

13. Ibid, p. 154.

14. Ibid, p. 16.

15. Jervis Anderson, *A Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972. p. 149.

16. Philip Foner and Ronald Lewis, *Black Workers: A Documentary History from Colonial Times to the Present*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989. p. 32.

Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?

by Bob Avakian

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Reviewed by MC12

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INTRODUCTION

"It is a law of Marxism that socialism can be attained only via the stage of democracy."

—Mao Zedong, "On Coalition Government." Selected Works, Vol. III, p. 233.

"This is the historic epoch in which world capitalism and imperialism are going down to their doom and world socialism and people's democracy are marching to victory."

—Mao Zedong, "The Present Situation and Our Tasks." Selected Works, Vol IV, p. 173.

There is nothing good that is original in this book by the head of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA (RCP), as far as a Marxist interpretation of democracy. Avakian correctly asserts that Democracy is always class-specific and contingent in class society. The idea of political equality without economic and social equality is an idealist dream, or, more frequently, a malicious lie. So much was already known by Marx and Engels, not to mention Lenin, Stalin, Mao and so on.

Thus we read that Plato thought it was fine to hold slaves, that John Stuart Mill argued for state repression of revolutionaries, that property rights were considered central to the founders of democracy, etc. This is all important for Marxists to understand. We should never be satisfied by the claims of those who say they want a socialism that "realizes" democracy instead of just promising it, or those who say Amerika would not be oppressive if only it

"lived up" to its promise of democracy.

The question at hand, however is different. First, what is the role of democratic struggles in the socialist revolution; and second, what is the role of democracy under socialism and communism? Avakian uses the Marxist analysis that democracy will be unnecessary in classless society in order to take away from the crucial importance of democratic struggles in the socialist revolution, especially struggles for national self-determination, as well as popular struggles under socialism on the way to communism.

MIM maintains that bourgeois democracy is a particular political form through in which one or several classes of rulers exert their control over those whose labor provides the wealth of the society. Any oppressed person who wants to be president is free to raise a billion dollars and run, provided she or he doesn't propose anything illegal, such as abolishing property, patriarchy or privilege. That's bourgeois democracy — the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie — and it is in need of destruction, not perfection.

Socialist democracy, on the other hand, is the temporary political system through which the formerly oppressed classes exert control over their former exploiters, even as they encourage the conversion of all those who can be convinced or coerced to come over to the side of the people, to the side of socialism and communism. And it is how the socialist masses propel society forward toward communism.

Socialist democracy, however, is still a class system — part of the dictatorship of the proletariat — and not a system of complete equality and openness to all. The former exploiters lose some of their privileges and "rights" during this period, especially their right to use property to exploit others, and their right to buy political influence greater than their numerical strength, but also, in extreme cases, their basic democratic rights period.

Complete freedom, complete equality, the end of oppression and coercion — all that will be strived for under communism, when democracy itself will no longer be necessary to mediate the relationships between classes, because classes themselves, along with national and gender inequality, will no longer exist. In a literal sense that will mean the realization of "true democracy" — rule by the people — but it will not make sense to call it democracy because it will mean so much more than that historically-specific term was ever meant to imply.

Avakian does take on some more recent mani-

festations of bourgeois ideology on the question of democracy, particularly social-democratic apologists for capitalism and Soviet revisionists. In some of these passages, Avakian's description is useful.

But he didn't write a whole book to do that. No, Avakian's purpose in *Democracy* is rather to make several very specific points relevant to the international communist movement and Maoism in particular in the late 1980s.

First, Avakian wants to distance Maoism from national liberation movements as an essential, decisive component of socialist revolution in the era of imperialism. He does this by stressing the conceptual relationship of national liberation to bourgeois democracy on the one hand and neglecting the role of national liberation struggle in the socialist revolution on the other.

Second, and in a very related point, Avakian wants to criticize the United Front (U.F.) policy led by Stalin and the Comintern before and during World War II. This is partly because of the implications of the U.F. for current national liberation struggles — the necessity of strategic unity between communists and such non-proletarian sectors as the progressive national bourgeoisie or petty bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations — and partly because he wants to criticize the concept of socialism in one country.

Third, in direct contradiction to Mao and all materialist dialectics, Avakian wants to say that conditions external to a particular country are fundamentally decisive to its development, rather than internal conditions and movements.

