated, this is closely intertwined with the fight to abolish the oppression of Black people and other oppressed nationalities within the U.S. and the whole question of the relation between national liberation and proletarian revolution, particularly in a country like the U.S., which is spoken to in *THE NEW COMMUNISM* and is addressed, concretely and in an overall strategic sense, in the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America*.⁴⁰

At the same time as there are these basic forces for revolution, suffering in this way, who have to be won to this revolution through a tremendous amount of struggle, in which transforming their thinking is pivotal, there is a need for a broader united front, with the leadership of the proletariat—not in the reified sense of individual proletarians representing the essence of this leadership, but in the sense of what are the fundamental interests of the proletariat as a class and, going back to Marx, the fact that the proletariat can only emancipate itself by emancipating all humanity, by eliminating oppression and exploitation throughout the world with the achievement of communism. Being based on that understanding, and proceeding in that way, is what is meant by the leadership of the proletariat. And what is in the fundamental interests of the proletariat, and required for the revolution to realize those fundamental interests, is bringing into the revolutionary process as many forces as possible from the broader ranks of society, and continually struggling to win people to the revolutionary communist position. It is matter of bringing forward those who catch the worst hell under this system, but also—and fundamentally by bringing them forward—working at the same time to bring forward all different strata of the people, including in particular youth and students, who constitute a crucial force that has an important role in this revolutionary process.

This requires a scientific, dialectical materialist approach to the situation and spontaneous sentiments and inclinations not only of the basic masses who can and must be brought forward as the backbone and driving force of this revolutionary process, but also of the middle class in this country, and the different strata within this middle class, whose situation is significantly different than it was 50, or even 20, years ago. It requires a living and constantly deepening understanding of the material position and outlook—the conditions of life and spontaneous thinking—of these different sections of the people and how to carry out the necessary struggle to bring about a profound change in the outlook and values of large and growing numbers of them, winning them to active and increasingly conscious involvement in the revolutionary process whose final aim is the abolition of all relations of exploitation and oppression, all antagonistic relations among human beings everywhere, and all the agony and anguish that is bound up with those relations.

All this—the whole ensemble of “Enriched What Is To Be Done-ism”—involves a fundamental rupture with economism in all the different dimensions in which I’ve spoken to this. And one of the ways in which this gets crucially expressed is in regard to the oppression of women and the

struggle for the emancipation of women. There has been a strain in the communist movement to reduce this, once again, to merely an economic question—to where the struggle against the oppression of women is reduced to just changing the economic system. And there has also been a way in which this has been posed in antagonistic relation to the struggle against national oppression. For example, in the 1960s there was a very influential line, in a negative sense, that insisted that, with regard to Black people, you couldn't bring up the oppression of women, because Black men have been so viciously oppressed, which of course is true. But, first of all, what about Black women and all the horrendous ways in which they've been oppressed throughout the history of this country and down to the present? And even more fundamentally, what about the emancipation of humanity as a whole? What about transforming all of those "4 Alls," including that profound social relation which has been woven into class society, has been interconnected with class oppression from the very beginning of the division of society into oppressors and oppressed, namely the oppressed status of women?

There have been economist and nationalist tendencies, even in the name of communism at times, which have downgraded the importance of the struggle for the emancipation of women. And with the new communism, one of its key pillars is recognizing the pivotal and essential role of the struggle to emancipate women and its interconnection with and its decisive role in the overall process of abolishing all oppression and exploitation. Closely interconnected with this is the radical break that the new communism has made with the previous history of the communist movement in regard to sexual orientation and traditional gender relations. While, on the one hand, and principally, the communist movement historically made crucial breakthroughs in scientifically analyzing the origins of the oppression of women, the basis for its final abolition, and the relation of this to the overall development of human society and the struggle to abolish all relations of exploitation and oppression—notably in the seminal work by Engels *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*—at the same time there has been a secondary, but significant, influence within communism of patriarchy which, among other things, has been manifested in a negative orientation toward sexual orientation and gender relations which are in conflict with traditional gender relations—something which those of us who became revolutionary communists out of the upsurge of the 1960s “inherited” from the existing communist movement and traditions and carried forward for a time—too long a time—and which was finally broken with as one important dimension of the development of the new communism. In breaking with this, the approach of the new communism has not been to tail identity politics and attendant relativist and other unscientific methods and approaches, including populist epistemology, but to apply a scientific method and approach to the study of human sexuality and gender relations, throughout history as well as in contemporary society, including by learning from and drawing from the work of others whose outlook and approach are not communist but who have nevertheless done important work in regard to these crucial questions and whose position on this has been more in line with reality than what has been the traditional position of the communist movement. The

result of all this is a scientific synthesis which is presented in a concentrated way in the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America*, which emphasizes that the goal is not just equality between men and women, but:

to overcome all “tradition’s chains” embodied in traditional gender roles and divisions, and all the oppressive relations bound up with this, in every sphere of society, and to enable women, as fully as men, to take part in and contribute to every aspect of the struggle to transform society, and the world, in order to uproot and abolish all relations of oppression and exploitation and emancipate humanity as a whole.⁴¹

It needs to be understood in relation to the emancipation of women and overcoming all oppression bound up with traditional gender relations, as well as in an overall sense, that only if you’re proceeding from the communist viewpoint, with the scientifically-established recognition of the need to achieve the “4 Alls”—only then are you going to be able to overcome the divisions and potential antagonisms among and between different sections of the people, and only then are you going to be able to bring to the fore all the various elements of the necessary struggle for revolution, as represented to a significant degree in those “5 STOPS.” Nothing less than that will make it possible to fully overcome the divisions that exist spontaneously and are constantly fostered by the workings of the system objectively and by the conscious actions of its representatives of various kinds. The ruling class repeatedly seeks to pit different sections of the people against each other and, contrary to the illusions of “intersectionality,” the ruling class has many powerful ways to do that if you’re not proceeding from the point of view of the emancipation of humanity as a whole.

