

**Polemical Reflections on Bernard D'Mello's Essay "What Is Maoism?"**

## **Scientifically Comprehending, Firmly Upholding, and Going Beyond Maoism for a New Stage of Communism**

By K.J.A.

Bernard D'Mello has opened up important questions for discussion with his article "What Is Maoism?" in the pages of the *Economic and Political Weekly [EPW]*. The essay aims to identify Mao's specific and qualitative contributions, Mao's "*differentiae specifica*" to use D'Mello's term, and thereby delineate its contours as a coherent theory and locate and situate this within the larger stream of communism. D'Mello strives to proceed from the standpoint of what will free those at the bottom of society. The *EPW* article is part of a collection titled *What Is Maoism and Other Essays*, edited and introduced by D'Mello.<sup>1</sup> The introduction begins, "This book is motivated by a desire to rekindle an imagination of socialism that brings to the fore the emancipation and fulfillment of the basic human needs of the most exploited, the most oppressed, and the most dominated on this earth."

The publication of this essay in one of India's leading progressive intellectual journals is significant at this moment – when the Indian state is engaged in a coordinated campaign of terror against the revolutionary and Maoist movement, dedicating military and paramilitary forces to destroy the movement, hunting down and extra-judicially assassinating leaders, unleashing vicious repression against all perceived to be supportive of the Maoists, arming reactionary thugs to terrorize areas that support the movement, including with wanton rape and murder, and spreading disinformation and slander through official channels and the mainstream media. Imperialist powers have applauded this campaign of terror, including dispensing with the obligatory protestations about human rights violations.

It is in the context of these attacks that a section of the intelligentsia, including, in addition to D'Mello, the celebrated novelist and essayist Arundhati Roy, have bravely opposed state repression, and firmly rejected the narrative and labels of "terrorism" applied to the Maoist movement in that country. They see the banner of Maoism in India deeply associated with opposition to unbridled capitalist globalization, and the just and righteous rebellion of the most viciously oppressed and downtrodden section of the masses, such as the tribal Adivasis, invisible to mainstream official society – when not despised by it.

This discussion of Maoism is also taking place in the context of a world of horrors, of howling and growing inequalities – and of nascent possibilities, manifest in recent mass social upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East or in the Occupy Wall Street phenomenon in the U.S. and similar movements in a number of other countries.

It is important that at this juncture of world history some are again investigating Maoism and revolutionary communism. What does one make of the history of the communist revolutions of the 20th century? Can Marxism be considered a valid science? Does communism represent the path by which humanity can achieve emancipation? This is the context in which Maoism has attracted

attention – not merely as an academic exercise but in the spirit of Marx's Eleventh Theses on Feuerbach, "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world; the point however is to *change* it," invoked by D'Mello himself.<sup>2</sup>

This renewed discussion of Maoism is no doubt very positive. But exactly because of the importance of what is at stake for the future of the revolutionary and international communist movement it is crucial to thoroughly examine the contents of these arguments. Without making demarcations – between communism as a living, critical and revolutionary science serving the emancipation of humanity, on one hand, and programs that cannot lead to emancipation on the other – it will not be possible to achieve the requisite understanding and clarity to radically change the world. What may seem to be abstract questions of theory today foreshadow crucial questions that will be posed in the practical political struggle on the horizon.

### **D'Mello's Definition of Maoism**

D'Mello's central conclusion, and his central error about which I will have more to say below, is that Mao was a "radical democrat." His conclusion is also consistent with the "specific features" that D'Mello identifies as Maoism. They are, in D'Mello's words:

- "the poor peasantry of the interior of a backward capitalist/semi-feudal society rather than the urban proletariat constitute the mass support base of the movement;
- theory of revolution by stages as well as uninterrupted revolution, implying a close link between successive stages;
- the stage of NDR [New Democratic Revolution], which makes capitalism much more compatible with democracy, thereby aiding the transition to socialism;
- the path and strategy of PPW [Protracted People's War], which relies on the peasants, builds rural base areas, carries out 'land to the tiller' and other social policies in these areas (run democratically as miniature, self-reliant states) thereby building up a political mass base in the countryside to finally encircle and capture the cities;
- the conception of 'base areas' and the way to establishing them;
- 'capturing' (winning mass support in) the cities by demonstrating a brand of nationalism that is genuinely anti-imperialist, thereby re-orienting an existing mass nationalist upsurge (as during the anti-Japanese resistance, 1937-45 in China) in favor of the completion of the NDR;
- democratic centralism *plus* the 'mass line,' ensuring that 'democracy' doesn't take a backseat to 'centralism' and making sure the people are involved in policy making and its implementation;
- the central idea that contradictions – the struggle between functionally united opposites – at each stage drive the process of development on the way to socialism, which is sought to be brought about in a series of stages, where the existing stage, at the right time, is impregnated with the hybrid seeds of the subsequent one, thereby dissolving the salient contradictions of the former and ushering in the latter;
- open-ended interrelations among and between the forces of production, the relations of production, and the superstructure; and
- the idea that political, managerial, and bureaucratic power-holders entrench themselves as a ruling elite and, over a period of time, assume the position of a new exploiting class, and that the people have to be constantly mobilized to struggle against this tendency."<sup>3</sup>

D'Mello's list suffers from his fundamental inability to understand, situate and evaluate Mao as a *revolutionary communist*. D'Mello wraps what he understands to be Mao's contributions in a package whereby Mao is reduced to a peasant-based democrat, a kind of populist, acting in the interests of the masses and always ready to listen to them (this is D'Mello's interpretation of the

"mass line" as presented in the article, which we will return to later). There is conflation of the necessary revolutionary process that Mao led (the new democratic revolution) and the features of building rural base areas, basing oneself on the peasantry, etc., and the ideology that Mao represented and which he sought to imprint as the guiding line and orientation of the whole revolutionary process. Even when D'Mello may appear to be circling close to Mao's most essential contribution, for example his concern about a new "ruling elite" and the need to mobilize the people against it, the "radical democratic" wrapping leads D'Mello away from a correct and scientific understanding of classes and class struggle as they exist under socialism. For example, D'Mello targets the entrenched "ruling elite" instead of what Mao termed "capitalist roaders" and "the bourgeoisie in the party." In fact, this kind of classless characterization of "ruling elite" can easily dovetail with the common anti-communist criticism of a communist vanguard or even of Mao himself supposedly as part of such a "ruling elite." The real question is this: which line and whose political representatives dominate, what policies and transformations will take place, and thus, fundamentally, which class holds power?

We can see a stark contrast between the way in which D'Mello recasts Mao as a radical democrat (actually imposing his own world view on Mao) and a scientific study of the material, political and ideological contradictions of socialist society. The continuing inequalities and divisions characteristic of class society, including hitherto existing socialist society as a society in transition, still require that some persons will have a "disproportionate influence" in relation to the masses as a whole. Under socialism there is still a contradiction between "leaders and the led" that contains the possibility of being transformed into a contradiction between exploiters and exploited. These are some of the questions that Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, has been examining repeatedly and from many angles for four decades.<sup>4</sup> Avakian's new synthesis of communism charts out a pathway for how these contradictions can be overcome in recurring waves and amid a complex process through which the proletarian revolution will advance. D'Mello's wrong and simplistic notions of "radical democracy" cannot actually address the real contradictions that make a state, a vanguard and leaders necessary for a whole historical period, and how, through all-around revolution, these contradictions can be overcome.

A real examination of Maoism must necessarily have as its center Mao's theory of "continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat" and the practice led by this theory (especially the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution). Such an examination was a crucial part of forging the new synthesis. Avakian's new synthesis encompasses and recasts Mao's theses on "continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat" and provides a basic orientation to how a communist vanguard can "do even better" in leading the masses to transform society in the direction of the communist future. D'Mello's repackaging of Maoism as "radical democracy" would rob the proletariat of crucial lessons that Mao was able to draw. It does not lead ahead but is a big retreat into the past.

D'Mello ends his essay with a call:

"... given the *radical* democratic streak running from Marx to Mao, the best thing that Maoism could do is to commit to the promise of radical democracy; after all, while it is true that there cannot be liberty in any meaningful sense without equality, for the rich will certainly be more 'free' (have more options) than the poor, so there cannot be equality without liberty, for then some may have more political power than others.

"So far, all revolutions inspired by Marx have only enjoyed the support or participation of a significant minority. Can the commitment to *radical* democracy up the tide to get the help of the majority? Will the means then be carefully chosen so that they never come to overwhelm the

socialist aspiration?"<sup>5</sup>

D'Mello reads Maoism as trying "to enrich the democratic process in the Leninist vanguard party, the mass organizations, and the society." Repeatedly he asserts that Maoism "has its roots in Marx who was, above all, a radical democrat" and warns "that which is not democratic cannot be socialist."

Calls for democracy, for radical democracy, for an immediate "equality of political power," converge and resonate deeply with the dominant currency of the day. Everywhere one looks, including in radical social movements, freedom and emancipation are conceived within the framework, the horizons and the language of equality and democracy – largely seen as the establishment and global extension of a radical egalitarianism.

In a world of crushing inequalities, this is understandable; but in order to understand why "democracy" is being dusted off and repackaged as communism and to understand the danger of this orientation, it is necessary to step back further and situate D'Mello's reading of Maoism and his political project, as concentrated in the call above, in today's historical moment and the current juncture of communism.

### **End of a Stage, Beginning of a New Stage**

There has been no socialist country in the world since the defeat of socialism in China in 1976 following the death of Mao and the restoration of capitalism led by Deng Xiaoping. That defeat marked the end of the first wave of communist revolutions and socialist societies – which began with the short-lived Paris Commune in 1871; followed by the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 led by Lenin, and the establishment of the Soviet Union as a socialist society (from 1917 till the mid-fifties, when Khrushchev restored capitalism); and the victory of the Chinese revolution of 1949 and the construction of socialist society led by Mao till his death in 1976. This historical experience of the first attempts at proletarian revolution to emancipate humanity, along with qualitative advances and developments in communist theory from Marx and Engels through Lenin and Mao, not only greatly improved the conditions for hundreds of millions of people, it established and charted new and radical pathways to a radically different and better world.<sup>6</sup>

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China was the pinnacle of this revolutionary experience of the first stage of communist revolutions and socialist societies. Underlying the GPCR was Mao's theoretical analysis of the contradictions continually characterizing the socialist transition and that constantly pose the question of advancing on the socialist road or retreating onto the capitalist road. Tumultuous in nature, the Cultural Revolution had the task of defeating the capitalist roaders in China but, as Mao stressed,<sup>7</sup> it had an even greater goal: to transform people's world outlook, reaching into all aspects of society and touching people to their souls, as a central part of carrying forward the further revolutionization of all aspects of society. It was during this great revolution that Marxism-Leninism-Maoism fully emerged and was recognized by the Communist Party of China as "a new and higher stage" of revolutionary communism (although at the time communists in China and throughout the world used the term Mao Tsetung Thought). After a decade of heroic struggle and radical transformations, the GPCR ended with Mao's death in 1976 and the subsequent counter-revolutionary coup d'état that put the capitalist-roaders back in power and opened the flood gates to the rapid restoration of capitalism by the new rulers led by Deng Xiaoping.

Since the restoration of capitalism in China after 1976, and escalating even further after the collapse

of the revisionist and social-imperialist Soviet Union and its bloc in the late eighties, we have also seen three decades of relentless counter-revolution, an "anything goes" slander and distortion of these socialist experiences as part of a broader ideological offensive by guardians of the imperialist world order. This ideological offensive has targeted Mao's further development of the whole ensemble of revolutionary communism to the stage of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. All of this has also resulted in lowered sights among revolutionary, radical, and progressive forces, a belief that a radically different world is impossible and maybe not even desirable. Acceptance of the material and ideological fundamentals of the world *as it is* is the unspoken and (sometimes at least) unconscious given, even among those who are truly horrified by these injustices in the world. In a sense, *whether we know it or not, we all suffer from the loss of revolutionary China, the defeat of that experience and the lack of a living example of a genuinely socialist state and society fighting to advance in the direction of communism.*

The end of this stage has surfaced big questions: how does one evaluate this stage and sum up this rich experience of proletarian revolution, its achievements and its shortcomings? These questions will objectively confront any individual or force examining how to radically change society. Is communist society an achievable and desirable goal? And if so, how to go forward and usher in a new stage of communist revolution? D'Mello's article needs to be seen in this light.

*Communism: The Beginning of a New Stage – A Manifesto from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA* presents the following framework of evaluation and summation of the historical experience of the 20th century revolutions:

"The first stage of the communist revolution went a long way, and achieved incredibly inspiring things, in fighting to overcome the very real obstacles it faced and to advance toward a world where all relations of exploitation and oppression would be finally eliminated and people would enjoy a whole new dimension of freedom and would undertake the organization and continuing transformation of society, throughout the world, with a conscious and voluntary initiative unprecedented in history. But, not surprisingly, there were also shortcomings and real errors, sometimes very serious ones, both in the practical steps that were taken by those leading these revolutions and the new societies they brought forth, and in their conceptions and methods. These shortcomings and errors were not the cause of the defeats of the initial attempts at communist revolution, but they did contribute, even if secondarily, to that defeat; and, beyond that, this whole experience of the first stage – with both its truly inspiring achievements and its very real, at times very serious, even if overall secondary, errors and shortcomings – must be learned from deeply and all-sidedly, in order to carry forward the communist revolution in the new situation that has to be confronted, and to do even better this time."<sup>8</sup>

Bob Avakian has been doing precisely this, and has developed an extensive body of work that sifts through and studies these questions scientifically, doing the hard work of identifying strengths and limitations in the methods and approach previously employed by the communist movement, repeatedly going back and excavating these experiences further and examining them in different ways so we can do better the next time around, all resulting in a radical re-envisioning of the socialist transition. This re-envisioning of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the socialist transition to communism, is a central part of a new synthesis of communism, the theoretical framework for the new stage of communist revolutions.