These three characteristics of the book are subtly written as a subtext, and have to be drawn out by careful readers of RCP-Avakian-thought, who have learned to watch him as he fakes left and runs right, as in this case, or vice versa.

At the root of all three of these characteristics — and the reason MIM asserts the comparison between Avakian and Leon Trotsky — is an oppressor-nation chauvinism, which is always at the root of Trotskyism. The thrust of all three is that revolution in the imperialist countries is at the center of world revolution, that it is the most important, decisive element in the course of socialism in the USSR, China and other countries. This ideology is poison to the oppressed majority of the world, and music to the ears of First-World chauvinists.

This error — or deception — on Avakian's part, from the mouth of a (sometime) self-proclaimed Maoist, underscores the vast international impor-

tance of MIM's analysis of the labor aristocracies of the imperialist countries as opposed to revolution under current conditions, and the urgent necessity of struggling over this issue among all communists, especially those in the imperialist world.

The fourth underlying point Avakian makes, in his criticism of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China (1966-1976), and in his proscription for future revolutions, is that struggle against capitalism within the communist party in power should be primarily directed and led by the party and state rather than by the masses themselves.

By this Avakian means that in the relationship between socialist democracy and proletarian dictatorship, it is the job of proletarian dictatorship (the state led by the party) to conduct the struggle against revisionism — to restrict the rights of oppressors and would-be oppressors — and the job of socialist democracy (mass participation) to contribute to the construction of communism. In this, as we will describe below, Avakian learns the wrong lesson from the GPCR, the failure of which he takes as a call for more repression under socialism.

AVAKIAN AGAINST NATIONAL LIBERATION (AGAINST LENIN)

National self-determination at the turn of the century belonged to the sphere of bourgeois democracy. Nevertheless, in the era of imperialism, Lenin and the Bolshevik Party recognized that the democratic demand for self-determination was not only an essential step in the process of anti-imperialist revolutionary struggle for socialism, it was also an important means of uniting the oppressed peoples of different nations, especially those of the oppressed and oppressor nations, such as Russia and the nations it oppressed under Tsarist rule. Only by explicitly guaranteeing the right of nations to self-determination — embodied in the right to secede at will — will it be possible to forge trusting alliances between the workers of different nations as they struggle against imperialism.

(In the case of Amerika, this means oppressed-nation masses will only come to trust the masses of the oppressor nation after a period of receivership in which the liberated oppressed nations rule the former Euro-American oppressor nation until its masses are sufficiently transformed to be allowed back into the cooperating human race.)

The struggle for national self-determination is a democratic demand. It belongs to the era of nations, which is the era of bourgeois democracy.

When successful, however — when it is led and won by communist forces — it leads to the period of New Democracy and the establishment of socialist democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat — toward socialism and communism. When Avakian says democracy is not only mythical but against the interests of the oppressed, he negates a crucial stage in the revolutionary struggle.

Avakian complains that the masses have naive views about democracy, that it means "economic opportunity" or "the rights of man." And he says:

"While such views of democracy and freedom serve to foster and reinforce the inclinations and prejudices of these privileged strata, they also exert considerable influence among the dispossessed in society — both because of the prevailing social 'atmosphere' and values and because of massive promotion of these ideas through media, the educational system, and other means — they serve to channel and contain outrage and outbursts against oppression.... In reality and in essence, democracy, in whatever form, means democracy only in the ranks of the ruling class (or classes) in society."(p. 5)

Now read Lenin, from 1916:

"It would be a radical mistake to think that the struggle for democracy was capable of diverting the proletariat from the socialist revolution or of hiding, overshadowing it, etc. On the contrary, in the same way as there can be no victorious socialism that does not practise full democracy, so the proletariat cannot prepare for its victory over the bourgeoisie without an all-round, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy."(1)

So, contrary to Avakian-thought, Lenin argued that the struggle for democratic rights was also an important element in the development of socialist revolution, even if it encountered failures along the way. Lenin addressed such views as Avakian's directly when he argued that it was wrong to consider the possibility of self-determination and other democratic rights "illusory," and thus not worthy of struggle:

