

REVOLUTION

FALL/WINTER 1989

Eye on the Prize

by Bob Avakian

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Eye on the Prize

Fall 1988

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This is not going to be as worked out nor as comprehensive as “Some Thoughts” and “Some Further Thoughts,” but there are some important points that I do want to cover and they come under two general headings: First “The Question of Revolutionary Situation and Revolutionary People: Scenarios and Subjective Forces.” In other words, more on what is necessary in order to *make a Beginning*. And then, “Once Again on the Historical and International Perspective, or, Mao Tsetung Knew a Thing or Two.”

I.

A. The first general subject here is: Focusing on the question of seizing power is a *new* thing. A new thing, that is, for parties in the imperialist countries since the time of Lenin and, more particularly, for revolutionaries in the U.S. It is important to recognize this and its implications. Now I’m not saying no one ever spoke to this question. Some, including our party, have had a general recognition of the need for seizing power and have raised the question of armed struggle. But never before—in the imperialist countries since the time of Lenin, and specifically in the U.S.—has this question been made central: Without power all is illusion.

In the history of the movement in imperialist countries, a lot of talk has gone on about “after the revolution.” In fact, there is a lot of discussion of this in our own *Programme*. And this is certainly not bad. In fact, part of what we need to do these days is even *more* “after the

revolution" talk, as called for in the 1988 CC Report. But the problem is that there has been a tendency to conceive of "after the revolution" as if you'd inherit things as they were the day before the revolution started. The material and ideological wrenching that would accompany revolution has not really been grappled with, at least not in its full dimension. And it is because even the best revolutionaries haven't really focused on what it means to seize power that the dramatic changes in the material and ideological landscape have not been taken into account as fully as they must be.

So it is necessary to ponder deeply that focusing on seizing power as pivotal is a new thing, in the sense I've raised it here. We have to come to grips with this, as we are now doing.

But, even while drawing attention to this question of seizing power as pivotal, we must never forget something even more fundamental. And that is the question of seizing power *for whom* and *for what*. Power must be seized and exercised by the masses, not any small group. It must be a proletarian revolution, not a coup. If this is not grasped as most fundamental, then even this question of "seizing power as pivotal" can turn into its opposite.

I can put this in personal terms. As we grapple with political and organizational, but also military questions involved in seizing power (like, for example, the article "Could We Really Win?"), I sometimes feel a frustration. I sometimes wish I had been more into military matters as a kid, so that now I would find it easier, have more of a "head start" on such questions of military theory. But actually it is a good thing that this was not that case. If I had been into military matters that way, I probably would have been a mediocre soldier for the bourgeoisie and not a revolutionary leader.

We have to hold firm to the fundamental principle of *for whom* and *for what*. We have to approach this question of seizing power from the perspective of radically transforming society and the whole world.

B. The second point I'd like to get into is: More on what do we need to make a Beginning and, in particular, more on the objective situation we need.

In the past, in regard to imperialist countries, communists have envisioned that the objective situation setting the stage for armed insurrection would look like

October 1917 in Russia, or like the 1930s—a crisis like the Great Depression, involving dislocations of that type. The view was that it was impossible to conceive of making a Beginning without something like this. We have come to see that if we wait for such a scenario, in all likelihood we would miss the real opportunity.

Wanting to learn from the past but not be bound by it, we have said "Yes, but. . ." on the applicability of the October Road to our situation. We can't expect to begin armed insurrection in a situation where something like 90 percent of the people are arrayed against a tottering government and all that is needed to topple it, initially, is a hard push. In all likelihood we will not get a situation like Iran of 1978 or Burma 1988—we certainly can't count on such a situation developing or hinge everything on something like this. We can't look to that as the way insurrection must be launched, or we will be condemned to never begin.

Having said that, however, we must keep in mind the decisive question raised by Lenin—the line of demarcation between Marxism (or Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, as we now say) and Blanquism (or terrorism). There is an important dividing line between putchism and mass revolution. One crucial element of this is the existence of a revolutionary people. That is, it is necessary to have a revolutionary people in order to carry out a revolution, in order to initiate the insurrection in imperialist countries and carry out the civil war, laying the basis for the revolutionary transformation of society.

This point of a "revolutionary people" came to my attention in the course of reading the recent interview in *El Diario* newspaper with Chairman Gonzalo of the PCP. At one point, mainly in the course of answering a question about charges of "terrorism," he referred to a statement by Lenin. Lenin speaks of the military actions carried out by a revolutionary army, even a rudimentary one, and contrasts this with isolated acts of terror which happened at an earlier point in Russia, often, he points out, as "an escape provoked by desperation." Lenin says, "Fortunately, the time has passed in which, lacking a revolutionary people making revolution, there were isolated revolutionary terrorists." (This particular statement is as presented in the *El Diario* interview, but the writings of Lenin during the general period of the 1905 revolution, for example, are full of arguments setting

forth the basic principle focused on here—the difference between terrorism and an armed struggle based on a revolutionary people.)

In Russia, as this quote from Lenin illustrates, there was not all the time a revolutionary mood among the masses. My purpose in bringing this up here is to emphasize that the presence of a revolutionary people is an essential and indispensable condition for a Beginning. There must be a revolutionary current with initiative among broad sections of oppressed masses, who become inclined to support a revolutionary current.

I also want to point out here that our relation to the development of a revolutionary people isn't a passive one. Our role is to help accelerate its development, to contribute everything we can to the development of a revolutionary people.

Further, this question of a revolutionary people can't be taken in dogmatic terms. In other words, a revolutionary people doesn't always have to take the form of outpourings of masses of people into the streets. The question of revolutionary situation is conditioned by the question of the two types of countries and the two basic roads. In other words, we've pointed out that a revolutionary situation as it emerges and develops in a Third World country is different in qualitative ways from a revolutionary situation as it emerges and develops in imperialist countries. And one of the features of these oppressed nations is the tremendous unevenness within them and the fact that there are areas of the country where it's possible to get the armed struggle going before it's possible to launch an armed struggle nationwide. As Mao put it (quoting Stalin), this is one of the particularities and advantages of countries like this, as compared with imperialist countries. You can find the basis there to get a revolutionary armed struggle going—one that does rely on the masses of people—before you have a situation of revolutionary high tide throughout the whole country.

On the other hand, in imperialist countries, I would argue that a revolutionary people—this essential and indispensable condition—has to manifest itself in revolutionary outpourings of the masses. Without that, you cannot carry through on the insurrectionary road, which is the necessary road in such countries.

In the '60s there was a revolutionary people in the U.S. Whether or not it was significant enough to sustain a

revolutionary attempt needs further thought and investigation, including in relation to world conditions at the time.

But to return to the main point here, a revolutionary people is essential. Without grounding the question of Beginnings in the need for a revolutionary people, you will degenerate, ultimately, into right or "left" errors. Of course, you can have a revolutionary people and still make such errors—still resort to Blanquism (terrorism), for example. And certainly history is, unfortunately, full of occasions where there was a revolutionary people and the revolutionary party failed to be revolutionary—instead it ran to the right and ended up missing the opportunity or even capitulating. Also, the existence of a revo-

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lutionary people is not a guarantee of success—it doesn't necessarily mean you'll have the exact conditions for a Beginning, or that you can win. But it is a very important condition, and a very important dividing line between Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and Blanquism.

C. More on the October Road... Yes, but. We've correctly stressed the basic distinction between the two types of countries and the corresponding two roads to the seizure of power. In this we have drawn from Mao's analysis of this question. For example, in *Problems of War and Strategy*, written in the '30s, Mao lays out this point on two different types of countries and two roads. Still, in probing this analysis, it could be pointed out that the particular problem of the road to power in imperialist countries was not something Mao focused his attention on to a great degree. And further, since this basic analysis dates from Mao's writings in the '30s, it is not unreasonable to

ask whether Mao might have changed his mind on this question.

But, from all we know, Mao did still hold to this basic analysis throughout his life. For example, we do know that revolutionaries who discussed this question of "road" with the Chinese party in the '60s were told that Mao still held to this general analysis of two types of countries and two roads, while also stressing the need to make concrete analysis of concrete conditions in each specific country. And in reading *A Critique of Soviet Economics* it is clear that Mao maintains there the basic distinction between the two types of countries and the implications of this in terms of revolutionary strategy and road (see, for example, section 13 and especially section 14, pp. 48-50, and also sections 3-5, pp. 35-40, in the 1977 Monthly Review Press edition).

Still, we don't want to hinge everything on one quotation, or even a few, in a religious way and, as Mao stated, we do need to make our own analysis. But our own analysis does bear out that the fundamental principle raised in Mao's statement is correct.

Let me return, however, to the "yes, but. . ." point, focusing on the "but." There are some points even in Mao's analysis in *Problems of War and Strategy* that we would not agree with. Specifically, there are some problems with his characterization of the road in the imperialist countries comprising a "long legal struggle...until the bourgeoisie becomes really helpless." If we waited until they were literally "really helpless," it would lead us to never launching the insurrection. Because, especially in the U.S., it is hard to imagine that the ruling class would ever be anything but quite strong, even when wracked with severe crisis and *relatively* weakened.

While pointing out these problems if Mao's statement is taken too literally and carried too far, it is still important to fundamentally uphold the basic principle he puts forward in this statement on the different roads. That important, correct principle is the need to draw a general distinction between the two types of countries (imperialist vs. oppressed) and the two generally corresponding roads, including the need for the basic form of work in imperialist countries to consist of a period of political preparation, followed by the launching of insurrection and then civil war, once conditions ripen. In imperialist countries, as Mao's statement on this is stressing, you

must go after them when they are in an acute crisis. And, returning to my earlier point, it is important to see the existence of a revolutionary people as indicative of this type of crisis in an imperialist country.

D. That takes me up to the point of "fine-tuning" in relation to the initiation of insurrection—fine-tuning within the development of a revolutionary situation, including within the emergence onto the scene of a revolutionary people. This is what I call the "Age of Aquarius" point—"when Jupiter is aligned with Mars" and so on, as the song by that name goes. And here I'm not trying to raise New Age thought but trying to apply Marxism-Leninism-Maoism to this question of tactical maneuvering and timing in regard to the launching of the insurrection.

Even within the emergence of a revolutionary situation and in particular with the emergence onto the scene of a revolutionary people, there are still gradations or stages within that. Lenin once discussed how even in a revolutionary period you get the alternation between intense calm and periods of outburst. Anyone who has been through a struggle on a lesser level of any significance, a struggle that involves both mass outpourings and also the maneuverings by the other side, knows that there is ebb and flow in these things. Some sections of the masses fall away and then come back. The bourgeoisie is able, through a combination of repression, maneuvering, and concessions, to put a lid on things temporarily or even to chip away a certain section of the masses that had been allied with the more solid forces involved in the struggle. Even in these lesser struggles, correct tactics have to be wielded in response by the revolutionary side, the people's side. And certainly in an actual revolutionary situation that would lead up to an insurrection all these developments and maneuvers by both sides are going to be magnified many times.

So this is a question of being able to maneuver tactically and also being able to determine the exact moment when, even with the general emergence of a revolutionary situation and outpouring of a revolutionary people, it is the correct time to actually launch things. That has very much to do with Lenin's three conditions which we've also drawn a lot of attention to. He said that an insurrection (I'm paraphrasing here) has to be the activity of an

advanced class, not just a party or small group (though, of course, there must be a vanguard party to lead it). That is one point. The next point is, it has to depend on an upsurge of the people. That's basically the principle that there must be a revolutionary people. And, third, it also depends on that turning point when the revolutionary upsurge is at its greatest and also when you have the most favorable situation, both in regard to the turmoil in the ranks of the enemy and in the willingness of intermediate forces to either ally with the revolutionary camp or at least to have a position of friendly neutrality.

Particularly this last point has a lot to do with the question of fine-tuning, or to use more trippy terms, the Age of Aquarius point, the "when Jupiter is aligned with Mars" point. It's picking that moment when all these "planets" are aligned just right. It's not only the question of when the masses are at the peak of their upsurge, which might actually go through several peaks. There's also the question of the moment when these other classes are aligned favorably, in terms of how they line up in relation to the two basic camps—the proletarian and bourgeois, the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary. In short, it's the question of when the intermediate strata are aligned in such a way that you have the most favorable chance of going at it.

This is important in political terms; it is also important directly in military terms. You don't want to start an insurrection at a time when you can easily be confined within the areas where the insurrection has its strongest base. You don't want to be in a situation where you can't break out after your initial victories and are stopped before you can get into the field as a real revolutionary army, accomplish the linking up of some different urban areas that gets you your base areas, establish your regime, and have the basis to go forward with the civil war. You don't want to do it when the attitude of the middle classes is such that it would be less likely for them to take a position of support or alliance or at least friendly neutrality toward the action of the revolutionary forces. You don't want to do it when the other side has most firmly got things under its grip. Even within a situation of tremendous upheaval, when the conditions are dramatically changed, there still is the question: Relatively speaking, does the ruling class have a more or less tight control and grip on things? It's a question of when, within that revolu-


tionary situation, is the ruling class in serious turmoil itself and having a hell of a time keeping its own ranks together and at the same time is having real difficulty keeping the middle classes on its side. You obviously want one kind of situation, not the other. You want it when the ruling class is having the most trouble. You want it when trouble is at its height in their own ranks and when the middle classes are least inclined to go along with

There's...the question of the moment when these other classes are aligned favorably, in terms of how they line up in relation to the two basic camps—the proletarian and bourgeois, the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary.

them and more inclined to swing toward your direction. You want those things to be lined up right—or lined up as favorably as they can be within the overall dynamic and development of the situation—and then you want to go for it.

This point is very important, and we have to learn how to think in these terms. However, while stressing this point, I want to reemphasize once again the "not absolutely helpless" point—that is, the point I made earlier about not taking Mao's "the bourgeoisie becomes really helpless" statement too literally. I want to reemphasize that point now because what I'm saying here on the question of "Jupiter aligned with Mars" and things being lined up just right could be perverted into a recipe for never getting going. In a real revolutionary situation, things are never going to be perfectly aligned in the way of the Age of Aquarius vision: Jupiter never will be exactly aligned with Mars and things will never be exactly that neat. We know, for example, that in a real revolutionary situation things will be complicated by there being many armies in the field, representing different class banners, different oppressed groups, etc. It is not going to be all neat.

Still, within all that, there must be the ability on the part of the proletarian leadership, the party, to judge the situation and to "fine-tune" within the dynamic that has



been set loose within which the opportunity to get things going can arise. There must be the leadership ability not only to maneuver tactically but to be able to judge the time, to be able to seize on those turning points, as Lenin stressed. In a revolutionary situation, the vanguard must have the orientation and ability not only to depend on the advanced class (as opposed to just a group), not only to depend on an upsurge of the people, but also to be able to grasp the key turning points *within* that revolutionary situation.

To sum up this point: There has to be a fine-tuning of the situation. The alignment does have to be as favorable as it can be even within the development of a revolutionary situation and the emergence of a revolutionary people. And, for the leadership, there has to be a developed enough political sense to, in turn, give the necessary tactical sense to be able to maneuver within that situation, to know how to bring about and then how to seize this most favorable possible tactical alignment or alignment of forces.

E. The next point I want to turn to is the question of “programme to program.” By the first I mean programme as a general description of our aims and goals and general sketching out of the kind of transformations that will be carried out and must be carried out upon the seizure of power—as is set forth in our *Programme*. And by program I mean a much more concrete, specific, and immediate indication of things to be done. In other words, program in the second sense takes form and has meaning in the immediate context of going for power.

In simple terms you could look at it as programme vs. program because (for whatever reason) we’ve spelled our *Programme* with “mme” to give a lofty, sweeping sense of long-term, general, fundamental objectives and tasks. So, in that sense, that “mme” is useful to contrast it with “program,” by which I mean a more limited specific, concrete, immediate program when the question of seizing power is coming on the agenda as an immediate and practical question.

Even now, as indicated earlier, on the one hand we must do more to popularize our *Programme* as we’ve now developed it. And we should popularize many of the very important indications our *Programme* gives, not only of our general aims and objectives and methods but also the

basic outline it sketches of the necessary transformations and how in basic terms to go about them. On the other hand, I think we need to be thinking even now, in an anticipatory way, about what kind of things will be necessary to concretize as program when the question of seizing power is immediately and concretely on the order of the day. By definition we can’t tell right now exactly what those will be, but we need to be thinking at least about the need to be able to formulate more specific concrete and immediate programmatic demands and guides to action as they will emerge in such a situation. At that time those things will take on tremendous force. In that pressing and magnified situation, your program vs. the program of all these other different groups, representing different class forces, will have tremendous importance and impact.

I believe that even now it is very necessary for us to continually train the masses, particularly advanced masses, in the ability to grasp the essence of different programs and their basic features, to grasp how and why they represent different class forces, and why only the proletarian program provides the real and fundamental solution and represents the real and fundamental transformation of society and the world. But more specifically than that, in a situation where seizing power becomes more directly, concretely, and immediately on the order of the day, the ability to formulate specific, concrete programmatic demands and courses of action takes on a new, tremendous impact and can literally sway millions. This has very much to do with the “Jupiter aligned with Mars” question.

That kind of immediate program has very much to do with your ability not only to solidly develop your ties with the basic masses and their solid, firm position as the bedrock and driving force of the revolution, but also your ability to swing significant sections and perhaps large numbers of intermediate strata and groups to your side or at least to a position of friendly neutrality.

You can think of various issues, for example, the concerns of the farmers and other demands and concerns of the middle strata which will be demanding immediate solutions right then: “What are you going to do about this?” “What are you going to do about that?” It is necessary to be anticipating those things as part of the question of anticipating and working toward the alignment that is the most favorable possible.

F. This takes me to the last point under this general heading of "Revolutionary Situation and Revolutionary People," which is the question of what I like to call "really being out there now." I'm thinking of this in two senses. One, in the sense of the metaphor we used previously about "being way out there but having a rubber band tied to our backs"—in other words, being really out on the edge with a really far-out revolutionary position, on the cutting edge in that way, but not breaking our links with the masses at the same time.

That's one sense in which I mean "being really out there now," and this continues to be a very important point. But another sense, which I also want to raise, is "really being out there now." I said in "Some Thoughts" and "Some Further Thoughts" that the question is not whether there will be upheavals and a lot of turmoil, there will be. I firmly believe that, and the signs are growing that there will be. Without going into a lot of detail there are many things on the cultural front, as I pointed out in "Some Thoughts." And such cultural developments can be, to borrow a saying from the Chinese, the wind in the tower that heralds a rising storm. I think there are things on the cultural front that do herald a rising storm, from Tracy Chapman to Public Enemy to other things, such as the Amnesty International Tour. Not all of them are revolutionary, at least in the full sense, not every aspect of them are things we would agree with, there are many contradictory things involved in all this, but nevertheless the fact that these things are out there, that they are receiving the kind of positive response they are, that people are gravitating toward them, is just one, although I would say one important, indication of turmoil and upheaval that's on the agenda, and not in the great distant future.

By being out there I mean aggressively out there, getting our position very boldly out there to the broadest number of masses. This is very important, particularly in relation to these mini-crises and upsurges that occur, but also more generally. Of course, you can't be out there with the same intensity all the time. In other words, to use an analogy, you can't have war communism all the time, there are ebbs and flows in the situation, things develop in spirals, not in straight lines, and we have to understand that in relation to what I'm raising here as well.

But I do think this is one of these times when it is

increasingly important for us to be out there in a big way and in a very bold way. I'm not talking about numbers of people as much as I'm talking about the *quality* of how we're out there. I mean be out there in a big way politically, boldly with our programme and, in another dimension, continually hounding the other side as well as continually rallying forward our side. In an overall and fundamental sense the *Revolutionary Worker* is the most important way we have for exposing and hounding the other side and also for rallying forward our side, but along with that it is very important that we be out there—according to our correct and developing division of labor—in a public way with public spokespeople out there really hounding the other side and rallying forward the masses.

This is very important in relation to the national question right now—among Black people, also among Latinos and immigrants—and it is very important in relation to the woman question. I think things are getting very sharp and acute in these arenas, as well as more generally, and there is a lot of fertile ground for us to be out there. We have to be out there generally with our own independent line, in addition to the work we do to unite more broadly with other forces; we also have to be out there with a very sharp edge and hounding the other side—really striking blows politically and sharpening things up.

To take one important example, abortion: There is tremendous potential for uniting with broad forces to take this up. We have done some very important things and we have to develop this further. It is also important that we be out there with our own line about this and our own cutting edge about it. In other words, nobody else but us is going to go up in the face of these Christian fascists in the full way in which they need to be taken on. Nobody else but us has the line, the understanding, the program, and the orientation. Nobody else is going to do it. And as a matter of fact, the more and the better we do that, the more and the better it is going to be possible to unite broad forces, from different political viewpoints representing different class outlooks and positions, to take this on in a bold and hard-hitting way. The same principle applies, as I said, to the national question among various oppressed peoples. We really have to be out there in relation to this too.

In one of my letters I referred to the section of "Some Thoughts" where I said we should popularize revolution

as the hope of the hopeless. In that section I stated that of course we shouldn't come off like a religious sect but we should be out there in a big way. Now jokingly, in my letter I said, "Well, so much for my warning 'let's not come off like a religious sect' because I'm now going to say that I think we should be out there, in a certain way, like prophets on the street."

When you have a period when things begin getting sharper, when there is more turmoil, when people's ears are beginning to attune themselves more toward the music that we sing, then there is more of a role for being out there on the streets and in sort of a spirit of prophets. Now, definitely I don't mean prophets of doom—except for the doom of the system. But I do think the times require a little bit of the pointing out to people that a lot of this shit that is so infuriating to people, and is such a real attack, is in a certain way a symptom of the "End of the Empire." There's no other way to describe it.

On the other hand, this has to be combined with "there is a way forward out of this," there is an end to the horror, there is hope for the hopeless. This is neither hype nor (as a matter of fact) religious fanaticism, and it shouldn't be

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done as such. But it should be done in a spirit of revolutionary optimism and it should be done in a spirit of "we're just not going to let them carry out this stuff unopposed."

I know the same people, or just a few people, can't run around everywhere being involved in everything with the same intensity and literally be like prophets on the street. But I'm trying to convey a certain spirit about what I think we need to be doing more of now because the situation both allows and demands it. So that's just a particular

point which I don't want to go into further here, but it should be taken up and thought through further.

I'll just end this particular section by recalling what I said in "Some Further Thoughts" about those times approaching when, as Lenin said, in one sense masses come to the aid of the revolutionaries. Or another way of saying this is that the revolutionaries who have been doing all the work preparing for the emergence of a revolutionary people suddenly are presented with a revolutionary people. But there is the other side of this too. Being presented with a revolutionary people also presents a challenge, and that is the way I presented the other aspect in "Some Further Thoughts."

It's not only that all of a sudden masses of people come to the aid of revolutionaries but also that they come to the revolutionaries *demanding revolutionary solutions*, and you have to be prepared for that, you have to be ready to deal with that. You have to be ready to provide revolutionary solutions, that is, revolutionary leadership in all the different ways we have said and some of the important aspects of which I've tried to indicate here. So I think we have to be preparing and have a sharper sense of this question of when there is a revolutionary people—when there is an outpouring of masses that on the one hand comes to the assistance of revolutionaries and on the other hand demands revolutionary solutions of the revolutionaries.

II.

I'll now go on to the second main point, which is, "Once Again on the Historical and International Perspective" or, more specifically, "Mao Tsetung Knew a Thing or Two." That's a paraphrase of what Stalin reportedly said when he first met Lenin and had some discussion with him back early in the development of the Bolsheviks. Stalin supposedly came away saying, "That Lenin knows a thing or two." A rather classic understatement meaning he knew quite a bit. This is what I also mean about Mao Tsetung, not only in general, which is obvious, but also I'm focusing particularly on the way Mao put forward the handling of the city-countryside contradiction and generally the centralization-decentralization

contradiction in a socialist society.