In opposition to the new synthesis of Avakian there have been two "mirror opposite" responses from some of those who have been part of the international communist movement.

*The first response* is a conception of communism which clings largely uncritically, in a quasi-religious and dogmatic way, to previous socialist experience and communist theory, or at least sections of it, rejecting a scientific approach to summing up the past and further advancing communist theory.

*The second response* openly rejects Marxism, or renders it unrecognizable, and reaches back to the 18th century and the proclaimed democratic and egalitarian ideals and social models of the emerging bourgeois epoch, to philosophers and political theorists like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Jefferson. In some cases, they discard the very term communism; in other cases, they affix the label "communism" to a political project that situates itself firmly within the bounds of bourgeois-democratic principles.

Such forces reject real scientific analysis of the contradictions of the socialist transition, and applying bourgeois-democratic criteria, distance themselves from the unprecedented breakthroughs in human emancipation represented by the Bolshevik and Chinese revolutions. In the main, the second conception buys into the bourgeois verdict that the socialist societies in the Soviet Union and China in the 20th century were essentially bureaucratic, authoritarian, and fatally flawed – and rejects what some of its adherents term the "party-state" framework, that is, the need to seize state power and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat as the transition to communism, and the need for the leadership of a vanguard party throughout this whole process.

Among intellectual observers and scholars of the communist movement like D'Mello, it is far more often the second erroneous summation, in short the "bourgeois democratic" rejection or reinterpretation of Marxism, that predominates. But as the *Manifesto from the RCP* explains, each of these two responses constitutes a kind of "mirror opposite" of the other, and it is not unusual to see one error flip over into the other, usually dogmatism turning into old-fashioned revisionism and social democracy. We will examine further in the course of this article how some of the long-standing political and methodological errors within the Maoist movement created a basis for the kind of "Maoism" that D'Mello feels he has discovered and which can exist symbiotically with a more dogmatic, but equally erroneous, "Maoism" that has also existed internationally.

One area where the dogmatism of some can marry with the social democracy of others can be seen in the tendency to reduce "Maoism" to simply a prescription for waging people's war in a third World country and not scientifically grasp or appreciate Mao's greatest contribution, his deeper understanding of socialism as a society *in transition* toward communism and his path-breaking analysis concerning the danger of and the basis for capitalist restoration in socialist society and his struggle to prevent it. As the *Manifesto from the RCP* points out, even among those who uphold the Cultural Revolution in China, those tending to the "mirror opposites" often "lack any real or profound understanding of why this Cultural Revolution was necessary and with what principles and objectives Mao initiated and led this Cultural Revolution." There are many different variations of composite errors that can come from the "mirror opposites." In D'Mello's case, "Maoism" is re-fashioned as a package of an overarching radical democracy plus the theory of people's war, a thesis that stands in stark opposition to *genuine* communism, as qualitatively advanced and brought to a new juncture by Maoism (or more accurately put, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism), and since then recast and further scientifically advanced with Avakian's new synthesis. These are the two packages in contention, the core of our dispute with D'Mello.

## **Radical Democracy or Scientific Communism**

In contrast to the approach of D'Mello and many others like him who look back to the bourgeois

ideals of the 18th century, re-framing even communism as radical democracy, those who seek a truly revolutionary transformation should insist upon a thoroughly scientific approach to the first stage of communist revolutions, not from bourgeois-democratic criteria and notions of legitimacy but from the standpoint of the real contradictions faced in transforming society and advancing to communism. The achievements and shortcomings in practice and conception must be seen from this perspective.

Today it is necessary and possible to consider the whole sweep of the first stage of communist revolution and the theory which led it precisely in relation to achieving the communist goal. Marx defined the communist project this way:

"This socialism is the *declaration of the permanence of the revolution*, the *class dictatorship* of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the *abolition of all class distinctions generally*, of all the production relations on which those class distinctions rest, of all the social relations that correspond to those production relations, and the revolutionizing of all the ideas that correspond to those social relations."<sup>9</sup> During the Cultural Revolution in China the revolutionaries led by Mao adopted the shorthand term the "4 Alls" to describe the historical tasks and sweep of the proletarian revolution.

It is on the basis of scientifically assessing the first stage in relation to achieving the Four Alls, as well as incorporating new experiences and advances in thinking from other spheres of human endeavor such as science and culture, that Avakian's new synthesis has advanced the science of communism beyond Maoism, representing both continuity and rupture with what we have called Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. The *Manifesto from the RCP* puts it this way: "The new synthesis of Bob Avakian embodies a continuation of Mao's ruptures with Stalin but also in some aspects a rupture beyond the ways in which Mao himself was influenced, even though secondarily, by what had become the dominant mode of thinking in the communist movement under the leadership of Stalin."

As Avakian has expressed it, communism is an *integral philosophy and political theory* at the same time as it is a *living critical and continuously developing science*. It is not the quantitative addition of the ideas of the individuals who have played a leading role in developing it (nor is it the case that every particular idea, policy or tactic adopted by them has been without error). "Communist ideology is a synthesis of the development and especially the qualitative breakthroughs that communist theory had developed since the founding by Marx up to the present time."<sup>10</sup>

### **Mao's Immortal Contributions**

Mao stood for *revolution*, an all-the-way-revolution that would lead society beyond the nightmare of class exploitation. In order to carry this revolution forward Mao needed to rupture with important elements in the practice, methods and thinking of communists, especially those focused to an important degree in the leadership of Joseph Stalin in the USSR following the death of Lenin. Mao not only had to combat the revisionists in the USSR who seized power after Stalin's death, he had to grapple with the laws of socialist society that made such a reversal possible and to develop the means to prevent it. He also faced a series of struggles within China itself with various other leaders of the Communist Party who were proposing policies and an approach similar to what Khrushchev had carried out in the USSR, lines which, Mao understood, would lead society back to capitalism. As the *Manifesto from the RCP* puts it, "Contradictions within the economic base, in the superstructure, and in the relation between base and superstructure of the socialist countries themselves, as well as the influence, pressure, and outright attacks from the remaining imperialist and reactionary states at any given time, would give rise to class differences and class struggle

within a socialist country; these contradictions would constantly pose the possibility of society being led on either the socialist or the capitalist road, and more specifically would *repeatedly regenerate an aspiring bourgeois class*, within socialist society itself, which would find its most concentrated expression among those within the Communist Party, and particularly at its highest levels, who adopted revisionist lines and policies, which in the name of communism would actually accommodate to imperialism and lead things back to capitalism."<sup>11</sup> Mao came to understand on a higher level the relation between beating back attempts to overthrow proletarian rule and further transforming society toward the communist future. This theoretical understanding went hand in hand with Mao's leadership in, as the Chinese Communist Party put it, "continuing the revolution under conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat."<sup>12</sup> His daring launching of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was aimed at preventing capitalist restoration and at advancing socialist transformation. While this was Mao's central contribution to communist revolution in theory and practice, it necessarily involved all aspects of the revolutionary communist science. In particular, even as Mao correctly upheld Stalin as a proletarian revolutionary, he also had to confront and sharply criticize much of Stalin's methodology as well as concrete policies during the period of the construction of socialism in the USSR. Criticizing what he called Stalin's "metaphysics," Mao gave renewed emphasis to the conscious dynamic role of people in the revolutionary process, and raised the understanding of dialectical materialism to a whole new level. In so doing Mao went up against much of the entrenched thinking of the communists in China and worldwide.

Even when Mao was alive there were conflicting understandings about whether or not he represented a rupture with previous communist thinking and, if so, what this rupture represented. Today, when re-examining Maoism, this takes on all the more importance. There were some who failed to see or accept Mao's rupture, seeing instead only that he continued upon the path of Lenin and Stalin. Others at most begrudgingly accepted that Mao, benefiting from historical experience, made minor "course adjustments." They failed to understand or opposed that Mao also had to *go against* significant wrong thinking and wrong methodology of the previous communist movement, especially manifested under Stalin's leadership.

The other side of the coin was represented by those who wanted to strip their repackaged "Maoism" of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and especially the leading role of a vanguard communist party. Such people had a bourgeois-democratic reading of Mao's Cultural Revolution, seeing it as an assault on the "party-state" "apparatus" and "paradigm," rather than a life-and-death struggle to keep revolutionary China and the very real dictatorship of the proletariat, led by a genuine communist party, advancing on the socialist road. There were forces and individuals, especially but not only in the imperialist countries, who recognized Mao's rupture with Stalin but gave this a social-democratic interpretation, mistakenly viewing Mao as having made a kind of *departure* from the dictatorship of the proletariat and the leadership of a vanguard communist party. These forces tended to accept the bourgeois consensus that the problems in the USSR under Stalin's leadership were his "authoritarian" and "iron-fisted" leadership (often slandered as personal dictatorship) when, to the extent that Stalin did mishandle contradictions among the people or suppress dissent and criticism, these errors stemmed most fundamentally from a deeper failure to correctly grasp the dynamics of the contradictions in socialist society.<sup>13</sup>

There were many who shared one or the other of these misinterpretations but who mainly saw in Mao a kind of third world populist whose contribution remained restricted to his answers to how to make revolution in the countries oppressed by imperialism and held in backward conditions due to feudalism, especially his theory of protracted people's war.<sup>1</sup>

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i This kind of understanding shared much in common with the line of Lin Biao, at one time officially designated

When the coup in China took place in 1976, Mao's most prominent followers, known as the "Gang of Four," including his widow Jiang Qing<sup>14</sup> and the outstanding leader and theoretician Zhang Chunqiao,<sup>15</sup> were arrested by the new revisionist rulers and made the target of a vilification campaign. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution had been, according to those who had taken over in China, a criminal folly. The basic theses that Mao had developed, and most especially his thesis on continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat, were systematically assaulted. Most of the international Maoist movement at the time was either incapable or unwilling to scientifically examine what was going on in China. Even among those who did not accept the new Chinese leaders' open reconciliation with the U.S.-led imperialist bloc, few combated the actual theoretical assault mounted by the revisionist usurpers, and they often opposed or were incapable of recognizing the centrality or the importance of Mao's thesis of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>ii</sup> Instead such people fell back on the litmus test of protracted people's war or other one-sided or wrong criteria.

In sharp distinction to all this was the systematic and comprehensive answer given by Bob Avakian to the question of what Maoism represented. His book *Mao's Immortal Contributions*<sup>16</sup> was written in the immediate aftermath of Mao's death and the counter-revolutionary coup directed against Mao's closest supporters and, in a broader sense, against the proletariat and revolutionary masses. Mao's Immortal Contributions systematizes Mao's main developments to the revolutionary science in the fields of political economy, philosophy, strategy and tactics, revolutionary warfare, the party, and other spheres.<sup>17</sup> Avakian gave particular attention to Mao's central and most important contribution, his thesis of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat and the leadership of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution led on the basis of this understanding. Avakian drew deeply from the works of Mao and those written by the revolutionary headquarters in China, which the Chinese party under Mao's leadership had translated into numerous languages and distributed broadly. Nevertheless it is to be noted that how rare were those who really sought out and built upon what Mao and his followers had bequeathed to the world's revolutionaries, and how shallow or outright wrong much of the understanding of the Maoists at the time was when the movement was confronted with by far its greatest test: the loss of China as a bastion of proletarian revolution, its capitalist transformation, and the all-out ideological assault led by the now-revisionist Communist Party of China itself.

All this explains in no small measure the depth of the collapse of what seemed such a widespread international Maoist movement. And it also partially explains why in more recent years some wrong understandings of Maoism have crystallized and become obstacles blocking the way of revitalizing the communist project.

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Mao's successor in the Communist Party of China. Lin had influenced many with his work *Long Live the Victory of People's War!* which theorized and concentrated many of the wrong understandings and lines of the time. Among other problems, waging people's war was made the decisive criterion in assessing the correctness of ideological and political line. This was given central import in the context of an analysis that the world had entered a "new era" and, by implication, that the basic laws Lenin had discovered concerning the era of imperialism were no longer determinant. According to this view, what was needed to advance the world revolution was reductively equated with and collapsed into the advance of national liberation struggles against imperialism. This line gained traction in the 1960s against the backdrop of such struggles throughout the world, including the heroic struggle against the U.S. aggression in Vietnam.

- ii Many others followed Enver Hoxha of Albania, who used the defeat in China to argue against Mao's whole development of Marxism. Instead Hoxha preached a return to a caricatural version of Stalin's understanding, in particular arguing *against* Mao's whole thesis on the contradictory nature of socialism and the need to continue to carry out the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. "Beat Back the Dogmato-Revisionist Attack on Mao Tsetung," *The Communist*, Number 5, 1979.

In our discussion we will return to some of these and other previous debates within the "Maoist movement" taken in its broadest meaning. What D'Mello's discussion reveals is that much of the understanding of Maoism reflected in his article overlaps in important ways with different, and, I would argue, wrong interpretations of Maoism from within the ranks of the Maoist movement itself.

### **Fighting to Uphold Mao and Laying the Basis for Going Further**

It was Bob Avakian who took the lead in confronting the loss of proletarian rule in China in 1976. It is not coincidental that, in the course of meeting this great need of the communist movement, Avakian both synthesized the contributions of Mao and laid the basis for his subsequent breakthroughs in communist theory. As Avakian put it, his "immersion" in and "reverence" for Mao during this period laid the basis for the critique he was to develop beginning with *Conquer the World* and is an important part of his new synthesis.

At the time when the Maoist movement was reeling from the shock of the coup in China and efforts were underway to regroup the genuine communists internationally, there were serious disputes about whether Lenin's thesis on the division of the world between rival imperialist powers was still applicable and whether these contradictions were leading to a new world war,<sup>18</sup> on whether Maoism should be considered a development of an "integral whole" of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism or an incorrect view of "Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, Principally Maoism" which largely separated Maoism from the body of revolutionary communist science,<sup>19</sup> on how to correctly conceptualize – and understand – the material basis for and the principles of proletarian internationalism,<sup>20</sup> the relation between defending the socialist state and advancing the world revolution, the evaluation of the "three worlds theory" proposed by the Chinese Communist Party as well as previous experience in the USSR in opposing imperialist encirclement and aggression, whether Mao's criticisms of Stalin both in terms of socialist construction and in relation to philosophy are valid and should be upheld, and other important questions as well.