There is a whole history of different sections of the people being pitted against each other. You have the egregious example of the Buffalo Soldiers after the Civil War—Black soldiers who fought to put down and kill off the Native Americans and steal their land—while in the Civil War, among the different Native American peoples, there were some who sided with the northern Union while others sided with the southern Confederacy, based on their narrow perception of their immediate interests. Only coming from the point of view of communism can you unify the masses of people to overcome every manifestation of oppression and achieve the “4 Alls.” This is crucial in an overall sense and it becomes particularly acute around the woman question, because there is a continual tendency, including in the communist movement, to subordinate this, or not to fully give expression to it, in the perceived interests of the moment, and with the narrow, economist outlook regarding what should constitute the working class movement or the communist movement. So, a very important component of the new communism is the recognition of the need to give the fullest expression to the struggle for the emancipation of women and its critical and pivotal role in relation to the overall struggle for the “4 Alls.”

Building on what was discussed earlier in regard to democracy, and its character and role under different systems and with the dictatorship of different classes, there is (as I have put it in the title of a book) the need to “do better” than democracy. This is one of the key elements and also one of the most controversial and often attacked elements of the new communism, for reasons one can well imagine. Once again, there is Mao’s important emphasis on the fact that democracy is part of the superstructure. With the new communism this has been further developed to systematize the understanding that going beyond class divisions and class rule (class dictatorship) also involves going beyond “democracy.” (I will speak to this further shortly, particularly in the context of discussing the question of leadership, and the development of the communist understanding of the character and role of the vanguard party, both before and after the seizure of power and the establishment of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.)

The Leadership

This brings me to the point on leadership—and in particular, the contradictory role of a communist vanguard, before and after the seizure of power.

Involved here is the role of intellectuals—the contradictions bound up with this, and how this applies in the communist revolution, as opposed to the bourgeois revolution (this is discussed in *THE NEW COMMUNISM*, and it is important to return to this here in speaking to the character and aims of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the role of a communist vanguard in relation to that). In *THE NEW COMMUNISM* the point is made, in rather provocative terms, that in the bourgeois revolution the masses of people fight and die but a class that is opposed to their interests, the bourgeoisie, comes to the fore and seizes power and then rules in accordance with the interests of the bourgeois class and the capitalist system of which it is a concentrated expression. In other words, the masses fight and die and some other, alien and opposed class reaps the benefits, to put it in brief and stark terms. And I made the deliberately provocative statement in *THE NEW COMMUNISM* that in the bourgeois revolution this doesn’t matter, but it does matter in the proletarian revolution. Then I went on immediately to say that, of course, it actually matters a great deal. The point of saying provocatively that it doesn’t matter is that this is in correspondence with the nature of the bourgeois revolution. But in the proletarian revolution something radically different has to happen: the interests of the masses of people, in the most fundamental sense—not in a reified sense, but in a fundamental sense—have to come to the fore as what is being upheld and fought for in the struggle to transform society. But this is not an automatic or an easy thing. And it matters profoundly whether this happens in reality in the proletarian revolution—or else the proletarian revolution gets turned, in effect, into a bourgeois revolution.

This is not a matter of the famous (or I would say infamous) British Lord Acton’s statement that

power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. This is a matter of the continuing contradictions that objectively exist when the revolution succeeds in overthrowing the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and establishing the rule, the dictatorship, of the proletariat, and embarking on the socialist road. This goes back to the analogy to evolution in the natural world. You don't make revolution by conjuring up ideas of how you'd like society to be and then magically imposing that on the real world; and you don't make it with a clean slate. You make it, to paraphrase Lenin, with conditions and people as they are inherited from the old society, even though masses of people have undergone a significant, but only beginning, transformation in their thinking—their outlook, values, and so on—through the course of that revolution. And then, once having embarked on the socialist road, you still have to deal with all the conditions and the contradictions that, in a real sense, you've inherited from the old society that you have to set out to transform at the same time as the socialist state is being developed, fundamentally and above all, as a base area for the advance of the communist revolution in the world as a whole.

So, why talk about this in terms of the role of intellectuals? Because, as I've pointed out before, in *THE NEW COMMUNISM* and elsewhere, to make the kind of revolution we're talking about, one that's aiming for the emancipation of humanity, you have to systematically work with ideas, ideas relating to a complex reality. You have to deal—and in a concentrated way the leadership of that revolution has to deal—with the real world contradictions that pose themselves repeatedly, with all the complexity of actually making a revolution, a complexity that is involved, first of all, in actually getting to and achieving the overthrow of the old system, but then the complexity that is involved immediately upon the seizure of power and the establishment of a new system of political rule and the embarking on the socialist road. You cannot deal with all that complexity in a way that's going to actually advance toward the "4 Alls" and the emancipation of humanity without working in the realm of ideas in a developed way, in a way that applies science to engage, to interact with and transform, the objective world as it actually exists, and as it's full of contradiction, motion and change. Without doing that, you are never even going to recognize fully what the contradictions are that you are confronted with, and how they have to be transformed, how the struggle has to be waged to do that, and how not to be turned away from the fundamental and final goal, even while you're dealing with immediate contradictions.

In any revolution that has any chance of succeeding, and certainly one that does succeed in even the first great leap of overthrowing the old oppressive system of capitalism, the people who lead it have to be intellectuals in the sense of people who can work with ideas in a more or less comprehensive way. Of course, everybody works with ideas on a certain level, but what is required is doing so on a very high level and in a comprehensive and scientific way. So, the core of leadership is going to be intellectuals. These intellectuals may have developed in different ways and come from different parts of society—including not only people with more privileged backgrounds and extensive formal education but also, for example, people among prisoners and other basic

masses who have overcome great obstacles to develop as intellectuals—but what they have in common is a developed ability to work with ideas in a comprehensive and systematic way.