Mao and his revolutionary comrades spoke a lot about the three great differences and the need to overcome these differences. These differences involve intellectual and manual labor, the peasants and workers, and the contradiction of countryside and city. These three great differences were posed very acutely in China and are very important generally in the revolutionary struggle. Certainly on a world scale this has a very important dimension. But here I'm focusing not so much on that in terms of overcoming bourgeois right, overcoming inequalities between different sections of the masses, overcoming class differences. Ultimately, obviously, that's fundamental. Rather I'm talking now more particularly about this question in relationship to two things: One, defending yourself against imperialist attack; and two, defending yourself against imperialist attack.

First, I mean being in the best possible position to defend yourself militarily if you are actually attacked militarily by the imperialists (obviously in league with domestic counterrevolutionaries). Second, I mean defending yourself against the "sugar-coated bullets" of the imperialists and the bourgeoisie.

With regard to the first point, let's recall Mao's insistence on not building up the cities at the expense of the countryside, not favoring the urban population at the expense of the rural masses, not furthering, but working to overcome, the antagonism between city and countryside that capitalism had accentuated. For Mao, all this had not only a fundamental relationship to the struggle to finally abolish class distinctions, but it also had a relationship to the question of how to carry out a revolutionary war of resistance if invaded or attacked by imperialists. Given the constant fact of imperialist encirclement that has existed for socialist countries so far and will very likely exist for socialist countries as they emerge for some time in the future, this is a very crucial question. Mao understood that if you allowed yourself to be more and more crowded into the cities and hinged everything increasingly on the cities you were increasingly vulnerable to imperialist attack, that is, outright military attack. Your ability to wage revolutionary warfare in opposition to such an attack would be undermined. The nuclear weapons of the imperialists and their other weapons of heavy and mass destruction would be that much more

powerful against you the more you allowed yourself to go in the direction of favoring the city over the countryside and concentrating all your strategic and crucial resources and forces, including people, in the cities.

This is one of the main reasons Mao urged decentralization of industry, spread throughout the country, and decentralization of the population. Mao insisted on not allowing the spontaneous pull of the inequalities left over from the old society to draw more and more people into the cities, which is a massive phenomenon as we know

If you follow the path of concentrating more and more of your resources and people in the cities and, even more than that, if you follow the path of settling in and being just another state that happens to have some socialist relations, then you put yourself on the path where you will not be able to stand up to the imperialists and the bourgeoisie ideologically and politically.

throughout the world in general, but particularly it is very acute in the Third World countries in this period.

So that's defending yourself against imperialism in the first sense. But there's also another sense in which I think Mao was onto something, and it's something I've been thinking more about lately: defending yourself against imperialism and the bourgeoisie ideologically and politically. This may be a very provocative point, but it is something I think we have to grapple with and put out there generally for broader ranks in the international communist movement and revolutionaries generally to grapple with: If you follow the path of concentrating more and more of your resources and people in the cities and, even more than that, if you follow the path of settling in and being just another state that happens to have some socialist relations, then you put yourself on the path where you will not be able to stand up to the imperialists and the bourgeoisie ideologically and politically.

Look at the Soviet Union today or China today. This question is sharply posed right now because of all the



Gorbachev reforms of perestroika and glasnost in the Soviet Union. People can argue about whether the Soviet Union is becoming more “democratic” or not, but nobody can argue the Soviet Union is becoming more revolutionary or is in any way revolutionary. Well, I suppose the argument *can* be made—as Stalin once said, “paper will put up with whatever is written on it” and pretty much people can say whatever they want. But there can be no *serious* argument that the Soviet Union is a revolutionary society or that with Gorbachev’s reforms it is moving in a more revolutionary way. There’s nothing revolutionary about that society, and the more they seek with Gorbachev to adopt more of the external forms and norms of formal democracy—and in fact bourgeois democracy is what we’re talking about—the more it becomes clear that there’s nothing revolutionary about it.

I thought it was very interesting reading over some articles in *Line of March* by Irwin Silber on perestroika where he makes basically this point, although he obviously wouldn’t put it in these terms. But he basically says that one of Gorbachev’s main innovations is that he is putting forward the position that a socialist society can’t always be on a war footing. That is, it can’t be more or less acting as if it is constantly under siege, from enemies within and without. Instead, it has to more normalize its functioning. In other words, in essence what he’s saying is that socialist society can’t be maintained as a revolutionary society and it has to settle into being another bourgeois state. What’s new is that Gorbachev is more or less openly and explicitly saying this, while since the time of Khrushchev this has been *in fact* the program of the new bourgeois ruling class in the Soviet Union—to be not only a bourgeois state but an imperialist state.

We can learn something by negative example from this. Once you take the road of settling in to being just another state, then I think you have taken the road which will undercut your ability to stand up to the imperialists and the bourgeoisie politically and ideologically, and not only militarily (although obviously the two are very closely interconnected).

Now in saying this I am not reversing or denying the very important analysis we made previously on the question of advance and consolidation of the revolutionary movement on a world scale and within particular countries. We have pointed out that there are periods of

upsurge, and you have to maximize the gains that you can make during periods of upsurge. Then, inevitably, as things don’t go forward in a straight line, there are going to be twists and turns and temporary ebbs, and you have to consolidate while doing all you can to carry forward revolutionary transformations within your own society and preparing for future leaps both within that socialist society and also on a world scale when the next opportunity presents itself. Also, you must seek to *hasten* those opportunities and to prepare to make the most of them while all the time continuing to do all that you can to support the world revolutionary struggle.

So I’m not saying that this principle should be thrown out or has been superseded by what I’m talking about here in terms of the question of standing up to the imperialists, the remarks I’ve just made under the heading that “Mao Tsetung Knew a Thing or Two.” But I do think that a central question must be kept in mind while continuing to understand and act upon this understanding of what we call the dialectic of advance and consolidation as applied to revolution within particular countries and their relationship to the world revolution. This important central question is: How do you maintain a socialist society as a revolutionary society, both in terms of the transformations that are carried forward there and in terms of its relationship to the world revolutionary movement, without attempting (and it would be an unsuccessful attempt) to maintain a perpetual state of war communism?

This is a very crucial contradiction that I believe has to be addressed by the entire international communist movement. Mao was obviously grappling with this question very profoundly through the development of the upsurge of the Cultural Revolution and then his efforts to lead the Cultural Revolution and carry it forward without attempting to continue it on the same level of intensity all the time over that ten-year period from 1966 to 1976 (up to his death). This is a very crucial contradiction. My point here is not to try to provide some kind of complete answer to this or to suggest that it is a problem that I already have a complete answer to, but more to focus on this as something very crucial.

I do think, however, this has to do with how we approach things even now. For example, I have been trying to learn what I can by studying the various accounts of the

Iran/Iraq war. Once you really make the question of seizing power pivotal, as I discussed earlier, you have to grapple with what's really involved in carrying on a revolutionary war. In the Iran/Iraq war, which was not a revolutionary war, there are nevertheless important lessons about what happens when one side or the other seizes cities. What did Iraq do, for example, when Iran seized certain cities (or smaller towns)? When Iran did seize them, or when certain masses in Iraq for whatever reason rebelled against the regime during the course of that war and seized cities or towns, the Iraqi regime was absolutely ruthless in crushing them—using chemical weapons, for example.

I think this has to be really understood and faced up to. It has important implications, I believe. It emphasizes all the more, during the phase of insurrection and civil war, the point that both Marx and Lenin have made about insurrection—that you have to seize the initiative, keep the initiative, and never lose the initiative, strategically speaking.

Now I don't mean to say in absolute terms that there would never be a time during the civil war, even in an imperialist country, when it might be correct to adopt a posture of defense, even for certain periods strategic defense. But, still, it is a problem that when you seize cities and hold cities you also become in a certain way a sitting duck for the other side, particularly if they have got massive means of destruction at their disposal. This is a crucial problem to grapple with, and also I do think in general it underlines in imperialist countries the need to get and maintain the offensive and go for as much as you can go for, without overextending yourself.

This doesn't change the basic strategy in terms of insurrection and civil war, but it does pose very crucial tactical questions that have to be thought through particularly in terms of the civil war stage but also as you transition from the end of the insurrection into the civil war stage. We're not going to be able to avoid—and we shouldn't pretend to people that we can avoid—massive destruction as a part of waging revolutionary war. We should put forward to them that revolutionary war is a very uplifting and liberating thing, as I pointed out in those articles addressing the question of pacifism (“The Myth of Non-Violence”). Even in the context of all the destruction going on, that remains very true and very

profound—revolutionary war is uplifting and liberating. This is not just hype, it is very true and very profound. But we do have to grapple with the real questions of what's involved here. I think we have to understand these things more deeply.

One of the things the bourgeoisie puts out about the Iran/Iraq war is this crude representation that Iran tried to fight on the basis of fervor, whereas Iraq always beat them back on the basis of having superior military technology. Now there is certainly an aspect of truth to the fact that Iran tried to mobilize people on the basis of religious fanaticism, reactionary religious fanaticism, but we have to make clear to the masses of people that this has nothing in common with the revolutionary daring and enthusiasm of masses of people who are unleashed to wage a *people's war*. We have to make clear that the kind of revolutionary daring that we're talking about, which is indispensable for *people's war*, has nothing to do with the reactionary religious fanaticism that was involved in attempts by the Iranian regime to mobilize masses. Not that they relied just on motivating people ideologically either—they used coercion and all kinds of repression against the basic masses of people in Iran to make them (or try to make them) support and be involved in that war. But even to the degree they put forward an ideological line, that was a *reactionary* ideological line. The ways in which they fought and the ways in which our class fights are fundamentally different.

In other words, we do not rely upon blind fanaticism. It is fundamentally true that revolutionary war depends on class-conscious, politically motivated masses of people, while counterrevolutionary war depends upon terror and suppression and heavily on military technology. This is a fundamental truth, but it's wrong to crudely apply that. That doesn't translate into saying that what we do is just rev up people with fanaticism and send them with no materials, plans, strategy, tactics, doctrine, operational principles, etc., into battlefields to be mowed down by the technology of the other side. There is a need for heroism and self-sacrifice on our side, a tremendous need for that. It will be a major component of what we rely on, but it has nothing to do with reactionary religious fanaticism, nor do we mindlessly and unthinkingly treat people as if they are our substitute for military technology in a literal and crude sense.

I don't want to back into a whole discussion of that, but I do want to call attention to this question of "Mao Tse-tung Knew a Thing or Two," specifically about not allowing yourself to get set into the pattern where you are sitting ducks for the other side, militarily and also ideologically and politically. This is a very crucial point to profoundly grapple with. Some time after nationwide power was won, Mao said, looking back, we used to all eat out of the same bowl when we were waging guerrilla warfare in the mountains, then we came down to the cities and we had all kinds of problems. That is, you couldn't apply war communism when you were administering a whole country, when you were leading a whole society. Obviously Mao didn't say they should have stayed in the mountains and not seized state power nationwide, but he was saying

that we have to figure out how to deal with this problem.

I'll just end by focusing on the problem as something to be taken up in a profound way by the entire international communist movement, not just ourselves: How do you maintain the future society as a revolutionary society—how do you maintain and carry forward the socialist revolution and do all you can to support and push forward the world revolution, acting in accordance with the need to correctly handle the relationship between advance and consolidation, and keeping up a revolutionary intensity and a revolutionary drive throughout the society—without attempting to maintain society constantly in a state of war communism? This has big implications for many different arenas, but I'll just leave it at that for now and end this talk on that point.

Upheaval in China: Mao More Than Ever

This spring the world watched an inspiring rebellion against the rulers of China. The legitimacy of the ruling clique—including their claim to be “communist”—was brought into question by millions of people rising up in Beijing and throughout China. And while the media focused most on those who looked to the West (or to Gorbachev) for support and salvation, thousands carried pictures of Mao Tsetung and sang *The Internationale* as they marched into battle. This showed clearly that many in the streets felt themselves to be fighting for a restoration of genuine socialism.

At the height of the rebellion, Raymond Lotta wrote that:

What is happening in China is the product of twelve years of revisionist rule. After the death of Mao Tsetung in 1976, a reactionary *coup d'état* brought to power a new exploiting class. Since then, China has undergone sweeping changes—in its economy, in its political institutions, in its educational system, in its social life, in the values it promotes. These changes have been hailed in the West and in the Soviet bloc as progress. Right there, that should tell us something about the reality of reform. What is described as the restoration of sanity is really the restoration of capitalism. What experts like to describe as a society going through growing pains and searching for political reform is really a society in deep crisis: an economic crisis, a social crisis, and a crisis of confidence in ruling institutions.

Lotta's analysis of the wellsprings and contradictions of the crisis in China appears at the end of this article. However, the revolt in China, and its subsequent bloody

suppression by an army that the people had at one time considered their own, raised further profound questions among revolutionary-minded people. How was it that everything that Mao had stood for had been reversed? What was the real character of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976? Must socialist societies always decay and degenerate? And why weren't forces like Deng Xiaoping simply eliminated while Mao still lived?

The following excerpts from works by RCP,USA Chairman Bob Avakian get into those questions.*

Bob Avakian on China: Excerpts on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the Restoration of Capitalism, and Genuine Proletarian Dictatorship

ON THE BASIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MAO AND THOSE NOW IN POWER:

The following excerpt comes from a speech given by Chairman Avakian in 1978 at the Mao Tsetung Memorial Meetings sponsored by the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, which was later reprinted as *The Loss in China and the Revolutionary Legacy of Mao Tsetung (Loss/Legacy)*. The reader will note that in the years since the speech the new rulers of China have gone even further in demonstrating their fundamental differences with and indeed open antagonism toward Mao and what he stood for. (The section reprinted here appears on pp. 15-21.)

Mao consistently put forward communism, completely turning the world upside down (or rightside up), eliminating all class distinctions and all exploitation and oppression as the lofty aim to strive for and the historical mission of the proletariat. He called on and led the working people to raise their sights, to pay attention to and master the cardinal questions in society and the affairs of state, to determine the whole direction of society and

* In the excerpts here, the term used to describe the proletariat's ideology is "Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought" (and, in the earliest works it's "Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought"). Since that time, the RCP,USA has summed up and changed the term to "Marxism-Leninism-Maoism." The RCP,USA explained this change in an important document issued in *RW* No. 470, August 29, 1988.

transform the whole world. These revisionists replace genuine communism with "goulash communism"; they say the working people cannot think beyond the question of where their next meal is coming from, that they are only concerned about meat and potatoes. They proclaim a new "historic mission"—capitalist restoration under the signboard of "modernization," in whose achievement the role of the working people is to put their nose to the grindstone and labor like beasts of burden lured with the promise of more grain. Leave politics and the running of society to the "experts," the "wise men," and the bigshots in general—this is their message for the masses of people. Mao constantly stressed political consciousness as the motivating factor; they snarl about "reward and punishment," trying to intimidate and induce the masses to break their backs for these tyrants.

Mao said revolution must guide production, politics must be in command and that mass movements are the main thing to rely on not only in political struggle but in production and scientific experiment and advancement. They insist on production first and above all else, relying on "efficient management"—like in the capitalist countries—not controlled and supervised by the masses but by colorless bureaucrats barking orders. And, in fact, despite their flimsy denials, they put profit in command.

Mao said the lowly are most intelligent, the elite are most ignorant. They unleash intellectual aristocrats, lording it over the masses and enviously aping their counterparts in the capitalist countries.

Mao called for narrowing and restricting the inequalities and social distinctions left over from the old, exploiting society. They say such things are fine, and one-sidedly promote and expand them without restriction.

Mao declared that "The proletariat must exercise all-around dictatorship over the bourgeoisie in the superstructure, including all spheres of culture." They promote and restore to the stage all manner of decadent bourgeois, even feudal, junk and uncritically import and build up imperialist "models"—returning things once again to the kind of situation that existed before the Cultural Revolution, when Mao was moved to remark about the Ministry of Culture: "If it refuses to change, it should be renamed the Ministry of Emperors, Kings, Generals and Ministers, the Ministry of Talents and Beauties or the Ministry of Foreign Mummies."

Mao said that "education must serve proletarian politics and be combined with productive labor," and that "our educational policy must enable everyone who receives an education to develop morally, intellectually and physically and become a worker with both socialist consciousness and culture." And Mao led in transforming

education through the Cultural Revolution so that it really conformed to these principles and did not foster an intellectual elite as it had before the Cultural Revolution. Those in power now have reversed the whole orientation for education, reinstated a "tracking system" (in fact we might say they have put into effect a Chinese "Bakke decision"): gearing education for "talents," sending them to "special schools" divorcing education once again from proletarian politics and productive labor, while the masses get "vocational training" at most—after all this is the most "efficient" way to do things—just like here in the good old USA! Now they are even begging and planning to send as many as 10,000 youth—no doubt the very special "talents"—to schools in the imperialist countries, where they will not only study natural science, engineering, etc., according to bourgeois methods, but so-called "social science" and "political science" as well. What better way to train bourgeois successors!

Mao insisted on self-reliance in developing the economy and on making use of small and medium-sized enterprises as well as large ones, and of backward as well as advanced technology in order to bring about independent, proportional and planned *socialist* development, not "development" that is distorted and dependent on foreign capital. They lust after the big, the big, the big, the modern, the modern and the modern, adopting the policies of selling out the country's resources to get advanced technology and even now inviting foreign capital in to "jointly" exploit the resources—and the people—of the country.

Mao said people, not weapons, are decisive in warfare and that while it was necessary to have the most modern weapons possible, this must not be done in such a way as to distort the economy and bring about dependence on others, especially imperialists. He emphasized again and again that reliance must be on the masses, armed politically as well as with guns, and not on technology, in war. They act on the bankrupt principle that weapons, not people are decisive—as for example in Deng Xiaoping's remark of recent years that a "modern war" is a "war of steel," that steel is decisive in determining the outcome of war today. This is exactly the same kind of line that Mao had to repeatedly and relentlessly struggle against years earlier in the Chinese revolution, in opposition to those who said that China was bound to be subjugated by Japan, and then by the U.S. imperialist-backed Kuomintang, because they had far superior technology and more modern weapons. And those revisionists ruling in China have not even learned the lesson that was forcefully taught to those imperialists, especially of the "advanced United States," whom they so slavishly tail after and want to

depend on. Ask *them* about Indochina and whether superior technology or a politically motivated people fighting for a just cause is decisive in warfare!

Mao built a people's army to fight a people's war; and he insisted that this must still be the basic policy. They are creating a bourgeois army, restoring ranks and even importing the appropriate *uniforms*—as well as models of stratification—from bourgeois armies.

Mao constantly reminded the masses of their proletarian internationalist duties to support the struggles of the oppressed peoples and nations and the revolutionary movement of the working class worldwide—repeatedly recalling Marx' famous statement that only by emancipating all mankind can the proletariat emancipate itself; he led them in opposing great power chauvinism and in preventing it from taking hold in China itself. Today the traitors who rule China. . . reverse Mao's well-known and decisive denunciation and exposure of Yugoslavia and Tito as revisionist, saying that Yugoslavia is a model of socialism—for them it is certainly a model, of how to carry out capitalism under the signboard of socialism. In general they try to act the bully in relations with those they regard as weak while at the same time they capitulate to and collaborate for bourgeois aims with imperialists and reactionaries hated and scorned by the masses of people the world over. And they preach that it is the main task of revolutionaries in every country not to fight for revolution there and support it worldwide, but simply to defend China and support its "modernization."

They have completely betrayed the cause left behind by Mao Tsetung. Reversing and trampling on Mao's line and his great revolutionary Thought serves only the bourgeoisie and leads only to taking the capitalist road. Mao Tsetung Thought represents the development and enrichment of Marxism-Leninism, the revolutionary science of the proletariat. To oppose and attack it, either outright or while hypocritically upholding it in words, is to oppose the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat and its highest advance so far, as realized in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, led by Mao's revolutionary line. To call this pathbreaking achievement of the working class a "disaster"—which in fact the curs and swine in power in Beijing now do—is to not only reverse the correct verdict on it, but to reverse the revolution as a whole.

In short, where Mao led the masses in exercising and consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat and continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat to prevent capitalist restoration and continue the advance toward communism, the revisionists reigning in China now give all-around "liberation" to counter-revolutionaries (recently they have even politically liber-

ated 100,000 who were classified as counter-revolutionaries, going as far back as the 1950s) and have instituted a fascist bourgeois dictatorship over the masses to carry out the restoration of capitalism.

ON THE PURPOSE AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE GREAT PROLETARIAN CULTURAL REVOLUTION

The following excerpt is from *Loss/Legacy*, pp. 48-52.

The mass upsurge of the Cultural Revolution succeeded in shattering the bourgeois headquarters of Liu Shao-chi, and seized back portions of power usurped by these revisionists. This was a great victory. But there were more long-term results as well. Through this process revolutionary transformations were carried out and carried forward in both the economic relations of society and the superstructure of politics, culture, ideology and administrative institutions. In every sphere of society the masses asserted and increased their mastery—from management in the factories and farms, to education, health work and other areas, which were changed from top to bottom to reflect and serve the interests of the masses and their revolutionary struggle.

Let's take education—consistently a focus of sharp class struggle. Through the Cultural Revolution worker-propaganda teams were sent to play a leading role in the universities. Exams, curricula and teaching methods were changed to link theory with practice and combine study with productive labor and to put politics in command. All high school graduates went to the farms, factories or military, and enrollment in college was based mainly on recommendations from one's fellow workers, again, with politics—devotion to the revolution—in command.

Beyond particular innovations, the thinking of tens, perhaps hundreds, of millions of people was further revolutionized. The study of Marxist theory was promoted broadly among the people and ideological struggle was actively fostered on all levels. Working people lifted their heads and sights even higher, leaving no sphere of society as the exclusive province of "experts," and paying attention to affairs of state and the running of society in a way never previously achieved anywhere. Masses learned in the swirl and tenseness of struggle what they could never learn from books alone or through the "regular functioning" of society, even socialist society.

During this period mass rallies were repeatedly held in China in support of the struggles of the peoples of the world against imperialism and reaction, including the

struggle of Black people, and others, in this country. And tremendous sacrifices were made, through conscious determination, by the Chinese people in support of the world revolution.

All this struck deep and powerful blows at the remnants, the "birth marks" and the inequalities left over from the old exploiting society, economic, political, social, cultural and ideological. It inspired and gave great encouragement to revolutionary people everywhere, but it horrified and struck terror into the hearts of reactionaries in every country, including the political mummies inside and outside the Party in China.

One incident highlights this and concentrates the difference between the proletarian and the bourgeois world outlook. In Shanghai, during the high tide of the mass upsurge, the capitalist-roaders attempted to divert the workers' struggle and divide their ranks by saying—you're right, you've been mistreated and to show our good faith we're giving you bonuses and back pay. After tremendous struggle in the workers' ranks, they were led to return the money. They said, when we got the money we forgot about state power, when we got the bonuses we forgot about revolution. We don't want this stinking bribe, we want state power and we want to make revolution! Today in China this is no doubt condemned as a hideous example of the evil "ultra-leftism" of the "gang of five."

Mao said that the Cultural Revolution was "absolutely necessary and most timely for consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat, preventing capitalist restoration and building socialism." Why was it "absolutely necessary"? Because, as Mao pointed out, previous struggles against revisionists at the top level of the Party had been able to beat them back and result in the removal of some from office, but had not enabled the broad masses of people to themselves determine the correct from the incorrect line and defeat the revisionists through their own struggle. Therefore, if in the future capitalist-roaders were to capture the leadership of the Party and state and suppress the revolutionaries, the masses would be in a passive position politically.

Further, struggle at the top could not succeed in shaking the bureaucracy out of its hardened conservative shell. It could not significantly challenge the strong tendency for many cadres to take to the bourgeois style of life and a bourgeois political line.