Many of these disputes contained seeds both of the more advanced understanding that was to emerge fully in Avakian's new synthesis as well as of the earlier-cited "mirror opposites" that are opposing it. While the work of Avakian had to a great degree laid the basis for the 1984 formation of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement which regrouped a large portion of the world's Maoists, the unity within RIM and in the Maoist movement more generally also encompassed some of these differences.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, D'Mello seems unaware of these discussions, and his collection of articles titled *What Is Maoism?* is particularly striking for its absence of texts from within the Maoist movement itself. It is important to note that D'Mello's interrogation of Maoism is not coming from within the Maoist movement – he does not share the same political history or reference points. This is by no means a reproach. Indeed a view from the exterior should be welcome and could provide new perspectives, and is all the more appreciated coming from those who are fighting an unjust society. But D'Mello's text on Maoism suffers from his failure to address the discussions that have taken place within the Maoist movement itself.

Today, several decades later, when the communist movement is at a crossroads, the discussion can no longer be fruitfully conducted within the framework of seeking to define or return to what constitutes "real Maoism." This is because the science of communism has advanced beyond Maoism, re-synthesizing and recasting what was overwhelmingly positive about Maoism while rupturing with the secondary incorrect elements,<sup>iii</sup> and the incorrect understandings have developed

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iii Avakian summed up that "This new synthesis involves a recasting and recombining of the positive aspects of the experience so far of the communist movement and of socialist society, while learning from the negative aspects of this experience, in the philosophical and ideological as well as the political dimensions, so as to have a more deeply

and consolidated as well.

Maoism itself is now undergoing a process of dividing into two between the new synthesis and mirror-opposites in relation to it as described above. It is true that within the thinking of Mao, and much more so within the thinking of many of those who claim to follow Mao, there are elements that approximate or resemble the Maoism that D'Mello feels he has discovered. But a "Maoism" that does not incorporate and in fact rejects today's required ruptures will turn into its opposite, a pale, non-revolutionary parody that cannot retain Maoism's previous revolutionary character, much less represent revolutionary communism as it is now advancing.

Substantial numbers of young people opposed to the imperialist world order are drawn to non-revolutionary and even counter-revolutionary ideologies such as Islam or the worship of imperialist-sponsored "democracy." This is not only because of the material lack of a socialist alternative such as existed when revolution was flourishing in China under Mao's leadership, but also at least partly a result of the inability of the communist movement internationally to sharply and consistently project a thoroughly revolutionary communist vision and path<sup>22</sup> that meets the needs of the day, both in summing up the past experiences and in addressing changes in the contemporary world. Yesterday's "Maoism," or rather the pale and distorted shadow of Maoism, cannot represent the compelling vision that people need.

On the other hand, the new synthesis enables communism to speak convincingly to past as well as current experience and points to a viable and desirable solution to the problems of society. Avakian's new synthesis incorporates and *reforges* both a stronger grasp and further development of Mao's breakthroughs as well as further rupture with the secondary elements in Mao's conceptions that stood in opposition to this.

### **Mao (and Marx) as "Radical Democrats"**

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and firmly rooted scientific orientation, method and approach with regard not only to making revolution and seizing power but then, yes, to meeting the material requirements of society and the needs of the masses of people, in an increasingly expanding way, in socialist society – overcoming the deep scars of the past and continuing the revolutionary transformation of society, while at the same time actively supporting the world revolutionary struggle and acting on the recognition that the world arena and the world struggle are most fundamental and important, in an overall sense – together with opening up qualitatively more space to give expression to the intellectual and cultural needs of the people, broadly understood, and enabling a more diverse and rich process of exploration and experimentation in the realms of science, art and culture, and intellectual life overall, with increasing scope for the contention of different ideas and schools of thought and for individual initiative and creativity and protection of individual rights, including space for individuals to interact in 'civil society' independently of the state – all within an overall cooperative and collective framework and at the same time as state power is maintained and further developed as a revolutionary state power serving the interests of the proletarian revolution, in the particular country and worldwide, with this state being the leading and central element in the economy and in the overall direction of society, while the state itself is being continually transformed into something radically different from all previous states, as a crucial part of the advance toward the eventual abolition of the state with the achievement of communism on a world scale.

In a sense, it could be said that the new synthesis is a synthesis of the previous experience of socialist society and of the international communist movement more broadly, on the one hand, and of the criticisms, of various kinds and from various standpoints, of that experience, on the other hand. That does not mean that this new synthesis represents a mere 'pasting together' of that experience on the one hand, and the criticisms on the other hand. It is not an eclectic combination of these things, but a sifting through, a recasting and recombining on the basis of a scientific, materialist and dialectical outlook and method, and of the need to continue advancing toward communism, a need and objective which this outlook and method continues to point to – and, the more thoroughly and deeply it is taken up and applied, the more firmly it points to this need and objective." Bob Avakian, "Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity", Part 1, <http://revcom.us/avakian/makingrevolution/> and included in *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*, a Revolution pamphlet, p.35-36.

Let's go back to how D'Mello defines Marx's goal. He writes that "Marxism has to be judged by the fruits of its project of taking humanity along the road towards equality, cooperation, community, and solidarity." It is difficult to read these words and not think immediately of the motto "*liberté, égalité, fraternité*" of the French bourgeois revolution of 1789 or even "with liberty and justice for all" of the U.S. pledge of allegiance to the flag. Dreams of cooperation and equality are as old as classes themselves. But in this epoch these kinds of slogans and appeals have always ended up being used by *bourgeois* forces, at best, to rally the masses, including in revolutionary struggle in which the great majority of the population, "the whole nation" to put it in other terms, faces a common enemy such as the feudal system in pre-revolutionary France before 1789. In reality, such slogans and such a vision cover over the truth that society is divided into conflicting classes with conflicting interests. Indeed, most of the reactionary states in the world today are rife with such talk of democracy.

At several points in his article, D'Mello attributes to Maoism generalizations about the nature and tasks of revolutionary transformation which actually reflect D'Mello's own world view and not that of Mao or his followers. Changing the world "for the better" or very similar expressions are repeatedly used to describe both D'Mello's goal and his yardstick for measuring revolutionary efforts. For example, D'Mello puts it: "Maoism did something unprecedented in human history – it brought about a drastic redistribution of income and wealth in China; it radically reordered the way Chinese society's economic surplus was generated and utilized, all for the better." Yes, Mao did these things and that is worth recalling, especially now when vile (and frankly ridiculous) slander of Mao is so commonplace in mainstream society and in liberal and academic discourse.

But "all for the better" is not the right viewpoint from which to view the Marxist project, nor is it the right criterion to judge the success or shortcomings of Maoism. Mao did not primarily aim to "change the world for the better" through income redistribution and social planning. His project was to radically transform society and people as part of a worldwide process of getting to communism.

At other points in his article, D'Mello's definition of Maoism (and Marxism) does come closer to reflecting the task and goal of achieving a classless society, or to put it more scientifically, getting beyond the "4 Alls" as addressed earlier in this article. But by confounding communism with the extension of radical democracy D'Mello eviscerates the goal of achieving classless society and in any event separates this goal from the actual course society can and needs to travel. It is an impoverished "Marxism" which holds D'Mello prisoner to a crippled and distorted conceptualization of social reality. Once the goal of communism is dismissed, consciously or unconsciously, as unobtainable or irrelevant, one is left with, at best, looking for one means or another of changing society "for the better" without transforming its fundamental structure. It is worth noting that in D'Mello's collection of articles "What Is Maoism?" he includes an article by Paul Sweezy arguing about the importance of winning reforms in the absence of any real possibility of revolutionary transformation. It is a reminiscent of the theory argued by Huey Newton a leader of the Black Panther Party in the US in the 1960s who called for a strategy of "survival pending revolution." Paul Sweezy, "What is Marxism?", in Bernard D'Mello , *What Is Maoism and Other Essays?*

D'Mello is correct that both Marx and Mao began their political life as "radical democrats," although the political circumstances and climate of mid 19th-century Europe and early 20th-century China were substantially different. The revisionists who seized power in China following Mao's death in 1976 made a point of stressing Marx and Engels' origins in the democratic movement in Germany in their efforts to refute the revolutionaries in China and Mao's thesis on "bourgeois-democrats becoming capitalist-roaders," examined later in this article. Both Marx and Mao saw a

world full of inequality and injustice and sought out a way to end it. In this sense they were not unlike so many of their contemporaries or those we see fighting on many fronts in the world today. The essential point, however, is the opposite: Marx was able to make a theoretical *radical rupture* with the bourgeois-democratic framework confining the progressive and revolutionary movement of his times. And it was this radical rupture in thinking and a scientific understanding of goals and means that laid the basis for a century-long wave of revolutionary struggle that could be consciously aimed at making the changes in society whose outline Marx was able to foresee.

D'Mello misses the centrality of Marx's breakthrough and radical rupture with the thinkers of the Enlightenment and theoretical forerunners of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions such as Rousseau, Locke and Kant.<sup>iv</sup> This rupture and the specific scientific character of communism is concentrated in the quote from the passage from Marx cited earlier, on overcoming "the Four Alls," describing the content and goal of communist revolution and the socialist transition to communism and distinguishing it from utopian and ultimately reformist "socialism."

The communist revolution necessitates the radical transformation of people and their thinking, of economic, political, and social relations and institutions – aiming not for radical democracy or attenuating the extremes of polarization, but overcoming all forms of exploitation and abolishing classes, the goal of communism.

As part of getting beyond the Four Alls and the struggle for communism, a fierce struggle against all forms of social inequality constitutes a critical aspect, but is not the defining horizon. It is precisely in the process of uprooting and transforming the material basis for such social inequalities and antagonisms that the horizon of equality will be transcended.<sup>23</sup>

How different and more revolutionary is Marx's view than the vision of "radical democracy" D'Mello attributes to him!

We must again return to Marx's insistence on "the dictatorship of the proletariat" as the necessary and liberatory transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society.<sup>v</sup> Mao's theoretical understanding and his life-long revolutionary practice needs to be seen from this viewpoint. Indeed, as we have stressed, Mao's central contribution involved identifying and engaging with the contradictions of this transition (socialism and proletarian dictatorship) and finding the revolutionary means to advance toward communism. Both the goal (classless communist society) and the means (dictatorship of the proletariat) explode the confines of "radical democracy" to which

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iv "The great men who in France were clearing men's minds for the coming revolution acted in an extremely revolutionary way themselves. They recognized no external authority of any kind. Religion, conceptions of nature, society, political systems – everything was subjected to the most unsparing criticism: everything had to justify its existence before the judgment-seat of reason or give up existence...

"We know today that this realm of reason was nothing more than the idealized realm of the bourgeoisie; that eternal justice found its realization in bourgeois justice; that equality reduced itself to bourgeois equality before the law; that bourgeois property was proclaimed as one of the most essential rights of man; and that the government of reason, Rousseau's social contract, came into being, and could only come into being, as a bourgeois democratic republic. The great thinkers of the eighteenth century were no more able than their predecessors to go beyond the limits imposed on them by their own epoch." Frederick Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1975), p. 20-21.

v "... 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*." "Marx to J. Wedemeyer, March 5, 1852," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Second Ed., ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), p. 220.

D'Mello wants to confine both Marx and Mao. The notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat is so much at odds with D'Mello's central thesis of "radical democracy" that he essentially avoids it in his article. Once this goal and means are left out of the picture, then there is no choice but to fall back on *other criteria* such as those that D'Mello offers about better wealth distribution, etc.

It is true that Mao, like Marx, began political activity as a radical democrat. But again the essential point is the opposite of what D'Mello is insisting. Mao *transcended* the "radical democracy" that was dominant in the thinking of the young revolutionaries of China in the early decades of the 20th century. His understanding – his grasp of the science of revolution that was known then as Marxism-Leninism – enabled Mao to correctly situate the revolution to liberate China from imperialism and semi-feudalism as part of the epochal effort of world proletarian revolution. Most of the other leaders of the Communist Party of China did not fully share this vision and understanding, which had much to do with why the course Mao had charted was reversed so soon after his death.

### **Confounding Communism and Democracy**

Again, let's consider D'Mello's conclusion: "Maoism has its roots in Marx who was, above all, a *radical* democrat... given the *radical* democratic streak running from Marx to Mao, the best thing that Maoism could do is to commit to the promise of *radical* democracy." Indeed, D'Mello's argumentation and his portrayal of Mao is consistent with this conclusion.

D'Mello thesis of "radical democracy" actually runs directly contrary to one of the central theoretical developments of Mao and his followers concerning the relationship between the democratic revolution and the further advance of the socialist revolution. In particular, the Maoists in China emphasized the reality of "bourgeois democrats turning into capitalist-roaders."<sup>24</sup> By this they meant that many of the top leaders of the Communist Party who had fought hard to liberate China from imperialism and semi-feudalism during the long years of the first stage of the Chinese Revolution did not fundamentally share Mao's goal, vision and line that the revolution needed to develop into a socialist revolution whose ultimate goal would be worldwide communism. Rather these people, some of whom were valiant leaders of the revolution in the first stage, went along with some measures of socialist revolution but increasingly balked at going further in the direction of radically transforming society beyond the Four Alls – ultimately taking the capitalist road and coming into opposition to the socialist revolution. While this process of "bourgeois democrats turning into capitalist roaders" does not encompass the whole phenomenon of capitalist restoration in China, which was rooted in the underlying contradictions of socialist society, it does explain to an important degree the history and configuration of the opposing headquarters within the party. D'Mello, on the other hand, understands it quite differently. Not only does he overlook or oppose Mao's thesis in this sphere, we will see below that he also treats key capitalist-roaders in China like Zhou Enlai as "close comrades" of Mao.