"This is because not only the right of nations to self-determination, but all the fundamental demands of political democracy are only partially 'practicable' under imperialism, and then in a distorted form and by way of exception.... The demand for the immediate liberation of the colonies that is put forward by

all revolutionary Social-Democrats [what they called communists] is also 'impracticable' under capitalism without a series of revolutions. But from this it does not by any means follow that Social-Democracy should reject the immediate and most determined struggle for all those demands — such a rejection would only play into the hands of the bourgeoisie and reaction — but, on the contrary, it follows that these demands must be formulated and put through in a revolutionary and not a reformist manner, going beyond the bounds of bourgeois legality, breaking them down, going beyond speeches in parliament and verbal protests, and drawing the masses into decisive action, extending and intensifying the struggle for every fundamental democratic demand up to a direct proletarian onslaught on the bourgeoisie, i.e., up to the socialist revolution that expropriates the bourgeoisie. The socialist revolution may flare up not only through some big strike, street demonstration or hunger riot or a military insurrection or colonial revolt, but also as a result of a political crisis such as the Dreyfus case or the Zbern incident, or in connection with a referendum on the secession of an oppressed nation, etc."(2)

Avakian wants to argue that imperialism is the highest stage of democracy, that it represents the culmination of the system started into action by Plato, picked up by the French Revolution, etc. So he rejects Lenin's argument that imperialism negates democracy by denying the "rights" it sets out to greater and greater numbers of people. He denies the value of the lessons learned and the gains won in the revolutionary struggle for such democratic rights as self-determination. So Avakian denies a qualitative difference between Nazi German fascism and Amerikan bourgeois democratic rule, and he rejects the struggle for democratic rights among the oppressed as a component of the revolution.

Avakian is against Lenin on this point, so he fakes left — in preparation for running right. He says:

"It is also true that, in making the flat statement that imperialism represents the negation of democracy — and that democracy corresponds to free competition while political reaction corresponds to monopoly — Lenin went overboard and was guilty of some exaggeration and one-sidedness."(p.163)

Then Avakian turns the question into one of the necessity of armed struggle, which of course

Lenin supported.

For Avakian on national liberation:

"From all this [discussion of Thomas Jefferson & Co.] it can be seen that the democratic principle of the equality of nations and the right of nations to self-determination, while it must be upheld and fought for today in opposition to the domination of oppressed nations under imperialism, nevertheless is historically delimited and in the final analysis is not sufficient even to illuminate the way to the abolition of national inequality and oppression. It falls far short of pointing to a world in which humanity is no longer marked by division into nations as well as classes."(p. 63, emphasis added.)

In contrast, Lenin argued that not only did national liberation illuminate the way toward socialism, it was an absolutely essential element. Lenin said:

"In the same way as mankind can arrive at the abolition of classes only through a transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, it can arrive at the inevitable integration of nations only through a transition period of the complete emancipation of all oppressed nations, i.e., their freedom to secede."(3)

Avakian's struggle against revolutionary nationalism is relentless. He sees national liberation as a part of democracy which must be left behind — and not just in the future: he faults the Black Panther Party for their "ultimate failure to rupture with the whole framework of democracy."(p. 88) National liberation for the Black nation, of course, is part of the "whole framework of democracy."

For Avakian, there have been "deviations within the Marxist movement" that included not only social democracy in the imperialist countries, but also:

"toward nationalism (as well as some other manifestations of bourgeois democratic tendencies) in the oppressed nations (though, again, the latter does have the virtue of often assuming a revolutionary expression, even if not a fully Marxist-Leninist one)."(p. 260)

In opposition to this, Lenin, Stalin and Mao all recognized that revolutionary national liberation struggle does not merely "often assum[e] a revolu-

tionary expression" — in the era of imperialism there is simply no socialist revolution that does not include this "bourgeois-democratic" demand. (MIM also notes that on the same page Avakian ominously refers to the development of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement — the RCP's international front — as an "extremely important, if still beginning [in 1986], step, including in terms of making such a rupture" against the nationalist deviation within Marxism.)

In imperialist oppressor nations such as Euro-Amerika, the struggle for democratic rights on the part of the labor aristocracy or other privileged groups does indeed have negative consequences for the oppressed of the world. J. Sakai calls this the dialectic of democracy and oppression in Amerika (4). For this reason MIM does not agitate for the democratic demands of the oppressor nation labor aristocracies, even as we continue to uphold the essential need for democratic struggle — especially national liberation struggle — among the truly oppressed as a stage in socialist revolution.