Early in the course of the Cultural Revolution, in February 1967, Mao explained all this: "In the past we waged struggles in the rural areas, in factories, in the cultural field, and we carried out the socialist education movement. But all this failed to solve the problem because we did not find a form, a method, to arouse the

broad masses to expose our dark aspect openly, in an all-round way and from below." That form, that method, was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

But, of course, the Cultural Revolution could not solve the problem entirely and for all time. Mao himself stressed this many times, pointing out in 1968, for example, that "We have won great victory. But the defeated class will still struggle. These people are still around and this class still exists. Therefore we cannot speak of final victory. Not even for decades." And in 1969 he predicted that "Probably another revolution will have to be carried out after several years." How correct and far-sighted!

In Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?, pp. 221-25, Chairman Avakian situates the Cultural Revolution in a world-historical context.

All in all, then, while in the few years between the initial victory of the proletarian revolution in Russia and his death in 1924, Lenin made some beginning analysis of the concrete problems that arise during the transition to communism, it remained for Mao Tsetung, several decades later, to achieve a new breakthrough on this question, on the basis of summing up a vast and rich store of experience, positive and negative, in the Soviet Union as well as in China itself. Mao summed up that, even after ownership of the decisive means of production had, in the main, been socialized (either in the form of state ownership or collective ownership by peasants in agriculture and some others in small factories, urban cooperatives, etc.), there still remained classes and class struggle. In particular, not only were many members of the old exploiting classes still around, but of greater significance—and increasingly posing the greatest internal danger to the socialist state—*new* bourgeois elements were constantly being engendered out of the very conditions—the basic contradictions—of socialist society itself. Wage-labor and payment in relation to work performed, the production and exchange of goods in the form of commodities, the continued role of money, even aspects of commodity relations and money exchanges in the dealings between various discrete units of ownership (whether collectives, urban cooperatives, and so on, or even enterprises formally under state ownership)—all these things continue to exist and exert considerable influence in various ways. "Under the dictatorship of the proletariat," Mao summed up, "such things can only be restricted," and not yet eliminated, and therefore if people in authority who take the capitalist road usurp political power, "it will be quite easy for them to rig up the capitalist system" (cited in Chang Chun-chiao, "Exercis-

ing All-Round Dictatorship over the Bourgeoisie," in Lotta, *And Mao Makes 5* [Chicago: Banner Press, 1978], p. 214). Mao also linked this with the fact that, especially in the more economically backward countries where socialism has so far been established, the contradictions between town and country and between workers and peasants have continued to be very acute. At the same time, in all socialist societies, the division between mental and manual labor persists as does the division of labor along sexual lines, whose roots are intertwined with the very division of society into classes; and other important contradictions, such as that between the dominant nationality and minority nationalities, also continue in various forms.

Because of the long-term persistence of these basic contradictions and social inequalities inherited from the old society (Mao used the term "bourgeois right," in a broad sense, to refer to such social inequalities and their reflection in the superstructure, including the spheres of law and politics as well as ideology)—indeed out of these very contradictions and social inequalities—a new bourgeoisie will be constantly engendered under socialism, and socialism itself will constitute a long transition period between capitalism and communism—a transition marked by recurrent acute class struggles between the bourgeoisie, particularly the newly engendered bourgeoisie, and the proletariat. In these struggles, bourgeois right—and specifically whether to restrict or give full expression to it—will be a major focus, and the more privileged strata in socialist society (intellectuals, administrative personnel, professionals, and others) will tend spontaneously to support a program of not restricting but giving unrestricted scope to bourgeois right. For all these reasons, along with the encirclement and pressure—and, at times, direct military attack—by imperialism, as well as the connections between domestic counterrevolutionaries and various imperialist states, the danger of capitalist restoration remains very great throughout this socialist transition period. It is essential, Mao summed up, not only to uphold the dictatorship of the proletariat, but to continue the revolution under it. But that is not all. Mao

made the unprecedented analysis that, in the conditions where ownership is (in the main) socialized and where the party is both the leading political center of the socialist state and the main directing force of the economy—in which the state is the decisive sector—the contradiction between the party as the leading force and the working class and the masses under its leadership is a concentrated

expression of the contradictions characterizing socialist society as a transition from the old society to fully communist, classless society. Therefore, Mao concluded, while the party must on the one hand continue to play its vanguard role, on the other hand, the party itself, especially at its top levels, is also where the new bourgeoisie will assume its most concentrated expression, where its core and leading forces will be centered, among those who, as Mao described it, "take the capitalist road." To defeat the attempts of these forces, and the reactionary social base they mobilize, to seize power from the proletariat and restore capitalism, it is necessary, Mao summed up, to expose and wage struggle against the revisionist line and actions of these "capitalist roaders" and more than that to continually revolutionize the party itself as part of revolutionizing society as a whole by unleashing and developing the conscious activism of the masses and mobilizing them in ideological and political struggle in every sphere of society while directing the spearhead of that struggle against the revisionists in positions of authority. (*Basic Principles for the Unity of Marxist-Leninists and for the Line of the International Communist Movement* [A draft position paper for discussion prepared by the Revolutionary Communist Party of Chile and the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA—January 1, 1981], paragraph 126.)

"It was all this, and more, that burst forth in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China beginning in the mid-'60s," as I put it in *For a Harvest of Dragons*. And I cannot here better summarize the importance of this Cultural Revolution than by repeating the assessment of it in that work:

Adjectives such as "unprecedented," "historic," "earth-shaking" and so on have frequently been used to describe this mass revolutionary movement, and if anything they understate its impact and importance. With the reversal of the revolution in China in 1976 and the suppression of everything revolutionary there in the years since, and in the present world situation, there is a strong tendency to forget what it meant that there was a country, with one-quarter of the world's population, where there had not only been a successful revolution leading to socialism, overcoming tremendous obstacles and powerful reactionary forces in the process, but even after that there was again a mass revolutionary upheaval, initiated and inspired by

the leading figure in the new socialist state, Mao Tsetung, against those in authority who sought to become the new party of order, restoring capitalism in the name of "socialism," using their revolutionary credentials as capital. The Cultural Revolution involved literally hundreds of millions of people in various forms and various levels of political struggle and ideological debate over the direction of society and affairs of state, the problems of the world revolutionary struggle and the international communist movement. Barriers were broken down to areas formerly forbidden to the masses of people—science, philosophy, education, literature and art. Putting self above the interests of the revolution, in China and the world, was an outlook under attack and on the defensive and few were those who would openly utter such phrases as "my career." Through all this, transformations were brought about in the major institutions in society and in thinking of masses of people, further revolutionizing them. Through all this as well, new breakthroughs were made and new lessons gained in moving, through the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat itself, toward the eventual withering away of the state—striking at the soil engendering class distinctions and at the same time drawing the masses more broadly and more consciously into the running of society (pp. 110-11).

What is noteworthy about this Cultural Revolution is not—as conventional wisdom insists today (including in a China now ruled by revisionists)—that mistakes were made by the revolutionaries; it is not that the new shoots of the communist future that sprung up through this Cultural Revolution were in many ways fragile or imperfect, nor that some of the innovations made were not viable; nor even that in the end this Cultural Revolution failed to prevent a revisionist takeover and capitalist restoration. What is noteworthy is that this was the first mass revolutionary struggle under socialism consciously aimed at bourgeois usurpers that had arisen within the structure of the new proletarian state itself; that it turned back and held off their attempts to seize power and restore capitalism for a full decade; and, of more lasting significance, that it indicated a means and method (as Mao said) for waging this struggle and, before it was reversed, brought into being new, indeed unprecedented, transformations in the economic relations and the political and ideological superstructure of society, new breakthroughs on the path to communism.

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 the 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 against imperialism, reaction, and all exploiting classes," 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 world proletarian revolution" (*A Horrible End, or an End to the Horror?*, p. 154; see also "The Philosophical Basis of Proletarian Internationalism," *Revolutionary Worker*, No. 96, March 1981). 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. It is this which sets the most fundamental basis and most comprehensive context for the discussion of the content and tasks of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

**ON THE COURSE OF THE LAST BATTLE,
IN WHICH THE CAPITALIST ROADERS
WERE ABLE TO COME TO POWER
THROUGH THEIR 1976 COUP**

For a number of years following the high tide of the Revolution, fierce and complicated battle raged back and forth. The twists and turns of this are analyzed in *Loss/Legacy* and documented in the collection *And Mao Makes Five*. The following excerpt from *Loss/Legacy* (pp. 85–93) begins in the midst of the last great battle, in 1975, a year before the death of Mao and the right wing coup d'état.

Returning to the situation in mid and late 1975, the Right is yet again stepping up its attacks and now blatantly challenging Mao's line and calling for the overthrow of the firmest supporters of Mao's line, led by the Four. This

takes shape in three documents—dubbed "poisonous weeds" by the Left—which flagrantly call for wholesale reversal of the achievements of the Cultural Revolution and a return to revisionist policies struck down since the start of the Cultural Revolution.

Mao responds in August 1975 by calling for study of a historical Chinese novel, *Water Margin*, whose main character is someone from the landlord class who is driven to join peasant rebels (somewhat like Robin Hood perhaps) but ends up capitulating to the Emperor and attacking the genuine rebels on behalf of the Emperor. But this is not an academic exercise; the merit of this book, Mao says, lies precisely in that it will help the people to recognize capitulationists, people who join the revolution but are not thoroughgoing revolutionaries and finally end up as traitors. Deng Xiaoping, and Chou En-lai behind him, are being targeted again, but now the ante is up: Mao is saying that there are traitors in our ranks and it's time to uncover them and strike them down.

A few months later the battle on the educational front erupted into a mass debate. Mao himself initiated this debate after receiving letters from university officials in Beijing who bitterly complained that the new educational policies were wrecking education and holding back economic development and so on. Mao sent these letters to the students and staff of the university (Tsinghua) and called for them to take up struggle around this. Mao not only stood with those students and staff who rose to defend the educational transformations but recognized and made clear that this battle in the educational field was a decisive part of the overall class struggle going on then. "The question involved in Tsinghua," Mao insisted, "is not an isolated question, but a reflection of the current two-line struggle." The Four, and apparently Chang Chun-chiao in particular, threw themselves actively into this struggle, carrying out Mao's line and supporting those fighting to uphold the educational "new things."

The Left, whose main strength does not lie in struggles at the top for position but in the movement of the masses, steps up the struggle to criticize the "unrepentant capitalist-roader" (Deng) and beat back the Right deviationist wind he has been most aggressive in whipping up to "reverse the verdicts" of the Cultural Revolution.

Mao issues a statement blasting Deng for trying to misuse Mao's own directives to support Deng's line that order and stability to ensure "production above everything" is the "key link." Class struggle is the key link, Mao shoots back, and everything hinges on it. Along with this Mao publicly blasts Deng and the whole Right deviationist wind, emphatically stating that "reversing correct verdicts goes against the will of the people." Deng, Mao says

bluntly, does not know anything about Marxism-Leninism, he never talks about the key link of class struggle, he is trying to reverse correct verdicts, and he represents the bourgeoisie.

During this open struggle against "that unrepentant capitalist-roader," Mao makes the statement that there are people in the Party who before, when the task was carrying out the collectivization of agriculture, were against that, and now, when it comes to criticizing bourgeois right, they are against that, too. Then he goes on to say, "You are making the socialist revolution, and yet don't know where the bourgeoisie is. It is right in the Communist Party—those in power taking the capitalist road. The capitalist-roaders are still on the capitalist road."

This was not only an exposure of Deng Xiaoping and others like him, but an extremely important analysis of two related questions: the analysis of the bourgeoisie in the socialist period and where its core and commanders will be—within the Communist Party itself, especially at its top levels; and the phenomenon, of great significance in China, of people—again, especially top Party leaders—who were revolutionaries in the bourgeois-democratic stage but fail to advance and instead become counter-revolutionaries, capitalist-roaders, in the socialist stage, especially the farther the socialist revolution advances and the deeper it strikes at the vestiges and inequalities left over from the old society.

Mao's analysis of the bourgeoisie in the Party was based on the understanding that in socialist society, where the Party plays the leading role in everything and there are no private owners of the means of production of any real significance, control over the means of production and the allocation of distribution will be concentrated as the power of political leadership, especially at the highest levels of the Party. If those who hold such leadership practice a revisionist line, treat the workers as mere labor power, expand rather than narrow differences, divorce themselves from the masses and productive labor and rely on bureaucratic methods, they will become bourgeois and transform their relationship with those they lead into exploitative relationships. In this way, capitalism can and does develop within the collective form, and this happens in certain economic units even while the state is still in the hands of the proletariat and the economy is still socialist. If this is not resolutely and effectively struggled against, those taking the capitalist road will grow in strength and numbers, expand the areas under their control and eventually succeed in seizing power in the Party and society as a whole and carry out all-around capitalist restoration.

This is what Mao was beginning to speak to as early as 1964, when he said that the main target had become those in authority taking the capitalist road—as opposed to bourgeois elements outside the Party. Putting it in simple terms in 1976, in speaking particularly of veteran leaders who failed to advance after the new-democratic revolution, and treated their positions of authority as capital, Mao explained: they have become high officials and want to protect the interests of high officials. And this means they have become the bourgeoisie right inside the Communist Party itself. This analysis, and the call to the masses to ferret out and strike down these people, hit the revisionists dead on the head.

They hit back with a fury, as evidenced by the April 5 counter-revolutionary riot in Tiananmen Square. . . . The Right staged this incident not with the aim of seizing power right then and there, but to make clear to their social base and followers throughout the country that they were not lying down just because Deng and the Right deviationist wind had been brought under attack. Further, they wanted to, and did, force organizational steps to be taken.

As a result of the riot, Deng was officially removed from his leadership posts (though the Right succeeded in keeping him in the Party) and Hua Kuo-feng was named Premier and First Vice-Chairman of the Party. Not a bad deal for the Right—they could always restore Deng to power (as they have of course) and they got the official stamp on Hua as at least nominal head of the Party (behind Mao) and of the state. That these changes were made while the struggle, in its open all-out form, was still in its early stages, was a definite advantage to the Right, because this had some effect of shortcircuiting the mass political struggle, through which the masses would grasp more deeply the issues involved and the role of different forces.

Meanwhile the Right also used the tactic of stirring up disruptions and an "ultra-left" current of anarchy and attacking everything and everyone to discredit and disorient the struggle and the masses. This was a trick often used by the capitalist-roaders when they came under fire, and in a speech to leading cadres in June 1976, Chang Chun-chiao spoke to this problem and called for vigilance against this kind of tactic and for keeping the fire on Deng and those who had united with him in whipping up the Right deviationist wind.

Shortly after this, devastating earthquakes struck China, killing many people and causing widespread damage. This, of course, was seized on by the Right for at least three purposes: (1) to play down the political struggle against Deng and the Right deviationist wind—after

all how can that take precedence over human suffering, they argue, with their typical Confucian "benevolence"; (2) to build up the image of Hua and other Rightists as benevolent leaders paying attention to the people's needs, in opposition to the Left which insists on "empty talk" about revolution even at a time like this; and (3) to make shifts in the army and troop deployments. Under the cover of the army's assistance in relief work, the Right gets its military forces strategically deployed to seal off Beijing and prepare for a coup (Mao is clearly dying by this time).

The Left responds by calling for the linking of the struggle against Deng with the earthquake relief work, pointing out that only by repudiating the bourgeois line of "look out for number one," and "what's in it for me?" which Deng has been promoting, and only by bringing into play the communist spirit of self-sacrifice for the good of society, can the relief work be carried out correctly and most effectively.

Not long after the earthquakes Mao dies. The Left and the Right both make preparations for the inevitable showdown. The Right's strength lies in the military and in the confusion and anxiety among many cadres and masses. The Left's strength, as always, lies in politically arming and mobilizing the masses and to some degree, militarily speaking, in the people's militia—they have been able to make little inroads into most of the army itself. The Left calls for continuing and stepping up the struggle against the Right deviationist wind, with Deng as the main target. But, as we know, this is cut short—within a month after Mao's death the Right pulls off the coup it has been carefully planning for.

The Right had to move when it did because its top leaders were all involved in the Right deviationist attempt to reverse correct verdicts, and they could not hide the dirt on their hands for too long. If the struggle against this "wind" is allowed to continue and deepen, they will come under heavy fire, the masses will increasingly recognize their treacherous role and they will be in a much weaker position, both inside the Party and in society as a whole.

That the Four were not "completely isolated" even at the top levels of the Party, as the revisionists have claimed after pulling off their coup, and that the line of the Four—and Mao—had both strong support among the masses and some, if in many cases not staunch, backing from middle forces in the Party leadership, is indicated by the nature of the statement on Mao's death by the leading bodies of the Party and state. . . .

Shortly before the coup, the Political Bureau meets to discuss the question of succession to leadership, but is

stalemated. Then the Right moves, seizing the Four, Mao Yuan-hsin (Mao's nephew, entrusted by Mao to manage his affairs during the last year and more of Mao's life), and other close supporters of the Four. The middle forces and vacillating elements in the Party leadership are presented with a *fait accompli* and the Right consolidates its power.

The most die-hard elements of the Right would have moved even if, for some reason, Hua Kuo-feng hesitated or was unwilling at the decisive hour. But they preferred to do it with Hua to preserve the image of orderly succession and to make use for the time being of the mantle of Mao, who had been able to oust Deng, temporarily, but had found himself having to give personal endorsement to Hua's appointment.

Hua served the Right well. He rose—or, I should say, sunk—to the occasion, and so the coup was pulled off with Hua to all appearances at the helm. And so, through military *coup d'état*, the Right seized power and began realizing its fond dream of bringing an end to "the era of Chin Shih Huang"—that is, an end to the leadership of Mao's revolutionary line and Thought and to the dictatorship of the proletariat in China. . . . for the time being.

ON WHY THE PROLETARIAT LOST IN CHINA

In *Loss/Legacy* and other works, Chairman Avakian has analyzed both the underlying and more immediate causes of the 1976 reversal in China, including, very importantly, the effects of imperialism's still-dominant position in the world. This crucial analysis is too lengthy for the immediate purposes of this article, though readers are urged to get into those works. However, in the passage that follows from *Loss/Legacy*, pp. 104–8, Chairman Avakian sets the context for understanding this and indicates firmly the correct overall approach to this question.

The Cultural Revolution was a leap forward for the international working class, it was not a gimmick. But it was itself a completely "new thing" in the history of socialism and therefore was bound to encounter difficulties, incur new problems and engender new contradictions—and meet stiff resistance. Mao insisted, even after the Lin Piao affair and in the face of the Soviet danger, that the Cultural Revolution and its gains must be upheld and carried forward, though not through the form of mass upheaval characteristic of its first years. More and more old leaders and some new upstarts who had risen to positions of authority and taken to the bourgeois style of life, as Mao said, sharply opposed this. They raised its

problems, shortcomings, and even the resistance they were whipping up to it, in an attempt to kill it and reverse the whole direction of society. In the last few years the focal point of the struggle was exactly how to evaluate and what stand to take toward the Cultural Revolution and the breakthroughs and transformations it had brought about. To uphold and build on these achievements, to continue the revolution, or to "return to the beaten track," which experience has shown is the well-worn path leading back to capitalism?

Not only the Lin Piao affair and the Soviet threat to China but certain setbacks in the international struggle and some successes by the Soviets in infiltrating, subverting and turning to their own ends revolutionary struggles in certain areas—this too strengthened the Right in China. They seized on it as an excuse not to support revolutionary struggles and to rely instead on U.S. imperialism and its bloc, which in turn actually strengthened the Soviets with regard to revolutionary movements—and so a kind of vicious circle effect operated. The Right would again seize on this in a circular argument to say—see, we can't rely on the masses in other countries—nor in China itself—we have to rely on imperialists and reactionary heads of state in the "Third World" and bourgeois and petty bourgeois elements in our own country to stand up to the Soviet danger. All this has much to do with why the Right was so strong and why it won the last round.

But, as far as can be determined now, what were the immediate causes of this defeat?

First, in answering this, I want to speak to what we regard as a seriously erroneous approach: to say that, since they lost, the Four, and Mao, must have made serious mistakes and that's the main thing to look for. Of course, we should investigate and sum up what errors the revolutionaries may have made, but the attitude that "if they lost they must have made serious mistakes" is in fact just pragmatism and assumes that if they had done everything right, they could not have possibly lost. As opposed to this, Mao himself pointed out that in social struggles often the forces of the advanced class suffer defeat not because their ideas are incorrect but because in the balance of forces at the time they are not as powerful as the reactionaries and so they are temporarily defeated, though they are bound to triumph in the long run.

In other words, continuing the revolution means just that, it means a class struggle. The Cultural Revolution was exactly that—a class struggle against tremendously powerful forces of reactionary opposition, most importantly a powerful bourgeois headquarters in the Party. In a class struggle, there is and can be no guarantee that you will win every battle, even every major battle—or else it's

not really a struggle, it's all settled.

It is quite interesting that some people seize on this defeat to say that Mao's line and the Cultural Revolution must be basically flawed—this amounts to saying that because Mao is proven correct and farsighted, in saying the danger of capitalist restoration is real and will be for a long time, then this proves that he was wrong and must have made serious errors! No, the Cultural Revolution was indeed absolutely necessary and most timely as Mao said, but as he also said there is still the danger of defeat and there will be for some time. One victory, even a monumental one, does not change that or lessen the danger.

On the other hand, there is legitimately the question of why the proletariat lost power and the bourgeoisie triumphed in China.

It is important to grasp that, essentially from the time that Lin Piao completely turned traitor, the Left was on the defensive and though it fought back and gained some initiative, especially as things came to a head toward the end, it was still largely fighting uphill. Why? There are several factors we can identify now.

One is that the whole Lin Piao affair and its traumatic effects made it much more difficult to carry out political movements and revolutionization in the military. There were hardly any three-in-one combinations—leading bodies of rank-and-file soldiers, officers and Party members—actually implemented in the armed forces, for example. And, especially in recent years, the practice—which Mao insisted on as of great importance—of officers operating for periods of time as regular rank-and-file soldiers, was not widely applied or was made a meaningless formality. These are obviously decisive points, for the army still exists as something of a "special armed body" even in socialist countries, and if it becomes divorced from the masses and under the command of an incorrect line and revisionist leadership then, in effect, its guns are in the hands of the bourgeoisie and not the proletariat. And this will be true regardless of whether the army is called the "People's Liberation Army," the "Red Army" or what have you. This is exactly what ended up happening in the People's Liberation Army in China.

This was linked to the question of the growing Soviet threat, which also greatly increased the difficulty of carrying out revolutionization in the military. It strengthened the tendencies toward "professionalism," toward making weapons, not people, decisive, and toward stiff resistance to any "disruptions" within the armed forces which politics would cause.

WHY DIDN'T MAO JUST DO AWAY WITH DENG AND THE REST WHEN HE HAD THE CHANCE?

The following excerpt is from *Loss/Legacy*, pp. 119–22.

Some have raised the question: especially since Mao knew he was dying, why didn't he prepare better for this, and in particular why didn't he just throw Deng Xiaoping out of the Party, cut off a few heads and settle the question? This completely fails to recognize what was just stressed—that this was a real class struggle, with real and powerful social forces involved, on both sides. First of all, Mao did not have the freedom to just throw Deng out and knock off a few heads; as emphasized several times before, the real freedom of the revolutionaries lies in the conscious struggle of the masses. Without that, revisionism is indeed bound to triumph.

And, related to this, even if Mao could have utilized his personal prestige to get rid of Deng Xiaoping or even several Deng Xiaopings, it would be very dangerous to depend on that. What happens then after Mao is gone and new Deng Xiaopings arise, as they inevitably will—who then will have the prestige and authority to get rid of them? And how will the masses be able to determine if the good guys are getting rid of the bad guys or *vice versa*—after all Chou En-lai, Deng Xiaoping and a number of other top leaders of the Right have great prestige among certain sections of society and even among sections of the basic masses.

