

A REFLECTION ON THE “OCCUPY” MOVEMENT:

AN INSPIRING BEGINNING... AND THE NEED TO GO FURTHER

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

The main—and, up to this point at least, the overwhelming—aspect of these “Occupy” protests has been their very positive thrust: in mobilizing people to stand up against injustice and inequality and the domination of economic, social and political life, and international relations, by a super-rich elite class whose interests are in opposition to those of the great majority of people; and in contributing in significant ways to an atmosphere in which people are raising and wrangling with big questions about the state of society and the world and whether and how something much better can be brought into being. It will be a very good thing if these protests continue to spread and further develop, with this basic thrust and this positive impact. And these “Occupy” protests can be a significant positive factor in contributing to the revolution that is needed—IF this is approached, by those with the necessary scientific communist understanding, in accordance with that understanding and the strategic orientation and approach that flows from it.

At the same time, and in keeping with this understanding, it is also very important, indeed crucial, to compellingly make the case, for broad and growing numbers of people (both those who are involved in these protests and people more generally), that the idea (or ideal), which at this point has considerable currency among many involved in or supportive of these protests—that a “horizontal” (as opposed to a

“hierarchical”) movement can in itself serve as a means of major social change and perhaps even a model of a different society—this idea (or ideal) does not and cannot measure up to the reality of what is actually required to fundamentally uproot and transform a society, and indeed a world, marked by and grounded in profound inequalities and relations of oppression and exploitation, within every country and in the domination by a handful of powerful, imperial powers over the great majority of countries in the world and the great mass of humanity. To uproot and transform all this requires nothing less than an unprecedented revolution: a radical overturning of the entrenched, and violently repressive, ruling forces and imperial powers who now dominate human social existence, and the deep-seated economic, social and political relations of exploitation and oppression of which they are the embodiment and enforcers. And to achieve such a radical overturning and transforming requires a scientific approach to the strategic orientation, program, and organization that is actually required for the revolution that is really needed.

This revolution is necessary not only in order to deal with the basic, and antagonistic, relation in which the masses of people are ruled over by an exploiting class representing a small part of society, but also in order to transform the relations between different sections of the people themselves—including the transformation

of the contradiction between those who (primarily) engage in physical labor and those who (primarily) engage in intellectual labor (the mental/manual contradiction)—in such a way that these relations no longer involve oppression and no longer contain the seeds of antagonism. Without such a revolution, even very positive developments, such as what is represented, in its main thrust and content, by the “Occupy” protests, will ultimately run into their limits. Such a movement cannot be extended linearly, and in its present form, into the radical change that is fundamentally needed. As with very positive movements in the past (including the very broad and very radical movements of the 1960s), left to their own spontaneous course (that is, without the necessary process of revolutionary communists uniting with and working to build these struggles but also working to provide direction to divert things onto a more fully and consciously revolutionary path) these movements, even while they can involve truly large numbers of people and have a very positive impact, will eventually be repressed and/or dissipated, and/or brought under the domination of the ruling class, in one form or another—unless masses of people involved in them are won to, become firmly convinced of, the need to develop the struggle further, into a movement for revolution, with the necessary understanding and organization—yes, including the necessary



Photo: Li Onesto/Revolution

Occupy Wall Street demonstration at Zuccotti Park, New York City.

structure and leadership—that is required to finally sweep away this system and bring into being a radically new system with the aim of ultimately abolishing all exploitation and oppression.

In fact, as positive as things like the “Occupy” protests are, and despite the sincere intent and efforts of a great many involved in them, they cannot fundamentally provide the means for “equal participation” by people from different parts of society, since the very nature and functioning of the capitalist-imperialist system—in its historical development in this country, down to the present time, and in its international relations of exploitation, oppression, plunder and depredation—results in a situation where, within U.S. society itself (and in an even more pronounced way on an international level), there are profound and deeply rooted inequalities between different sections of people, which cannot be overcome within the framework and confines of this system and its fundamental relations and dynamics. Along with oppressive divisions based on race (or nationality), gender and sexual orientation, there are, within this society, significant differences in economic and social position. There are layers of people who are part of what is broadly referred to as the “middle class” and who generally occupy a more privileged position, in terms of access to education (and the whole realm of working with ideas), better-paying jobs and the benefits that go along with this, and a life relatively free of constant and intense repression, so long as they do not “step out of line,” and yet they are subordinated to and, yes, dictated to by the ruling class of this country and, especially in these times, they find the quality of their lives and their prospects for the future significantly demeaned and diminished and many feel increasingly acute anger and disgust at basic inequalities, injustices and outrages which are in fact built into and expressive of the very fabric and nature of this system. At the same time, there are tens of millions, especially among those in the inner cities and the immigrants, who are deeply discriminated against and heavily weighed down under this system, which subjects them to the most profound and bitter exploitation, oppression and repression, binding them in chains which, in ultimate and fundamental terms, can only be broken by shattering the grip of this system and fully dismantling its apparatus of violent repression. As is demonstrated in the “Occupy” movement, there is a basis for a broad unity among these different sections of the people—in opposition to many of the manifestations of the oppressive and