AVAKIAN AGAINST THE UNITED FRONT AND NEW DEMOCRACY (AGAINST STALIN)

Avakian correctly criticizes those theories that lump the Stalin-led USSR with Nazi Germany into the category "totalitarianism," in the process denying the class-specific character of each political system. But his real purpose in the discussion is to say that Nazi Germany was not qualitatively different from other imperialist countries at the time, and thus the United Front was a wrong-headed policy:

"Throughout this period Germany was and remained nothing other than a bourgeois imperialist state, though it ruled at home not in the 'classical' form of bourgeois democracy but through a fascist — an openly terroristic — form of bourgeois dictatorship."(p. 173)

Maybe Avakian considers Poland and Czechoslovakia, not to mention the USSR or France, to be Germany's "home," but MIM does not!

Nazi Germany not only unleashed a new level of terror and repression within its borders, but expanded that system across Europe, up to and into the Soviet Union. But there is no room for such trivialities in Avakian's analysis, which is bent on showing the worthlessness of democratic right, and thus wants to paper over any difference between imperialists — who all represent the height of democratic

oppression.

MIM knows it is important to point out the similarities between fascism and bourgeois democracy in the imperialist countries, especially in their conquest of oppressed nations, the complicity of their labor aristocracies, and in their expansionist aggression. In fact, as MIM repeatedly points out, the United States and Germany colluded during World War II, as Amerika was willing to let parts of Europe fall to fascism in exchange for a Nazi attack on the socialist USSR.

Nevertheless, MIM does not make the mistake of saying there is no significant difference between the two systems either. Nor does MIM deny the critical importance of the Soviet Union's position in the world revolutionary movement at that time in history, something Avakian ignores.

On the subject of New Democracy, Avakian says as much by what he doesn't say as by what he does: he devotes less than three pages out of 269 to the concept. In those three pages, he grudgingly accepts that in the Third World, the "immediate transformations" that must be carried out:

"conform, as a general rule, to what can broadly be defined as democratic tasks: the winning of genuine national liberation and the elimination of various forms or vestiges of precapitalist economic relations and their reflection in the superstructure."

When he says things "as a general rule" or "broadly defined," look out! He's after these ideas, leaving the extent of the implied exceptions purposefully undefined, even though he calls new democracy a "decisive component" of world revolution. MIM, on the other hand, unequivocally states that New Democracy is absolutely essential in all cases for the transition to socialism in the oppressed nations, and that national liberation in the oppressed nations is absolutely essential in all cases for the transition to socialism.

At the same time, MIM believes that more developed countries will have shorter periods of new democracy, as one of the critical tasks of the period is to gradually eliminate precapitalist economic arrangements and gradually win over some members of the progressive national bourgeoisie and peasantry to the socialist consciousness.

Avakian's revisionism on New Democracy is very related to the United Front. Both involve the strategic necessity of enlisting the efforts of the national bourgeoisie and other middle elements in

the struggle against imperialism — efforts that are crucial to the victory of national liberation and the transition to socialism. Both avoid the ultraleft error of isolating middle forces that can be won over to socialism. Here again, Avakian fakes left.

Once he has supposedly established that Nazi Germany was no different from any other imperialist country, and without any reference to the international situation, including the threat to the Soviet Union, he attacks the United Front thus out of context. The Comintern called on workers in the imperialist countries to support their countries against fascism, prompting Avakian to declare:

"Not only was the Leninist line on the nation in the imperialist era openly reversed — it was stated that the communists should be the best representatives of the nation, even of the imperialist nations, whereas Lenin had insisted that the statement in the Communist Manifesto that the workers have no fatherland applied precisely to the imperialist countries — but, despite talk about finding ways to make the transition to the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, it was actually argued, 'Now the working masses in a number of capitalist countries are faced with the necessity of making a definite choice, and of making it today, not between proletarian dictatorship and bourgeois democracy, but between bourgeois democracy and fascism.'" (p. 258, with quote from Georgi Dimitrov.)

Avakian is upset that:

"It was not emphasized that bourgeois-democratic rule means bourgeois dictatorship, and fascism was presented as a dictatorship only of the most reactionary sections of the bourgeoisie — rather than as the dictatorship of the bourgeois class as such — in open terroristic form."

In other words, Avakian objects to the application of materialist science to the existing circumstances of World War II, instead preferring abstract or out-of-context criticism — idealist criticism.

What the idealist criticism boils down to, whether advanced by open Trotskyists or Avakian crypto-Trotskyism, is that revolution in the imperialist countries was stalled by the decision to support the war against fascism. In other words, that the political decisions of foreign leaders were decisive in determining the course of events internal to the imperialist countries — the blame-it-on-Stalin school of explaining why no labor aristocracy has ever pro-

duced a revolution. (Further, any local decision to follow the advice of foreign leaders does not place responsibility for the outcome of that advice on the foreign leaders; revolution can not be exported or imported, as Mao said.)