D'Mello's thesis on radical democracy has much in common with the very real limitations the whole communist movement has had in correctly understanding communism as the *transcending* of all class society, and with it all forms of rule of one class over another.<sup>vi</sup> "Democracy" is no exception

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vi In contrast to D'Mello's formalist and classless "radical democracy" and his efforts to remake Marx and Mao in that image, we can contrast Bob Avakian's following three sentences on 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

to this: each ruling class will have a form of democracy which is most suited to its social system. Democracy under conditions of the proletarian dictatorship is qualitatively different than the bourgeois democracy of the capitalist societies. The dictatorship of the proletariat grants and assures the fundamental rights to the formerly oppressed and relies on the broad masses in the exercise of power. But most importantly, this type of democracy, as more expansive and qualitatively richer as it is, still is not an end in itself but *serves* the continuing struggle and continuing transformation to achieve the abolition of Marx's "Four Alls," thus creating the material and ideological conditions for the state to "wither away" (to use Marx's term) and, with it, proletarian democracy as well.

Again, this was a very important point of struggle and debate in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution initiated by Mao in China. For example, the revolutionaries in China gave great attention to "criticizing bourgeois right" and the ideology of bourgeois right. "Bourgeois right," a conception elaborated by Marx in *Critique of the Gotha Programme*,<sup>25</sup> refers in particular to the fact that, under conditions of socialism, distribution of goods would be according to the principle of "to each according to his work" and it is still not yet possible to implement the communist principle of "to each according to his needs." This principle of "to each according to his work" comprehends a measure of equality but masks the underlying inequality – differences in capabilities and needs. Bourgeois right takes in such relations of formal equality that mask actual inequality, and more broadly refers to the continuing influence of the aspects of bourgeois society that carry over into socialism, and their ideological manifestations and expressions in state and policy. The revolutionaries in China recognized that bourgeois right could not be fully abolished until it was possible to move out of the realm of commodity production and exchange through money completely – that is to say, as a product of the material and ideological transformations of the whole socialist transition period, which can only be understood as a world process of transition from the bourgeois to the communist epoch. But that was exactly the point: socialist society has to be seen not as an end in itself but precisely as a transition toward the future communist society.

Mao and the revolutionaries in China understood that commodity production and bourgeois right would be present in different degrees during the whole period of socialist transition, but most importantly they understood that these very same "birthmarks" from capitalist society, even while the revolution had to restrict and reduce them, would still provide material and ideological soil engendering new capitalist elements who would inevitably try to overthrow the socialist system and restore capitalism. And indeed, the revolutionaries in China understood that a very important terrain of class struggle would precisely be whether to restrict bourgeois right or allow it unrestricted expansion. This was a major battlefield between Mao and his followers and the capitalist-roaders who took power after Mao's death.

Democracy, even *radical* democracy as D'Mello likes to emphasize, is integrally bound up with the exchange of commodities, the "equal exchange of equal values" so very much at the heart of both the capitalist system of production and the (bourgeois democratic) ideology that corresponds to that system of production and exchange.

The notion of radical democracy, of absolute egalitarianism, was first propounded by the radical bourgeois thinkers of the 18th century from Jefferson to Robespierre. Radical democracy is a bourgeois ideal that is both unrealizable within an economy and society dominated by commodity production and exchange – and one that most corresponds to the position of the petite-bourgeoisie.<sup>vii</sup>

of exploitation, oppression and inequality." *Revolution*, 273.

vii "At the heart of the matter was that Robespierre – and the Jacobins generally – tried to institute a society that would realize the bourgeois ideals of equality, freedom and the universal rights of man, avoiding the extremes of wealth and poverty, monopolized power and mass powerlessness. The historic irony lies not in the fact – as is often alleged by bourgeois democrats and bourgeois historians generally – that in the attempt to do this they resorted to dictatorial

Even struggles against inequality, so just and so necessary as they are, will not left to themselves escape from what Marx called the "narrow horizons of bourgeois right"; they will remain unable to see beyond commodity production and exchange and the material basis of class society. This type of thinking is so pervasive in bourgeois society and so much of an accepted given in the discourse of our epoch that even resolute opponents of the injustices of the contemporary world are trapped by its limits without real work to make the necessary rupture.

It is worth recalling Engels' remark that before the division of society into classes and the emergence of the state "there was no difference between rights and duties."<sup>26</sup> The replacement of the dichotomy between "rights and duties" with the free and voluntary association of human beings is a hallmark of the difference between even the democracy that will exist in a genuine and liberatory socialist society and the future communist society that has fully escaped the horizons of bourgeois right and all class divisions.

This does not mean that the radical democrats such as D'Mello so forcefully counts himself are consciously seeking to perfect the capitalist system of commodity exchange or consciously respectful of the boundaries and permanence of capitalism.<sup>viii</sup> The problem is that D'Mello argues that such rupture is not necessary and instead argues that Maoism should redefine itself to fit safely with this paradigm of radical democracy.

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss at length the relationship between democracy and the overcoming of all class divisions. Here, too, it is necessary to note the substantial body of work that Avakian has developed on this subject, beginning especially with his book *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?* published in 1986. In that work and in many others over the several decades since then, Avakian examines how, even within the communist movement, all too often the communist goals have been confounded with and limited to the struggle to "perfect" democracy. Avakian's body of work and theorizations include critiques and a scientific understanding of bourgeois democracy as practiced today, past and recent polemics on the political philosophy of Rousseau, Locke, Jefferson, and other 18th century and contemporary theorists of democracy, as well as a further scientific understanding and conceptualization of proletarian democracy in socialist society, a critical appraisal of past socialist societies in this regard, and its eventual withering away

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and violent means and then themselves became the victims of this; rather, it lies in the fact that *this bourgeois ideal actually corresponds most to the position of the petite bourgeoisie...* – and yet this class (or more accurately, these petit-bourgeois strata) are incapable of ruling society and reshaping it in their image. This is because the very property relations – and even more, the laws of commodity production and exchange – of which these strata are an expression, and the whole process of accumulation in which they are enmeshed once bourgeois production relations take hold, *inexorably lead to the polarization of society into a small number of big bourgeois and a large mass of propertyless proletarians* – with these petit-bourgeois strata caught in between. *One or the other of these two main forces must rule modern society.*" Avakian, *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?*, (Chicago, Banner Press, 1986), p. 35.

viii But here it is worth recalling Marx's comment on the petit bourgeois shopkeeper and the democratic intellectual: "This content is the transformation of society in a democratic way, but a transformation within the bounds of the petite bourgeoisie. Only one must not get the narrow-minded notion that the petty bourgeoisie, on principle, wishes to enforce an egoistic class interest. Rather, it believes that the *special* conditions of its emancipation are the *general* conditions within whose frame alone modern society can be saved and the class struggle avoided. Nor should one imagine that the democratic representatives are all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven and earth. What makes them representatives of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter 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. This is, in general, the relationship between the political and literary representatives of a class and the class they represent." Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx/Engels Selected Works, (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1969), p.126.

in transition to communism worldwide. That these are no mere academic disputes can be seen clearly in Nepal where the Maoist leadership redefined the goals of the struggle *away* from socialism and communism and instead settled for a bourgeois-democratic republic.<sup>27</sup>

### **Missing the Lessons of the GPCR**

Given D'Mello's effort to recast Mao as a radical democrat, it is not surprising that D'Mello, like far too much of the Maoist movement itself internationally and historically, never really examined Mao's theoretical work on "bourgeois democrats turning into capitalist roaders" and "bourgeois right" nor really understood the rich experience of the GPCR in this light. This is consistent with D'Mello's belief expressed in his article that 1969 "marks the beginning of the end of the Maoist era," thus lopping off the latter part of the GPCR which was not only a precious historical experience but also the time when the revolutionaries in China were able to give a fuller and more scientific theoretical expression to the whole experience of the GPCR. Again, D'Mello is not alone in this wrong periodization of the GPCR. We have seen in recent years that Alain Badiou's "reinterpretation" of the GPCR also relies on a similar construct.<sup>28</sup> And the "mirror opposite" dogmato-religious version of Maoism also had real difficulties in understanding the Cultural Revolution following the downfall of Lin Biao in 1969.

D'Mello, like many others who see things through a radical-democratic prism, considers the first stage of the GPCR, with its mass upheavals and mass criticism, as the essence of the GPCR. In fact, this early period was but an initial phase of a complex revolutionary process that developed and deepened as it spread from revolutionary youth to the workers and peasants rising up against the capitalist-roaders in the party and state who were taking China down the same road that the Soviet Union had traveled after Khrushchev had come to power. Periods of upheaval alternated with the periods of consolidation of new forms of political power and the institution of new methods and practices in every sphere of society. The radical transformations that came after 1969 included the forging of new institutions such as the revolutionary committees that brought the masses into the exercise of power under party leadership and were integrated into the structures of the socialist state.

Throughout this process Marxism-Leninism-Maoism itself blossomed immeasurably as Mao and those most closely associated with him deepened their own understanding of the laws of socialist revolution under conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat, confronted new and complex problems and also worked night and day to train new communists and to regain and remold others who had fallen into revisionism. Far from being on a downward trajectory after 1969 as D'Mello believes, the Cultural Revolution advanced, faced new and difficult challenges, and generated even deeper theoretical understanding until Mao's death in 1976. For example, it was only after 1969 that it was clearly understood that "the capitalist-roaders were representatives of capitalist relations of production," whereas previously they were sometimes portrayed as mainly or simply capitulators, traitors, etc. The targets of the revolution were not simply "revisionists" but a new bourgeoisie, those high in the party and state taking the capitalist road. The question of when the decisive turning point in China took place may seem like an esoteric dispute, but the argument over the date reflects considerably different understandings.

D'Mello's "beginning of the end of the Maoist era" formulation will lead him and others *away* from studying the lessons of the Cultural Revolution as Mao and his followers saw it at the time. From the vantage point of several decades later and in light of Avakian's new synthesis, it is most definitely necessary to take another, more profound, look at the GPCR and draw appropriate conclusions. But this is not what D'Mello is doing – he has neither assimilated Mao's understanding

nor has he advanced beyond it.

D'Mello's shallow and wrong understanding of the Cultural Revolution is revealed in his description of Zhou Enlai and Zhu De as Mao's "close comrades." In fact, Zhou became emblematic of those party leaders who increasingly opposed the deepening of the revolution.<sup>29</sup> And, as mentioned above, D'Mello passes over those outstanding communist leaders, such as Zhang Chunqiao and Jiang Qing, who actually did lead the Cultural Revolution on the basis of Mao's line. It is no accident that Zhang Chunqiao and Jiang Qing were vilified as part of the "Gang of Four," arrested after the counter-revolution and died in prison, whereas the legacy of Zhou Enlai is touted to the skies by the new capitalist rulers.

As Mao pointed out, many of the capitalist-roaders began as bourgeois and petit bourgeois democrats who never made the radical rupture to become communists ideologically. Many of these same communist party members did not want the revolution to advance to the socialist stage or did not want to see the further deepening of that stage of the revolution. As Zhang Chunqiao put it, they saw revolution like a bus: "Here is my stop and I must get off the bus." They did not want the revolution to keep digging away at the birthmarks of the old capitalist system such as bourgeois right. Instead these forces became more or less conscious representatives of the very capitalist relations of production that the revolution still needed to overcome. This is a different dynamic to socialism than the view wrongly attributed to Mao by D'Mello in which each stage of the revolution prepares the subsequent stage – as if this could take place in a purely evolutionary way without sharp struggle. And it is different from the widespread "bureaucracy" theory that D'Mello also echoes, an understanding that does not look at the economic basis of the capitalist-roaders.

Although Mao was certainly aware of the tremendous changes that the revolution had brought about for the masses of people, he chose to emphasize the *opposite* point: the long, persistent, difficult struggle to move China forward along the socialist road toward the communist future. Mao stressed "If people like Lin Biao came to power it would be easy for them to rig up the capitalist system." Mao was sober and clear-sighted about the difficulties facing the revolution and he warned again and again that the danger of capitalist restoration was real. Unfortunately, the history of China after Mao's death – the counter-revolutionary coup and breakneck speed with which capitalism was restored and with it all of the horrors of exploitation – has proven just how insightful Mao was.

Our point is not to underestimate what Mao did accomplish or how this benefited the masses of the people. But we must be clear and firm on upholding what Mao was able to accomplish as part of the revolutionary communist project and not to substitute a different vision and a different yardstick, in fact a very paltry one, of radical democracy, wealth redistribution and "change for the better."<sup>ix</sup>

It is an illusion of the "radical democrat" to believe that there can be gradual reduction of wealth disparities, a greater and greater sense of community and fraternity and incremental change "for the better" without having to tackle the momentous task of uprooting capitalism, commodity production

ix It is also worth noting that if the socialist road is not maintained even many of the democratic features or "changes for the better" that D'Mello and others recognize will be put into jeopardy. There were some, such as William Hinton, whose article D'Mello has included in his collection of essays, who were unclear on the terms and nature of the two-line struggle in China during Mao's last years, and this confusion led them to side with the opponents of the revolutionary headquarters in the party. (Hinton, "Mao, Rural Development and Two-Line Struggle" and "On the Role of Mao Zedong.") A few years later the results were such that the collective system of ownership in China's countryside which had been such a source of inspiration to Hinton and many others was transformed into private capitalist farming. Gaps in wealth that the revolution had reduced skyrocketed and took new forms as capitalists ferociously went about intensifying class polarization, building a new class of billionaires and its corollary, the dispossession and impoverishment of huge sections of the rural population and their enslavement in what many have aptly called the "world's sweatshop."

and class society generally, and to do so by the only means that this can be achieved, the *revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*. In fact, the radical democrat's goal itself – a classless community, fraternity and democracy without the thoroughgoing revolutionization of all social relations – is itself an illusion. Although history the world over proves the opposite, and will prove it over and over, experience alone will not pop this bubble of illusion. That is because these illusions do not result from a lack of perceptual information but rather from the class outlook of the "democratic intellectual" (or, if D'Mello prefers, the "radical democrat.")