Mao was by no means “lenient” toward counter-revolutionaries, he was ruthless toward them, but he was also ruthlessly scientific. As he had summed up as early as 1967, only by arousing the masses to deal with this problem in an all-around way and from below could the means be developed to solve it, and if battles might be lost and a temporary setback suffered, then at least, as compared to the Soviet Union, the masses will be in a far stronger position politically to grasp what has happened and why, to sum it up and develop the methods of struggle and the new leadership necessary to fight against and finally overturn this defeat.

Some people say, in essence: What's the problem, you have state power, why should it be so difficult, just smash the enemy and keep moving on. But who is “you” who has state power? “You” divides into two: there are two classes inside the Party and inevitably bourgeois headquarters will repeatedly gather their forces and jump out for a trial of strength with the proletariat.

Mao was wrong to allow this, some say. But he did not “allow” it—or “disallow” it. It is an objective law, independent of Mao's will—or anyone else's, for that matter.

It stems from the contradictions of socialist society and of the Party as the leading force in that society. It is rooted in the material (and ideological) conditions of socialism and will remain in force throughout the socialist period, until the material and ideological conditions for communism have been achieved. This does not mean that the proletariat simply “accepts” the existence and actions of the bourgeoisie in the Party. Revolutionaries must identify and fight against the capitalist-roaders and fight to maintain the proletarian character and leading role of the Party. But this cannot change the fact that the capitalist-roaders will constantly emerge and repeatedly form bourgeois headquarters in the Party, particularly at its top levels. This kind of struggle has gone on and will continue to go on in every Marxist-Leninist party; the great thing about the experience of the Chinese Communist Party is that, exactly because of Mao's line and leadership, the terms of these struggles can be grasped broadly and the appropriate lessons drawn from them.

Mao summed up this law and developed the basic means for dealing with it. The result was the basic line of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution was indeed absolutely necessary and most timely, and it has universal significance. But it was also the first time that something like this had been done, and it is not surprising and should not be demoralizing or disorienting to revolutionaries if, after initial great victories, it was reversed. The experience of the Cultural Revolution, like everything else, must be summed up, but this can only be correctly done by upholding it and drawing lessons from the struggle on this basis. And it can only be correctly done by upholding and applying Marxism-Leninism, *Mao Tsetung Thought*, and never by denying or downgrading Mao's immortal contributions.

The Cultural Revolution was the highest pinnacle yet achieved by the proletariat. The proletarian movement, like everything else in the world, develops in spirals, and since the proletariat is the rising class, it is bound to advance, through this spiral, from the lower to the higher level. The material conditions and the laws of society dictate that socialism and ultimately communism are inevitable, and no setbacks can change that historical inevitability. In the last 100 years or so, from the Paris Commune to the Soviet Union to socialist China and the Cultural Revolution, the proletariat has continued to ascend to still greater heights and win still greater victories, despite temporary setbacks and reversals. As Mao Tsetung said: “The future is bright; the road is tortuous.”

WHAT STAND SHOULD THE PROLETARIAT IN POWER TAKE TOWARDS DEMOCRACY... AND DICTATORSHIP?

The rulers who unleashed the army against the Chinese people are not socialists, despite their trappings and labels. Nor does the constant agitation of the media and politicians in the West about "human rights" amount to much more than hypocrisy; indeed, Henry Kissinger blurted out the true feelings of the ruling class when he noted that no (non-revolutionary) government in the world would have tolerated an uprising like the one in Tiananmen Square for very long. However, since the question of democracy has been raised, it is good to discuss what policy the proletariat in power should follow towards dissent and disagreement, and more than that, how to understand the whole question of democracy. While a full treatment of that is beyond this article—and again, readers are urged to consult *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?*—the following brief excerpt (pp. 228–29, 231–36) speaks well to the point.

Here we must return also to the fundamental point that democracy is not and cannot be an abstract thing unto itself or an end in itself, it cannot exist in "pure" form; it always assumes form as part of the state—that is to say, the dictatorship—of one class or another, and specifically in this era, of the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. But there is a profound qualitative difference in the content of democracy under the rule of the one class and the other, that is, between democracy under socialism and democracy under capitalism. . . .

In contrast [to bourgeois democracy—ed.], Lenin stressed, "Proletarian democracy is a *million times* more democratic than any bourgeois democracy." ("Proletarian Revolution and Renegade Kautsky," *Collected Works*, 28, pp. 248.) In fact, it is not only a million times more democratic, it is democratic in a qualitatively new and profoundly different way: it represents and depends on the broadest, and ever-deepening, participation of the formerly oppressed and exploited masses in every sphere of society—and more than that requires their increasing mastery of affairs of state, of economic management, and other aspects of administration, and indeed of the superstructure as a whole, including culture as well as other spheres of ideology. All this goes far beyond—again, it is qualitatively different from—the mere question of formal democracy and formal rights. . . .

Before entering further into discussion of the withering away of democracy and dictatorship, and other politi-

cal phenomena attendant to them, it is necessary to more deeply explore the issue of democracy and dictatorship in socialist society, how this differs from capitalist society, and in particular how the general principle that democracy is not an end in itself but a means to an end applies to socialist democracy. In one sense, to give a basic answer to the latter question, it would be sufficient to recall what has just been stressed: democracy, along with dictatorship, is a means under socialism to achieve the end of communism and all the transformation of society that implies (and in this regard it would be highly relevant to invoke once again Marx's decisive analysis that "right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby"). What poses a more concrete problem, however, is how to understand—and beyond that, how to handle in practice—the actual relation between democracy among the masses and dictatorship over the exploiters that is at the heart of the proletarian state. It is fairly easy to say (at least for those not fogged by bourgeois-democratic miasma) that it is necessary to exercise dictatorship over the exploiters while applying the broadest and deepest democracy among the masses; but in reality it is far from easy to carry this out correctly. During the height of the Cultural Revolution in China, Mao remarked that one of the most difficult things was to sort out the two different types of contradictions—on the one hand, those among the people, which must be resolved by democratic means, and, on the other hand, those between the people and the enemy, which require the exercise of dictatorship—because in the swirling turbulence of this mass upheaval, these two types of contradictions became very closely intertwined. While this problem was acutely posed in the Cultural Revolution, it finds expression, in one form or another and with one degree of intensity or another, throughout the socialist transition period. One extreme, and crucial, expression of this, to which Mao also drew pointed attention, is the phenomenon of capitalist-roaders right within the Communist Party itself, especially at its top levels. Mao described this with dramatic irony:

You are making the socialist revolution, and yet don't know where the bourgeoisie is. It is right in the Communist Party—those in power taking the capitalist road. The capitalist roaders are still on the capitalist road (quoted in "Reversing Correct Verdicts Goes Against the Will of the People" (*People's Daily* editorial, 12 March 1976), in Lotta, ed., *And Mao Makes 5*, p. 262).

It is because of this, and the other ways in which the

two different types of contradictions intertwine and are likely to be confused, that Mao focused attention on the question of ideological and political line and the struggle over this—which assumes concentrated expression within the vanguard party in the form of the struggle between the Marxist-Leninist line and opportunist lines of one kind or another, but which must be taken up and battled out by the masses of people broadly, both in terms of how this line is expressed theoretically and in terms of its implications and application in practice. As a matter of basic policy—and basic principle—Mao insisted, dictatorship must be exercised over particular people and social groupings only on the basis that it has been clearly established that their line, the program they adhere to, and the activities they engage in represent a determined position antagonistically opposed to socialism, the world revolution, and the advance to communism (of course, the overthrown exploiters, whose fundamental antagonism with the revolution has long since been demonstrated, will have been stripped of all power, and there will be no question of granting them the same political rights exercised by the masses of people). And in suppressing counterrevolutionaries it is necessary to bring to light the line and outlook guiding them, to thrash out among the masses the key questions this raises and concentrates, and to fundamentally rely on the support—but more than that, the conscious activism—of the masses.

Here we see, once again, democracy among the masses in its most profound sense, and in its dialectical relationship with dictatorship over the exploiters. Clearly, in cases of actual criminal activity against the interests of the revolution which assumes acute form and poses an immediate problem demanding action—to be specific, such things as murders, robberies, rapes, theft of the property of others, or theft or destruction of public property, and so on, as well as such things as actual armed attacks on organs or representatives of the proletarian state—the repressive apparatus of this state must be brought to bear forcefully and decisively. But even here, the underlying political and ideological questions involved, and their implications in terms of what kind of society is being upheld, must be brought out to the masses and thrashed out among them—and in this way fundamental reliance must be placed on the support and ultimately the conscious activism of the masses.

This raises the question of the relationship between the law and mass revolutionary struggle in the enforcement of proletarian dictatorship and the exercise of democracy among the masses in socialist society. “The rule of law” is another basic bourgeois ideal, another principle which is treated as an end in itself by bourgeois

theorists of freedom and democracy.* In this conception, dictatorship is the antithesis of “the rule of law.” But in fact, “the rule of law” can be part of a dictatorship, of one kind or another, and in the most general sense it always is—even where it may appear that power is exercised without or above the law, laws (in the sense of a systematized code that people in society are obliged to conform to, whether written or unwritten) will still exist and play a part in enforcing the rule of the dominant class.† Conversely, all states, all dictatorships, include laws in one form or another. In socialist society, too, law has a definite class character: it must reflect and serve the exercise of dictatorship over the exploiters and the exercise of political power by, and democracy among, the broad masses of people. As Mao put it, applying this to social organization in particular, and socialist society more specifically, “An organization must have rules, and a state also must have rules. . . .” (quoted in “Report on the Revision of the Constitution,” delivered by Chang Chun-chiao [13 January 1975], in *Documents of the First Session of the Fourth National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China* [Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1975], p. 33; also in Lotta, ed., *And Mao Makes 5*, p. 186). In short, law is a part of the superstructure, it has a definite class character. Under socialism it serves the transformation of society toward the goal of communism, and with the achievement of communism, law too will wither away. But beyond this general principle, the fact that law is a subordinate part of the rule of a particular

*Thus, in *The Social Contract*, for example, while insisting that “All legitimate government is ‘republican,’” Rousseau explains that “any state which is ruled by law I call a ‘republic,’” and he adds that by “republic” he means “not only an aristocracy or democracy, but generally any government directed by the general will, which is law” (Rousseau, *Social Contract*, p. 82). It may be helpful to recall here the distinction. . . between Rousseau’s concept of *sovereignty*, which he insisted must be popular (democratic), and of *government*, which Rousseau thought should, preferably, not be democratic, while it must represent the popular will.

†In this regard it must be remarked that when Lenin said that “Kautsky accidentally stumbled upon *one* true idea (namely, that dictatorship is rule unrestricted by laws)” (Lenin, “Proletarian Revolution and Renegade Kautsky,” *LCW*, 28, p. 235), he was mistaken in granting Kautsky even this much. For as Lenin makes clear in this very passage, all states, whatever their form and whatever the “rule of law” within them, are dictatorships. In one sense, then, all states, all dictatorships, are “unrestricted” by laws, in that laws conform to the relation of classes, and specifically to the rule of one class over others, and not vice versa (the laws do not fundamentally determine, but reflect and form part of, the state—the dictatorship—of whichever class). But in the sense in which Kautsky means this—and in which Lenin assents—this statement that dictatorship is unrestricted by laws is wrong, because laws do after all *form a part of* and *give some content to the specific character* of the dictatorship, even if only secondarily.

class must find expression in socialist society in the practice of combining the implementation of the laws with mobilization of the masses—and fundamental reliance on the conscious activism of the masses in the functioning of the socialist state and the correct handling of the two different types of contradictions and the two interrelated aspects of democracy among the masses and dictatorship over the exploiters.

It is in line with the same fundamental orientation that Mao also called attention to the fact that, as he put it, “Marxism is a wrangling *ism*, dealing as it does with contradictions and struggles” (“Talks at a Conference of Secretaries of Provincial, Municipal and Autonomous Region Party Committees,” *SW*, 5, p. 364), and that he emphasized the need for ideological struggle and debate over the major questions of politics and world affairs, but also science, philosophy, education and culture, and other spheres. Any particular truth, when it is first being grasped, is always recognized only by a minority and has to fight for general recognition, Mao repeatedly pointed out. (See, for example, “Talks at the Chengtu Conference,” in *Chairman Mao Talks to the People*, ed. Stuart Schram, [New York: Pantheon Books, 1974].) It is also in line with this same fundamental orientation, and drawing from the emphasis Mao gave to it, that in discussing this point in a previous book I stressed that truth should not “be directly equated (and sometimes it should not be equated at all) with the governing ideas and policies of any particular proletarian state at any given time (even a *genuine* socialist state) to say nothing of a nonproletarian, reactionary state, whether openly such or in ‘Marxist’ disguise.” (*A Horrible End or an End to the Horror?*, p. 163). At the same time, however, I also stressed that the wrangling over such major questions, the confrontation of opposing views, the thrashing out of diverse ideas, and indeed the role of dissent from the governing ideas and policies—all this too is not an end in itself but a means to an end: arriving at a more profound grasp of the truth and utilizing this to further transform society, and nature, in the interests of humanity. And I stressed the fundamental difference between this orientation and approach and the principle of “pluralism”:

Pluralism as such is an expression of agnosticism, which—wrongly—denies objective truth. That is, it denies such truth on one level while actually defining truth (openly or implicitly, consciously or “by default”) as whatever is in accord with and serves the outlook and interests of the ruling class. (This is closely akin to the pragmatism that is upheld and promoted by the U.S. imperial-

ists especially.) . . . The “pluralists” say (at best) that the conflict of opinions and ideas itself is more important, higher than objective truth—or even that there is *no* objective truth, only different points of view, with each as true (and untrue) as the other. But in the final analysis the “pluralists,” by acting as if all ideas are equal and can compete equally—when in reality the bourgeois ruling class has a monopoly on the dissemination of ideas and exercises dictatorship in the realm of ideas, as it does in every other sphere—actually aid this ruling class in defining and enforcing as truth whatever suits its own class interests and outlook. . . .

. . . The reason and purpose of communists in encouraging and unleashing this wrangling over ideas, the critical spirit, the challenging of convention, the dissent from the established norms, is that this is in accordance with the basic laws of development of all life and society and with the interests of the proletariat, which must also *lead* all this to contribute in various ways to the advance of communism. This is possible only with the establishment of Marxism in the commanding position and the exercise of the all-around dictatorship of the proletariat—in the way summarized here, and in particular in dialectical unity with the long-term policy of “100 flowers” and “100 schools” [let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend in the arts and sciences, a policy put forward by Mao beginning in the mid-1950s] (*A Horrible End or an End to the Horror?*, pp. 188-89).

**Raymond Lotta:
Revolt in China—The Crisis
of Revisionism, Or...
Why Mao Tsetung Was Right**

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China has been caught up in massive upheaval. Demonstrations led by students erupted in the major cities of the country. Several attempts to remove students from Tiananmen Square failed, and soldiers openly refused orders from their superiors. Workers joined the protest movement in ever larger numbers. Discontent is deep. People from all walks of life are carrying on discussion and debate about the sickness of Chinese society. This

revolt not only took the revisionist Communist Party leadership by surprise but also seriously called into question its ability and mandate to rule. Where the movement may go is unclear. The extent to which genuine Marxist-Leninists, upholding Mao Tsetung's banner, may be trying to exert revolutionary influence is also unclear. But this much is certain: Deng Xiaoping's pipe dreams of an obedient population, a stable political environment, and a controllable capitalism have been shattered.

What is happening in China is the product of twelve years of revisionist rule. After the death of Mao Tsetung in 1976, a reactionary coup d'état brought to power a new exploiting class. Since then, China has undergone sweeping changes—in its economy, in its political institutions, in its educational system, in its social life, in the values it promotes. These changes have been hailed in the West and in the Soviet bloc as progress. Right there, that should tell us something about the reality of reform. What is described as the restoration of sanity is really the restoration of capitalism. What experts like to describe as a society going through growing pains and searching for political reform is really a society in deep crisis: an economic crisis, a social crisis, and a crisis of confidence in ruling institutions. The purpose of this article is to examine some of the basic characteristics of Chinese society that produced such discontent and what this suggests about the solution to the problems of China under revisionist rule.

**I. CHINA IS NOT A SOCIALIST SOCIETY.
CAPITALISM HAS BEEN RESTORED AND
CHINA IS BEING REDUCED TO AN
OPPRESSED NATION.**

Profit in command

The Chinese economy is organized around the principle of profit in command. Chinese theoreticians themselves have said that profit provides the most useful measure for economic performance. They have said that competition among enterprises is a good thing since it insures that "only the best survive." In fact, bankruptcies now exist in China. Enterprises are now rewarded for earning greater profits, and more and more investment is now financed by loans rather than by grants. Profit guides the investment of capital. Here is an example. One policy that Mao fought for was to disperse industry throughout the country and to make special efforts to develop the poorer and backward regions. Today, development resources are being concentrated along China's coastal provinces. These have traditionally been more prosper-

ous regions. The idea is to develop an export-oriented economy in these areas. But the effect is that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, as investment and financial resources are sucked into high-profit ventures. This is not socialism.

The Situation in Agriculture

Under Mao, China had developed a system of collective agriculture. China's basic food needs were met and enormous social changes took place in the countryside. In 1978, after revolutionary power was overthrown, China adopted the household responsibility system. Fields were broken up into parcels, and plots of land were assigned to individual peasant families. A series of directives in 1983 and 1984 allowed individual farm households to hire labor, to buy and own farm machinery, and to market their surpluses in other regions. More efficient households were encouraged to enter into leasing arrangements with less efficient households. In this way land ownership was concentrated in a few hands.

William Hinton has described this process of decollectivization: "When the time came to distribute collective assets, people with influence and connections were able to buy, at massive discounts, the tractors, trucks, wells, pumps, processing equipment, and other productive property that the collectives had accumulated over decades through the hard labor of all members. Not only did the buyers manage to set low prices for these capital assets. . . but they often bought them with easy credit from the state banks. . . . It is doubtful if, in the history of the world, any privileged group ever acquired more for less." What you have in the Chinese countryside today is a system of modern capitalist commercial farming, often with international linkages, developing alongside a dependent and fragmented poor peasant economy.

China's leaders promote short-term gain. Whatever brings in the most income will supposedly benefit the economy as a whole. "To get rich is glorious," says Deng Xiaoping. This is the capitalist way. And what have been some of the consequences? First, grain production has failed to increase over the last four years. This is because it is more profitable for farmers to grow other cash crops and because the prices of fertilizer, pesticides, and agricultural machinery have risen as a result of declining state investment in agriculture and industries supporting it. China is now importing huge amounts of grain. Second, there has been tremendous environmental destruction to grasslands and forests, and destruction to drainage and irrigation systems, as cash-oriented farming and herding spread uncontrolled. Third, polarization in the countryside, inheritance practices which split family plots into

units too small to farm, and the collapse of collective social services have produced a huge migration of people out of the countryside. By 1988, 50 million peasants had flocked to the major cities. Most are without jobs or housing and many of them sleep in railway stations, parks, or urban slums. Never in human history has there been so massive a movement of people from the countryside to the city in such a short period of time. This is not socialism.

The Situation of Workers in Industry

China's leaders say they want to modernize society. They say the way to do it is to maximize efficiency. And the way to do that is to maximize profits. Anything that raises productivity is just fine. In fact, in a very important speech given in October 1987, Zhao Ziyang, the secretary-general of the Chinese Communist Party, said that the sole criterion for the economy is its level of productivity. This means that the most important thing to the rulers of China is how much they can squeeze out of the workers.

Productivity is boosted by capitalist means. Workers in state industry face strict factory discipline and are subjected to management controls over the organization and performance of work. They are no longer masters of society as they were in revolutionary China; they are not engaged in all-around political life and struggle. They are mere elements in the productive process. In 1984 a "flexible wage system" was introduced, allowing for more wage differentials and bonus systems to get more work out of people. Reforms have also given managers more "flexibility" in hiring and firing. In 1985 the government changed the terms under which young workers became employees of state enterprises. This is the labor-contract system. Rather than being hired for life, new workers are hired for a limited length of time. They do not have the same security and welfare benefits as do other workers. In some situations, these contracts are verbal agreements under which workers receive a "floating wage" based on output and profits.

The Chinese state no longer guarantees employment. In the industrial city of Shenyang, 63,000 workers were laid off in 1988; but only 16,000 of them found new jobs during the year. These reforms are sold to people as "freedom of choice"—you can work where you want to. What's really happening is that the threat of wage reduction, dismissal and unemployment, and a system of competitive hiring are used as clubs to enforce exploitation. At the same time, a segmented labor force is being consolidated. It is based on growing differences in payment, position, and security and a huge surplus of cheap mi-

grant labor from the rural areas. This is not socialism.

Foreign Domination

Deng Xiaoping & Co. have dragged China back into the clutches of the Western powers. When Mao was alive, China was a base area for world revolution. Today China is a sweatshop for imperialism and an unofficial arms dealer for the CIA.

China has received large amounts of foreign capital over the last ten years. Since 1979 China has negotiated \$25 billion worth of foreign investment and signed loan agreements worth \$47 billion. China's large-scale industrial equipment industries increasingly rely on imported foreign technology. China often has to repay its trade and investment partners with the output of the projects with which they are associated. This is the case with much of the off-shore drilling by foreigners. China must continually export more to meet its rising import bill. Failing this, it must borrow, and its foreign debt now stands at about \$40 billion. The performance of China's economy is very much influenced by its integration in the world economy. High imports in 1984-85 fueled industrial growth, while recent cuts in imports have made domestic shortages and inflation worse.

In many respects the old system where foreign powers dominated enclaves and received concessions is returning. Nowhere is this more apparent than in "special economic zones" established by the Chinese government along China's southeast coast. These zones are similar to the export-processing zones established in Taiwan and South Korea in the 1960s and 1970s. The Chinese government has invested in transportation and communication, provided a work force, and offered preferential tax rates to foreign capital, which is now allowed to set up wholly owned foreign enterprises. In 1988 more than one million workers in southern China depended on manufacturing arrangements with capital from Hong Kong. It is not uncommon to find employees, even children, working twelve hours a day, seven days a week, for piece-rates amounting to 30 cents an hour. Meanwhile, large chunks of Hainan Island, another special economic zone, are being leased to Japan for eighty years.

The Chinese revisionists' program of internal economic reform has at the same time been a program of opening up to foreign capital. But owing to China's historical backwardness, this opening up has led to relations of dependency between the state bureaucratic apparatus and foreign capital, and because of the weakness of China's central structures, foreign capital has been able to strike deals at the provincial levels and play regions and localities against one another. China has once again

become a nation oppressed by imperialism.

A Social Cesspool

The counterrevolution in China has affected every sphere of social life. While higher education has been reorganized along elitist Western lines, more than 30 million children have dropped out of primary and middle school. With the return of family farming in the countryside, brutal feudal traditions and practices have made a comeback. In the system of family farming, male laborers and heirs are valued above the lives and rights of women. Sons are valued more than daughters. So, along with private family plots, wife beating, the persecution of women giving birth to females, and the killing of female babies have reemerged as major social problems.

Crime is on the rise in cities. Bribery, gift-giving, use of family, school, and workplace connections to get jobs or consumer goods in short supply—this is part of the survival and get-ahead game. Poverty in the cities is growing and 20 million peasants in the countryside face famine this year. Meanwhile, party officials openly flaunt their wealth.

In revolutionary China, Mao Tsetung inspired the Chinese people to work for the liberation of all the people of the world. Today the rulers of China inspire people with a vision of color televisions from Japan. This is not socialism.

II. THE CURRENT CRISIS

The Economy

China's growth rate in the 1980s has averaged about 9 percent a year. This is quite high. But this growth has had a very distorted character. And today the economy is in a state of disarray.