Aside from political opportunism and idealism, this approach reflects a basic misunderstanding or distortion of materialist dialectics. Therefore, in educating open-minded revolutionaries to understand and oppose this view, we go back to dialectics: to Trotskyism, socialism in one country, and the determination of internal forces.

AVAKIAN AGAINST THE DETERMINATION OF INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS (AGAINST MAO)

Let us begin by examining Mao's central thesis on this question. In "On Contradiction," Mao wrote:

"Contradictoriness within a thing is the fundamental cause of its development, while its interrelations and interactions with other things are secondary causes. Thus materialist dialectics effectively combats the theory of external causes, or of an external motive force, advanced by metaphysical mechanical materialism and vulgar evolutionism. ... Changes in society are due chiefly to the development of the internal contradictions of society, that is, the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, the contradiction between classes and the contradiction between the old and the new [which includes the gender contradiction—MC12]; it is the development of these contradictions that pushes society forward and gives the impetus for the supersession of the old society by the new. Does materialist dialectics exclude external causes? Not at all. It holds that external causes are the condition of change and internal causes are the basis of change, and that external causes become operative through internal causes. In a suitable temperature an egg changes into a chicken, but no temperature can change a stone into a chicken, because each has a different basis."(5)

This scientific truth has been most sorely tested by the revisionist claims that it is impossible to develop socialism in one country; these claims were advanced by Trotsky, and are now continued by Avakian, among many others. Maoists do not take this principle as an abstract matter of dogma or religious adherence to holy scripture. Avakian's problem is not simply that he disagrees with the letter of

Maoism; his theory is wrong.

Under imperialism, and indeed for many years before the highest stage of capitalism, the whole world was interconnected economically, militarily and politically — to different degrees. Nevertheless, the most profound changes in any particular society were always principally the product of internal developments.

Thus, even when colonialism imposed severe conditions upon oppressed nations, the effects of colonialism were always filtered through local conditions, and the colonists were constrained by the characteristics of the society under attack.

For example, in North America, where many different small indigenous nations existed before European conquest, and they were mostly not politically centralized, the colonists ended up destroying or dispossessing the First Nations little by little and in different ways, in the process killing or dispossessing almost all of them. This in turn shaped the development of the settler society.

In contrast, in those areas of South America where there were developed, centralized societies prior to the European conquest, the colonists sought to take over and then undermine existing hierarchies. This resulted in a less complete genocide and displacement in these areas, and led to the hierarchical structure of settlers oppressing indigenous peoples, living much closer together for much longer than in North America. Thus, even in the case of colonialism, where one could make the best case for the decisiveness of external forces, we see that internal conditions play a decisive role in shaping the outcome of these societies.

Mao wrote:

"In the era of capitalism, and especially in the era of imperialism and proletarian revolution, the interaction and mutual impact of different countries in the political, economic and cultural spheres are extremely great. The October Socialist Revolution ushered in a new epoch in world history as well as in Russian history. It exerted influence on internal changes in the other countries in the world and, similarly and in a particularly profound way, on internal changes in China. These changes, however, were effected through the inner laws of development of these countries, China included."(6)

This is a liberating, empowering theory, because it makes it clear that, as Mao said, that "it

can be seen that to lead the revolution to victory, a political party must depend on the correctness of its own political line and the solidity of its own organization."(7)

In other words: no blaming Stalin if the revolution in your country doesn't work out. This is liberating because it recognizes that the destiny of a people is in its own hands. This was so even in the Warsaw ghetto, in which Jews were imprisoned by Nazi Germany during World War II, totally surrounded, walled in and trapped by the Nazi army. There, once they saw the extermination Hitler had in mind for them, the Jews waged a heroic uprising, and fought to the last person. Even there, where external conditions left them with only two options — to die lying down or to die fighting on their feet — they determined their own destiny, and in so doing set an example for all oppressed people.