## **National Democratic Revolution**

In this article, we need not and cannot examine in depth Mao's very important teachings on what he called the New Democratic Revolution (NDR). Still, there are a few essential points that need to be understood, and differently from how D'Mello presents them.

Mao argued that in China the revolution needs to go through two stages, the first being one of "New Democracy" directed against foreign imperialism, feudalism and what he called "bureaucrat capitalism," the kind of capitalism closely linked to imperialism and feudalism. Mao argued that the proletariat, represented by its vanguard communist party, could lead the broad masses, especially the downtrodden peasants, in completing this revolution. We can see the continued importance of Mao's breakthrough even today, when the task of doing away with imperialist domination remains central to the revolution in most of the world and many features in society are still marked by the stench of feudalism and other pre-capitalist systems of exploitation.

But even while D'Mello is correct in pointing to the importance of Mao's thesis on New Democracy, he shows a real misunderstanding of it when he asserts that one of the distinctive features of Maoism is the "the conception of NDR as opposed to that of bourgeois-democratic revolution." Actually, Mao was quite clear that in its social character, the NDR remained bourgeois-democratic in that its target is precisely the foreign domination and semi-feudalism that objectively prevented China from being an independent modern capitalist country.

Mao did very much insist that the New Democratic Revolution was "part of the world proletarian revolution" and no longer part of the bourgeois-democratic revolution *of the old type*. Mao argued that the leadership of the NDR by the proletariat through its vanguard communist party is linked to the proletarian revolution in the advanced capitalist countries, and that it had important *socialist elements within it* (including targeting foreign imperialism and comprador-bureaucrat capitalism, the main form of large-scale capitalism in China), thus laying the basis for and potentially ushering in socialist revolution as opposed to the *consolidation* of bourgeois democracy and capitalism. Perhaps it is this understanding D'Mello is trying to reference in his distinction between NDR and "bourgeois-democracy." But D'Mello's understanding of this is quite different than that of Mao and his followers.

It may seem very revolutionary for D'Mello to deny the "bourgeois-democratic" character of the NDR. In fact, collapsing the socialist and democratic revolutions into a single whole is a classic error of reformists, particularly of the Trotskyist variety in the third world countries. By presenting both the NDR and the "socialist revolution" together in the framework of "radical democracy" D'Mello ends up missing the proletarian revolutionary character of the communist revolution and its *qualitative distinction* from the democratic revolution which is *and can only be* bourgeois in its social character. This is precisely the material base for a great many who remained "bourgeois-democrats" in their outlook to join the Communist Party and even fight heroically in the first stage of the revolution in China. But when the revolution entered into its socialist stage and as it deepened

many of these leaders jumped out to oppose the revolution.

Further work needs to be done on how revolution in the 21st century will proceed in the countries dominated by imperialism and still suffering from the scars of feudalism and other pre-capitalist forms of exploitation. Avakian's theses concerning the more "inter-knitted" character of the world, including understanding that imperialism has become internal to the class structure in the oppressed countries,<sup>30</sup> provide a basis for more thoroughly underscoring the proletarian internationalist content of the revolution in every country.

Great changes continue to take place as imperialism penetrates and shapes the socio-economic system in countries all over the world – and this will surely call forward further development of strategy and tactics. But Mao's thesis on New Democracy will remain a vital reference and starting point for elaborating revolutionary strategy. It is not possible to imagine, for example, a revolution in Iran in which a strong component does not include attacking religious obscurantism and the medieval oppression of women which has integrated in new ways with "modern" forms of capitalist exploitation. And we have also seen, time and again, that revolutions in the oppressed countries which remain "stuck" in the perspective of "radical democracy" will be defeated or, if they do seize and consolidate political power, rapidly "tamed" and transformed into another cog in the life-crushing machinery of the imperialist world order.

It is an important truth that revolutionary communism is the most thoroughgoing rupture with *every kind* of oppression. This is a point Lenin stressed in the preparation period of the Russian Revolution when he argued that a communist must be seen as "a tribune of the people" and not as a trade-union secretary. Mao's New Democracy thesis and his leadership of the Chinese revolution stressed the principle that the proletariat must act not on the basis of its narrow economic interests but as vanguard fighters for taking the whole of society to a new level.<sup>x</sup> But this is not an argument for confounding communism with radical democracy as D'Mello is insisting.

It is necessary to emphasize that we are not calling into question the need for communists to shoulder the task of leading the democratic revolution where such a stage is necessary. But when communists take up and lead such a struggle they do not do so as "radical democrats"; they subordinate this struggle and situate it in the larger framework of achieving communist society. The specific goal of national independence and democracy is only important in so far as it furthers this goal. In reality D'Mello is formulating in theoretical terms what many Maoists have been practicing – "combining two into one" (in this case the bourgeois-democratic with the proletarian revolution), and in so doing making a confused mess rather than understanding the difference, the distinction, between the two. The experience of the last several decades leads to an opposite conclusion: communists must resist any effort to repackage communism as "radical democracy": there can be no genuine emancipation without the radical rupture with all previous social systems and their corresponding ideologies – including radical democracy.

The New Democratic Revolution is bourgeois-democratic in its immediate character, but because it is led by the proletariat and because of the specific policies – such as thorough-going agrarian revolution, confiscation of bureaucrat capitalist and imperialist property – the NDR can and must lead directly, indeed usher in, the socialist revolution. Without understanding this correctly there will be both right and "left" errors. "Left" in the sense that the communists may fail to recognize the

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x Indeed, Avakian's call for "enriched What is To Be Done-ism" [Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity, Part II] is broadly applicable in all countries and is not fundamentally rooted in the existence (or non-existence) of a bourgeois-democratic stage of revolution but rather in the need for the proletarian revolution to liberate all of humanity and wipe out every sphere of oppression. [revcom.us/avakian/makingrevolution/](http://revcom.us/avakian/makingrevolution/).

actual democratic tasks that the revolution needs to accomplish, and may also consider the open and avowed bourgeois democrats as unwelcome intruders in the revolutionary movement. But by far the greater danger is the openly rightist deviation, that at some point in the revolutionary process, either before or after the nationwide seizure of power, the goal of socialism and ultimately communism will be dropped altogether, just as we are seeing in Nepal today.

### **What does Proletarian Leadership Mean?**

How are we to correctly understand the concept of "proletarian leadership" which Mao argued for? D'Mello is correct in rejecting the mechanical notion that this means that urban industrial workers must necessarily be at the head of the revolution, as some still try to argue. But D'Mello fails to correctly understand wherein lies the proletarian character of Marxism. Looked at from the long sweep of history, it is the emergence of the proletariat on a world scale, as the product of capitalist relations of production, which carries the *possibility of transcending the capitalist mode of production and achieving communism*. This is what it means, scientifically, to speak of the historic mission of the proletariat.

D'Mello however understands it this way (citing Benjamin Schwartz): "in Maoism, the term 'proletarian' refers to a set of moral qualities – 'self-abnegation, limitless sacrifice to the needs of the collectivity, guerilla-like self-reliance, unflagging energy . . . iron discipline, etc' – as the norm of true collectivist behaviour. Proletarian leadership then comes to be constituted by a set of intellectuals, workers and peasants who excel in these moral requirements."

It is certainly correct that people from different social classes can adopt the world view of the proletariat and many have done so. It is also the case that such a world view does not exist spontaneously or automatically among the workers *themselves* (in any country, oppressed or oppressor). But the proletarian world view is not reducible to "moral requirements," even while it is important to recognize that there is a moral component to the proletarian world view.

It is also possible to recognize that Schwartz (and D'Mello's) description of proletarian characteristics (self-abnegation, limitless sacrifice to the needs of the collectivity, guerrilla-like self-reliance, unflagging energy . . . iron discipline) are not limited to proletarian revolutionaries alone. There have been throughout history and in many countries numerous bourgeois and petit bourgeois revolutionaries who displayed these same virtues. Robespierre, who led and sacrificed his life for the (bourgeois) French Revolution, was known as the "incorruptible." Would it not be fair to say that many cadres of a nationalist grouping such as the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka shared many of the qualities D'Mello cites?

The proletarian world view is, above all, a question of the science of understanding and transforming society and the identification of the social process which alone can lead to the achievement of classless, communist society, specifically the socialist revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is not a question of the particular concrete members of the proletarian class, but rather of the proletariat as a class determined by its relation to the mode of production and not as a collection of individuals who embody "moral requirements." It was a great breakthrough of Marx to understand that the social conditions of the proletariat meant that only "by emancipating all mankind can the proletariat achieve its own final emancipation."<sup>31</sup> The mission of the proletariat to "liberate all of humanity" flies squarely in the face of the kind of vulgar, economist and workerist interpretations typical of revisionism and it is noteworthy that the revolutionaries in China made Marx's quote one of their principal slogans during the GPCR. It has a profound moral content, clearly, but it is a morality founded on a scientific understanding and not at all the empty

moral injunctions of classless democracy and humanism.

Mao himself was a consistent and thoroughgoing representative of the proletariat (which is not to deny secondary, contradictory aspects of his thinking). Mao's proletarian quality stemmed from his world outlook, which was overwhelmingly that of dialectical and historical materialism, and the fact that he led in fighting for a political line that overwhelmingly corresponded to the class interests of the proletariat in the largest historical sense, specifically policies and transformations that would push society forward, and very concretely, that would create, through a complex and protracted struggle, the economic, political and ideological conditions for society to move in the direction of socialism and communism. What distinguished the proletarian revolutionaries from capitalist-roaders such as Deng was ultimately where their respective orientation, politics and economic policies would lead and, in that sense, what class relations they represented. Indeed, Mao's whole conception of the New Democratic Revolution is in keeping with the orientation of proletarian leadership. Yes, the NDR as Mao formulated it is in many ways as D'Mello describes it: based on the peasantry, surrounding the cities from the countryside, waging a protracted people's war, and so forth. But the proletariat was *leading* this revolution, which was concentrated in the leadership of Mao and the communist party, precisely because he fought for a political line that would enable the revolution to go *beyond* the democratic revolution and usher in the socialist stage.

When it comes to making socialist revolution there is no "neutral." In other words, either there is a determined, conscious and protracted struggle to transform society, including periodically confronting fierce challenges and making great leaps in the direction of communism, *or* the direction of society will be determined by representatives of capitalist relations of production and organized along capitalist lines. There has to be a conscious and revolutionary struggle in the political, economic and cultural spheres to go against both the inherited inertia of centuries of class exploitation and the spontaneity that comes with the daily, hourly exchange of commodities – the exchange of equal values (again linked to the bourgeois right that was so so sharply criticized in the Cultural Revolution) central both to capitalism and to capitalist ideology where the "equal exchange" of commodities masks class division and exploitation.

D'Mello doesn't understand it this way. Again, it needs to be pointed out that he is, unfortunately, in good company. This is one of the reasons that Bob Avakian remarked that "most communists, most of the time, are not communists".<sup>32</sup> Being part of a communist party is not enough, nor is it even enough to fight and sacrifice in the interests of the people. The success or failure of the revolution will be ultimately decided by the political and ideological line that is leading. This does not only mean whether the leaders accept the communist goal in words, but also whether, in a fundamental sense, achieving this goal actually guides the choice of strategy and tactics throughout different stages of the struggle, including in the bourgeois-democratic phase of the revolution where such a stage is required.

This is why Mao stressed so importantly toward the end of his life that "the correctness or the incorrectness of the ideological and political line decides everything."<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately far too many party members and middle level leaders ended up supporting the revisionist takeover, perhaps unwittingly for many, at least at first. And this was just as true of communists internationally, including in India, where important Maoist formations, even some who had been carrying out heroic revolutionary armed struggle against the guardians of the old order, initially supported the coup in China marked by the arrest of the so-called Gang of Four.

Indeed when discussing moral qualities one must be very careful *not to separate them from the overarching political and ideological line*. We should remember how the capitalist-roaders in China

sought to slander the revolutionaries as "soft, lax and lazy." On the other hand, the revolutionaries in the China correctly pointed to the "hard-working capitalist-roaders" who toiled day and night to restore capitalism.