And then there's the point that Marx made that, in class-divided society, intellectuals are the political and literary representatives of a class (even if they're not fully conscious of that, and certainly if they are). Their ideas and ways of thinking objectively reflect the interests and outlook of one class or another. And, because of the particularity of what it means to be an intellectual and working with ideas, there is a certain kind of social mobility, in the sense that intellectuals can "attach" themselves to one class or another, and they can detach themselves from one class and attach themselves to another class, in a positive or negative direction from the point of view of the communist revolution and the objective interests of humanity.

All this is a reflection of where we are, and where we have not yet gotten, in the process of transforming society and ultimately the world toward the elimination of all exploitation and oppression and everything bound up with that, including all the ideas. So it's not, "power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely." It's that you're dealing with complex real world contradictions, and you need a group of intellectuals to lead this; you're dealing with all these contradictions that are inherited, so to speak, from the old society and which can't be waved away with a magic wand, and can't be transformed, even on the correct basis, all at once or in a short period of time. Different people can develop different approaches to and different programs for dealing with these real world contradictions. And, because you're still in a world largely characterized by, and for a period of time dominated by, the relations and ideas of an exploitative system, the spontaneity will always—or for a long period of time, at least—go in the direction of falling in line with those exploitative and oppressive relations, or seeking shortcuts which objectively land you there.

This is where the rub becomes very acute, to put it that way—that for a long time there will be a need for a core leading group, which is objectively in a different position than the masses it is leading. The decisive question is: What methods, flowing from what kind of outlook, what kind of scientific or anti-scientific approach, is applied to dealing with these contradictions? And to put it in certain terms: What do the people who make up this leading core "reach for" when they come up against very acute contradictions? Do they recognize the need, and act on the need, to wage a fierce struggle against spontaneity in dealing with real world contradictions that can very acutely pose themselves, including to the extent of posing the question of the continued existence, or not, of what's been achieved so far, which, again, is not "easy-come, easy-go"?

This is what you're dealing with in the transition from the old society to a communist world, which begins largely with conditions and people as they are "bequeathed" to the new society by the old one, so to speak. And this has everything to do with the contradictions of a vanguard party. In *THE*

NEW COMMUNISM it was put this way, and it is important to focus on this: *the very contradictions that make a vanguard necessary are also the contradictions that can lead that vanguard back onto the road of capitalism.*

This, again, gets posed in a very concentrated way in terms of the role of intellectuals. Many of us who have been involved for some time have experienced the very positive phenomenon of a whole section of intellectuals in a certain sense “deserting” their class and coming over to the side of the masses of oppressed in the world. But more than a few have gone back on that—that’s the other thing that can happen, the negative way this contradiction can be resolved. This assumes a much fuller, and at times much more acute, dimension in a situation where the proletarian dictatorship has been established and the socialist road has been taken. And this has to do with the whole question of the character and role of the dictatorship of the proletariat itself, the understanding of which has been further developed with the new communism.

Let’s pose the basic question: Why is there a need for such a dictatorship? I remember that, years ago now, there was a debate with one of these social-democratic types, who said: “Why do you want to start out talking about a dictatorship—you’re just setting yourself on this road of having a dictatorship. Why aren’t you talking about something else, some other way of doing what needs to be done?” This gets back once more to the analogy to evolution in the natural world, and Marx’s profound point that people make history, but they don’t make it any way they wish; they make it by proceeding from the material conditions that are “bequeathed” to them from the old society—conditions that have been transformed to a significant degree through the process of overthrowing the old order, but still only in a beginning way. So this is a kind of idealist notion: “Why don’t you just come up with a way to do this without having a dictatorship?” Well, no. You need the dictatorship of the proletariat because you are starting out with everything that is concentrated in those “4 Alls,” which have not yet been transformed, you’re dealing with a situation where to a large degree the material conditions, not only within that new socialist society but in the world as a whole, are working against such a transformation. Within this new society, and especially at times when the contradictions are acutely posed, the spontaneity—not just on the part of a bunch of “power-grabbers” at the top, but on the part of significant sections of the masses of people, including among those who suffered the worst in the old society—is going to be to go back to the old society. So, you have to have a system of rule which keeps things going on the socialist road through all the twists and turns and the repeatedly acutely posed contradictions.

This is obviously in fundamental conflict with the idea of democracy as the highest goal—democracy as the highest political expression of human interaction and social relations. Here it is very relevant to cite three sentences which give concentrated expression to a very important dimension of the new communism, and which speak directly to this idealization of democracy:

In a world marked by profound class divisions and social inequality, to talk about “democracy”—without talking about the *class nature* of that democracy and which class it serves—is meaningless, and worse. So long as society is divided into classes, there can be no “democracy for all”: one class or another will rule, and it will uphold and promote that kind of democracy which serves its interests and goals. The question is: *which class* will rule and whether its rule, and its system of democracy, will serve the *continuation*, or the eventual *abolition*, of class divisions and the corresponding relations of exploitation, oppression and inequality.⁴²

Notice what it says here. It doesn’t simply say, “which class will rule and whether its rule and system of democracy will serve the continuation, or the abolition, of class divisions,” and so on. It says: “will serve the continuation, or the *eventual* abolition...” Right there is the recognition that it requires a whole process to achieve those “4 Alls.” By including the word “eventual” it is stressing the fact that this is a whole process; and this goes back to the point—a crucial point brought forward by Mao—that, all throughout this process, there is the basis for this to be reversed, for socialism to be overturned and capitalism restored.

And, as emphasized earlier, with the abolition of class divisions and the corresponding relations of exploitation, oppression and inequality, with the achievement of communism throughout the world, will come the abolition of democracy—the advance of human society beyond the conditions where democracy has meaning, purpose, or necessity. Now, why is that so? And does that mean that a benevolent group of dictators will more and more accrue power to themselves and then you’ll get to communism and, almost like Plato’s philosopher-kings, they will perfectly serve, or in the best possible way serve, the interests of the masses of people? No, it means that the institutions and social constructs, if you will, that are representative of democracy and are necessary to protect the interests of one part of society against another, will no longer be necessary because you will have eliminated the material basis for exploitation and oppression and you will have transformed the thinking wherein one part of society would see it in its interests and therefore would strive to oppress and exploit other parts of society. This definitely doesn’t mean the people will have no role in the governing of society, or that somehow society won’t need to be governed. But it means that the formal institutions and processes and constructs of democracy, as an expression of the superstructure of a class-divided society, will no longer be necessary. There will still be a need for government. There will still be institutions. But the institutionalization of the means to protect one part of society from another—and to ensure that the will of the people is realized (to put it that way)—will no longer be required, and democracy will wither away in that sense. This is very important in terms of the development of the understanding of what’s involved in actually getting to communism and what is involved when that has been achieved.