After praising the accomplishments of the GPCR, which "brought into being new, indeed unprecedented, transformations in the economic relations and the political and ideological superstructure of society," Avakian adds:

"At the same time, it is important to stress that the struggle for communism is, and must be, an international struggle, and that the class struggle within a particular country, even a socialist country, is, and must be, subordinate to the overall world revolutionary struggle to achieve dictatorship of the proletariat and carry through the transition to communism. Here my purpose is not so much to repeat the criticism I have previously made that the Cultural Revolution, while it indeed represented the highest pinnacle yet reached by the international proletariat, was still treated, even by Mao, a bit too much as a thing unto itself and 'too much apart from the whole, worldwide struggle ...' and 'even though support was extended to revolutionary struggles elsewhere and it was stressed that the final victory of a socialist country requires the victory of the world proletarian revolution, it was not firmly enough grasped and popularized that the socialist transformation of any particular country can only be a subordinate part of the overall proletarian revolution.' But what must be emphasized here is that the overcoming of the social inequalities characterizing the old order — the eventual elimination of bourgeois right in the broadest sense — must be approached, above all, on the world level in order to carry through the transition to communism."(p. 225, quoting himself.)

Left unsaid here is what it means, practically, to subordinate the struggle in one country to the world proletarian revolution, in the case of the GPCR. Lenin, for example, said:

"internationalism ... means waging a revolutionary struggle against [one's own] government and overthrowing it, and being ready to make the greatest national sacrifices (even down to a Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty), if it should benefit the development of the world worker's revolution."(8)

In Lenin's case, the principle is materialist, not idealist, and the example is concrete. What is the sacrifice in the case of the Brest-Litovsk treaty (in which Bolshevik Russia conceded territory in order to get itself out of World War I) to which Lenin is referring? He explained in 1918, that the peace deal increased the conflict between imperialists, and he added:

"Here is something that has decisive significance.... For, until the world socialist revolution breaks out, until it embraces several countries and is strong enough to overcome international imperialism, it is the direct duty of the socialists who have conquered in one country (especially a backward one) not to accept battle against the giants of imperialism. Their duty is to try to avoid battle, to wait until the conflicts between the imperialists weaken them even more, and bring the revolution in other countries even nearer."(9)

Thus, Lenin, for one, described as a sacrifice the concession of conflict with imperialism in order to advance socialism in one country! Left to Avakian is the task of explaining how the Cultural Revolution went against this principle of internationalism.

While Mao, Stalin and Lenin understood that the world situation set conditions for the decisive internal developments within socialist countries, Avakian in Democracy sees the priority reversed. He notes that socialism develops unevenly, in a few countries at a time, and says:

"So, especially viewed in light of all this, it becomes clear that not only does the bourgeoisie still retain the upper hand in the world as a whole — and is likely to for some time — but this interpenetrates with, and indeed sets the overall framework and foundation for, the struggle to carry forward the

revolutionization of society in any particular socialist country." (p. 226-7. emphasis added.)

Thus, Avakian converts Mao's "external condition" into an external "foundation" which determines the course of internal events. He futilely tries to take destiny out of the hands of the revolutionary masses of socialist countries.

Avakian explains this crucial revision more clearly a few pages later, when he says "the contradictions and struggles within the particular socialist country intertwine with and are ultimately determined by the contradictions and struggles on a world scale." (p. 231. emphasis added.)

In general, these ideas belong to the theory of Trotskyism, which holds that socialism is impossible in Third World countries before the imperialist countries have had revolutions. And in particular, Avakian here belongs to the economist school of thought that puts the development of productive forces over the development of production relations in the transition to socialism and communism.

Avakian says that:

"a decisive point which the historical experience of the socialist transition so far has underscored is that this transition cannot be approached, fundamentally, within the particular countries, taken by themselves, but must be approached, above all, as a worldwide process...."

And the "basis does exist for carrying through this worldwide, and world-historic struggle, exactly because of the previous development of human society...." So, again, it is development in the advanced industrialized countries that make it possible to achieve socialism in the Third World.

As a corollary to that is the RCP thesis, wrong at the time and now decisively proven wrong, that the conflict between Amerika and the social-imperialist USSR was the principal contradiction on a world scale. Avakian quotes himself on that point again in this book (from A Horrible End Or An End to the Horror?):

"a deadly serious struggle is going on between these two trends which will have everything to do with determining the direction of human society, and indeed the destiny of humanity itself." (p. 267)

Again, by this non-materialist theory, the people of the oppressed nations will not decide their

own fate.