The importance of this question is staring everyone in the face now as the revolution in Nepal is being reversed. No one should deny the struggle and sacrifice during the people's war by all of the members and leaders of that party – which seems to be what D'Mello is getting at by the "moral qualities." But whether the revolution in Nepal could open a pathway toward a socialist future and serve as a vitally needed breakthrough in the socialist revolution or whether, as the current trajectory indicates, the end result will be the consolidation of a bourgeois republican order with the masses remaining in chains, depends essentially on the political and ideological line of the leadership. "Self abnegation" can be a feature of revisionists and capitalist-roaders, just as frugality and discipline were often associated with the capitalist class as it first emerged.<sup>xi</sup>

As Avakian put it: "There is a great deal of misunderstanding and confusion about the question of communist leadership, confusion which is bound up to a large degree with misconceptions about – and in some ways opposition to – the principles and objectives of communist revolution itself. Leadership – in particular communist leadership – is concentrated in line. This does not simply mean line as theoretical abstractions, although such abstractions, especially insofar as they do correctly reflect reality and its motion and development, are extremely important. But in an all-around sense, it is a matter of leadership as expressed in the ability to continually make essentially correct theoretical abstractions; to formulate, to wield, and to lead others to take up and act on – and to themselves take initiative in wielding – the outlook and method, and the strategy, program, and policies, necessary to radically transform the world through revolution toward the final aim of communism; and through this process to continually enable others to increasingly develop their ability to do all this. This is the essence of communist leadership."<sup>34</sup>

### Third World Marxism?

D'Mello's definition of Maoism as "radical democracy" also overlaps with other tendencies in the history of the Maoist movement to understand Maoism essentially as "third world Marxism," a tendency that was associated with Lin Biao, a major leader of the Communist Party of China.<sup>xii</sup> This

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xi D'Mello's wrong thinking is illustrated by his attitude toward Babarum Bhattarai, who is quoted favorably in his article and whose own article is included in D'Mello's collection. Bhattarai, a leader of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and at this writing Prime Minister of the country, has won the admiration of the international bourgeoisie for his "unflagging energy" and even "self-abnegation" in the interests of capitalism. But the *line* of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which D'Mello finds "imaginative," is actually a line that can lead only to capitalism, as the party leadership is now vigorously promoting. Moral qualities, like other elements of ideology such as culture, must ultimately reflect and serve the underlying economic base or, in the case of communist morality, reflect the future economic base and the struggle communists are waging to bring it into being. We can be sure that the "self abnegation" of the revisionists and the "hard working capitalist-roaders" will gradually transform into the nepotism and corruption that is the companion of every exploitative system and which the masses naturally find so infuriating but which are the symptoms of an exploiting system, not its cause. D'Mello, p.261.

xii In his very influential book "Long Live the Victory of People's War" Lin Biao argued that the basis for determining whether or not a person was revolutionary was "whether one dares to fight a people's war against them, means whether one dares to embark on revolution. This is the most effective touchstone for distinguishing genuine from fake revolutionaries and Marxist-Leninists." In fact, this type of thinking was quite widespread among the new-born Maoist forces in the late 1960s. With hindsight it is not difficult to see how erroneous this view is. There were many types of forces that took up armed struggle against the ruling classes, especially in what Lin called the "storm centers of the world proletarian revolution" of Asia, Africa and Latin America. There were many new Maoist forces that took part in that historic upsurge but many others were nationalist reformists who felt that at that time in history their objectives could only be achieved by participating in the armed struggle and aligning with revolutionary China. Yasser Arafat in Palestine and Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe were active proponents of armed revolutionary struggle

involved reducing Maoism to a number of specific features that D'Mello lists, especially the waging of protracted people's war and making revolution in the "world's countryside" of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

D'Mello gives a great deal of importance to the fact that the working class masses in Europe did not carry through the revolutionary struggles that Marx envisioned.<sup>35</sup> It is true that the process of world proletarian revolution as foreseen by Marx and Engels was profoundly affected by the later changes that took place in the world. As Lenin was to analyze, the growth of capitalism into imperialism carried with it important changes to the class structure of the advanced capitalist countries and, in particular, a division within the proletariat itself in the advanced countries between a labor aristocracy benefiting from imperialism and ready to collaborate in the imperialist adventures of the ruling classes and, on the other hand, a more dispossessed section of the proletariat whose conditions of life and work more correspond to those described in the *Communist Manifesto* as having "nothing to lose" but their chains. Lenin understood this reality very deeply and considered this division within the working class the starting point for developing revolutionary strategy and tactics in that kind of countries. Thus he called for the communists strive to build a base "lower and deeper" in the proletariat. Given Lenin's well-known theses on this subject, it is surprising that D'Mello says that these conditions "thwarted the permeation of a revolutionary consciousness in the workers on the continent" but that this reality "eluded" Lenin.

Definitely the relatively privileged position of workers in the advanced countries is an important factor which reflects the class structure in those countries and bears on the thinking of this section of the workers. But D'Mello is also falling into the vulgar determinism that he warns about in his article. First, there is a material basis for *both* revolutionary communism *and* class collaboration in the proletariat of the imperialist countries and it is wrong to *only* see the one aspect of the bourgeoisification of major sections of the working class. There are also "lower" and "deeper" or otherwise oppressed sections of proletarians such as Black masses, immigrants, oppressed women, and other sectors, even in the most advanced imperialist countries, whose conditions of life lend themselves to a hatred for the existing system. Furthermore, it must be stressed that in no situation can the mere existence of extreme conditions of exploitation and impoverishment be sufficient for "automatically" acquiring the class consciousness that communist ideology represents. Indeed the need for the communists to *win* the workers to a class conscious understanding was a fundamental element of Lenin's teachings and is developed at some length in *What Is To Be Done?* where he persuasively argues that the spontaneous struggle and the reality of exploitation will not automatically translate into proletarian consciousness. This consciousness, he stresses, needs to be "brought" to the workers from *outside* their immediate experience. It hardly needs to be pointed out that Lenin advanced this thesis in conditions of great misery and hardship in Tsarist Russia.

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at that stage and were in a broad sense "pro-China" in terms of their political alignment, if not ideological commitment.

It is worth noting what that D'Mello considers the high point of the Cultural Revolution came before Lin Biao's aborted revolt against Mao and the beginning of a more systematic criticism of some of the erroneous features of Lin's line. Clearly D'Mello is unlikely to accept many of the positions of Lin Biao, many of which were associated with a kind of militarism and ultra-"leftism." But the definition of Maoism as a "third world," peasant-based Marxism, and a view in which the "countryside of the world" (Asia, Africa and Latin America) were surrounding imperialists citadels, was not confined to Lin Biao alone. In fact, there were elements in Mao's own thinking, and all the more so among some of his genuine supporters, where this kind of understanding coexisted with the more correct understanding of Mao. The Lin Biao affair was part of a process of "one dividing into two." The revolutionaries in China pointed out that there was the process of Lin exposing himself and also a process of the "us coming to know Lin." The correct, scientific kernel of Mao's thinking was developing, including against some features of "Maoism" that were objectively present to a degree in his own thinking and certainly widely held in the Maoist camp, in China and internationally. Lin Biao, *Long Live the Victory of the People's War*. [marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1965/09/peoples\\_war/index.htm](http://marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1965/09/peoples_war/index.htm)

D'Mello's re-casting of Maoism within the framework of radical democracy and a peasant-based and third world people's war severs the crucial role of Lenin's contributions, Leninism, as part of the integral character and synthesis of communism – a scientific appreciation and understanding of the need for communist revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat as the transition to communism as part of a world process, and the institutionalized leading role of the vanguard party through this whole process.<sup>xiii</sup>

Even in countries where the exploitation and oppression of the masses is extreme and the masses frequently rise up in different types of struggles, it is still the case that these conditions do not lead spontaneously to communist consciousness. During the high tide of revolutionary struggles during the 1960s and early 1970s, the spontaneous consciousness of the revolutionaries in Asia, Africa and Latin America tended to be characterized by one or another variant of revolutionary nationalism. Often this took on a kind of "Maoist" coloration – in part out of recognition of the genuine support that China was giving to these struggles. The problem was many of the Maoists were themselves confused over the difference between revolutionary nationalism and revolutionary communism.

Today it should be enough to note the unfortunate grip that some reactionary ideologies such as religious fundamentalism or various kinds of opportunism have on significant sections of even the extremely downtrodden masses in many of the oppressed countries to see that revolutionary communist ideology does not develop spontaneously. This reality should spur on efforts to wage *resolute ideological struggle*, and not to try to sidestep this necessary battle.

It was important for Mao and revolutionary China to wholeheartedly support the struggles for national liberation that were sweeping the world in the 1960s and reached their high point with the war of liberation in Vietnam. In so doing, Mao had to fight against the Soviet Union and other revisionists who either sabotaged these struggles and/or tried to manipulate them to serve the USSR, which Mao had correctly analyzed as a "social-imperialist" superpower. At the same time, problems existed in how Mao and the Communist Party of China related to the struggles in the oppressed countries. For example, they did not do their maximum to support the development of independent communist organization, often resting content to support various kinds of fronts or liberation organizations in which bourgeois and petit bourgeois forces predominated, such as the Palestine Liberation Organization or Robert Mugabe's ZANU in Zimbabwe. In his last years especially, as Mao faced an increased threat of war from the Soviet Union, he made efforts to build a kind of "united front" even involving reactionary states opposed to the USSR. Mao's mistakes in this regard<sup>36</sup> were not the first and not the worst in the history of the international communist movement. For example Stalin's subordination of the world revolution to the state interests of the USSR, especially in the period before, during and after World War Two, was a more egregious case. But Mao's mistakes in this arena, even while he rejected basic revisionist theses such as "non-capitalist road of development," still caused real problems. Errors in this sphere also interpenetrated with other errors in method and approach as well.

The tendency to define "Maoism" as an ideology of national liberation struggle definitely existed within the Communist Party of China during Mao's lifetime, a tendency that was taken up and greatly amplified by many revolutionaries of that period who never went beyond the boundaries of

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xiii Writing in *Conquer the World* in 1980, Avakian presciently theorized "To put it somewhat provocatively, Marxism without Leninism is Eurocentric social-chauvinism and social democracy. Maoism without Leninism is nationalism (and also, in certain contexts, social-chauvinism) and bourgeois democracy. Now those may sound like nice little axioms but they apply, and have real importance, and this is, in my opinion, a summation from experience of some phenomena that exist in the world and around which there must be deeper struggle."  
[revcom.us/bob\\_avakian/conquerworld/index.html](http://revcom.us/bob_avakian/conquerworld/index.html)

struggle against imperialism and feudalism. In other words, those who never saw beyond "the narrow horizon of bourgeois right." It would be a great injustice to equate Mao with the limited vision of some of his supporters. But nonetheless, here, too, is one of the contradictions of Maoism: the emancipatory outlook corresponding to the proletariat's task of taking human society beyond the boundaries of classes and nations co-exists with a secondary but nonetheless real tendency on Mao's part to sometimes combine two into one with respect to communism and the liberation of nations. This tendency is reflected in Mao's often cited remark that "in China, patriotism is applied internationalism."<sup>37</sup> D'Mello is making use of the ambiguities and secondary errors of Mao and in so doing *recasting* the ensemble of Mao's teachings as the work of a non-communist, a "radical democrat."

## **Mass Line**

Let us now look at how D'Mello's explicates the Maoist concept of mass line: ".. a distinctive feature of Maoism. This is a method of involving the masses in how, for instance [carrying through different kinds of struggle], each of the above is to be done and then implementing what had been decided upon with their participation. The party leaders thereby correctly understand the opinions of the people and so fashion the required policies in a manner the masses will support and actively implement."

Mao did develop a theory of mass line, but it is also another area where many Maoists themselves as well as scholars and friends of the communist movement have misunderstood the essential matter. Mass line must not become an argument for simply "listening to the masses," allowing them to criticize and so forth, or just systematizing their thinking, although all of these things are crucial to Mao's understanding and practice. Communist leadership of the masses must encompass a profound understanding of the masses and their thinking (which can only mean their *contradictory* thinking). On the basis of an overall scientific understanding of the tasks of the revolution, the necessary strategy and tactics, and revolutionary communism more generally, the communists are able to develop slogans, policies and so forth that concentrate the fundamental interests of the masses and that increasing sections of the masses can be won to take up and fight around. "Mass line" must not be used as an argument that communist slogans or policies should be a simple empirical reflection or concentration of the spontaneous sentiments and understanding of the masses; if so the communists would be promoting all sorts of backward-looking ideas. (Indeed, this is what the revisionist distortion of the mass line often leads to). For example, it would be quite damaging to "unite" with (and still less concentrate) the communalist or religious sentiments of the masses, however widespread they might be at any given point. And we have seen this type of error even among those seeking or claiming to apply Maoism.

D'Mello leaves out the dynamic role of politics and ideology, the struggle that takes place in these spheres, and the necessary role of communists in waging this struggle. Here again we should note that Mao's insistence on the need to carry out this ideological and political struggle is very much a central feature of Maoism, although one which goes little noted in D'Mello's article. (This does not mean that there is nothing in Mao's understanding of the mass line or the relation between consciousness and class position which could give rise to D'Mello's populist rendition as I will explain below). The kind of tailist understanding of the mass line promoted by D'Mello (shared by many Maoists, now and historically) cannot help but diminish the dynamic role of revolutionary theory in guiding the whole revolutionary process. In fact, far from being a passive reflection of the sentiments and thinking of the masses, scientific communist theory must "run ahead" of practice, as Avakian has put it.

Related to the problem of the "mass line" as a justification for tailing the masses is the history in the international communist movement of wrong tendencies toward what Avakian has referred to as the "*reification* of the proletariat" (reification being misunderstanding an abstraction, in this case the proletariat as a *class* with its long-term and fundamental interests, for its specific concrete manifestations, in this case the ensemble of specific *proletarians* and how they might perceive their interests at any moment).

This tendency toward reification expressed itself during the Cultural Revolution to varying degrees but represented a counter-current to what Mao was mainly bringing forward. Throughout the course of the very complex struggles in the GPCR – including efforts by the capitalist-roaders to manipulate the workers by demagogic appeals to their narrow interests (for example, trying to get the workers to focus their struggle on obtaining higher wages) when the whole future of the country was at stake – Mao and the revolutionary headquarters in the party called on the workers to "pay attention to affairs of state." Again, this was not without contradiction. The revolutionaries themselves deepened their understanding and gave greater emphasis to struggling for the masses to use what was then known as Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought in order to sort out correct from incorrect lines. Zhang Chunqiao was said to have argued that "theory is the most dynamic factor in ideology" in distinction to the simple class feelings.<sup>38</sup>

Differences on how to understand the relationship between the spontaneous understanding of the masses and revolutionary communist theory could also be seen during Mao's lifetime. For example, in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution (the same period of the GPCR which D'Mello considers the high point), Lin Biao was frequently cited as saying that "the mainstream of the mass movement always conforms to the development of society and is always rational."<sup>39</sup> That argument, which disappeared from usage in the Chinese party, can be contrasted with the slogan by Mao stressed at the 10th Party Congress in 1974: "Going against the tide is a Marxist-Leninist principle"<sup>40</sup> The report from that Congress also made clear that only revolutionary communism would enable someone to be able to distinguish a correct from an incorrect tide.