By 1988 the central bank was losing its grip over the money supply and credit, the country was facing 10 and 20 percent inflation, and there were runs on banks. Investment was out of control: money was going into ill-conceived, get-rich-quick projects, while some basic industries were neglected. Provinces were competing for raw materials and waging price wars to corner markets. There has been a kind of economic warlordism. Speculation was getting out of hand. The government responded with a program to slow down the economy and regain more central control. But this has only led to more speculation and unauthorized financial activities at the local levels and to new difficulties. For instance, because of the tightening up of the money supply, the government has not been able to pay peasants the full contract price

for grain. As a result of government cuts in investment, the official rate of unemployment has jumped to 15 percent, and real unemployment is much higher. Inflation is now running at about 30 percent. Chaotic reform has been followed by chaotic retrenchment.

Corruption

If they have achieved none of their other goals in the international arena, the Chinese revisionists have certainly reached, and probably exceeded, international capitalist standards of corruption. It is rampant at every level of the party and government and bitterly resented by the masses. Local bureaucrats have the political power and control over scarce resources and state capital to take advantage of various situations. With access to officially priced products, they will, for example, buy a ton of steel at 200 yuan (the Chinese money unit) and resell it at the market price of 700 yuan. They engage in speculative trading of imported goods in the special economic zones for resale to the rest of China. These practices have made many officials overnight millionaires. And there is widespread cronyism. For example, China's four largest state-owned companies are supercorporations with subsidiaries all over the country and with important connections to the outside world. On their senior staff are to be found former ministers, vice-mayors, senior party secretaries, and relatives of politburo members. These people amass huge fortunes and are protected by top officials in the party. The students had good reason to demand that party officials disclose their income and assets.

The Crisis of Ideology and Legitimacy

The Chinese Communist Party does not inspire people. As one teacher in Beijing put it, "Party members used to be 'the first to bear hardships and the last to enjoy comforts.' But now it's the opposite. All they do is take, take, take." But the problem goes deeper than that. This is a party that has nothing to do with revolution, that has nothing to do with the lofty ideals of communism, with the goal of a classless society. It has attempted to rally people around the ideology of self-interest and around the goal of a modern, industrial China. It promises an efficiently run economy and improved living standards but delivers exploitation, incompetence, and ruin. It sends 100,000 students abroad to get trained in Western management and engineering; they return only to find that the economy can't absorb their skills. It extols democracy but is an autocratic institution with feudal-like power centers and is out of reach of mass criticism and transformation. Why should people believe such a party? Why should people believe in such a party?

III. ONLY ANOTHER SOCIALIST REVOLUTION CAN SAVE CHINA

If you want to understand why these things could happen in China, you have to go back to Mao Tsetung. It was Mao who warned of the danger of the capitalist road under socialism. It was Mao who pointed out that people joining the Communist Party only to build a modern, prosperous China would, once in power, develop into a new bourgeoisie. It was Mao who predicted that if the capitalist-roaders came to power they would slavishly submit to imperialism. It was Mao who had worked out a series of policies and principles of socialist planned economy that were designed precisely to avoid the disastrous consequences of what has since come to pass in China. And, most of all, it was Mao who initiated the Cultural Revolution to overthrow the likes of Deng Xiaoping and other new bourgeois forces within the Communist Party who were aiming to restore capitalism. Mao taught revolutionaries everywhere that the revolution doesn't end with but must continue *after* the seizure of state power.

The only way out of the mess of Chinese society is another socialist revolution. The revisionists must be overthrown. Foreign capital must be driven out and China must disentangle itself from the web of imperialist economic relations. Industry and agriculture must be re-organized. The tremendous social polarization must be overcome. New political institutions of popular rule must be established. The ideas and values of private gain must be replaced with Mao's principle of "serving the people."

The situation in China is a complex one. A Marxist-Leninist-Maoist party to lead a revolutionary struggle does not appear to be on the scene. But the influence of

Mao and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution have been felt in the recent revolt. Analysis of the political economy and class structure of China is urgently needed, along with the formulation of strategy and tactics. Genuine revolutionaries also face a major challenge: how to popularize a truly revolutionary socialism in the revisionist countries. Many of the young people who have courageously confronted the regime and dramatized the sense of political powerlessness that people feel are themselves disillusioned with socialism. They have been educated on a diet of anti-Mao and anti-Cultural Revolution propaganda. Most have been led to believe that what they are experiencing and revolting against is socialism. And for many of them, and this applies also to young people in Eastern Europe, socialism is often seen as something that is outmoded, that is no longer relevant or vital.

But if Mao's analysis of the capitalist-roaders has been proven right, so too has his vision of socialism. Socialism is a higher order of society, which is itself a transition to communism. It is about abolishing exploitation and overcoming the differences and inequalities in society. It is about the continual transformation of society from top to bottom. It is about altering institutions and ideas. Is this possible? Well, this was the reality of China during the Cultural Revolution. One-quarter of humanity was on the road to the future. The Cultural Revolution didn't fail, it didn't collapse, as its enemies proclaim—it was defeated by those who rule China today. But that was not the end of the story. The lessons and legacy of Mao live on. The revisionists may be in power, but the crisis they now face makes one thing abundantly clear: it is revisionism that fundamentally has no future.

Islamic Revivalism and the Experience of Iran

by Larry Everest

We have arrived at the end of the world. The presidents and the ministers are devouring themselves. The armies are traitors. Society is corrupt. The privileged, the notables do not concern themselves with the poor. Only Islam can give us hope.

Iraqi Shi'ite, 1980s (Wright, 1985, p. 44)

If the class struggles of that time appear to bear religious earmarks, if the interests, requirements and demands of the various classes hid themselves behind a religious screen, it little changes the actual situation, and is to be explained by conditions of the time.

Frederick Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, p. 51

Over the past decade, as the Middle East has been rocked by rebellion and upheaval, Islamic revivalism, or fundamentalism, has become a potent political force.¹

The revivalist trend is diverse, encompassing different class forces with different political programs and outlooks. But Islamists agree on the need to revive and strengthen Islamic practice: some within (and often in support of) existing governments; others in order to establish a state and social order based on "true" Islamic principles and in repudiation of the "corrupt," "quiescent," "status quo" Islam of the current ruling regimes. All stress Islam's relevance to every facet of modern life, including politics and economics, not merely morality and religious ritual. Islam, they argue, provides the foun-

1. The term "fundamentalism" may be a misleading Americanism, as many revivalists have reinterpreted Islamic teachings, not simply returned to religious "fundamentals." In this article we will generally use the terms *Islamism* and *revivalism*. Although Islamic revivalism is a global phenomenon—there have been Islamist stirrings in the Philippines, Indonesia, Nigeria and among Black people in the U.S.—this article will focus on developments in the Middle East, especially Iran.

datation for a just social order; it is supposedly a third way—superior to both capitalism and communism—to liberate Muslims from imperialism and oppression.

What is the political character of this resurgence? What are its origins? What are the sources of its strength? These questions have been furiously debated by both those in government and media who are eager to maintain the West's grip on the strategically vital Middle East as well as those equally eager to shatter that grip and advance the liberation struggle of the peoples of the region.

Typically the imperialist press pictures Islamist movements and struggles as springing not from oppression or the depredations of imperialism but from endemic religious fanaticism. The people of the region are chauvinistically portrayed as backward and barbaric zealots, with a deep "penchant" for martyrdom. One scholar quoted in the *New York Times* called the Iran-Iraq War "a seventh-century battle, a primitive, atavistic struggle" between the Sunni and Shi'ite branches of Islam "being refought with the arguments—and the weapons—of the 20th century" (Kifner, 1987, p. 1).²

Others, in an effort to combat the racist stereotyping of Muslims and put the revival in a historical and social context, have stressed its nationalist, oppositional, anti-foreign domination aspect—a sort of Islamic version of the national liberation movement. Sharp clashes between Islamists and the U.S., notably in Iran and Lebanon, have lent weight to this view.

The Islamic revival is certainly rooted in material causes, not ideology in the abstract. It is largely a response to the imperialist-generated crises and transformations shaking the social order in the Middle East. These include the disruptive impact of imperialist-sponsored development, the severe economic and political crises gripping many countries, the tyranny of imperialist-backed regimes, and the shocks of inter imperialist contention, military buildups, and armed aggression.

In some cases Islamist movements do reflect the interests of national and petty-bourgeois forces who have adopted Islam as a vehicle for nationalist protest against imperialism and domestic reaction. Such forces are potential allies of the proletariat. But the revival cannot be reduced to Islamic nationalism.

2. In the latter half of the seventh century, conflict over the succession to the caliphate, or leadership, split the Muslim community into two distinct branches which remain to this day—the Sunni and the Shi'ite. Ninety percent of the world's Muslims are Sunnis. Shi'ites form about 80 percent of Iran's population, are a majority in nearby Iraq, and comprise substantial minorities in Turkey, India, Pakistan, Lebanon, and the Gulf States.

While middle-class elements often make up the bulk of the cadre of the Islamist movements and such movements may attract a broad base of support, particularly among the urban masses, the politics of the Islamic revival principally reflect the interests of comprador and bureaucrat capital (current or aspiring) and semifeudal or traditional elements.³ They have been thrown into conflict with the current ruling regimes by the political and economic crises gripping the region and/or the undercutting of their status and power as a result of the profound social changes wrought by imperialism since World War 2.⁴ Such forces (for example, the main revivalist trends in Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia) seek

3. Describing a political figure or trend as "representing" certain class forces does not imply that such figures are themselves landlords, capitalists, etc., or directly in their employ, or that such trends can't attract a broad range of followers. It simply means that the political line and outlook of such trends, in this case the Islamists, reflect and ultimately promote the interests of those classes. As Marx put it describing the middle class, one must *not* imagine that

the democratic representatives are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven from earth. What makes them 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. (Marx, 1969, pp. 50-51)

4. Due to the worldwide expansion of capitalist relations of production and shifts in the international division of labor, especially the process of imperialist-led industrialization in the oppressed nations, the differentiation between the national bourgeoisie and the comprador bourgeoisie is more complex than the situation that Mao had analyzed when he described the former as representatives of "capitalist relations of production in China" and the latter as "wholly appendages of the international bourgeoisie, depending upon imperialism for their survival and growth" (Mao, 1971, pp. 11-12). Today even the national bourgeoisie has more connection with the world imperialist market on the one side, while there is a broader internal base for the existence and power of the comprador bourgeoisie on the other.

These changes underscore the need for concrete analysis in each particular country. But nonetheless the distinction between national and comprador capital remains highly important. The national bourgeoisie, the objective determinants of which include size of holdings, its place and role in the national market, and the nature of its financial, productive, and organizational linkages to foreign capital, does not stand in the same relationship to the circuits of imperialist capital as does bureaucrat-comprador capital, and this has political implications, although, again, all this must be analyzed in the concrete.

The term "semifeudal" refers to those economic, political, social, and ideological relationships which contain or reflect aspects of feudalism. It does not imply a specific level or quantity of feudal or semifeudal relations in any particular country (nor does it only refer to relations in the countryside). The overall weight of feudal, semifeudal and pre-capitalist relations is a question that must be analyzed on a country-by-country basis.

to lead the popular struggle in order to install themselves as a new ruling clique—atop the existing imperialist-dominated and reactionary social order.

After examining the material and political roots of the current Islamic revival, this article will focus on the politics of the Islamist movement in Iran, where the current revival came to world prominence and has taken state power.

The death of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of Iran's Islamic Republic, this past June and the cease-fire in the Iran-Iraq war in August 1988 marked the end of a period in the development of the Islamic Republic. But even before these events, the experience of this Islamic state had already exposed how revivalist Islam is not a "third road" in the world today, nor can it stand up to imperialism (and social-imperialism). Rather it is a wrong road for the masses who seek justice and liberation. It is a path of accommodation to imperialism and an attempt by reactionary class forces to channel the masses down a dead-end road of domestic reaction and of continued domination by imperialism.

ROOTS OF REVIVAL

The resurgence of Islam must be viewed in the context of the overall contradictions roiling the Middle East, contradictions which have sparked broad-based mass revolt, convulsed the old order, and continually thrown the legitimacy of various ruling elites (and ideologies) into question.

Imperialist domination has meant tyrannical political oppression, brutal exploitation, and continued impoverishment for the vast majority of people of the region.⁵ Religious, ethnic, and national divisions implanted and/or fostered by ex-colonial powers continue to fuel conflict. And the Middle East has been subject to a succession of imperialist-sponsored wars and military as-

5. In Sudan, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, and Syria, for example, per capita GNP averaged \$556 per year in 1977; their combined literacy rate was 40 percent; and life expectancy averaged 54 years. In the relatively wealthier oil-producing states Iran and Iraq, per capita GNP averaged \$1,855 per year, with literacy rates barely 50 percent and average life span just over 50 years (Issawi, 1982, p. 230). This compares with a per capita GNP of \$8,520, an official literacy rate of over 80 percent and an average life expectancy of 73 years in the U.S.

Even these overall statistics do not fully convey the emiseration of the masses because income distribution is so grotesquely skewed—and growing more so. In 1970 the wealthiest 8.2 percent of the population of the Arab states accounted for 30 percent of the wealth, with the bottom 72.5 percent sharing 50 percent. In 1981 the top 11.8 percent controlled 72.8 percent of gross domestic product, while 88.2 percent shared only 27.2 percent (Stork, 1984, p. 6).

saults—in which Israel has often played a central role—and has been a focal point of destabilizing inter-imperialist rivalry.

These contradictions, which have sharply intensified during the 1970s and '80s, have fueled revolt and opposi-

Iran's Islamic state has exposed how revivalist Islam is not a "third road" in the world today, nor can it stand up to imperialism (and social-imperialism). Rather it is a wrong road for the masses who seek justice and liberation. It is a path of accommodation to imperialism and an attempt by reactionary class forces to channel the masses down a dead-end road of domestic reaction and of continued domination by imperialism.

tion to the status quo—witness the recent rebellions in Algeria and Jordan, the continuing civil war in Lebanon, and the Palestinian *intifada*.

Given this setting, what has inspired the current resurgence of Islam in particular? What are its material roots? What are the sources of its strength relative to other, secular opposition trends? What has propelled it into prominence in some countries and enabled it to attract a broad base of support?

In explaining the resurgence of Islam, the media loves to focus on the weight of tradition in the Middle East, and that is certainly one factor. Since its founding in the seventh century A.D., Islam has been the predominant and generally ruling ideology in the region. Powerful reactionary forces have promoted and continue to promote Islam to defend their interests. This ideological weight, the continued existence of feudal and traditional relations, and the downtrodden and oppressed condition of the masses provide a powerful basis for Islamic revivalism among the masses in the region; the weight of spontaneity is on its side.⁶ People in revolt often look for philosophy and, in the Middle East, Islam is the closest one at hand.

Indeed, the debate that has raged since the early 1800s

6. It is still true, as Lenin wrote in 1909, that "The deepest root of religion today is the socially downtrodden condition of the working masses and their apparently complete helplessness in face of the blind forces of capitalism, which every day and every hour inflicts upon ordinary work-

over how to respond to the depredations of colonialism and imperialism has often taken place within the framework of Islam: for instance, do Muslims best combat the West by updating the faith, or is the answer returning to the purity of Islam's original message? And Islamic trends, such as Islamic socialism, Islamic nationalism, and Islamic revivalism have also been a force in the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements that have swept the region during the past two centuries.

The current revival, however, follows a period in which many in the Middle East took up secular ideologies such as Marxism, Western liberalism, and radical or even revolutionary nationalism to respond to the changes wrought by the new post-World War 2 order. In the '50s and '60s the Algerian revolution and mass anti-imperialist upheavals in Iran and Egypt were led by secular nationalists—not Islamists (although religious forces played a role). Ba'ath Party socialists took power in Syria and Iraq. At that time Islam was considered passé, backward, and unattractive by much of the intelligentsia and politically aware, and variants of Arab nationalism and Arab socialism generally predominated in the region.

So rather than simply being a product of the weight of tradition, Islam's current strength derives from two more contemporary sources: the contradictory and disruptive impact of increased imperialist penetration in the post-World War 2 period, and political developments in the region and globally which have served to discredit and weaken Islam's secular rivals, including the revolutionary left. In short, a range of traditionally minded forces have been propelled into the opposition by the workings of imperialism, and a political opening for revivalism has occurred at a time of extreme crisis and upheaval.

As mentioned, the Islamic revival is overall characterized by comprador and semifeudal politics. But, thanks to the workings of imperialism, a wide variety of social forces—from powerful clerics to urban businessmen and professionals to dispossessed peasants—have been thrown into opposition to the status quo and have provided a base of support for revivalist trends. In Iran, the fusion of these disparate elements laid the basis for the eventual hegemony of Ayatollah Khomeini in the revolution of 1978-79.

ing people the most horrible suffering and the most savage torment. . . . 'Fear made the gods.' Fear of the blind force of capital—blind because it cannot be foreseen by the masses of people—a force which at every step in the life of the proletariat and small proprietor threatens to inflict 'sudden', 'unexpected', 'accidental' ruin, destruction, pauperism, prostitution, death from starvation—such is the root of modern religion" (Lenin, 1973, p. 405-406, emphasis in original).

The exigencies of the imperialist accumulation process demand—and the position of a victorious U.S. imperialism following World War 2 made possible on a vast scale—the expansion of imperialist capital into new areas, the subordination of other modes of production to the needs of imperialism, and the transformation of existing production relations. The most significant of these transformations have taken place in the Third World, including in a number of countries in the Middle East. There, such transformations began on a large scale in the 1960s and were accelerated by the 1974-75 oil price hike. Often these transformations have been linked to, and fueled by, the growing militarization of the region which is to a large degree a byproduct of heightened U.S.-Soviet tensions.⁷

These transformations vary sharply from country to country, depending principally upon the overall needs of imperialism. Significantly, some of those countries most affected by "disruptive modernization" have also seen the most rapid growth of the Islamic revival, and the movement is most often urban, not rural, based. (One exception is Afghanistan—a country that has not experienced significant imperialist-backed "development." There a large segment of the Islamic resistance is led by Islamic dignitaries allied with rural tribal and ethnic leaders.)

For example, the spread of capitalist relations, particularly in the countryside, has undercut and threatened semifeudal and traditional relations (even while continuing to prop them up in other respects).⁸ Such traditional

7. Trade and investment in the Middle East have skyrocketed. Between 1938 and 1977 imports into the region rose nearly 100-fold, from \$900 million to \$79 billion, and exports even more, from \$800 million to \$129.4 billion (a major share, of course, being oil exports which are increasingly vital for the functioning of the economies of the West (Issawi, 1982, p. 233). The Arab world's share of world trade more than doubled (from 3.6 percent to 8 percent) during the decade of the seventies alone (Owen, 1981, p. 7). In a number of countries in the region there has also been a dramatic shift in the relative weight of agriculture and industry. In 1960, 63 percent of Algerians worked in agriculture and 12 percent in industry; in 1980 only 25 percent were still in agriculture, with an equal percentage in industry. Over the same time period the percentage of agricultural workers declined in Iran from 54 percent to 39 percent and in Lebanon from 38 percent to 11 percent. Meanwhile the percentage employed in industry rose in Iran from 23 percent to 34 percent and in Lebanon from 23 percent to 27 percent (Stork, 1984, p. 6).

Between 1977 and 1986 \$144.9 billion worth of arms were transferred to the Middle East, nearly half that of the Third World and 38 percent of the world total (U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency [USACDA], 1988, p. 131-33).

8. Raymond Lotta writes, "[I]mperialism does not simply and solely destroy precapitalist modes. It will also reinforce them and create certain hybrid forms, even while these forms are brought ever more under the sway of capitalism and increasingly penetrated by the capitalist mode of production" (Lotta, 1985, p. 71).

relations are the economic, political, social, and cultural basis of the standing of powerful bourgeois and semi-feudal forces, including elements of the Islamic clergy, and their erosion has, in some instances, propelled such elements into the opposition.

Iran's White Revolution, a program sponsored by the U.S. in the 1960s, is one example. It stripped a number of mainly small and medium-sized landlords of their land and generally undercut the rural power base of the landowners and the Shi'ite hierarchy, substituting institutions more closely controlled by the Pahlavi regime. This created new investment opportunities for imperialist capital, but it also provoked widespread clerical opposition. (And even without government reforms from above, the spontaneous expansion of capitalist agriculture, often linked to the world market, has caused important and disruptive shifts in patterns of rural landholding in many other Middle Eastern countries.)

Imperialist penetration has also brought rapid urbanization, the growth of the middle classes, and the spread of secular values and Westernization—including Western-style decadence. These developments have undercut traditional Islamic values and social relations and been another source of traditionalist opposition. Khomeini complained, "The poisonous culture of imperialism is penetrating to the depths of towns and villages throughout the Muslim world, displacing the culture of the *Koran*." According to Khomeini's son Ahmad, the late Shah's inability to halt the spread of "social filth" drove many moderate clerics into the opposition. In Iran, Islamic values and the Shi'ite ulama⁹ were also directly attacked by the Shah.¹⁰

9. Ulama means those learned in Islam, literally Islamic teachers or theologians. Strictly speaking they do not comprise a "clergy" in the Catholic sense; however, for the purposes of this article the distinction is not significant and the terms ulama and clergy or clerics will be used interchangeably.

10. The Shah's frontal attacks on the Shi'ite ulama, motivated partly by the Shi'ite ulama's institutional independence from the state, seem to be more the exception than the rule in the Muslim world. Sunni Muslim religious institutions and leadership are generally closely controlled and often directly supervised by the state, and they have been important pillars of existing regimes. Thus, the active participation in and eventual leadership of the Iranian revolution by the Shi'ite ulama, a very powerful institution, may be particular to Iran and not repeated in other Muslim countries, even where Islamic movements play an important oppositional role.

Two Middle East scholars argue, "It seems most improbable that an Iranian-type revolution can spread with a similar pattern of clerical participation and rule. In Sunni countries 'Islamic' governments either are traditional ones or have been installed from above by military dictators. The lack of a strong, oppositional, and organized ulama cadre outside Iran appears to preclude a repetition of the Iranian pattern" (Keddie and Cole, 1986, p. 27).

The growth of imperialist-dominated capitalist relations has created new layers of the comprador, national, and petty bourgeoisie. But it has also meant the monopolization of economic and political power by narrow cliques of compradors and state-bureaucrat capitalists tied to imperialism along with severe economic downturns and crises. This has often led to sharp conflicts between these different segments of the bourgeoisie, including between different comprador factions.¹¹

National and petty-bourgeois forces also comprise an important social pillar of the revivalist movement. They have sharply contradictory relations with imperialism and its client regimes: linked to and nurtured by international capital, but restricted, held down, and often crushed by it as well. Wide segments of the traditional middle classes—the shopkeepers, merchants, and craftsmen of the bazaar—have also experienced both periods of prosperity and, increasingly, hard times and the threat of ruin.¹² These strata have been particularly resentful of their exclusion from political and economic power. Some have called "the hopeless situation of the middle classes in the Moslem world" the "motive force behind the spread of fundamentalism" (House, 1987, p. 4).

Broad segments of the middle classes have also been alienated by the cultural and spiritual bankruptcy of the region's comprador regimes, and offended by the assault of imperialist culture. This Western onslaught has denigrated indigenous culture and wounded national pride. In Iran, for instance, "The cultural and religious life of the people was denied in an arrogant way," stated Shokrallah Paknejad, an Iranian professor and anti-Shah activist.

11. Today the principal Islamist opposition groups in Lebanon, Tunisia, and Egypt, for example, are aspiring comprador elements who want to take over—and Islamicize—the existing state.

12. In Iran, the Shah's failure to develop institutions capable of politically integrating the new middle class into the regime and the extreme concentration of power in the clique closest to the Shah—excluding even powerful comprador elements—were prime sources of discontent and helped spark the revolution. (For an in-depth look at how such transformations laid the basis for the Iranian revolution, see Union of Iranian Communists, 1985.)