In “A Scientific Approach to Maoism, A Scientific Approach to Science”⁴³ (which is included in

Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy) I made the comment that probably after a ways into communist society, people wouldn't talk about communism any more. That's related to the point about democracy withering away. I made the analogy to when you're sick and then you finally get well: you don't usually notice the moment when you got well. After a little while, it hits you: "Oh, I don't feel sick any more." The analogy is that, once you get into communism and that's what is, and then you're dealing with the contradictions that exist when you've achieved the "4 Alls," the idea of communism then will be so assumed that it won't be something people will be talking about very much. That's another way of getting at the point about democracy withering away. So there's some more food for thought.

Mao was the one who systematized the understanding of the need for the continuation of the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. This was based on his analyzing and synthesizing what I've been speaking to here about the remaining contradictions that exist within socialist society—and, in a larger sense, in a world which for a long time will still be dominated by imperialists and other exploiting classes, and where exploitative and oppressive relations will remain the dominant relations. Mao's formulation of the need for continuing revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat involved the recognition that, in the conditions of socialism, especially after you've advanced past the very early stages, the danger and the forces for capitalist restoration don't reside mainly in the overthrown bourgeois class and its overt representatives, but in newly emerged bourgeois elements, and in a concentrated way within the communist party itself, especially at its top ranks. Those are the people who have a disproportionate role in determining where society goes. It is among the people who are at the apex of this society, so to speak, that the greatest and most concentrated danger of capitalist restoration resides—and, yes, there is still an apex to society, it's still a society marked by class and social divisions, you haven't achieved the "4 Alls" yet, you're actually engaged in a whole long process of transformation to achieve that, not just within the particular country but on a world scale. Mao made the statement: You're making revolution and you don't know where the bourgeoisie is. It is right within the communist party, he emphasized, especially at its top ranks.

One of the important insights in relation to this was the recognition that different political forces, including in the communist party, are representative of different relations of production in the society. It is not that the revisionists—people calling themselves "communists" who are actually on the capitalist road—are capitalists in the crude, or immediately operative, sense that they're running a factory according to capitalist principles (although that might be the case). But the essence of this is that someone's outlook, method and approach, and the policies that flow from that, represent—objectively at least—one kind of production relations or another. And during the socialist transition, it's possible to go on one road or another. It's possible to go with one set of production relations or another; and, once again, spontaneity strongly pulls toward going back to the old relations, to the exploitative and oppressive relations.

All this was a very important breakthrough that Mao made, and with the new communism this has been taken up and further systematized and built upon. As set forth in the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America*, the dictatorship of the proletariat does not mean the dictatorship of individual proletarians or of people speaking in the name of the proletariat, but is essentially defined by its *content and role*. The following statement from the Preamble of that *Constitution* states this very clearly:

in its essential character and its basic principles, structures, institutions and political processes, [the dictatorship of the proletariat] must give expression to and serve the fundamental interests of the proletariat, a class whose exploitation is the engine of the accumulation of capitalist wealth and the functioning of capitalist society and whose emancipation from its exploited condition can only be brought about through the communist revolution, with its goal of abolishing all relations of exploitation and oppression and achieving the emancipation of humanity as a whole. In accordance with this, the governing bodies and processes of this socialist state, at all levels, must be vehicles for the furtherance of the communist revolution; and, as a key dimension of this, they must provide the means for those who were exploited and oppressed in the old society—and were effectively locked out of the exercise of political power and the governance of society, as well as the spheres of intellectual endeavor and working with ideas overall—to increasingly take part in these spheres, with the aim of continually transforming society in the direction of communism.⁴⁴

Now, here, an anarchist would say that we giveth and we taketh away—we giveth with one hand, and taketh away with the other—because it doesn’t just say that those who were exploited and oppressed in the old society must have their democratic right to run the new society. It says they have to have the right to do that—and to increasingly take part in those spheres from which they’ve been locked out, in order to do that—but then there’s a “kicker,” which is all-important, actually: “with the aim of continually transforming society in the direction of communism.” In other words, there is a purpose and a direction to this. It’s not some supposed pure democracy without social content—there can be no such thing. Rather, it is within a certain framework and with a definite direction and purpose.

This relates to something very important that is emphasized in *THE NEW COMMUNISM*: “One of the things that should really be understood about this *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic*, in most fundamental terms, is that this *Constitution* is dealing with a very profound and very difficult contradiction.” Notice: “very profound and very difficult contradiction”—the contradiction “that, on the one hand, humanity really does need revolution and communism; but, on the other hand, not all of humanity wants that all of the time, including in socialist society.”⁴⁵

And then it goes on to amplify this, to discuss the profound point that you can't get to communism by putting guns in the backs of the masses of people and saying, "This is in your interests, so you gotta go this way," and then force-marching them on that basis. On the other hand, every time there's a spontaneous pull to go back to the old society, you can't just say, "Well, ok, that's what the people want, so let's go there, and then maybe we'll see if we can somehow overthrow the system which we just allowed to be restored, which took us 50 years to overthrow in the first place." No, you can't do that. So you have these two poles here of what you can't do, so to speak.

What this *Constitution* is doing is providing the institutional means to deal with this profound contradiction, through all the complexity and the repeated acuteness of this, by providing for a lot of dissent, ferment and so on, but also making it very difficult for the old system to be restored: allowing for that possibility if, *overwhelmingly*, the masses don't want the socialist system any more—but, on the other hand, making it so that only in rare circumstances could that be effected.