So here again we can see that some partial and wrong elements in what Mao and the Chinese communists had earlier put forward (in this case an implication that the mass understanding should be considered always correct) are seized upon and raised above the more scientific and more central understanding that Mao and his followers were developing. Whether he is fully aware of it or not, D'Mello is insisting upon hanging onto and building upon elements in Mao's thinking and practice that Mao himself was calling into question or discarding. Rather than following D'Mello's retreat, we should look to the advanced understanding that Avakian has been forging on the relationship between the communists and the masses. Avakian has emphasized the role of putting forth crucial questions before the masses and involving the masses in grappling with them, breaking down, as much as possible, the barriers to their engaging in this realm. He has stressed, "The point of all this is not simply to create a situation in which growing numbers of the masses will 'feel involved' in the revolutionary process, but to actually help find the solutions to these problems and to enable the Party, as well as the masses, to learn in this way."<sup>41</sup>

### **"Practice alone is the criterion of the truth"**

Another area where D'Mello concentrates an incorrect understanding shared by many within the Maoist movement is his discussion of what he describes as the Maoist dictum "seek truth from practice." While I am not aware of any statement by Mao that corresponds exactly to what D'Mello is citing, Mao did write that "practice alone is the criterion of the truth."<sup>42</sup>

D'Mello defines Marxism as "a guide to life and social practice, and in the long run its validity can only be judged by its fruits," relying on a citation from Paul Sweezy whose article is reprinted in D'Mello's collection. The depth of this error is more apparent when one reads the whole of the passage from Sweezy, which is truncated by D'Mello: "Perhaps most important, Marxism has a theory of history and destiny of humanity which is simple in its main outline and incalculably far-reaching in its implications. *It is a rational, not a mystical, theory; but like all such theory it can never be proved in any precise or scientific fashion.* It is a guide to life and social practice that can only be judged by its fruits" [emphasis added].<sup>43</sup> The point to emphasize here is precisely the words that D'Mello left out, the basic rejection by Sweezy of any scientific basis for "proving" Marxism.<sup>xiv</sup>

Marxism is, above all, a science and not simply a "guide."<sup>44</sup> As with any science it can and needs to be continually verified, enriched and where necessary corrected. But this is different than saying it must be verified by "its fruits."

For example, Mao's teachings on the nature of socialist society, his thesis on the bourgeois-democrats becoming capitalist-roaders, his thesis on the danger of capitalist restoration, his predictions about what such a restoration would mean for the people in China and the world – all of this was, alas, "tested" by Deng Xiaoping's coup d'état, in this sense verified in practice. Indeed, it is difficult to think of many other scientific theses, at least in the sphere of the social sciences, that have been so thoroughly tested.<sup>xv</sup>

In this light it is worth considering why so *few* of the Maoist forces in the world were able to understand, in even a basic way, what was going on in China following the coup d'état. A good many followed China blindly, only to wake up a few years later to the fact that the Chinese revisionists had no need for Maoist forces internationally.

The reasons for this collapse are multiple, but some of the questions of understanding and approach bear on our discussion here. In particular, many people were applying a vulgar understanding of the "criterion of practice" similar to how D'Mello, borrowing from Sweezy, formulates it in his article. According to such pragmatism, if the revolution was defeated, certainly a very bitter fruit indeed, it is easy to conclude that it must necessarily be the "fault" of Mao and his teachings. The point was not whether or not what Mao argued was *true*. So instead of science and its definition of truth as the ever closer approximation of the objective world, which must be tested in practice and experiment, we have a subjective criterion of truth whose validity is determined by its alleged utility.

Unfortunately, D'Mello's argument for using the standard of utility or usefulness to determine the truth is second nature to many Maoists. This is expressed in many ways, including in the most vulgar pragmatism of "if it works it must be right" and the corollary "if it doesn't work it must be wrong." The "failure" of the GPCR (which should be more correctly understood as a defeat) was cause for many, even most, "Maoists" to either justify support for the new leaders in China or to dump Maoism altogether.

It also needs to be pointed out that the "criterion of practice," as commonly understood by much of

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xiv D'Mello is eclectic on this point. He advances, correctly, that "scientific validity should be judged in the first instance by its contributions to the ability to explain reality." But in the next sentence he says, "here's something even more exacting – in the very long run, Marxism has to be judged by the fruits of its project of taking humanity along the road towards equality, cooperation, community, and solidarity." D'Mello, p. 24.

xv This does not mean, of course, that Mao's teachings were proven to be completely correct. While the fundamental outlines of Mao's theses are validated by a scientific examination of experience, this same process of examination and the application of lessons from other domains of human experience also makes it possible to identify weaknesses and errors in some of Mao's understanding.

the Maoist movement (and as D'Mello promotes it in his article), is founded on a narrow and impoverished definition of "practice" – as immediate and direct experience, with theory only an empirical generalization of such practice. Social practice does not just consist of the experience of one's own immediate struggle – there is the importance of the experience, "practice," of the struggle internationally and historically. Here, too, it is worth remembering that the practice of the GPCR and the Soviet and Chinese revolutions more generally remains far and away the most important experience from which to examine previously existing understanding and to develop new theory.<sup>xvi</sup>

Furthermore, revolutionary theory does not develop only from the experience of the proletariat itself, even when understood in its broadest sense. There are still other sources knowledge, such as the natural sciences, whose discoveries and advances do and must contribute to an overall scientific, revolutionary communist world view. For example, understanding the uncertainty principle in physics or recent advances in mathematics can help correct linear mechanical materialism, thus contributing to a more correct, dialectical and more scientific understanding of the laws of nature and society, and in particular, the relationship between necessity and accident, contingency and causality.

Isn't Marxism itself the product of a great deal of human knowledge accumulated in numerous spheres of activity?<sup>45</sup> On the one hand this seems obvious, including because of Lenin's well know article on the "Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism."<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, however, more often than not a pragmatist and empiricist epistemology has gone unchallenged in the Maoist movement, often hiding behind a wrong interpretation of Mao's statement that "practice alone is the criterion of truth."

## Concluding Remarks

A key conclusion flowing from D'Mello's politics and discourse of Marxism/Maoism as radical democracy is that a fundamental flaw of socialist revolution is that "all revolutions inspired by Marx have only enjoyed the support or participation of a significant minority" and what is needed is a "commitment to *radical* democracy [to] up the tide to get the help of the majority." While we cannot get into a full discussion of this topic, I want to offer a few brief thoughts:

Socialist revolution objectively benefits the great majority of the population. But *this is quite different than acting as if the revolution must await the express approval of the majority before advancing*. The reality is that revolution will generally begin with only the support of a minority, although there is a material basis for what generally begins as a struggle of a conscious minority to draw in and mobilize increasing broader sections of the people. This is also true even in countries where the oppression is severe and the stability and "legitimacy" of the ruling classes very weak. For example, does anyone really think that in Nepal in 1996 the majority in the whole country would have approved the initiation of the people's war? Or in Peru in 1980? Or in China in 1927? And not only would this be a ridiculous claim when speaking of a country as a whole, it applies to a great extent even in the immediate areas where the armed struggle began, such as in Ayacucho in

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<sup>xvi</sup> Avakian has characterized the dynamic between theory and practice this way: "proceeding at any given time on the basis of our theory and line, as determined collectively and through the structures, channels and processes of the party; extracting lessons from our practice and raising these up to the level of theoretical abstraction, but also drawing from many other sources (including the thinking and insights of others), and applying the scientific outlook and method of communism, dialectical materialism, to repeatedly synthesize all this to a higher level, in the development of and through the wrangling over theory and line – which is then returned to and carried out in practice, on what should be a deepened and enriched basis. And on...and on...and on...." (Quoted in *Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*, RCP Publications, 2008), p. 16.  
[revcom.us/Constitution/Constitution/index.html](http://revcom.us/Constitution/Constitution/index.html)

Peru or Rolpa in Nepal. By this I mean that there is certainly a large section of society, even in such extremely oppressed rural areas, who *fear* the outbreak of revolutionary struggle because they know all too well the vicious policies of the reactionary classes and their armed enforcers when anyone dares to lift their heads. The PCP referred to having to live in caves for the first six months or year of the people's war in Peru before the masses had enough confidence in the staying power of the revolutionaries to give them shelter.

A similar situation can also develop after the nationwide seizure of power. In other words, for many reasons a numerical majority might, at crucial junctures, be persuaded or bullied in to going along with a line and leadership which would lead to the restoration of the old exploiting order. In China during the later years of the GPCR, pressure from the world imperialist system, the uneven political consciousness of the masses and the inability of many to understand the real nature and import of the revisionist line, enhanced the capacity of the capitalist-roaders to gain support from significant sections of the population. Moreover, mistakes made by the revolutionaries contributed, even if secondarily, to an unfavorable balance of power and alignment of forces in 1976. If Hua Guofeng's coup d'état had been approved by an election, would it have been any more legitimate? Should the revolutionaries have just accepted counter-revolution as "the will of the people"?

One of the great difficulties of the socialist revolution is that it is in the interests of the great majority of people and must fundamentally rely upon them but the masses are constituted of advanced, intermediate and backward sections. Even under conditions of socialism the broadest masses are not fully conscious of their long-term interests or how to achieve them – and this calls forth the continual need for vanguard communist leadership. The masses must be increasingly mobilized to pay attention to affairs of state, participate in various state institutions, and take increasing responsibility for the direction of society and decision-making in society. But this does not mean that the masses can directly rule, in an unmediated way, without delegating some of the authority of the proletarian dictatorship to representatives. For a long historical period, there will be a need for a state, and, furthermore, in a world where imperialism still seeks to prevail, this will also include the need for a standing army.

In most future socialist countries, especially formerly oppressed countries, there will still be profound differences between town and countryside. In every country there will be a remaining chasm between mental and manual labor, and the contradiction between men and women will be a defining feature of society. All of these distinctions are part of the remaining basis for the revolution to be reversed and Mao paid great attention to how to handle these problems. Handled correctly, these same contradictions can be part of the motor through which society advances. It won't do to simply wish these problems and contradictions away.

This is related to Avakian's criticism of the establishment of an official ideology in the socialist country, as was the case in both the USSR and China, whose 1975 constitution stated, "Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought is the theoretical basis guiding the thinking of our nation." In fact, in past and no doubt future socialist revolutions as well, large sections of society, including vast numbers of potential supporters of the socialist system – for example, many who uphold religious beliefs – cannot be said to share the communist ideology, and to claim otherwise is both false and harmful. Furthermore, insisting that society as a whole swear allegiance to communist ideology when many or most are not yet won over makes it less possible to unleash and embrace the energy and thinking which can, in a multifaceted and non-linear way, contribute to advancing toward communism. As Avakian has put it, the vanguard party will have to lead a dialectical process that will require it to repeatedly go "to the brink of being drawn and quartered" while still fighting through on the need for continuing revolutionary transformation. In this same light, Avakian has

also insisted on the need to encourage dissent under socialism and correctly incorporate the principle enunciated by John Stuart Mill "on the importance of people being able to hear arguments not just as they are characterized by those who oppose them but as they are put forward by those who strongly believe in them."<sup>47</sup>

But D'Mello addresses the contradiction between the communist leadership and the broad masses from his perspective of a "radical democrat," and misunderstands both the problem and the solution. In his description of the development of socialism in the USSR, D'Mello quotes from and relies heavily on the UK social-democratic political theorist Ralph Miliband:

"Lenin's vision of the socialist state 'did not survive the Bolshevik seizure of power.' Yet, he 'never formally renounced the perspectives which had inspired *State and Revolution*.' Can we thus conclude that Lenin wanted 'the creation of a society in which the state would be strictly subordinated to the rule and self-government of the people'?... The contrast between theory and practice, in this respect, couldn't have been starker... After all, what happened to the Congress of Soviets – soviets which had the potential to be self-governing organs of the workers and the peasants – that had arisen almost spontaneously from the movement of February 1917? By the summer of 1918 the soviets had no more than a mere formal existence... Indeed, the dictatorship of the proletariat was deemed impossible except through the leadership of the single party; socialist pluralism too got precluded."

It should be pointed out that Miliband's discussion of *State and Revolution* as reprised by D'Mello is a grotesque distortion. Miliband/D'Mello are obscuring that *the main point* of Lenin's celebrated work is to argue in favor of the dictatorship of the proletariat!

The reader familiar with the debates in the contemporary Maoist movement will immediately see the similarity between Miliband/D'Mello's arguments and those of the former Indian Maoist K. Venu<sup>48</sup> of the early 1990s, and more recently of Babarum Bhattarai in Nepal in his revisionist rendering of "proletarian democracy" and one-sided negation of the past experience of the proletarian revolution of the 20th century.<sup>49</sup>

Here I would only emphasize a few points. While forms and structures of political rule and mass initiative are important,<sup>50</sup> there is no magic form (soviets or other) which alone can assure the actual rule of the masses. Certainly the "universal suffrage" characteristic of bourgeois democracy has been shown time and again, and in country after country, to be a very good vehicle for cementing and justifying the rule of a small minority of society, the exploiting classes. Nor will direct elections of workers' councils (soviets) or similar institutions solve the problem of the real and effective participation of the masses in the governing institutions or, more importantly, assure that the society is being led forward in keeping with the class interests of the proletariat in ultimately transcending class society. Nor should we forget that "radical democrats," when they come to power, can be among the worst tyrants (for example, when Nasser came to power in Egypt he used the military to crush what had been been a flourishing mass movement and rounded up thousands of communists and others to be tortured and held in concentration camps).

D'Mello's attribution to Mao of the need to struggle against a "ruling elite" may appear to correspond to Mao's treatment of the class struggle under socialism. However, it actually separates the contradiction between the leaders and led from the contradictory nature of the socialist economic base which provides the basis for the emergence of a new bourgeoisie. In other words, there will be a need for planners, administrators and leaders throughout the period of socialism: the decisive question is which line is implemented by these forces, with the leaders of the party playing

a particularly central role. The proletarian revolutionary line must lead society along the socialist road, which will include narrowing the remaining divisions between leadership and led, restricting the operation of the law of value and bourgeois right, drawing ever broader sections of the masses into the decision-making process, and so forth. If the capitalist line triumphs, as was the case first in the USSR with the ascension of Khrushchev to power and then in China following the coup d'état after Mao's death, all of the birthmarks of the old society, such as the division of labor, the law of value, etc., will expand exponentially and the horrors of the capitalist system will return.