Somewhat similar developments occurred in Lebanon. One analyst writes that "From the 1920s to the mid-1950s, Shi'i political representation was practically monopolized by six prominent landowning families." During the '60s and '70s, however, these traditional notables and religious leaders "lost ground" in favor of "a new Shi'i elite" that included "religious figures, politicians and financiers." "The Shi'a now had an active and radicalized intelligentsia, an ambitious and enterprising counter-elite, and other new strata with new demands. They began to challenge the rules of the game and to question the distribution of power and resources in the Lebanese system. In this context, the movement of Imam al-Sadr (the forerunner of today's Lebanese Shi'ite groups) was born in the early 1970s, an expression of the demographic and socioeconomic shift of the Shi'a from the periphery toward the city-state of Beirut" (Nasr, 1985, pp. 10-12).

"People began searching for a new vehicle for their own independent thought, something that couldn't be said to be foreign. This was exploited by the religious forces during the revolution" (interview with author). (Paknejad was executed in Evin Prison in Tehran in 1981 for his opposition to the Islamic Republic.)

Islam remains a powerful ideological force in part because even in the more industrialized countries in the region, such as Iran, Egypt, and Turkey, semifeudal relations have not yet been reduced to "residual" leftovers in many important areas.¹³ Thus, while clerical, traditional, and/or comprador elements form the strongest base for Islamic revivalism, petty bourgeois (and proletarian) forces also remain enveloped in many ways in a semifeudal atmosphere, including in urban areas where today's Islamist movements are generally based.

Marital and family relations remain strongly traditional. Many, including even members of the newly engendered "modern" middle class, are new to urban life and steeped in traditional ideas. Merchants often have one foot in the world market and the other in the semifeudal

What marked the period of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism was the relative exhaustion of secular bourgeois nationalism in the region by the late 1960s and the ebb in the national liberation struggles by the early 1970s.

countryside; they may own considerable land, have workshops in rural areas, or be engaged in petty production and trading—more characteristic of feudalism than modern capitalism—even as they simultaneously have connections with the world market.

Rapid urbanization, so alarming to Islamic traditionalists, has also worked in some ways to strengthen their hand. (The dimensions of the region's rural-urban migration have been enormous. Teheran's population grew from one to five million in the space of fifteen years. Cairo's population nearly tripled between 1976 and 1988. Between 1960 and 1981 the urban population increased from 31 to 44 percent in Algeria, from 43 to 72 percent in Iraq, from 33 to 51 percent in Iran, from 35 to 77 percent in Lebanon, and from 12 to 68 percent in Saudi Arabia

13. See Lotta, 1985, p. 72.

[Stork, 1984, p. 5].)

Thus, millions of dispossessed peasants have been driven into sprawling, politically strategic urban areas. There they live a marginalized existence, neither absorbed into modern urban relations nor completely stripped of their peasant outlook. Socially adrift, they often turn to religion for solace, a sense of community, and a familiar cultural anchor. Such urbanized peasants have been an important popular base of support—and shock troops—for the Khomeini regime and other Islamist movements.¹⁴

A scholar who studied Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in the early 1950s captured some of the contradictoriness of urban revivalism. He described the Brotherhood as "an effort to reinstitutionalize religious life for those whose commitment to the tradition and religion is still great, but who at the same time are already effectively touched by the forces of Westernization." The Brotherhood "not only sought to imbue the present with some sense of the past. . . but also to redefine the past in terms meaningful for the present" (Mortimer, 1982, p. 253).

Defeat of Secular Forces and

The Shifting of World Contradictions

Structural factors such as the disruption of the old order, deepening economic crises, and the creation of new layers of the bourgeoisie have helped lay the basis for the Islamic revival but neither made it inevitable nor determined its strength. In other circumstances, many now marching under the Islamic banner might have been proponents or supporters of secular nationalism, Western-style bourgeois democracy, variants of pseudo-Marxism including Soviet-style revisionism, or even revolutionary Marxism. In fact, some now in the Islamic camp began their political activity as secular progressives or revolutionaries.¹⁵

What marked the period of the rise of Islamic fun-

14. Iranian *mullahs* also had a stronger organizational presence and were less exposed in the cities. "*Mullahs* were present in less than 12 percent of all villages," one Middle East scholar noted. "The overwhelming majority of villages not only had no *mullahs* of their own, but also they were rarely, if ever, visited by clerical representatives of formal Shi'ism." "Most villagers developed a cynical attitude toward *mullahs*," he continued, due to the latter's close ties with rural landlords and moneylenders (Hooglund, 1982, p. 24).

15. According to one researcher, "The typical social profile of members of militant Islamic groups [in Egypt] could be summarized as being young (early twenties), of rural or small-town background, from middle and lower middle class, with high achievement motivation, upwardly mobile, with science or engineering education, and from a normally cohesive family." This profile, he adds, is quite similar to that of Egyptian leftists, the only difference being the latter are more likely to have urban roots (Ibrahim, 1982, p. 11).

damentalism was the relative exhaustion of secular bourgeois nationalism in the region by the late 1960s and the ebb in the national liberation struggles by the early 1970s.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, more or less secular Arab nationalism, exemplified by Egypt's Nasser, was the predominant political trend in the region. Nasser and others of his ilk claimed to be liberators of the masses, champions of Palestinian rights, and resolute opponents of imperialism. They aroused considerable hope among the Arab masses.

But the crushing defeat of Egypt and the other Arab countries in the 1967 "Six-Day" war with Israel, along with the inevitable evolution of such "progressive" Arab governments into openly reactionary, comprador regimes, was a severe shock and dealt this trend a blow from which it has not yet recovered.

These events demoralized some and, together with the rise of national liberation struggles in the 1960s, pushed others in a more revolutionary direction, crystallized by the revolutionary nationalist posture and orientation of the PLO in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The PLO's "Black September" defeat in 1970 and its subsequent failure to mount a serious challenge to Israel then greatly discredited this political path.¹⁶

The ebb in the revolutionary movement in the Middle East was part of a broader global trend. As RCP Chairman Bob Avakian has analyzed, by the early 1970s many national liberation struggles "had run up against their limitations, were either getting bogged down, were suffering defeats, or weren't getting off the ground." Among many revolutionaries, he continues, "there was a certain retreat or a feeling... of disorientation and a certain exhaustion," indicative of a "larger ebb in the revolutionary struggle" during the mid to late 1970s (Avakian, 1985, pp. 12, 18, 7). All this resulted from a combination of factors, including the difficulty of defeating imperialism and carrying out an all-the-way revolutionary orientation, the limitations of the predominantly bourgeois and petty-bourgeois leadership of most national liberation struggles, and the related shift in the way in which world contradictions were playing themselves out.

Faced with such difficulties, and a more aggressive, confrontational Soviet foreign policy during the "Brezhnev era," a number of revolutionary nationalist trends (including the PLO) gravitated toward the Soviets for support. As these quasi-Marxist groups linked their fortunes to the Soviet Union, their standing among the

16. Islamist forces have grown even in the historically secular Palestinian movement. While secular forces currently dominate the Palestinian movement and the *intifada*, a setback for that movement might well open the door to further gains by Islamic trends.

masses as genuine revolutionaries further eroded. This, coupled with the Soviet Union's imperialist machinations in the region, tended to discredit Marxism.¹⁷ In addition, the revolutionary Maoist trend was seriously weakened in the wake of Mao's death in 1976 when reactionaries seized power in China.

The difficulties faced by the various left trends, relative to the Islamist movement, are also partly a product of differential treatment at the hands of imperialism and reaction. The left, especially the revolutionary left, has been subject to much more thorough and vicious repression than the Islamic opposition. Islamic groups are generally considered less a threat, and their anticommunism is welcomed. Protest under the rubric of Islam carries the weight and protection of powerful institutions and an officially sanctioned ideology.

Even the Shah, who unleashed certain attacks on Shi'ite mores and the opposition clergy, recognized the value of religion to the ruling classes, and stated, "No society has true stability without religion" (Algar 1972, p. 253). And under his rule, the Shi'ite ulama remained a large and powerful institution, with some 180,000 clerics, 80,000 mosques, and 5,000 religious shrines.

While the revival is not primarily a creation of imperialism and its allied regimes in the region, over the past two decades a number of pro-U.S. regimes have promoted Islamic revivalism to counter the left, to undercut or pacify Islamist opposition, and as a force for stability during a period of crisis and turmoil.

Following its defeat in the 1967 "Six-Day" war with Israel, the Egyptian government began encouraging renewed interest in Islam as an ideological prop for the regime (perhaps also to begin undercutting pro-Soviet forces and to prepare to oust the Soviets and align with the U.S.). Today the Mubarak government is trying to co-opt Islamist opposition by allowing the reformist Islamic Brotherhood to participate in Parliament, while cracking down on more extreme and antigovernment Islamic organizations.

The Saudis, who established the Moslem World

17. The role of the Soviet Union and the revisionist parties allied to it are important factors in the political terrain of the Middle East which are beyond the scope of this article. Soviet imperialism has been discredited in the eyes of many by its actions throughout the region. Some noteworthy examples are its invasion of Afghanistan, its support for thoroughly reactionary regimes in Syria and Iraq, and its refusal to oppose the existence of Israel—supporting the two-state solution instead. Pro-Soviet parties in the region have a history of treachery and capitulation that has also isolated them from more militant, revolutionary forces. The Tudeh Party of Iran is an outstanding case in point. Nonetheless, the Soviets retain considerable influence—among a variety of class forces—in the region, especially among those seeking a counter to the U.S.

League in 1962 to combat Arab nationalism, have used their oil billions to fund Islamic groups, institutions, and ideology throughout the region (for instance, in Turkey, Afghanistan, and Pakistan). In the wake of the Iranian revolution, Pakistan, Sudan, and some of the Gulf states launched preemptive Islamicization campaigns. Prior to the *intifada* the Israelis encouraged Islamist trends in order to undermine support for the PLO.

The U.S. imperialists have also sought to use the Islamic resurgence as a weapon against their Soviet rivals. The U.S. restrained the Shah's armed forces and tolerated Khomeini's rise to power in February 1979 in order to prevent an all-out clash between the army and the revolution that could have triggered a deeper crisis and created an opening for Marxist groups or the Soviets, and they still hope to turn the Islamic Republic into a bulwark against the Soviet Union.

During the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Teheran, Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's national security adviser, argued that "The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan made it more important to mobilize Islamic resistance against the Soviets—and that dictated avoiding anything which might split Islamic opposition to Soviet expansionism" (Brzezinski, 1983, p. 485). The U.S., together with the Saudis and the Islamic Republic, have massively supported fundamentalist Afghan guerrillas, and U.S. strategists frequently muse about the possibility of exploiting Muslim unrest within the Soviet Union.

This is not to argue that the U.S. and its allies are wholly supportive of Islamic revivalism. U.S. client regimes have lashed out against Islamist opponents (recently in Egypt and Tunisia). And promoting some (more pro-regime) revivalist forces in certain instances does not mean hoping they unseat established allies. However, it is not always easy to promote a trend while restricting its growth and ambitions; events can get out of hand—witness the destabilizing role of some Islamic forces in Egypt or Israeli disquiet over the role of revivalist groups in the *intifada*.

Given political openings, the Islamic trend has worked to maximize its gains. For example, in Iran prior to the revolution the clerical forces headed by Ayatollah Khomeini had a fairly developed organization for disseminating religious propaganda—which enjoyed a certain degree of immunity from repression due to the relative inviolability of the mosques. The Khomeinists and other Islamists made a conscious effort to "update" Islam and speak to the concerns of the broad masses. They aggressively propagated their views, and by 1976-77 religious publications outnumbered all secular publications combined.

Of course Khomeini's victory itself, coupled with his anti-U.S./anti-Soviet rhetoric and posturing, redoubled the appeal of Islamic revivalism—Sunni and Shi'ite—fueling feelings that the Islamic movement was the wave of the future and that victory was possible. (And since the revolution, the Islamic Republic has extended material support to fundamentalist trends in Lebanon, Iraq, and a number of sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf.)

THE AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI AND IRAN'S ISLAMIC MOVEMENT

The character of the Islamic revival and the unity and differences between its various currents have been most fully expressed in Iran. There the Islamist camp was divided into three basic trends (although there are sub-currents within each and the political and material divisions between them are not hard and fast).

First are the theocrats, formerly led by the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and now comprising his clerical and lay disciples, who continue to rule the Islamic Republic. Their political program centered upon replacing the "un-Islamic" rule of the Shah with a theocracy headed by the Shi'ite ulama—without uprooting Iran's semifeudal and dependent production relations. These politics reflect the interests of traditional and aspiring reactionary class forces, in particular elements of the clergy, who had been under assault or cut out of their "rightful" share of power and prestige by the Shah. Their "true Islamic" state has taken material form in the Islamic Republic of Iran: a theocratic version of comprador and bureaucrat despotism.

Then there are those who can best be described as Islamic liberals, figures such as Mehdi Bazargan, the first Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic and a leader of the Liberation Movement, and Abolhassan Bani Sadr, the Republic's first president. The liberals are essentially Islamic technocrats. While desiring a prominent social role for religion, the liberal program calls for a bourgeois democratic form of political rule with bourgeois expertise—not the *Koran*—in command, a defense of capitalist relations, and continued close ties with the West.

Like the clerics, the liberals' program reflects the interests of aspiring comprador forces. Their differences with the theocrats stem in part from the fact that their power and prestige derive less from traditional social and political relations than from the "modern" transformations wrought by imperialism; in many ways they are the stepchildren of modernization, while the theocrats have been its victims.

Finally there are the radical democrats, represented

principally by the Mojahedin organization. Similar in some ways to liberation theologians in the West, the Mojahedin developed Islamic liberalism in a radical, egalitarian, and anti-imperialist direction. They reflect the outlook of a section of Iran's radicalized national and petty bourgeoisie, and during the Shah's reign the organization was a significant and progressive opposition force.

Following the revolution, however, the politics of the Mojahedin evolved to the right. At first part of the loyal opposition, the Mojahedin soon came into sharp conflict with the Islamic Republic. They ended up supporting Iraq in the Gulf War and now seek to replace the Khomeini regime by allying with Iraq and winning support from Western imperialism.

The Clerical Politics of the Ayatollah Khomeini

Before coming to power, the Ayatollah Khomeini was viewed by many in Iran, and beyond, as a progressive anti-imperialist whose religion was a vehicle for the politics of the radical petty bourgeoisie or the national bourgeoisie. Today, while millions have been severely disillusioned by the reactionary brutality of the Islamic Republic, the exact nature of the politics of Khomeini and his Islamic Republic remains a subject of debate and controversy, a debate that is renewed with each new crisis in Iranian politics or clash with the West.

In this, Khomeini's and the Islamic Republic's relationship to imperialism, their supposedly anti-imperialist posture, has been a particularly vexing question. Was Khomeini simply a xenophobe who had no use for relations with any foreign countries? A representative of the national bourgeoisie, reactionary on domestic questions, but with sharp contradictions with imperialism, who in some ways should have been supported? Or have the periodic crises between Iran and imperialism, the U.S. in particular, merely been a charade, manipulated by Khomeini and the clerics to maintain political power?

Khomeini and the Islamic Republic had real and sharp conflicts with imperialism, the U.S. in particular (which continue in the wake of his death). But these conflicts did not stem from a radical nationalism, much less from consistent anti-imperialism. Instead, they reflected Khomeini's clericalism and traditionalism, and the necessities he confronted in seeking to establish an Islamic theocracy.

Khomeini was born in the poor rural town of Khomein in 1902. The son of a cleric, he went on to study Islamic doctrine, eventually rising to become an Ayatollah, literally the sign of God and the highest rank among Shi'ite clerics.

Khomeini's political thought evolved during a period

of radical changes in Iranian society. Iran was forcibly integrated first into the British and Russian empires and later into the U.S. bloc; the centralized Pahlavi state was being forged; traditional Islamic practice and belief as well as the power and prestige of the Shi'ite ulama were under assault; new social relations were growing in importance; and mass movements against foreign domination and indigenous despotism repeatedly shook Iran.

Khomeini's politics were a response to these dramatic changes—from a traditionalist and clericalist viewpoint. He came to oppose the growing power of the monarchy and foreign powers in Iran, not because he was a progressive democrat or nationalist (a view he did much to encourage before the revolution), much less a thoroughgoing anti-imperialist. Instead Khomeini opposed them because foreign domination and the monarchy were undercutting Islamic values and the power and prerogatives of the Islamic ulama. "The influence of the Islamic law in the Moslem society has diminished," he complained in 1965, "the nation has been afflicted with division, weakness and degeneration; the rules of Islam have been obstructed; and the situation has changed. . . we have lost the formations of the proper government" (Khomeini, 1979, p. 30). "You who want to reduce the power of the *ulama* and eliminate their honour among the people, you are committing the greatest treason to the country" (cited in Mortimer, 1982, p. 324).

For Khomeini the solution lay not in secular bourgeois nationalism, much less in transforming the economic and social relations upon which this oppression was based. Rather it lay in the defense and reassertion of Islamic tradition and the preservation and extension of the power of its guardians—the Shi'ite ulama. "If the men of religion had influence it would not be possible for the nation to be at one moment the prisoner of England, at the next, the prisoner of America. . . . If the men of religion had influence, governments could not do whatever they pleased, totally to the detriment of the nation" (cited in Bakhash, 1984, p. 34).

In 1920 Lenin critiqued pan-Islamists who strove to "combine the liberation movement against European and American imperialism with an attempt to strengthen the positions of the khans, landowners, mullahs, etc." (Lenin, 1966, p. 149). Such forces were Khomeini's spiritual and intellectual forebearers, and the evolution of his political thought and activity illustrated the reactionary and obscurantist thrust of his efforts to continue the Islamist project—albeit in a changed world and in alliance with a somewhat different mix of forces.

Khomeini's first book, *Secrets Exposed*, published in 1944, was one of the earliest clerical counterattacks

against secularism, which was then popular in Iran. In it he attacked the government of Reza Shah (the former Shah's father) as an enemy of religion and criticized the Iranian constitution of 1906 (modeled on Belgium's bourgeois Constitution) as a vehicle for imposing European-style law. And he began to develop his thesis that only the ulama, familiar with God's laws, can rule justly.

Yet at this point Khomeini was neither a theocrat nor an unrelenting opponent of the Pahlavi monarchy. During the tumultuous 1940s and early '50s, Khomeini was relatively inactive—and unknown. Iran was being rocked by massive anti-imperialist, popular uprisings. However, since Islamic tradition and the clerics were not yet under the sort of assault that accompanied the White Revolution of the 1960s, Khomeini and the bulk of the Shi'ite

ulama were not in the forefront of the anti-Shah opposition.

Instead, Khomeini followed the lead of the predominant Shi'ite ulama who supported—tacitly or actively—the CIA-sponsored coup that returned the Shah to power in 1953. These clerics had turned against the anti-British, anti-Shah uprising of 1953, led by the bourgeois nationalist Mohammed Mossadeq, for fear that it would strengthen secularism and the left.

The basis for Khomeini's support for the Pahlavi state was evident in *Secrets Exposed*:

Khomeini did not in this early book declare monarchy to be by its nature illegitimate. While stressing the desirability of permitting the ulama a large measure of supervision over governmental affairs,

Islamic Liberalism and the Liberation Movement

Since the onslaught of Western colonialism, one important current of thought among bourgeois reformers in Iran—and throughout the Middle East—has been the effort to arrive at a modern, updated version of Islam. In opposition to the traditionalist-minded clerics, these thinkers viewed the West as something of a model at least in terms of scientific and economic progress, and strove to integrate Western bourgeois thinking and modern science into an Islamic framework.

Such reformers played an important role in the 1979 revolution. They helped spark the wave of interest in Islam that swept through Iranian high schools and universities in the mid-1970s and paved the way for Khomeini's leadership by convincing a broad cross-section of the middle class that Islam was progressive and democratic in spirit. Khomeini himself borrowed from their method of combining Islamic precepts with populist politics. Islamic liberals initially occupied key positions in the Islamic Republic, although they quickly came into sharp conflict with the theocrats over the direction of the revolution.

One trend within this grouping was the *Nahzat-i Azad-i Iran*, the Liberation Movement of Iran. It was formed in 1961 by two supporters of Mossadeq's National Front: Mehdi Bazargan, a

French-educated engineer and member of Mossadeq's cabinet, and Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani, a progressive religious leader.

The defeat of the National Front and the Shah's return to power in 1953 prompted Bazargan and Taleqani, along with many others, to reexamine the resistance movement. It had been hampered, they felt, by a split between the secular, Mossadeq-led National Front (allied to a certain degree with the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party) and some of Iran's leading religious figures who feared the movement would lead to the growth of secular and communist influence. Bazargan respected the ulama's strength among the masses and came to feel the Front's secularism fatally isolated it from the mainstream of Iranian society. He shared the clerics' fear of Marxism and the proletarian revolution and viewed Islam and the ulama (as well as the Pahlavi state), as a bulwark against them.

Yet he also felt that the traditional Islam espoused by the clerics could never unite Iran and lead it in the modern world. The liberals wanted principles of state derived from modern bourgeois thought, not Islamic tradition. They felt that experts and technocrats—not clerics—should play the leading role in government. The liberals also felt that Western capital and technology were es-

sential in developing a modern, industrialized Iran and favored retaining close ties with the West.

The result was the Liberation Movement, an effort to "bridge the gap between the National Front and the modern salaried middle class on one side and the religious establishment and the traditional propertied middle class on the other." Bazargan and company

intended to break the clerical monopoly over religion and develop a new Islam that would synthesize the mild features of European socialism with the progressive ideals of early Iranian Shi'ism, and the advantages of industrial technology with the cultural values of their own traditional society. In short, they aimed at formulating a lay-dominated religion that would be acceptable both to the anti-Shah clergy, especially to the junior clergy, and to the modern-educated middle class, particularly the discontented intelligentsia. (Abrahamian, 1980, p. 9)

Prior to the revolution most liberals sought, through nonviolent reformism, to convince the Shah to "reign, not rule" and abide by the 1906 Constitution (which gave principal power to an elected parliament).

he did not claim for them the right to rule.... On the contrary, he indicated the readiness of the ulama to accept a far more limited role and to cooperate even with bad governments in upholding the state because "they consider even this rotten administration better than none at all."

The ulama, he pointed out, served as a pillar of the state. They helped to insure internal order, suppress insurrection, and protect the country against foreign interference and influence. But by the same token, he noted that the government must protect and uphold the religious classes. (Bakhash, 1984, p. 23, emphasis added)

It was only with the imposition of the U.S.-sponsored White Revolution in the early 1960s and the economic and political crisis that accompanied it that Khomeini first came to national attention as an opposition leader, resulting in his exile in 1964.

Khomeini rose to prominence by vociferously opposing the Shah's regime and demagogically playing to the democratic and anti-imperialist sentiments of the Iranian people. He focused his denunciation of the White Revolution on its character as a vehicle for strengthening the dictatorial monarchy and further opening up Iran to the depredations of foreign capital.

However, contrary to the claims of his apologists, these were not the only sources of Khomeini's opposition. He and important segments of the clergy also opposed this "Revolution" for thoroughly reactionary reasons. They were critical of provisions giving the franchise to women, appropriating clerical lands (at that point religious foundations owned 1.235 million acres, 12 percent of all villages and their associated lands in Iran), and making it easier for non-Muslims to run for government office (Parvin, 1988, p. 170). In 1962 Khomeini declared, "It is a capital sin to dispossess people of their property through forcible seizure or decrees. . . . Women's interference in social matters. . . will involve women in corruption and is against the will of God [and] prohibited by Islam and must be stopped" (Floor, 1983, p. 85). And he vehemently opposed the Shah's direct assaults on the Shi'ite hierarchy.¹⁸

In the years that followed, Khomeini refined his ability to appeal to broad segments of the Iranian population by

18. These included efforts to extend and/or strengthen state control over religious education, propaganda, and shrines—all traditionally controlled by the Shi'ite hierarchy and important sources of funds and influence. During the White Revolution a Pahlavi-controlled "religious corps" was formed. The Shah intermittently launched a number of

focusing on their grievances, infusing traditional Islamic concepts with oppositional meaning, and couching his Islamist program in populist idiom.