Once again, anarchists, and assorted social-democrats and so on, might scream that we're faking here—we're pretending to be democratic, but we're really being dictatorial, we're once again giving with one hand and taking away with the other. But the point, again, is that there is no such thing as pure democracy for all, without social and class content. And, yes, we do have the *chutzpah*, and more to the point the *science*, to say that we can objectively determine what the fundamental interests of the masses of people are, *and* we're going to lead society in that direction without, however, doing so in a way of force-marching everybody toward that, but providing for a great deal of ferment, dissent, and, as it says in the *Constitution*, people going off in different directions, and then working—and here's where what I've referred to as "going to the brink of being drawn and quartered" comes in—working to "get our arms around all that," to lead all that, on a broad road, through many divergent paths, toward the goal of communism, but not put our arms around it and squeeze the life out of it. This goes to the point made by Ardea Skybreak in *Science And Revolution*⁴⁶ about the analogy to riding a horse and not holding the reins too tightly, on the one hand, on the other hand not holding them so loosely that things go every which way, and, ultimately (or maybe not so ultimately) things go back to the old way.

This is a key method that's built into and runs through the whole *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America*: how to handle this contradiction between what you can scientifically—yes, scientifically—determine to be in the fundamental interests of the broad masses of people (the formerly oppressed but also, ultimately, all of humanity) and on the other hand working through the contradictions without either holding the reins too tightly or just letting them go and let things go wherever spontaneity takes them, which will be right back to capitalism.

In terms of the role of the party in the socialist state, as is made clear in the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America*, in this vision and blueprint for a radically new society the

state is not the direct extension of, and in effect identical with, the party—it is not the “party-state paradigm” as it is described in various anti-communist theses. The leading role of the party in relation to this state, and the society overall, is not reducible to, nor is it principally expressed in terms of, the party exercising *organizational* predominance in the various institutions of the state. Rather, while there are definite organizational relations and mechanisms that give expression to the leading role of the party, particularly in relation to certain key institutions, such as the armed forces, this leading role is most essentially and above all expressed in terms of *ideological and political influence* and the waging of struggle to continually *win masses of people* to the goals of the communist revolution. Further, as is discussed in the Preamble to this *Constitution*:

As historical experience has demonstrated, socialist society will—for a considerable period of time—contain, and in fact regenerate, elements of exploitation, social inequality and oppression, which have been, unavoidably, inherited from the old society and cannot be uprooted and abolished all at once, or soon after the establishment of the socialist state. Further, there is likely to be a protracted period in which new socialist states come into existence in a situation where they are, to one degree or another, encircled by imperialist and reactionary states, which will continue to exert significant influence and force, and may even occupy a dominant position in the world for some time. These factors will, for a long time, repeatedly give rise to forces within socialist society itself, as well as within the parts of the world still dominated by imperialism and reaction, which will attempt to overthrow any socialist states that exist and restore capitalism there. And historical experience has also demonstrated that, as a result of these contradictions, forces will emerge within the vanguard party itself, including at its top levels, which will fight for lines and policies that will actually lead to the undermining of socialism and the restoration of capitalism. All this underscores the importance of continuing the revolution within socialist society, and of doing so in the overall framework of the revolutionary struggle throughout the world and with the internationalist orientation of giving fundamental priority to the advance of this worldwide struggle toward the achievement of communism, which is only possible on a world scale—and the importance of struggle within the party itself, as well as in society as a whole, to maintain and strengthen the revolutionary character and role of the party, in keeping with its responsibilities to act as the leadership of the continuing revolution toward the final goal of communism, and to defeat attempts to transform the party into its opposite, into a vehicle for the restoration of the old, exploitative and oppressive society.⁴⁷

Before concluding, I want to talk about the party *before* the seizure of power—problems of maintaining, *under these conditions*, its character and role as an actual *vanguard of revolution*, carrying out the necessary preparations for and then, with the development of the necessary conditions, carrying out the overthrow of the dictatorship of the exploiting class (or classes), in order to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and carry forward the transformation of

society toward the ultimate goal of achieving the “4 Alls” on a worldwide basis.

In addition to what the experience of socialist society has shown, experience has also shown that under the rule of exploiting classes—the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in essential terms—and particularly where, as has generally been the case, even after the revolutionary communist vanguard has been formed, there is a protracted period where the bourgeoisie continues to rule, the influence in those conditions of the existing system, not only within the country but worldwide, can have a significantly deteriorating effect on the party that is attempting to build toward the overthrow of this system. This has everything to do with why many, many parties end up going off the revolutionary road and either dissolving into nothingness or being transformed into pitiful reformist sects.

So this is another historical problem to be grappled with. In the recent history of the U.S., there have been what I’ve referred to as “these awful decades,” when not only has the bourgeoisie been in power but the revolutionary upsurge of the 1960s and into the early 1970s was suppressed, dissipated, and reversed to a significant degree. It’s not just that the bourgeoisie has, to use that phrase, “taken revenge” on socialist countries where they have existed and has leaped on the restoration of capitalism, in a country like China, to pile on with abuse of communism. But they have also, in a broader sense, sought to take revenge on all the positive radical uprisings in this country, and in the world overall, through that period of the 1960s and early ’70s. And, with the shifting of relations not only within this country but internationally, and the receding of revolutionary upsurge and revolutionary sentiments that characterized that period, as a mass phenomenon, we’ve been paying ever since, in terms of the masses of people and what they’ve been subjected to, here and throughout the world, paying in a real sense for our failure to carry things through then to an actual attempt at revolution to overthrow the existing system and bring into being a radically different and better system. We’ve been paying for that ever since, both the masses of people and the vanguard forces for the revolution that is needed.