AVAKIAN AGAINST PROLETARIAN DEMOCRACY (AGAINST COMMUNISM)

Communists have learned a lot about how to bring about socialist and communist society, primarily from the experience of the Russian and Chinese revolutions, as well as others. In particular, we have learned that when a communist party comes to power after a military struggle, it cannot simply institute a classless society (communism) or even a society without private exploitation of labor or ownership of the means of production (socialism). Instead, the protracted revolutionary struggle continues, and goes through many stages, some of which have been identified and developed into useful models.

As already discussed, the period of new democracy is a transitional period before socialism, in which progressive capitalists — those who are willing to contribute to socialism even though it will mean the end of themselves as a class — are included in a democratic process, under the leadership of the working classes. After that transitional period, the dictatorship of the proletariat has replaced the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie that existed under capitalism, and socialist construction begins in earnest.

Even under socialism, classes still exist, and therefore socialist democracy represents proletarian dictatorship: the former bourgeoisie — which still exists and still poses a threat to socialism either through its own organic power or through its connections with international capitalism — finds some of its bourgeois-democratic rights restricted. No longer can the bourgeois class use its property to extract surplus value from workers and peasants; no longer can it use its wealth to buy political power. At the same time, the working classes have greatly-increased democratic rights.

And under conditions in which the leading communist party directs economic planning and management, the party has a great potential power, including the power to exploit labor for a profit, in the process developing within itself a new bourgeois class. In the case of the USSR, this new class developed over a long period, and finally seized power after Stalin's death. In China, where Mao and the communist leadership had learned lessons from the USSR and China, the people and the party launched a vast popular struggle against the new bourgeois class within the party, the GPCR. Despite

10 years of acute struggle, the new bourgeoisie still won the battle and seized power in 1976.

Avakian's book raises the question: what do we learn from the USSR and the GPCR for future struggles? Avakian's conclusion is mostly implicit and we will attempt to draw it out. Avakian argues that democracy has only a minimal role to play in the advanced struggles of a cultural revolution, that proletarian dictatorship — exercised primarily by the party and the state — plays the decisive role in the acrimonious development from socialism to communism. MIM does not deny the crucial role of the party and the state in this struggle, but we believe Avakian sets up a false dialectic — that the dictatorship exercised by the party has a democratic form at this stage of the struggle. The masses participate in the party and the state democratically, and together the masses, the state and the party exercise dictatorship over the enemies of socialism.

We know, although Avakian tries to conceal, that democracy under socialism is fundamentally different from democracy under capitalism, that because of this difference it is not something that must be limited beyond the concrete restrictions placed on the bourgeoisie. In short, democracy under socialism has lost its bourgeois character.

When the masses struggle against new or old bourgeois forces under socialism, they can be increasing the power of the proletarian dictatorship over those bourgeois forces, even as they increase socialist democracy. The more the dictatorship wins victories over the enemies of socialism, the more socialist democracy the masses can enjoy.

Avakian focuses this discussion around a critique of the bourgeois philosopher John Stuart Mill. And it is here that we see the danger in Avakian's concepts of democracy and dictatorship, which, as he applies them, would lead to strengthening the state exclusively, but not increasing socialist democracy in the process. He writes:

"Whether Mill meant to say so or not, the reality is that some kind of authority, in one form or another, has to provide guidance, direction, leadership — and in the final analysis, dictatorship, so long as we are talking about class-divided society — in determining what will and will not be discussed, and in what terms, in society at large..." (p. 244)

Here he says it is dictatorship, not proletarian democracy, that in the final analysis, shapes the public debate under socialism. In contrast, we argue

that the means of dictatorship are only necessary to restrict the old and new bourgeoisie from generating influence beyond the strength of their numbers in the population, while the means of proletarian democracy exercise the greatest influence on the course of political and economic development.

Avakian paraphrases Lenin: "... Lenin's answer to the accusation that he was a dictator ... can stand as an answer to Mill and all other apologists of this system: better me than you, better the dictatorship of the proletariat than the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. When such apologists ... insist on equality for all opinions and denounce attempts at dictatorship not only in the sphere of action but in the ideological sphere as well, they are actually ... insisting on the continued domination of the bourgeoisie in the domain of ideas — and in society as a whole." (p. 250)

But under socialism, especially after a certain amount of extended mass struggle, the ideas of the bourgeoisie are no longer the dominant ideas; they still exist, but they no longer dominate. When the bourgeoisie has lost its previous hegemony over popular thought — lost control over schools, mass culture production, and so on — and when the state apparatus is used to keep the bourgeoisie from gaining influence greater than its numbers, then a freer flow of ideas is better, not worse. Thus the dictatorship gets stronger even as it is required to act less in its repressive capacity. As the people gain strength, letting the bourgeoisie express itself politically — letting them speak with their mouths, not with their money — will result not in the resurgence of bourgeois ideas, but in a strengthening of the masses' ability to create and advance their own socialist ideas. At the same time, when the dictatorship has less work to do to repress the bourgeoisie, the masses will be able to have a more productive political debate among themselves, in a freer environment.