In interviews with *Le Monde* shortly before returning to Iran, Khomeini denied that he was an obscurantist or that clerics would run the new government, condemned the Shah for curtailing political liberty, and argued that "Islam has never been against [women's] freedom. . . . A woman is a man's equal." He stated that an Islamic republic would take the "ill-gotten wealth" of landowners and "redistribute it equitably among the needy," and that he stood for a "national and independent" economy "in the service of the people," not "foreign dependent" industry (Nobari, 1978, pp. 9-23).

However, fifteen years earlier, while in exile in Iraq, Khomeini had already articulated a theocratic vision that foreshadowed the nightmare gripping Iran today and stood in glaring contrast to the bulk of his public pronouncements. His views were spelled out in *Islamic Government*, published from notes taken by one of his students and now codified in the Iranian constitution. They were articulated in opposition to secular rule and based on the premise that all true and just laws and social codes derive from God alone. In contrast to secular governments in which "the people's representatives or the king's representatives are the ones who codify and legislate," Khomeini argued, "The power of legislation is confined to God. . . and nobody else has the right to legislate and nobody may rule by that which has not been given power by God" (Khomeini, 1979, p. 31).

The rulers of Khomeini's theocracy were, naturally, those most familiar with "God's law"—the ulama. And the leader of the Islamic state should be the leading religious figure of the community:

If a knowledgeable and just jurisprudent undertakes the task of forming the government, then he will run the social affairs that the prophet used to run and it is the duty of the people to listen to him and obey him. . . . This ruler will have as much control over running the people's administration. . . as the prophet and amir of the faithful had. . . . (Khomeini, 1979, p. 37)

Khomeini developed and fought for his concept of an Islamic state in opposition to Shi'ite tradition and the prevailing views of Iran's Shi'ite hierarchy, which was

frontal assaults on Islamic custom and tradition, and made little pretense at strict observance of Islamic mores himself. A number of opposition clerics were jailed, some tortured to death.

generally supportive of the Shah.¹⁹ (In fact most Iranian clerics only threw their weight behind Khomeini when it became apparent that the Shah was finished and he would take power.) The key for Khomeini was that the Shah's regime could no longer "protect" Islam and the religious classes; their future, in his view, hinged on holding state power.

Khomeini devoted less than two pages to economics in *Islamic Government* (and later argued that economics was for "donkeys"). This lack of attention is itself a statement of Islamist political economy: since the present economic base isn't the problem, why analyze it extensively—or transform it?

And the economic vision Khomeini did elaborate (if briefly) preserved the economic status quo. His was a vision of capitalism unencumbered by the domination of imperialism and the monarchy, and hence more productive, and leavened with Islamic morality and state welfare to eliminate its most egregious abuses.

If direct foreign domination (in the sense of direct political rule and economic control through lackey regimes like the Shah's) and royal corruption were eliminated, if wealth were used productively, if the propertied paid their religious taxes, and if all followed religious principles in dealing with their fellow Muslims, his argument went, there would be plenty for all and oppression would be impossible.²⁰ On this front Khomeini was no innovator, but followed Islamic tradition and texts which explicitly support private property and feudalism.

19. Some bourgeois journalists have labeled Shi'ism an "inherently" revolutionary ideology, in part because it holds that no temporal government was fully legitimate and only divine rule could bring true justice. In fact, this view has traditionally been interpreted not in an oppositional manner but in defense of passivity and the status quo. Nothing positive was possible until the return of the Mahdi, the Hidden or Twelfth Imam who was supposedly the last descendant of the prophet Mohammed. Therefore political activism was useless.

Khomeini argued instead that Islam was not concerned merely with ritual and did not sanction acquiescence to tyrants. Instead Islam was concerned with all aspects of life, first and foremost politics. Muslims had a duty to resist corrupt, un-Islamic rulers, he argued, and those knowledgeable concerning God's law could make a difference now—before the Mahdi's return. In fact they had the responsibility to rule.

Like the fictional Mahound of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, Khomeini's dogma flowed not from divine revelation but the worldly problems confronting a religious leader trying to maintain and spread the faith.

20. In *Islamic Government* Khomeini states that if all Muslims paid the required one-fifth tax on profits, "enormous funds" would be generated for "meeting the needs of an entire nation," including "meeting the important essential needs of people and for providing the public health, educational, cultural, defense and construction needs" (Khomeini, 1979, pp. 21-22).

Khomeini, then, was no religious modernist whose theology served (and cloaked) an anti-traditionalist, bourgeois nationalist program. Nor did his politics represent the traditional, but often anti-imperialist, petty bourgeoisie (although he certainly received support from this strata). Nor was Khomeini merely a throwback to an earlier era, trying to recreate the pristine Islamic community that Islamists argue existed during the founding of the faith.

Rather his outlook was that of a Shi'ite cleric, fighting on the terrain of the modern (and in Iran, increasingly urban) world to reassert Islamic tradition and clerical prerogative by putting the ulama at the head of a theocratic state. To institute such a theocracy upon the foundation of Iran's existing production relations meant aspiring to rule an Iran with both modern industry and entrenched Islamic traditionalism. As the Union of Iranian Communists (Sarbedaran) incisively put it, "His programme was nothing more than a clerical version of bureaucrat capitalism" (UIC[S], 1987, p. 48).

REVIVALISM IN PRACTICE: IRAN'S ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

The Islamic resurgence has drawn strength from its claim to stand for liberation from imperialism and oppression. And the continued clashes between Iran and the imperialist powers, the U.S. in particular, have given these anti-imperialist claims a certain credibility. But the practice of Khomeini's Islamic Republic during its decade in power has demonstrated their bankruptcy.

Rather than liberating the Iranian people from oppression, the rulers of the Islamic Republic have erected a particularly brutal and backward-looking theocratic state, preserving much of the Shah's reactionary state apparatus while adding new oppressive institutions and practices of their own.

And instead of freeing Iran from imperialist domination, the clerics have demonstrated a willingness to deal with imperialism. More significantly, they have also preserved and defended the core dependent capitalist and semifeudal production relations that characterized Iranian society under the Shah and are the underpinnings of both their own power and imperialism's continued domination of Iran. Khomeini and his allies, in short, replaced the Pahlavi clique as a new reactionary ruling class and left the "three mountains" of imperialism, feudalism, and comprador/bureaucrat capitalism weigh-

Khomeini Leads the 1979 Revolution

The weight of Islam, the institutional strength of the clergy, and the organizational efforts of the Islamic opposition—coupled with the weakness of the revolutionary left—laid the basis for Khomeini's leadership of the Iranian revolution. But his actions during the revolutionary upsurge of 1978-79 were crucial as well.

Khomeini's sense of the revolutionary moment, his insistence that the Shah had to go (when most other prominent opposition figures were calling instead for a constitutional monarchy), and his ability to play to the revolutionary, anti-imperialist sentiments of the Iranian people were all central to his coming to the head of the mass upheaval.

Khomeini's more militant posture stemmed not from thoroughgoing anti-imperialism but from an understanding that the masses were demanding revolution and that his hopes for an Islamic theocracy rested on seizing the moment. "No waiting," he told Bazargan. "We must not lose a day, a minute. The people are calling for an immediate revolution. It's now or never" (Fallaci, 1979, p. 26).

Khomeini was able to carry through with this posture and maintain his grip on the upheaval (even though he opposed an insurrection to topple the regime) due in significant measure to the limits on American freedom of action because of its rivalry with the Soviet Union. (And these limitations were reinforced by Soviet warnings against U.S. involvement).

A broad coalition of forces, including the urban bazaar, lower middle classes, Islamic-minded students and intellectuals, and the urban poor, rallied behind Khomeini's leadership. This support was forged in large part during the course of the upheaval when millions were rapidly politicized and Islam became broadly

popular among the middle classes, including among many who had not been particularly devout, as a statement of resistance and solidarity. Contrary to the picture generally painted in the media, religious sentiments were principally reinforced and heightened by revolutionary ardor, not the other way around.

By November 1978, when it was clear that the Shah's days were numbered and that Khomeini was the undisputed leader of the revolution, a broad array of reactionaries joined the tide of opposition to the Shah and lined up behind Khomeini to "save" Iran and their place within it. In particular, Khomeini came to concentrate the interests of those feudals and compradors who had come into sharp conflict with the U.S. and especially the existence—and further retention—of the monarchy. The U.S. used its influence to hold back and preserve the Shah's army, preferring Khomeini to a deepening of the fight for revolution.

The liberals had little choice but to ally with Khomeini or become irrelevant. They hoped to ride his popularity to power and expected the clerics to turn power over to them, the experts and technocrats, once the Shah was deposed.

Initially, it seemed that things might work out their way, as Islamic liberals such as Bazargan and Bani Sadr assumed key posts in the new Republic. But their alliance with the clerics did not last. The liberals' vision of a nominally Islamic, Western-style regime was in sharp conflict with the clerics' theocratic program and hunger for power. And despite promises to retire from politics, Khomeini and the clerics had no intention of letting this historic opportunity slip from their hands. "Today is the time when Islam must be established," Khomeini declared in 1979. "If we don't apply Islamic laws in this revolution and this movement, then when will we apply

them? . . . If, God forbid, this movement dies out, who can bring back Islam again?" (Khomeini, 1980, p. 15).

The liberals and the clerics clashed over whether to call the new government a Republic or an Islamic Republic. The liberals campaigned against the proposed constitution which gave supreme power to the *fajih*, the supreme religious jurist. They warned against putting clerics in positions of power and opposed clerical efforts to replace Iran's bourgeois legal system with an Islamic one.

The liberals opposed the limited efforts of the clerics to eliminate pro-Shah elements from the army, police, and security forces, which Bazargan called "indispensable bodies for establishing law and order." They feared such measures would further disrupt Iranian society, deprive them of needed allies, and alienate the West. While the exigencies of establishing a theocracy forced the clerics to maintain a certain distance from the U.S., Bazargan favored a quick restoration of close ties. (And documents seized at the U.S. Embassy in Teheran revealed numerous contacts between the U.S. and various liberals immediately before and after the Shah's downfall.)

About the only thing these two reactionary factions agreed upon was the need to halt the revolution. Bazargan said that as far as the radical left was concerned, he was "absolutely in agreement with Khomeini." "They represent the most dangerous enemies of our revolution" (Fallaci, 1979, p. 37).

By the summer of 1981, after Khomeini and the theocrats forcibly ousted President Bani Sadr and bloodily suppressed the Iranian opposition, most liberals had been driven from the regime and theocrats clearly dominated the government.

ing heavily upon the people of Iran.²¹

Islamic Theocracy—Hangman + Priest

Lenin commented that all oppressive systems require both the hangman and the priest. The Islamic Republic has combined these two functions with a vengeance.

Establishing an Islamic theocracy necessarily meant resurrecting and reinforcing a whole range of particularly reactionary practices and traditional and feudal social relations. Clerical rule and Islamic law have been enshrined as the basis of the political system, and secularism has been attacked. While calling for an elected

21. This is not to argue that a real revolution didn't take place in 1979, or that the overthrow of the Shah was a step backward for the Iranian people. The uprising of 1978-79 was a genuine popular upheaval and succeeded in dispersing, albeit not completely, the old ruling class and brought a new regime, with some different forces, to power—hence it was a real revolution. It also represented a serious blow to U.S. imperialism. Although Iran's Marxist-Leninists have sustained heavy losses at the hands of the Islamic Republic, the revolution also provided them with valuable lessons and preparatory training.

legislature and presidency, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic also established the principle of *wilayat al-faqih*—the “guardianship of the jurist”—which gave

Lenin commented that all oppressive systems require both the hangman and the priest. The Islamic Republic has combined these two functions with a vengeance.

Ayatollah Khomeini, as *faqih* or supreme religious leader, dominant and decisive powers.

The Constitution gave the Council of Guardians, composed of twelve high-ranking clerics, the right to veto any legislation considered contrary to the precepts of Islam, mandated that the President be a Shi'ite Muslim, and

Other Islamist Thinkers: Dr. Ali Shari'ati

A number of essentially liberal thinkers had an important impact on the Islamic revival in Iran. Their work influenced many now in the Khomeini regime and illustrates some of the principal themes of the Islamist trend in the region.

Dr. Ali Shari'ati, a one-time member of the Liberation Movement, was an Islamist ideologue and teacher during the 1960s and '70s who furthered the project of reinterpreting Islam in light of the national liberation struggles of the 1960s and in opposition to Marxism. A critic of the Pahlavi monarchy, Shari'ati developed a more modern, up-to-date case that Islam, not Marxism or Western capitalism, provided the theoretical framework for ending all forms of exploitation and creating a just and “classless” society.

Shari'ati, who studied in Paris, was influential in popularizing Islam among the intelligentsia and middle class youth because he incorporated modern social and analytical concepts into an Islamic framework and presented Islam as philosophically consistent with science, progress, and liberation. Shari'ati's appeal was enhanced by the fact that he

sharply criticized the established ulama—whom he claimed represented the Islam of the caliphate and king, not the Islam of the oppressed—for stripping the faith of what he alleged to be its populist, activist, oppositional thrust. At the same time, he also stridently attacked Marxism and Western liberalism as failed ideologies.

A principal and influential aspect of his work was the notion that national struggle and liberation was impossible without cultural liberation—the rediscovery of an oppressed peoples' own national and cultural identity in opposition to Western imperialist culture or “Westoxication.” According to Shari'ati, this national culture and heritage was Islam, and defending and upholding it was a key front in the struggle against imperialism. (In Iran prior to the revolution, and today in countries such as Egypt, occupied Palestine and Tunisia, Islamic cultural societies have spread rapidly and are an important organizational expression of the Islamic resurgence.)

Shari'ati was able to impart to progressively inclined youth a sense of nationalist pride and identity in their own roots, without denying the need for

modern science and industry, or divorcing the struggle in Iran from the liberation struggle throughout the Third World. This notion of a modern and pro-liberation Islam is an important element in the current revival throughout the region.

For all his “modernism,” Shari'ati wrote little on politics and economics, and when he did his thinking was reactionary, unoriginal, and muddled. Shari'ati repeated all the usual charges against Marxism, equating Marxism with Soviet-style revisionism. He claimed it denied human spirituality, made men into tools of production, and failed to give consistent support to the national liberation movements (the role of the revisionist French Communist Party during the Algerian war of independence was his prime example). Not even a consistent democrat, he posited the need for an Islamic version of Plato's Republic in which those most knowledgeable would lead and enforce the transformation toward a just Islamic society. He even defended the Ottoman Empire for spreading Islam to Europe.

made Shi'ite Islam (specifically the Twelver Branch) the state religion. Islamic morality has been forcibly imposed throughout society, and steps have been taken to desecularize and Islamicize the educational and legal systems.²²

Consolidating clerical power necessitated purging, executing, or driving into exile many of those closest to the Pahlavi throne and stripping them of their economic and political power. Clerics and cleric-led organizations (built around Shi'ite institutions), such as the Revolutionary Guards and Revolutionary Committees, now have prominent positions throughout the government and armed forces.²³

But the theocrats have also allied with landowners and big capitalists—some of whom were quite powerful or held official positions under the Shah. And they have not hesitated to preserve and make use of the core of the reactionary machinery of the Pahlavi state. As the UIC(S) points out:

vigorous efforts were started by the new rulers, led by Khomeini, to save the reactionary state machinery; the royal army was "exonerated," many of its commanders reappointed, its bureaucracy left untouched. Many organs of the government were left untouched. New ministries were set up with representatives of the reactionary classes appointed to head them; generous amnesty was given to ex-SAVAK forces and these criminals were appointed the same tasks in new offices, this time reorganizing SAVAK under its new name called SAVAMA. The masses were immediately disarmed. . . . (UIC[S], 1987, p. 51)

When revolutionary energy was at a high pitch and the masses attempted to strike at the domestic pillars of reaction and foreign domination, for instance by expropriating large landholdings, the regime employed both new, "revolutionary" Islamic institutions and the old Pahlavi armed forces to suppress them. Iran's oppressed nationalities, such as the Kurds, Azerbaijanis, and Turkomens, saw the revolution as an opportunity to realize long-held and just demands for self-determination. Instead, their demands were met with military assaults in order to

22. In the wake of Ayatollah Khomeini's death, Khomeinists continue to monopolize political power, although its institutional configuration has shifted somewhat. A recent amendment to the Iranian constitution now places more power in the hands of the new Iranian president, Hojatolislam Hashemi Rafsanjani.

23. The Foundation for the Deprived, controlled by the clerics, took over many of the Shah's holdings. It now employs 70,000 people and controls industries with a turnover of \$8 billion annually, 10 percent of Iran's total (MEED February 17, 1989, p. 17).

preserve majority nationality (Fars) domination, spurring the Kurdish people to launch a fierce, and continuing, armed resistance.

Political opponents of the regime, especially the revolutionary left, but also progressive and nationalist forces, intellectuals and writers, have been brutally attacked, with many, many executed. Women have been subjected to vicious assaults, infamous worldwide, aimed at quelling their revolutionary energy and reimposing repressive Islamic practices.²⁴ Non-Shi'ite groups and religions have been under the gun.

While commanding "God's forces" and leading bloody attacks on the masses, the Ayatollah Khomeini also tried to console them in their suffering. He claimed that God holds the poor in special esteem—in his eyes, one day in the life of the *mostazafin* (the shoeless, or wretched of the earth) is more valuable than the whole life of the wealthy (Abrahamian, 1989). During the Gulf War he promised that martyrdom in service of the regime would be rewarded in heaven. And he and other theocrats preached that all their brutality and conniving is part of a grand and heroic effort to advance Islam and eliminate misery and oppression.

Comprador/Bureaucrat Interests and Conflict with the U.S.

What is the source of the Islamic Republic's frequent conflicts with the U.S. and other big powers? To begin with, the Iranian revolution itself—a powerful and massive rising against the monarchy and foreign domination. The revolution jolted and disrupted Iran's political and economic links with imperialism and imposed conflicting necessities on the imperialists on one side and the Khomeini regime on the other.

24. Women have been forcibly veiled and subjected to whippings, beatings, and arrest if they don't comply; banned from entering technical fields, agriculture, and law school, and excluded from a wide range of occupations—such as lawyers and judges—because of their so-called "emotional inferiority"; and forcibly segregated from men in many public places. The principle that women's place is in the home rearing children has been enshrined in the Islamic Constitution. Women accused of adultery have been stoned to death; young girls who have been arrested for political reasons are often subject to obscene manual searches and abuse in front of the public at the time of their arrest to prove that they are not "decent girls."

According to the Islamic Republic's Law of Retribution, women are half-citizens; it takes the testimony of two women to equal that of one man. The right to divorce and child custody is one-sidedly given to men, and the right to temporary marriage (*sigheh*), a form of religiously sanctioned prostitution, has been legalized. And many more atrocities against women could be added to this list. (Much of this information comes from the pamphlet "On the Situation of Women in Iran," by the International Solidarity Front for the Defense of the Iranian People's Democratic Rights.)

For the U.S. the revolution was a severe shock and a major defeat. This was all the more so because it came at a time of deepening crisis in the imperialist world, renewed efforts to reassert U.S. power, and growing U.S.-Soviet tensions and war preparations (which the revolution, in turn, exacerbated). Given this situation and Iran's strategic importance, the U.S. was compelled to take various steps to regain its hold on Iran, protect Western interests in the region, and counter Soviet efforts.

The problem was that U.S. moves, which included some inducements but mainly focused on bullying Iran's

The Khomeini regime's actions were never part of an all-around program of freeing Iran from the grip of foreign domination. For the Islamic Republic the question wasn't breaking out of the framework of imperialist domination; it was establishing more favorable terms within that framework.

new leadership, were in conflict with the surge of the revolution and the exigencies faced by the theocrats in consolidating power. For starters, maintaining credibility with Iran's anti-imperialist population made a business-as-usual posture toward the U.S. impossible.²⁵ Indeed, Iran's theocrats built their political legitimacy on posturing as anti-imperialist fighters.

The clerics, never the U.S.'s primary allies in Iran, also had to knock down some of the monarchist forces closest to the U.S. in order to consolidate their own hold on power. Strengthening the foundations for clerical rule meant Islamizing Iran and reviving Islamic culture, and this depended on distancing Iran from the West and preventing the kind of massive intrusion of Western culture that took place under the Shah.

25. Iran's first Prime Minister, Mehdi Bazargan, learned this the hard way. Word of his meeting with U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski in October 1979 to discuss normalizing U.S.-Iranian relations sparked a political uproar in Iran. The ensuing furor (which was manipulated by the clerics to advance their agenda in the power struggle against the Islamic liberals), coupled with mass outrage over the U.S.'s admission of the ex-Shah (ostensibly for medical treatment), led to the seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran in November and Bazargan's subsequent removal from office.

There was a strong current of Pan-Islamism in the Khomeinist ideology, and, more importantly, Iran's theocrats also had their own regional needs and ambitions. They needed to create a favorable regional environment for the Republic's survival as well as beat back American efforts to undermine their power. Hoping to extend Iran's power in the area and make their revolution a force throughout the Muslim world, they backed Islamist groups in Iraq, Lebanon, and some of the Gulf states. And they felt that the U.S. defeat in Vietnam and its escalating rivalry with the Soviet Union limited America's freedom of action and gave them enough maneuvering room to realize these goals.

This combination of necessity, ambition, and perceived freedom in relationship to the U.S. impelled Iran's new leaders to take steps to redefine Iran's relationship to the U.S. and adopt some positions in conflict with U.S. interests. Iran quit CENTO, a U.S.-sponsored military alliance, kicked out NATO military personnel, and backed away from the Shah's role as the U.S.'s Middle East "gendarme." Many Western firms and personnel left the country. The new regime cut oil production, nationalized foreign trade and most industry, distanced itself from the international financial system, and restricted foreign investment.

These actions, coupled with the Khomeini regime's support of the Embassy seizure from November 1979 until January 1981, led to increasing U.S. hostility toward the Islamic Republic and political, military, and economic efforts to bully it into adopting a more pro-Western posture. The most notable of these was the U.S. green light to Iraq for its attack against Iran in September 1980, subsequent American assistance to Iraq throughout the eight years of the Gulf War, and the overall U.S. policy of tolerating and even encouraging the enormous slaughter in the Gulf. The idea was to absorb Islamist (and to a lesser degree Iraqi) energy and ambitions and force both regimes to turn West for help.

These conflicts were indeed intense, but their intensity no more demonstrates the anti-imperialist character of the Islamic Republic than American campaigns against General Noriega of Panama prove that he is a nationalist freedom fighter; contradictions between reactionaries often get quite intense.

The Khomeini regime's actions were never part of an all-around program of freeing Iran from the grip of foreign domination. The regime's slogan—"Neither East nor West"—really meant trying to play one superpower off against the other and gain maneuvering room. For the Islamic Republic the question wasn't breaking out of the framework of imperialist domination; it was establishing

more favorable terms within that framework.

Nor was there ever all-out hostility between the Islamic Republic and the U.S.—despite each one's public "satanization" of the other. The U.S. was mainly concerned about the possibility of Iran tilting toward the Soviet Union or destabilizing pro-U.S. clients in the region with a victory in the Gulf War. On the other hand, the U.S. also viewed the Islamic Republic's sanguinary repression and virulent anticommunism with favor and hoped the regime would become an important bulwark against the Soviet Union and the revolutionary left.