When I say “our failure,” I don’t say that to beat ourselves up. The movement that emerged in that time was a very positive phenomenon: there were very powerful revolutionary currents within it that were reflected in the thinking and sentiments of millions of people in this country at the high point of that upsurge; there were positive organized forces, above all those that led to the formation of the Revolutionary Communist Party. But the organization, and even the understanding, at that time was also very primitive. And by the time there could possibly have been the development of a revolutionary situation—if a real vanguard had emerged and worked on conditions toward that end—there was not the coming together of a vanguard force that had the basis, in terms of a scientific approach and the corresponding line and program, and developing ties among masses of people, that could have led a real attempt to make revolution.

I don't want to adopt a determinist position of saying, "What was done then was all that could have been done, and what happened was bound to happen—things were too primitive, so there could not have been a revolution." The point is: We need to learn from that experience and work actively on hastening while awaiting and not be in a situation where an opportunity would be thrown away if and when such an opportunity were brought into being. That's the point of saying that we're paying for this reversal. It's not to beat ourselves over the head, but to recognize the factors that presented real obstacles to revolution even being seriously attempted, and the consequences of that not happening. And since that time, the operation and the influences of the oppressive system and the ruling class and its outlook have gone to work on people who were striving for a radically different world, including among the ranks of those still claiming the banner of revolution and communism.

This is why there was a profound and pressing need for, and why I called for, and have striven to lead, a Cultural Revolution within the Revolutionary Communist Party. This is a struggle that is ongoing, and there is an urgent need to bring forward many new forces to further forge the vanguard force for the revolution that is needed, on the basis of the new communism, to actually carry out the strategy for revolution that I've been speaking to here.

There are lessons that need to be more fully drawn about a vanguard party and the danger of that party being pulled off the revolutionary road, not just when it's in power but also before things reach the point of actually going for the seizure of power, so that by the time you might have been able to work on the objective contradictions to actually have things go toward a revolutionary situation, you don't even have the vanguard force to do that. This is an objective problem. I don't believe it resides in the character of a vanguard party itself. Rather, it is the contradictions of the larger society and world that impinge very significantly within the ranks of that party; and there needs to be a recognition, perhaps more than there has been, at least until recently, of the ways in which this works, in a negative direction, on the character of that party, exerting a strong pull toward going off the revolutionary road. Most essentially, this is not an "institutional" problem where, almost inevitably, the existence and dynamics of an organized institution become "a thing unto itself and for itself"; but there can be the phenomenon where, *on the basis of the goal of revolution being actually abandoned*, instead of the party being an instrument for making revolution, the existence and dynamics of maintaining a party become instead a *substitute* for doing so. And here again the decisive question sharply poses itself: What does a party "reach for" when confronted by the difficulties of the objective situation?—a question that poses itself in a concentrated way for the leading core of such a party. For all these reasons, there needs to be an even greater emphasis on continually replenishing and further amplifying and strengthening the ranks of the revolutionary vanguard by continually bringing in new people, again on the basis of the new communism, as well as continuing, in one form or another, cultural revolutions within that party to keep it on the revolutionary road, to keep it working on hastening while awaiting,

carrying out those “three prepares,” consistently working to bring about, together with the development of the objective factor, the ripening of a revolutionary situation, and then to *seize* on it, *and* do something good with it.

A Radically New Society on the Road to Real Emancipation

I’ve referred many times to the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America*, and there are a number of important principles and methods that are embodied and applied in that *Constitution* as well as in the observations on it in *THE NEW COMMUNISM*. There is the question of, on the one hand, firmly maintaining the dictatorship of the proletariat in the way that I have been discussing that, while, at the same time, applying, in the conditions of socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat, a continuation of the united front and, as a key principle in implementing that, correctly applying the basic methodological approach of “solid core with a lot of elasticity on the basis of the solid core.” Along with that is what’s been referred to as the “parachute point”: the recognition that, even if masses of people come over to the revolutionary position at the time of an acute revolutionary crisis, that doesn’t mean they will all be with you at every point in the protracted process of transforming society toward the goal of communism, ultimately on a world scale.

In the past in the communist movement, there has been sort of an assumption (spoken or unspoken) that, because people are with you at the time of acute revolutionary crisis in the old society, then, once they have had the chance to be rid of capitalism, they would never want to go back to that again—they’ll always be with you, no matter what. But it is very important to recognize—and this recognition is embodied and institutionalized in the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America*—that this will not always be the case. This is owing to all the remaining contradictions that carry over into socialist society and will exert pulls on people toward going back to the old society, as well as the influence of the larger world which may, for some time, still be dominated by imperialist and other reactionary forces. So the parachute analogy—the “parachute point” by analogy—is that at the time of all-out revolution, things tend to “close up,” people tend to rally around a vanguard if it has a program that can actually deal with what masses of people are acutely feeling needs to be dealt with then; but that doesn’t mean they will all be with you in a straight line march all the way to communism after the seizure of power. This goes back to what was highlighted earlier in terms of the profound contradiction that the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic* is dealing with—the contradiction between the fact that the advance to communism is in the objective interests of the masses of humanity but, even in socialist society, not all of the masses want that, all of the time.

This is an extremely important point to grasp, for people involved in a revolution and particularly for people leading that revolution. To go back to the analogy about riding a horse, failing to recognize that people will not all just be marching together with you in a straight line toward communism will lead to one wrong approach or another, either holding the reins too tightly or letting them be too loose—or flipping from one to the other.

And here is another important aspect of the “parachute point”: Lenin made the analysis (and this is spoken to in “On the Possibility of Revolution”) that one of the necessary features of a revolutionary situation—particularly in an imperialist country like the U.S.—is that those he referred to as the weak, half-hearted and vacillating friends of the revolution are revealed to be bankrupt, that the programs of the reformists are shown to be unable to deal with what not just a small number of people, but masses of people, in the millions and millions, are urgently feeling are problems that need to be resolved now. This is a big part of why, in that situation, “the parachute closes up” and people rally around the pole, the organized vanguard, of revolution. But then, even assuming the revolution is actually successful, there unfolds a whole new set of contradictions as well as the reassertion—sometimes in old forms, sometimes in new forms—of previously significant contradictions. And then “the parachute opens out again.” Here again, the principle of “solid core with a lot of elasticity on the basis of the solid core” becomes crucially important.