Finally, Avakian speaks of the "withering away of democracy," through the strengthening of dictatorship:

"This process — this struggle — is dialectical in a two-fold sense: it involves the dialectical relationship between dictatorship and democracy in socialist society...; and it involves the dialectical relationship — the unity and opposition — between strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat and, at the same time, by the same means, creating the conditions whereby the dictatorship of the

proletariat will no longer be necessary ... or possible." (p. 253)

This requires careful scrutiny to understand. Remember, when two things are in dialectical contradiction, it means one is coming and one is going, one will replace the other in a process that transforms both. There are two dialectical processes in Avakian's analysis. This first is between dictatorship and democracy. He sees democracy — which he has defined as universally bourgeois — being replaced by dictatorship. MIM, on the other hand, sees no such opposition. More proletarian dictatorship means more proletarian democracy. Democratic methods are used to strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat, and democracy is the means by which the masses participate in and criticize the state and the party on the way to constructing communism.

The second process he sees is that which at once builds up and tears down dictatorship, as dictatorship eventually eliminates classes. MIM agrees that such a process is necessary, but again, it is not a matter of dictatorship triumphing over democracy, but rather both triumphing over the bourgeoisie and revisionism.

Notes:

1. Lenin, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination," 1916. In Selected Works in One Volume, International Publishers, 1971. p. 158. While Avakian's comment is vague and general, Lenin was speaking specifically of nations in which bourgeois democracy had not been established, which is also the case in struggles for national self-determination.
2. Ibid, pp. 158-9.
3. Ibid, p. 160.
4. J. Sakai, Settlers: The Mythology of the White Proletariat. Morningstar Press, 1983. p. 16.
5. Mao Zedong, Selected Readings, Foreign Languages Press, 1971, pp. 88-9.
6. Ibid, p. 89.
7. Ibid, p. 90.
8. Lenin, The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky, in SW in One Volume, p. 473.
9. Lenin, "Left Wing" Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality," 1918, in SW in One Volume, p. 433.

MLP Statement

In the 1980s, MIM witnessed two liquidations

— the Maoist Organization for Revolutionary Unity (ORU) in the United States and the vanguard Maoist party in Canada. In 1993, another party — but one claiming to uphold Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Hoxha — also collapsed. Before it collapsed, it underwent internal split and toward the end of its life, MIM spoke to MLP members that knew nothing about Hoxha or the MLP's earlier history. What all three dissolutions had in common was relentless pursuit of the industrial worker.

The following is an excerpt of the MLP's dissolution statement, a negative example:

Our collective existence sprang from a single precept: as revolutionaries coming from different walks of life and varying experience in mass struggles, we shared a common conviction of the need for a party of the proletariat. Over the years, our particular views on a host of questions evolved or changed. Pretenders to the heritage of the world movement came and went. Yet we remained dedicated to the aim of building a party, and toward that end we oriented ourselves toward concentrating our forces in the industrial proletariat, toward intervening in all social movements from a revolutionary standpoint, and toward carrying through the theoretical struggle and theoretical clarification.

Our attempt at realizing this program has been approaching the end of its natural life. For nearly a decade the social movements have failed to give rise to new forces attracted to this program as we in our time rallied to it. Our forces have slowly eroded, while the pressures on us have mounted. Our industrial concentration has nearly been extinguished, while our capacity for intervening in the social movements has by-and-large become marginal. Outstanding theoretical problems have multiplied beyond our ability to satisfactorily address them.

This process of erosion has culminated in a crisis in our central organs: the National Executive Committee is dysfunctional, and we are unable to sustain our existing system of publications. That we are unable to overcome this crisis is due not only to the practical problem of numerical erosion of our forces, but also to the loss of ideological cohesiveness and to the loss of most reflection among the masses of our activity. These factors, when continued over a protracted period, could not be overcome simply by individual belief in the need to maintain party organization at all costs, and inevitably reflected themselves in the spirit of the party as well.