truly murderous nature of this system, and in a basic searching for a better way that human beings could relate to each other—but that unity cannot eliminate nor cancel out the reality and the effects of the profound inequalities that are so deeply rooted in this system and will continue to have force and effect so long as this system remains in power and its relations and dynamics set the fundamental and ultimate terms for things. This is yet another expression of the fact that nothing short of revolution, with a leadership grounded in a communist understanding and orientation, can fully penetrate to the depths of, let alone uproot, the relations that oppress and divide masses of people.

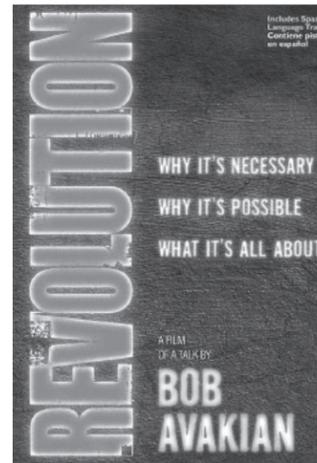
While uniting with the basic and very positive thrust of the “Occupy” protests; while continuing to work to broaden and deepen them; and while learning as much as can be learned from the already rich experience of these protests and the initiative and creativity, as well as determination, shown by many involved in them, it is crucial to influence and win more and more people to seriously engage with the scientific communist understanding and orientation—particularly as this is embodied in the outlook and strategic approach of our Party, the RCP, and in a concentrated way in the new synthesis of communism that I have brought forward over the past few decades and that I am continuing to work to further develop. For, once more, as emphasized in the first supplement in *Basics*,* this is not “our thing,” in some narrow and sectarian sense—it is what, in accordance with the deepest reality, is required to end the outrages and injustices continually perpetrated by this system, and the horrendous suffering to which this continually subjects the great majority of humanity, and to bring into being a radically new and better society and world.

Once again, this understanding is crucial not only in an overall and basic sense, but also more specifically in relation—in opposition—to the idea of a “leaderless revolution” and related concepts, which are not in accord with the reality that must be confronted and transformed, in order to truly achieve the kind of world that many in the “Occupy” movement are searching and struggling for. □

* “Reform or Revolution, Questions of Orientation, Questions of Morality,” supplement of Chapter 1, “Worldwide System of Exploitation and Oppression,” *Basics*, from the talks and writings of Bob Avakian (Chicago: RCP Publications, 2011), pages 25-32. Originally published in *Revolution* #32, January 29, 2006, and available online at revcom.us/a/032/avakian-reform-or-revolution.

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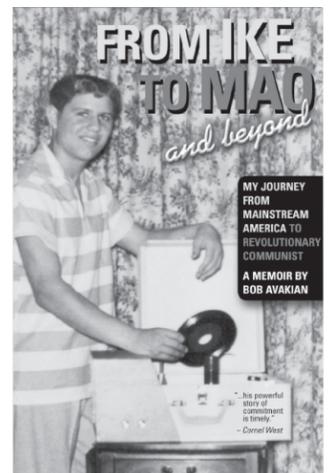
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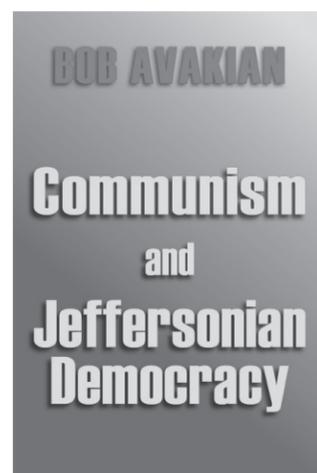
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