I also want to touch briefly on the question of abundance and revolution. In the history of the communist movement there has been a sharp struggle over what’s been called the “theory of the productive forces,” the idea, in other words, that to have socialism you have to have highly developed productive forces, in particular highly developed technology, and once you’ve seized power, the key task, therefore, is to develop the economy to strengthen the basis for socialism. This is what prevailed in China after the death of Mao. There was the (in)famous Deng Xiaoping saying that it doesn’t matter if a cat is white or black, as long as it catches mice—meaning, who cares what methods we use as long as we develop the economy, we can use capitalist methods, because if we develop the economy that will provide the material basis for socialism (this is perhaps the “best interpretation” of what Deng Xiaoping was advocating).

Lenin, when he led the Soviet Revolution, was roundly attacked—again for “pushing on” things—for “prematurely” seizing power in a situation where the conditions hadn’t arisen to build socialism, according to his critics. He was accused in political terms of carrying out a putsch rather than a real revolution. And, along with that, a lot of social democrats and others criticized him because they insisted that the conditions didn’t exist for building socialism in the Soviet Union. It was a backward country technologically and economically. I remember someone—one of these veterans of the communist movement from back in the day (it might have been Leibel Bergman whom I’ve referred to in my memoir *From Ike to Mao, and Beyond* ⁴⁸) telling a story about a delegation from Germany that went to the Soviet Union in the 1930s to see what socialism was like.

Well, they were going through the rural areas where they still had outhouses, and one of the people in the German delegation (supposedly a socialist or a communist) was overheard saying, “Socialism is wasted on these people. We have a much more advanced economy.” So there was that kind of “criticism,” and Lenin responded to this line of criticism by saying (this is something I pointed out in *Conquer the World?*): You say we need a certain level of technology for socialism; well, why can’t we first seize power and then develop the technology? “Whoaaa, that’s terrible, it’s a putschist coup, it will lead to horrors,” and so on and so forth—the social democrats and outright bourgeois democrats leaped to attack Lenin in that way.

But, social-democratic opportunists, German so-called communists, etc., notwithstanding, there is a real contradiction here. You do have to develop the productive forces. There is a dialectical relation between that and transforming the relations of production. You can’t just “communize poverty,” as the accusation has been frequently raised. You are not going to emancipate the people by doing that. You can’t transform those “4 Alls” if you don’t bring about the development of the economy with an increasing abundance. If you remain at the point where the masses of people have to spend the bulk of their waking hours working very intensely in physical labor in order to develop the economy, there is no way you’re going to break down the antagonism between mental and manual labor. Anyone who works at any kind of a job, and especially one involving intense physical labor, knows that you’re exhausted by the end of the day, if that’s what you’re doing all day long. And, as long as there are large parts of society that have to engage in that kind of labor, it will tend to reproduce the division, with its potentially antagonistic character, between those who carry out this physical labor and those who are engaged in the intellectual sphere. So this is a critical question: how to correctly handle the dialectical relation between transforming the production relations and developing the productive forces so that you have more of a material basis to overcome the “4 Alls,” including the unequal—and at least potentially oppressive—division of labor in society, particularly that between mental and physical labor.

There is an important discussion of this in *THE NEW COMMUNISM*, as well as in *Birds and Crocodiles*: how to correctly handle this so that revolution advances through stages, within the socialist country itself and in the context of the larger world situation—and, through each stage of this process, actually raises the level of the productive forces and the relative abundance, while at the same time narrowing the differences among people to the greatest degree possible, without overstepping what’s possible given the material basis that exists at that time. That this is another acute contradiction that has to be understood, and first of all has to be recognized, and then you have to go to work on it with a scientific, dialectical materialist approach, including the recognition that you are doing this in a context where your socialist country does not exist as an island unto itself but in a larger world with which you have to interact, including economically. You can’t be absolutely self-sufficient economically, even as you have to be strategically self-sufficient economically, as a socialist country. So this is another important point that is spoken to in the book

THE NEW COMMUNISM and more broadly in the development of the new synthesis of communism.

Finally, there is the whole question of really being *on the road to real emancipation*. I've spoken a great deal about the emancipation of humanity, and here too there is a further advance in communist understanding and orientation. Once again, going back to the Ajith polemic, it is emphasized:

Beneath the apparent simplicity of Avakian's repeated watchword to be "emancipators of humanity" lies a complex, comprehensive, scientific, and profound understanding of contemporary human society and its historical development, the existence of class antagonisms and their material basis and ideological and political reflections, and the possibility and need to transcend class divisions through communist revolution.⁴⁹

In other words, some might say: "Emancipators of humanity—what's the big deal? Marx already talked about that. There's no new synthesis of communism with that." Well, what's spoken to in a concentrated way in this section of the Ajith polemic (which is from Part III. "Class Position and Communist Consciousness," where the point is emphasized that the two are not identical) is a polemic against reification, among other things. The point is being emphasized that the class position of the proletariat (or, more broadly, the social position of oppressed masses) does not automatically and spontaneously lead to communist consciousness. All this is closely related to the point in the "Outline" on the new synthesis where it says:

Epistemology and partisanship. In the relation between being scientific and being partisan, being consistently scientific is principal, and the basis for being, correctly and fully, partisan to the proletarian revolution and its goal of communism.⁵⁰

This relates to everything I was discussing earlier regarding the fundamental question and dividing line of whether you're proceeding scientifically and dealing with reality as it actually is, and the potential within it for transformation in the direction of communism, or whether you've got an idealist notion that you're trying to impose on reality, which will lead to serious errors and, in many cases, to disaster and even to horrors.

The understanding of *why* being consistently scientific is the basis for being correctly and fully partisan to the proletarian revolution and its goal of communism has everything to do with grasping the full meaning of that statement from the Ajith polemic—that there is a great deal of complex, comprehensive scientific understanding concentrated in the call to be "emancipators of humanity." And, in turn, this has everything to do with what is concentrated in the statement that, "Everything that is actually true is good for the proletariat, all truths can help us get to

communism.”