Arguing for a struggle against a monolithic "ruling elite" while avoiding a scientific analysis of the class contradictions and tasks of socialist society, as D'Mello does, is neither what Mao taught nor what he practiced. Worse than just a muddle of confusion, this kind of non-materialist approach can open the door to populist demagoguery. Capitalist-roaders under socialism are just as capable of this as the populist demagogues in today's reactionary societies. There was plenty of this type of demagogic smoke covering the coup d'état by Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping in 1976, such as attacking Jiang Qing as "decadent" for playing cards and watching Western movies. And we should repeat again that many comrades internationally were also taken in by this.

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Revolutionary communism requires a different democracy than that of the bourgeoisie, one which strengthens the proletarian dictatorship, that helps ensure that more and more sections of the masses are drawn into the process of decision-making and helps ensure that the state continues to advance toward communism.<sup>xvii</sup> We know from historical experience that there will be bitter struggle to maintain this path and we also know that the very structures that the revolution has put into place can be transformed into instruments to re-enslave the masses and drag society backwards to capitalism, as happened in the USSR and China. We can also sum up that a flourishing debate and widespread political ideological struggle, however "messy" and complex this process may be, creates more favorable conditions to stay on the socialist road and defeat attempts to change the color of the socialist state. On the other hand, efforts to hem in, stage manage or even repress the political and ideological struggle will ultimately work in favor of those who would go backwards to capitalism. Fundamentally, however, bringing about a vigorous and lively socialist society is not mainly a question of democracy.

Avakian's new synthesis provides a new framework to unleash creativity and experimentation, to foster ferment and dissent, and to narrow and overcome the contradiction between mental and manual labor, between leadership and led – all as part of the advance to communism. He is providing a new framework to work on the contradiction between those forces in society determined to advance toward communism and the broader and contradictory sections of society. This gets concentrated in the formulation "solid core with lots of elasticity." "This means that, on the one hand, there must be a continually expanding force in society, with the revolutionary communist party as its leading element, which is firmly convinced of the need to advance to communism and deeply committed to carrying forward this struggle, through all the difficulties and obstacles; and, on the basis of and at the same time as continually strengthening this 'solid core,' there must be provision and scope for a wide diversity of thinking and activity, among people throughout society, 'going off in many different directions,' grappling and experimenting with many

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xvii Avakian wrote, "Rule by the people – that is, democracy – what meaning does it have, when you have moved beyond the division of people into exploiters and exploited, when there is only the common association of people? Yes, there will be contradiction and struggle, but there will not be social relations and institutionalized forms through which one part of society will be dominating, ruling over and exploiting and oppressing other parts of society. So what meaning, then, is there to 'the rule of the people' when there is just the people, with their common association, without the need for and without the existence, in fact, of instruments of suppression of one part of society by another?" *What Humanity Needs – Revolution and the New Synthesis of Communism*, An Interview with Bob Avakian, *Revolution*, no. 267, May 1, 2012.

diverse ideas and programs and fields of endeavor – and once again all this must be 'embraced' by the vanguard party and the 'solid core' in an overall sense and enabled to contribute, through many divergent paths, to the advance along a broad road toward the goal of communism."<sup>51</sup>

There is a basis to bring a vibrant, exciting socialist society into being – a society that not only meets the expanding needs of the masses but one where the economy, political institutions, culture and relations between people are being revolutionized, and that is in motion towards a communist world. There is a basis to forge a path to a future where human beings could truly flourish and act as caretakers of the planet. Put differently, the challenge before us is to initiate a new stage of communist revolution.

**<http://www.demarcations-journal.org>**

- 1 As of June 2012, the article could be found at <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2009/dmello021109.html>. Bernard D'Mello, "What is Maoism?", in D'Mello, ed., *What Is Maoism and Other Essays*, Cornerstone Publications, 2010.
- 2 D'Mello, p. 24. Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1946), p. 354.
- 3 D'Mello, p. 43-44.
- 4 See Bob Avakian, *Unresolved Contradictions, Driving Forces for Revolution*. A Talk, 2009. For more on this and related questions, see other works by Avakian such as the "Dictatorship and Democracy" talk, "Reaching for the Heights and Flying Without a Safety Net", "Birds Cannot Give Birth to Crocodiles, But Humanity Can Soar Beyond the Horizon", "Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity," in the pamphlet *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation* (May 1, 2008), the recent interview "What Humanity Needs – Revolution and the New Synthesis of Communism," and the GPCR interview in this issue of the journal - and other works that reflect the new synthesis such as the Manifesto of the RCP and the Constitution of the New Socialist Republic of North America. Most articles can be found at [revcom.us/avakian/index.html](http://revcom.us/avakian/index.html) and looking through the titles in the rubric Recent Talks and Writings. The interview "What Humanity Needs" can be found at [revcom.us/avakian/what-humanity-needs/interview.html](http://revcom.us/avakian/what-humanity-needs/interview.html).
- 5 D'Mello, p. 52.
- 6 For more on this question, see the Website of the Set the Record Straight project: [thisiscommunism.org](http://thisiscommunism.org).
- 7 See Mao Tsetung's 1967 "Talk to the Albanian Military Delegation," reprinted in *A World To Win* no. 1/1985.
- 8 *Communism: The Beginning of a New Stage, A Manifesto from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*. [rev.com.us/Manifesto/Manifesto.html](http://rev.com.us/Manifesto/Manifesto.html). Hereafter referred to as *Manifesto from the RCP*.  
For more discussion of this theme, see Lenny Wolf, "What Is Bob Avakian's New Synthesis?", [revcom.us/a/129/New\\_Synthesis\\_Speech-en.html](http://revcom.us/a/129/New_Synthesis_Speech-en.html), and Avakian, *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, Part 1. [revcom.us/avakian/makingrevolution/](http://revcom.us/avakian/makingrevolution/).
- 9 Karl Marx, "The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850," *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, Vol 1, (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1969), p. 282.
- 10 *Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*, (Chicaog, RCP Publications, 2008), p. 42. Also [revcom.us/Constitution/Constitution/index.html](http://revcom.us/Constitution/Constitution/index.html)
- 11 *Manifesto from the RCP* [emphasis added].
- 12 Report to the Ninth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, April 1969. [marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1969/04/01.htm](http://marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1969/04/01.htm).
- 13 A leading exponent of this kind of view among academics is the French ex-Maoist Alain Badiou. See Raymond Lotta, Nayi Duniya, and K. J. A., "Alain Badiou's 'Politics of Emancipation' A Communism Locked Within the Confines of the Bourgeois World," *Demarcations*, no. 1., [demarcations-journal.org](http://demarcations-journal.org).
- 14 Jiang Qing (Chiang Ching) was Mao's wife and principal revolutionary leader on the cultural front. For more, see "Chiang Ching: The Revolutionary Ambitions of a Communist Leader," *A World to Win*, no. 19, 1993.
- 15 Zhang Chunqiao (Chang Chun-chiao) played a leading role in the 1967 January Storm in Shanghai and was both a major theoretician and a key leader of the revolutionary headquarters. See his seminal work *On Exercising All-Round Dictatorship over the Bourgeoisie*, (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1975).
- 16 Avakian, *Mao Tsetung's Immortal Contributions*, (Chicago, RCP Publications, 1979).
- 17 Other important works were to follow that further elaborated on Mao's contributions but also began to explore important areas in which mistakes in practice and conception existed. See, among others, *Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will*, [revcom.us/bob\\_avakian/conquerworld/index.html](http://revcom.us/bob_avakian/conquerworld/index.html); *For a Harvest of Dragons* (Chicago, RCP Publications, 1983); *Democracy: Can't We Do Better than That?* (Chicago, Banner Press, 1986).
- 18 See *Conquer the World*.
- 19 See and contrast "On Marxism-Leninism-Maoism," Documents from the Communist Party of Peru (PCP) First Congress, *A World to Win*, no. 11, 1985; and "Marxism-Leninism-Maoism," by the RCP,USA, *A World to Win*, no. 12, 1988.
- 20 See Avakian, *Advancing the World Revolutionary Movement: Questions of Strategic Orientation* (a talk given shortly after *Conquer the World?*, first published in *Revolution* magazine, Spring 1984, [revcom.us/bob\\_avakian/advancingworldrevolution/advancingworldrevolution.html](http://revcom.us/bob_avakian/advancingworldrevolution/advancingworldrevolution.html). Also see *On Materialism and the Material Basis for Revolution, for Socialism and the Advance to Communism*. [bobavakian.net/articles/basis-goals-methods/.html](http://bobavakian.net/articles/basis-goals-methods/.html).
- 21 RIM's basis of unity at its founding in 1984 was stated in the *Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement*. In 1993 RIM also adopted *Long Live Marxism-Leninism-Maoism*.
- 22 For more on these themes see Bob Avakian, *Bringing Forward Another Way*, 2006. [revcom.us/avakian/anotherway/index.html](http://revcom.us/avakian/anotherway/index.html).
- 23 For a more thorough discussion on the relation between "equality" and the struggle for communism see Lotta et al., "Alain Badiou..." chapter 1.

- 24 See Text 38, "From Bourgeois Democrats to Capitalist-Roaders," and Text 39: Capitalist-Roaders Are the Bourgeoisie Inside the Party," in Raymond Lotta, ed., *And Mao Makes Five*. (Chicago, Banner Press, 1978).
- 25 Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition, ed. Robert Tucker, (W.W. Norton, 1978) p. 530 – 531.
- 26 Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Cited by Avakian in his 2005 talk *Views on Socialism and Communism: A Radically New Kind of State, a Radically Different and Far Greater Vision of Freedom, Revolution*, March 8, 2006. [revcom.us/avakian/index.html](http://revcom.us/avakian/index.html).
- 27 "On Developments in Nepal and the Stakes for the Communist Movement: Letters to the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, 2005-2008 (With a Reply from the CPN(M), 2006)," *Demarcations*, no. 1. [demarcations-journal.org](http://demarcations-journal.org).
- 28 See Lotta et al., "Alain Badiou..." chapter IV, "Rereading the Cultural Revolution in Order to Bury the Cultural Revolution."
- 29 Avakian, *The Loss in China and the Revolutionary Legacy of Mao Tsetung*, (Chicago, RCP Publications, 1978).
- 30 See Bob Avakian, *Advancing the World Revolutionary Movement*, op. cit.; and *Conquer the World?*; op. cit.
- 31 Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850*. Marx/Engels Selected Works, Vol 1. (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1969).
- 32 Avakian, "The Need for Communists to Be...Communists," *Revolution* no. 38, March 12, 2006. [revcom.us/a/038/avakian-need-for-communists.html](http://revcom.us/a/038/avakian-need-for-communists.html).
- 33 *The Tenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Documents)*, (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1973). Maoist documentation Project/mao/cpc/10cong.htm#p1
- 34 Avakian. *Ruminations and Wranglings – On the Importance of Marxist Materialism, Communism as a Science, Meaningful Revolutionary Work, and a Life With a Meaning*. 2009. [revcom.us/avakian/ruminations/BA-ruminations-en.html](http://revcom.us/avakian/ruminations/BA-ruminations-en.html).
- 35 D'Mello, op cit. Also see especially the Sweezy essay "What Is Marxism?" in this anthology.
- 36 See *Advancing the World Revolutionary Movement*.
- 37 Mao, "The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War," *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1967), p. 196.
- 38 Quoted by Avakian, "The Need for Communists to Be ... Communists."
- 39 Originally in *Peking Review* 39, September 22, 1967. Also quoted by Avakian, "The Need for Communists to Be ... Communists."
- 40 To find the 10<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, [www.prisoncensorship.info/archive/etext/classics/mao/cpc/10cong.html](http://www.prisoncensorship.info/archive/etext/classics/mao/cpc/10cong.html)
- 41 This is part of what he describes as "Enriched What Is To Be Done-ism." See *Making Revolution and Emancipating Humanity*, Part II.
- 42 Mao, "On Practice", *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tsetung*, (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1971), p. 68.
- 43 Paul Sweezy, "What is Marxism?," op. cit., p. 58.
- 44 See Avakian's discussion of this question in the section "Marxism as a Science – Refuting Karl Popper." Part I of *Making Revolution, Emancipating Humanity*.
- 45 "Stuck in the 'Awful Capitalist Present' or Forging a Path to the Communist Future? - A Response to Mike Ely's Nine Letters," by a writing group in the RCP, [revcom.us/a/126/polemic-note-en.html](http://revcom.us/a/126/polemic-note-en.html).
- 46 Lenin, Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism, in *Karl Marx Selected Works*, (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1945), p. 45.
- 47 "Bob Avakian in a Discussion with Comrades, On Epistemology, On Knowing and Changing the World," *Observations on Art and Culture, Science and Philosophy*, (Chicago, Insight Press, 2005), p. 43.
- 48 See CRC,CP(ML), "On Proletarian Democracy," and Avakian, "Democracy: More Than Ever We Can and Must Do Better Than That," *A World to Win*, no. 17, 1992.
- 49 See also the letters from the RCP,USA to the UCPN(M).
- 50 See for example the RCP's *Constitution for a Socialist Republic in North America (Draft Proposal)* outlining provisions for state institutions that can assist in developing the revolutionary character of the proletarian state as a vehicle for advancing toward communism, and provide for a wide scope for dissent and debate within the society, which also is a crucial means to move society forward. (Chicago, RCP Publications, 2010). [revcom.us/socialistconstitution/index.html](http://revcom.us/socialistconstitution/index.html)
- 51 *Constitution for a Socialist Republic in North America (Draft Proposal)*, p. 5.