The goal of this revolution is not revenge and the reversal of the positions of oppressed and oppressor (“the last shall be first, and the first shall be last”). Here it is very relevant to refer to a statement by Lenin who said that all those who approach revolution with the orientation, “They had their chance, now it’s my turn to have a go at it”—all those who approach revolution in that way do so from the point of view of the petite bourgeoisie. And it hardly needs saying that the approach of the petite bourgeoisie is not going to lead to the achievement of the “4 Alls” and the emancipation of humanity. Even though at times the practical/political Lenin got in the way of the philosophical Lenin, in the sense discussed earlier, this is a very important statement by Lenin, because what he refers to as the point of view of the petite bourgeoisie is a powerful spontaneous pull, even on people who are not in the petite bourgeoisie. You see it over and over again—the goal becomes revenge, it becomes something short of transforming all of society. It becomes, “get mine if I can, or if I can’t, at least I can tear somebody else down.” That’s very pronounced in this society, particularly at this time, and even struggles which are dealing with very real and profound contradictions and relations of oppression can be turned toward that kind of outlook and approach by the powerful pull of spontaneity and the prevailing relations in this society.

This goes back to the point that even movements which start out highlighting very important outrages and injustices, and carrying out struggle against them, can only continue to go in the direction they need to go in, ultimately—and all these different forces in society that are opposing various forms of oppression can only be united in a lasting and forward moving way—on the basis of a scientific communist approach and what it reveals to be the solution to the profound problems that the present society embodies and enforces. With the outlook of the petite bourgeoisie you’re never going to get there. What is needed is—in a non-reified sense, in the communist sense—the outlook of the proletariat, the outlook and approach that corresponds to the fundamental interests of the proletariat, which involves the recognition that only by emancipating all of humanity can any one section of the exploited and oppressed be emancipated.

In contrast to narrow and petty motivations and aspirations for things such as revenge and “my turn to have a go at it,” the goal of the communist revolution is, as emphasized in *THE NEW COMMUNISM*, “getting to a different world where all these horrors for the masses of people don’t go on any longer.”⁵¹ The goal is the emancipation of humanity—the abolition of all exploitation and oppression, and the corresponding antagonisms among human beings, and the uprooting of the soil out of which they arise, with the achievement of communism, throughout the world.

Grasping, on the scientific basis of communism—beginning with the historic breakthrough by Marx, and with the further breakthrough embodied in the new synthesis of communism—the necessity and the possibility for this most radical revolution in human history: this should lead to a

passionate commitment to work actively and tirelessly to make this a reality. As I emphasized in *THE NEW COMMUNISM*: “This is our responsibility to the masses of people of the world who are suffering so terribly—and, what makes it all the worse, suffering so unnecessarily.”⁵²

Notes

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- [38.](#) Revolutionary Communist Organization, Mexico (OCR), “Communism or Nationalism?” *Demarcations: A Journal of Communist Theory and Polemic*, Issue Number 4, Winter 2015. Available at demarcations-journal.org and revcom.us.
- [39.](#) Avakian, *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, Part 2: “Everything We’re Doing Is About Revolution” begins with the following six paragraphs:

“Enriched What Is To Be Done-ism”

Hastening while awaiting—not bowing down to necessity

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

I spoke earlier about the outlook and approach of revisionist “determinist realism”*** which, among other things, involves a passive approach to objective reality (or necessity), which sees the objective factor as purely objective—and purely “external,” if you will—and doesn’t grasp the living dialectical relation between the objective and subjective factors and the ability of the latter (the subjective factor—the conscious actions of people) to react back on and to transform the former (the objective factor—the objective conditions). In other words, this “determinist realism” doesn’t grasp the essential orientation, and possibility, of transforming necessity into freedom. It doesn’t really, or fully, grasp the contradictoriness of all of reality, including the necessity that one is confronted with at any given time. So, one of the essential features of “determinist realism” is that it dismisses as “voluntarism” any dialectical grasp of the relation between the subjective and objective

factors, and sees things in very linear, undifferentiated ways, as essentially uniform and without contradiction, rather than in a living and dynamic and moving and changing way.

Of course, it *is* necessary not to fall into voluntarism. There are many different ways in which such voluntarism can be expressed, leading to various kinds of (usually “ultra-left”) errors and deviations, if you will—including in the form of giving in to infantile or adventurist impulses—all of which is also extremely harmful. But—particularly in a protracted or prolonged situation in which the objective conditions for revolution (that is, for the all-out struggle to seize power) have not yet emerged—by far the much greater danger, and one that is reinforced by this objective situation, is this kind of determinist realism which doesn’t grasp correctly the dialectical relation between the objective and subjective factors, and sees them in static, undialectical, and unchanging terms.

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

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

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

So that is a point of basic orientation in terms of applying materialism, *and dialectics*, in hastening while awaiting the emergence of a revolutionary situation. It's not just that, in some abstract moral sense, it's better to hasten than just await—though, of course, it is—but this has to do with a dynamic understanding of the motion and development of material reality and the interpenetration of different contradictions, and the truth that, as Lenin emphasized, all boundaries in nature and society, while real, are conditional and relative, not absolute. (Mao also emphasized this same basic principle in pointing out that, since the range of things is vast and things are interconnected, what's universal in one context is particular in another.) The application of this principle to what is being discussed here underlines that it is *only relatively*, and not absolutely, that the objective conditions are “objective” for us—they are, but not in absolute terms. And, along with this, what is external to a given situation *can become internal*, as a result of the motion—and changes that are brought about through the motion—of contradictions. So, if you are looking at things only in a linear way, then you only see the possibilities that are straight ahead—you have a kind of blinders on. On the other hand, if you have a correct, dialectical materialist approach, you recognize that many things can happen that are unanticipated, and you have to be constantly tense to that possibility while consistently working to transform necessity into freedom. So, again, that is a basic point of orientation.

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

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