For instance, in the summer of 1979 the Carter administration spoke out in favor of the regime's suppression of the Kurds and resumed some military shipments. The U.S. never favored a decisive Iraqi victory in the Gulf War that would threaten either to topple the Khomeini regime or to lead to renewed revolutionary upheaval. In 1983 the West supplied the regime with the names of Tudeh Party cadre and applauded their subsequent slaughter. And recently the imperialists tacitly approved—by their deafening silence—the mass execution of some 16,000 Iranian political prisoners, including many members of the Union of Iranian Communists (Sarbedaran), immediately following the Gulf War cease-fire in August 1988.²⁶

For their part, much of the Khomeinists' "anti-imperialism" has been rhetorical bombast, little different than the *pro forma* declarations made by most Middle East leaders, including some of America's closest clients, that they are preparing to "liberate" Palestine, etc. Khomeini and his fellow theocrats were also quite adept at using the various crises in U.S.-Iranian relations to oust rivals, consolidate political power, and maintain varying degrees of popular support.

Perhaps not as loudly, but more seriously, Teheran's Islamists have repeatedly attempted to normalize ties with the West, including the U.S. One Iranian-born U.S. academic notes:

with respect to every major issue, including the war with Iraq, Iranian policy has consistently contained elements of self-restraint, pragmatism, and even,

26. Overall U.S. policy has focused on preserving Iran's territorial integrity while forcing Iran back into the U.S. orbit with pressure and inducements—and not on launching an all-out campaign to topple the Khomeini regime. The U.S. has tried to link up with more firmly pro-U.S. elements within the regime (the so-called "moderates" of the Iran/Contra affair) and apply pressure from without, mainly through its encouragement of Iraq in the Gulf war. Conflict with Iran has also been linked to a larger American agenda: promoting the myth of America as a victim—"America held hostage"—and the consequent need to get tough, overcome the "Vietnam syndrome," and prepare for war.

occasionally, helpfulness. The revolutionary regime's bark has been worse than its bite, its rhetoric more strident than its actions, its declared policies more belligerent than its intentions. President Ali Khamene'i has characterized this emerging realism as Iran's "open-door policy" . . . *Its premise is the growing conviction that the very survival of the revolution is at stake. In Khomeini's words, Iran will face "defeat and annihilation" . . . if it fails to establish relations with other governments.* Although he has excluded Israel, South Africa, and the United States from this requirement, he has left the door slightly ajar for the United States: relations with America could be resumed if it "behaves itself" . . . Speaker [of the Majlis (Parliament)—L.E.] Hashemi-Rafsanjani has reportedly said: "We have no intention to keep our diplomatic relations severed forever but it will be difficult to restore relations under the present [Reagan] administration." He did not say it will be impossible. (Ramazani, 1986, p. 237, emphasis added)

The 1985-86 U.S. arms initiative was the most important example to date of efforts to restore normal U.S.-Iranian relations. This initiative involved much more than exchanging TOW missiles for hostages. The U.S. and Iran were discussing, at the highest levels of each government, a new strategic rapprochement, based on common interests "vis a vis the Russians, Afghanistan and perhaps even against Iraq." Robert McFarlane, a Reagan administration official who was a key player in U.S.-Iranian arms dealing, felt the talks could lead to "a truly strategic gain for us at the expense of the Soviets."²⁷

This initiative fell apart, not because Khomeini had a change of heart, but because the initiative was exposed and the clerics feared a popular backlash. McFarlane said that then-Speaker Rafsanjani, Foreign Minister Musavi, and President Khamenei were "each traumatized by the recollection that after Bazargan met with Brzezinski [in

27. The U.S.-Iranian negotiations also shed light on another facet of the fundamentalists' "anti-imperialism"—the use of terror. As was clear in the seizure and subsequent release of several Americans in Lebanon, the Iranians and their allies in Lebanon make use of terror, including hostage-taking. They do this not to uproot imperialist influence in the Middle East—something that is impossible without mobilizing and relying upon the masses—but as a bargaining chip with which to pressure imperialism into making concessions, in this case loosening the U.S. arms embargo against Iran. There is a unity between the Islamist groups' use of such tactics to strike out against foreign "interests," as they put it, and their refusal to thoroughly uproot the social relations that are at the core of imperialism's domination of the Middle East. There is a world of difference between armed reformism and genuine revolutionary armed struggle.

October 1979], he was deposed (so strong was popular sentiment against doing business with the Great Satan)" (quotes from Tower Commission, 1987, pp. 298-99).

Preserving the Roots of Imperialist Domination

Talk of Islamic economics and anti-imperialist posturing notwithstanding, the theocrats have never had any serious program for transforming Iran's historical dependence on imperialism. Nor could they: such a pro-

Talk of Islamic economics and anti-imperialist posturing notwithstanding, the theocrats have never had any serious program for transforming Iran's historical dependence on imperialism. Nor could they: such a program would mean uprooting the bourgeois property relations and precapitalist social and economic relations upon which imperialist domination rests. These, however, are also the pillars of the power of the clerics and their allies.

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These, however, are also the pillars of the power of the clerics and their allies, and Islamic precepts, supposed to guarantee economic justice for all, have instead been mustered in the defense of private enterprise and land ownership—blocking, for the most part, even moderate reforms in commerce and land tenure. "Private property is as sacred as the blood of the holy martyrs," the Council of Guardians has declared (Abrahamian, 1989).

Behzad Nabavi, Iran's Minister of Heavy Industry and supposedly a "reformist" compared to some of the right-wing clerics in the regime, admitted in 1985, "We don't have a strategy and we don't know which way to take to become self-sufficient quickly" (MEED, December 14, 1985, p. 43). In early 1989 one knowledgeable journalist summed up the regime's economic practice over the past decade as follows:

So far, the leaders have tended simply to react to events and pressures, often giving the impression that they lack ideas or commitment. Difficult decisions have been postponed and vital ideological issues left unresolved. . . the economy has been run on an ad hoc basis. Officials have failed to use the war emergency to mobilise public sentiment for a radical restructuring away from dependence on oil and imports and towards the greater self-sufficiency promised by the revolution. (MEED, February 10, 1989, p. 2)

Consequently, the heart of Iran's economic relationship to imperialism remains essentially—and qualitatively—the same as under the Shah. One key pillar of that relationship is the exchange of oil for imported technology, industrial goods, and needed consumer items, including food.

Between 1979 and 1987, 96 percent of Iran's foreign exchange earnings and 60 percent of its total budget revenues were generated by oil revenues, which hinge on the ups and downs of the world oil market and are subject to imperialist manipulation (Clawson, 1988, pp. 376-77). *Kayhan*, a government newspaper, admitted that "oil is the lifeblood of this revolution" (cited in Renner, 1988, p. 186).²⁸

Between 1982 and 1986 Iranian imports averaged over \$16 billion a year, nearly as high as peak levels under the Shah (MEED, September 27, 1986, pp. 41-42). Iran relies on a variety of imperialist arms merchants, including Israel, for much of its military hardware. Arms imports totaled \$8.4 billion between 1982 and 1986, making Iran one of the top ten arms importers in the world, and in 1983 Iran spent 70 percent of its oil revenues on arms (USACDA, 1988, p. 129 and Renner, 1988, p. 189).

There has been much talk of "neither East nor West" and shifting trade from the imperialists to the Third World. But in practice this has meant little except reducing U.S.-Iranian trade in favor of commerce with other Western imperialist powers (a trend underway before the revolution). Iran still gets 64 percent of its imports from the industrialized West, with Japan, West Germany, and Italy its main trading partners (Sciolino, 1987). Rafsanjani reportedly views Japan as a power capable of filling

28. The collapse of oil prices in 1986 to under \$10 a barrel (largely due to Saudi efforts to pressure Iran by flooding the oil market and driving down prices) cut Iran's oil earnings to under \$6 billion. (When adjusted for inflation, this amounted to one-third of its earnings in 1972-73 and one-tenth its 1977-78 earnings [Clawson, 1988, p. 372].) Iran's economy went into a tailspin, and debt and inflation shot up.

the "technical and industrial vacuum" left by the U.S.

Even U.S.-Iranian trade, which totaled some \$15 billion in 1978 and dropped precipitously after the revolution, has rebounded somewhat. By 1987 the U.S. was once again one of Iran's largest export markets, importing \$1.7 billion worth of Iranian goods (mainly oil) (*MEED*, August 12, 1988, p. 8). The Iranian government is still afraid to publicly acknowledge this fact and omits oil sales to the U.S. from its official statistics (Valibeigi, 1988, p. 217).

Joint ventures with imperialist concerns, while initially curtailed and still an explosive subject politically, have never ceased.²⁹ In 1986 Iran and the Soviet Union signed

29. In 1986 Peugeot was leading the field to build a new \$1 billion auto factory, with Toyota, Nissan, Fiat, Volkswagen, Mazda, and Mitsubishi also in the running; Italian and Dutch concerns were bidding on a \$1.5 billion petroleum complex in Arak; and the contract for another chemi-

a wide-ranging protocol on economic co-operation centered on the resumption of Iranian natural gas shipments to the Soviet Union in exchange for the return of Soviet technicians and the resumption of joint industrial projects begun under the Shah in the oil, energy, and metal industries.

Agriculture is the foundation of self-sustaining and independent economic development, and the repeated defeat of even limited land reform bills has been an especially telling sign of where things were headed. On the eve of the revolution, 200,000 families owned nearly half the arable land, with the top 1 percent of the rural population owning 21 percent (Bakhash, 1984, p. 195-96). And semi-

cal plant near Bandar Khomeini was awarded to two West German firms. In Shiraz parts of a \$1 billion fertilizer complex were to be built by Humphrey and Glasgow of Great Britain (selected issues of *MEED*, 1986).

Islamic Economics

A number of Middle Eastern Islamists have paid considerable attention to developing theories of "Islamic economics" which purported to demonstrate Islam's relevance—and superiority to Marxism and other ideologies—in abolishing economic exploitation and imperialist domination.

Iran's Ayatollah Taleqani wrote one of the first and most exhaustive efforts to derive a unique and non-exploitive economic system from the principles of Islam—*Islam and Property, in Comparison to the Economic Systems of the West*. Bani Sadr, a close confidant of Khomeini's prior to the revolution and the first President of the Islamic Republic, also expounded a theory of Islamic economics—the "economics of divine unity." Both visions represent, relative to Khomeini's, a more sophisticated effort to concoct a capitalism stripped of crisis and exploitation by Islamic morality.

Taleqani argues that Islamic precepts imply that resources must be used productively, not monopolized or hoarded, and that everyone should have equal access to the means of production and receive fair compensation. Of course, none of this challenges the core of bourgeois production relations—property ownership. Rather, Taleqani upholds private property and capital as

necessary and productive.

Taleqani's stress on eliminating monopolization and the concentration of wealth is an impossible dream (if not sheer demagoguery) given the current development of production. His attempt to reconcile capitalism with Islamic morality is, as Marx pointed out, wishing for "the impossible, namely, the conditions of bourgeois existence without the necessary consequences of those conditions" (Marx, 1967, p. 190).

Indeed, Taleqani himself falls back upon state intervention as the ultimate protection against the abuse of private economic power. This, he claims, is superior to capitalism "for which property is absolutely free; and to socialism, which suppresses individual property" (cited in Keddie, 1981, p. 212).

Bani Sadr took the threads of Taleqani's work and developed them in a more egalitarian, "anti-imperialist," and state-capitalist direction, and in the process took Islamic economic sophistry to new heights. Passing over Islam's explicit support for private property, he claimed that the Islamic concept *tauhid*, the unity of God and creation, actually meant the "negation of every sort of economic, political, ideological, or other bastion in which power can be concentrated," including "absolute owner-

ship" which is "God's alone" (cited in Keddie, 1981, p. 227; Bani Sadr, 1980, p. 193).

According to Bani Sadr's interpretation, Islamic morality meant that an individual had the right only to the fruits of his own labor, no one could exploit another, and wealth acquired through domination was illegitimate. What all this boiled down to was state capitalism: Surplus belongs to society, not the individual, he argued.

Bani Sadr critiqued Iran's dependence on imperialism, but his analysis differed little from Deng Xiao-ping's Three Worlds theory and centered around winning political independence and on that basis "taking control" of national resources and wealth to foster all-around economic development. Like other proponents of Islamic economics, he did not and could not embrace the internal transformations necessary to thoroughly uproot imperialist domination, let alone the worldwide struggle against imperialism and reaction from which it is inseparable. For all his anti-imperialist rhetoric, when in power President Bani Sadr worked to end the turmoil of the revolution and "normalize" relations with the West.

feudal and precapitalist relations were widespread. Yet the Islamic Republic has steadfastly rejected efforts to redistribute land and has forcibly suppressed the peasants when they have tried to redivide it themselves.

During the regime's ten years in power there has been much talk of land reform and any number of measures proposed, but very little arable land has actually been distributed to the peasantry. This is a major reason that agricultural production has stagnated (according to one author, production has declined for all major crops). Food imports remain at levels comparable to those under the Shah: \$3 billion in 1983 and \$4 billion in 1984. In 1988 alone, Iran imported 10 percent of Argentina's entire grain output (Renner, 1988, p. 186 and *Iran Focus*, April 1989, p. 13). And the flight of peasants and rural proletarians from the countryside to the already bloated cities is continuing unabated.

Getting By on Austerity and Ideology

The regime has attempted to maintain economic and political stability without significantly restructuring the Iranian economy through a combination of austerity, populist leveling, and ideological appeals—coupled with savage repression of all opposition. Teheran has tried to squeeze all it could out of Iran's oil wealth while cutting government expenditures and limiting imports to make up for the shortfalls created by the war costs, lower oil revenues, and a stagnant domestic economy. By 1986, when oil revenues collapsed, government expenditures adjusted for inflation had been cut by two-thirds since the Shah's final year in power, returning them to pre-'73 oil boom levels, with development spending slashed by 80 percent (Clawson, 1988, p. 378). Various stop-gap efforts at self-reliance (particularly in weapons production) and rural development have also been undertaken.

To maintain the allegiance of the urban poor and lower middle classes, the regime has subsidized and rationed basic consumer items and enacted certain welfare measures. Meanwhile some of the wealthy have been expropriated and the middle class has been squeezed. The real income of government employees, for instance, has fallen 60 percent (Clawson, 1988, p. 385). At the same time, a new business elite is emerging, "utilizing links with powerful clerics and government officials close to the administration, and waxing rich on the control of import licenses, scarce resources, and land" (Bakhash, 1984, p. 185).

The regime has justified hardship and belt-tightening as necessary to win the Gulf War and maintain independence from imperialism—even as the clerics deal with the U.S. and Israel. "The people should make their

choice: either comfort and gluttony or hardship and independence," Khomeini told workers early this year. (*MEED*, January 27, 1989, p. 14). Islamic teachings in support of sacrifice and austerity have been mustered to rationalize deprivation.

Obviously none of these measures attack the roots of Iran's economic crisis, nor can such a juggling act go on indefinitely. The economic situation is severe and will probably worsen. Industry is reportedly operating at 42 percent capacity (*MEED*, September 16, 1988, p. 2), and economic output is stagnant. One Majlis member claimed last year that 29 percent of the workforce was unemployed and inflation was 47 percent (Clawson, 1988, p. 376).

National income has not risen to the 1977-78 level since the revolution, and the overall standard of living may be below 1972-73 levels (Clawson, 1988, p. 376). On top of all this, the war left some half million dead, an equal number wounded, millions homeless, and damages estimated at between \$100 and \$300 billion.

There are signs that popular discontent is growing. Public unrest and disillusionment (along with military reverses and imperialist pressure) forced the clerics to end the Gulf War on U.S./Iraqi terms in August 1988. Some government leaders warned that the situation threatened the very foundations of the revolution. The regime's savage execution of as many as 16,000 political prisoners following the cease-fire testified to its difficulties and fear of rebellion. This June Rafsanjani admitted that the regime was afraid to announce Khomeini's death before naming a successor because "there would have been a lot of trouble" (Thurgood, 1989, p. 9).

The end of the war and rising discontent has brought increasing pressure to "normalize" the situation and improve living standards. Temporary upswings in oil income may give the Islamic Republic some breathing room. But with no program for relying upon the masses to transform Iran's basic relations, Iran's theocrats will face growing compulsions and ultimately no other choice but to even more openly embrace imperialism.

This is true with the late Imam or without him. Indeed in the last period of Khomeini's life there were numerous signs of such motion. For the first time since the revolution the new budget included provisions for overseas borrowing—to the tune of \$2.5 billion. Prior to creating an international furor by calling for the death of author Salman Rushdie, Iran had taken significant steps to restore relations with Britain and France, and there was talk of doing the same with America. One of Khomeini's last instructions to government leaders was to improve relations with Iran's "northern neighbor"—the Soviet

Union. Imperialist concerns from Japan and Western Europe have been lining up in Teheran with visions of billions of dollars in postwar reconstruction contracts dancing in their heads.³⁰

Now, in the wake of Khomeini's death, there is renewed discussion of improving relations between Iran and the imperialist world. In late June Rafsanjani made a major pilgrimage to Moscow to sign an "unprecedented" agreement on Soviet-Iranian cooperation. The agreement reportedly totals some \$15 billion and includes arms deals worth over \$1 billion.

Iran and the U.S. have quietly been exchanging notes, and Rafsanjani recently repeated Iran's willingness to begin the process of normalizing U.S.-Iranian relations, provided the U.S. released Iranian assets frozen by the Carter administration following the 1979 seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Teheran and adopted a more positive attitude toward the Islamic Republic. The recent exclusion of the "hard-line" Minister of the Interior, Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, from President Rafsanjani's new cabinet may be a sign that Iran's leadership is icing those government figures who object to more open ties with imperialism and a signal to the West of Iran's reliability.

Objective Difficulties and Internal Splits

The Islamic Republic has frequently been shaken by fierce, occasionally bloody, struggles within the regime itself (even after most liberals were forced from power in 1981). The nature of these disputes and the nature of the factions within the Islamic regime has been the subject of much speculation in the Western press. Its analysis has generally focused on fathoming which figures are "moderates," i.e., those most willing to deal with the U.S. at any given moment, and which are "radicals," those not so willing.

This radicals vs. moderates dichotomy gets quite convoluted: today's "radical" is soon tomorrow's "moderate" and vice versa.³¹ In fact there are no radicals in the

30. For instance, Teheran is pushing Japan's Mitsui group to finish a \$4.5 billion petrochemical plant; Peugeot recently finalized a \$1.5 billion deal to supply auto assembly kits; and the government is entertaining bids from foreign concerns for \$700 million worth of oil platform repair work (*MEED*, December 23, 1988, p. 27; February 17, 1989, p. 16; March 3, 1989, p. 36).

31. For example, former Majlis Speaker, now President Rafsanjani had been labeled a moderate, then he reportedly called on Palestinians to kill Westerners (*Ibrahim*, 1989, p. A3). Now that incident has blown over and he is once again being referred to as a moderate. The Ayatollah Montazeri, Khomeini's designated successor until early this year, was once labeled a "radical" for his support of groups promoting Khomeinism in Lebanon; his recent criticism of some of the arbitrary and tyrannical practices of the regime, however, would seem to put him in the "moderate" camp.

regime, in the sense of a progressive or anti-imperialist faction. The revolution unleashed many competing political tendencies, even within the Khomeinist camp, and the resulting political and ideological disputes within the theocratic camp have often been complex.³² Most importantly, all those now holding power are proponents of Islamist theocracy. Often, factional lines within the regime are blurred; coalitions form around different questions, with alignments shifting from one set of issues to the next.

Besides reactionary opportunism and power hunger, intraregime disputes principally reflect the objective contradictions and difficulties Iran's rulers face in establishing and consolidating Islamic rule. Three such questions that have generated considerable struggle are: how to relate to the imperialist world, the relationship between state and private enterprise, and the balance between traditional and contemporary interpretations of Islam—in effect, between liberalism and traditionalism.

Khomeini (and some of those now ruling Iran) may well have been xenophobic zealots who despised the non-Muslim and infidel West and East. But such feelings matter little. Given Iran's dependent economy (and their inability to transform it), Khomeini recognized, and now all the major figures in the regime recognize, as President Khamenei put it, that expanding ties with the imperialist world is a matter of the "very survival" of the regime. The debate is over how to do so and get the best deal possible while not losing popular support, being discredited by political rivals, or undermining the Islamist character of the regime.

For example, the Iran/Contra dealings with the "Great Satan" were first exposed by a minor Iranian faction in retaliation for the arrest of its leader, Mehdi Hashemi.³³ Dealing with the U.S. was then publicly repudiated in order to preserve the regime's popular credibility, even as Iran tried to continue the dialogue. During the negotiations between the U.S. and Iran, McFarlane noted:

Today the force of events and self-interest has brought them to the point of realizing that we have

32. For example, one recent debate concerning the limits of interpreting Islamic canon involved four different clerical organizations—the Hojatieh Society, the Islamic Publicity Office of Qom Theological Seminaries, the Teheran Militant Clergy Association, and Teachers Association of Qom Theological Seminaries (*Iran Focus*, April 1989, p. 5).

33. The so-called "radical" Hashemi faction was composed of thugs and petty gangsters. Hashemi himself had cooperated with SAVAK during the Shah's reign. His differences with the regime centered around his efforts to create an independent center of power by manipulating and controlling Revolutionary Guard units and other organizations involved in exporting Khomeinism to Lebanon.

some common interests. . . . But they still cannot overcome their more immediate problem of how to talk to us and stay alive. (Tower Commission, 1987, p. 298)

The unity of the key players around dealing with the U.S., however, was underscored by Khomeini's refusal to allow the Majlis to even discuss the affair.

Often the twists and turns in Iranian posture haven't mainly reflected internal disputes or struggles for power but are cases of the same leaders taking different tacks in different situations—like George Bush being “kinder and gentler” one moment and “standing tall” the next.

Khomeini knew and approved of the dealings with the U.S. exposed in Iran/Contra and of efforts to build normal ties with the outside world; yet early this year he threatened Salman Rushdie with death, denounced liberalism, and inveighed against ties with the West. These

actions weren't evidence of the rise of some “radical” faction or a sudden about-face by Khomeini. They reflected changed necessity, specifically his concern that, in the wake of Iran's defeat in the Gulf War and rising popular discontent, too quick a rush West—as some in the government favor—could backfire, discredit the regime, and undermine his Islamic project. (And it may also have reflected a last, deathbed effort to breathe some Islamist fire into his movement.)

Another repeated focus of struggle has been over the economic importance of the private sector compared to the government sector. The so-called radicals in this debate are actually bureaucrat capitalists who favor maintaining the current predominance of the state sector (although they are not opponents of private capital). They also support an activist role for the state—restricting private capital to a certain extent and enacting some redistributive and welfare measures—in order to main-

The Mojahedin: Iran's Radical Democrats

The radical democratic trend was represented by the *Sazman-i Mojahedin-i Khalq-i Iran* (Organization of the Jihad-fighters of the Iranian People). Based among the intellectuals and professionals of the petty and national bourgeoisie, the Mojahedin helped lay the groundwork for the 1978-79 revolution and played an active role in the February 1979 insurrection.

Founded in 1963, the Mojahedin grew out of the Liberation Movement. It embodied the sentiments of a younger, more combative, and anti-imperialist generation, impatient with the non-violent reformism of Bazargan and company. The Shah's June 5, 1963 massacre had, for them, “made demonstrably clear that the old struggle methods could no longer be applied against this regime and its imperialist supporters.” National liberation struggles in Algeria and Vietnam provided “inspirations toward the adoption of new methods, in other words—armed struggle” (People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, 1981, p. 14). The Mojahedin developed an underground organization, committed to waging urban guerrilla warfare against the Shah's regime.

The Mojahedin remained committed to Islam because they felt it, not Mar-

xism, was a more viable ideology for reaching Iran's masses:

our organization has reached the firm conclusion that Islam, especially Shi'ism will play a major role in inspiring the masses to join the revolution. It will do so because Shi'ism. . . has both a revolutionary message and a special place in our popular culture. (cited in Mortimer, 1982, p. 336)

To develop Islam as such a vehicle for resistance, they integrated Islamic teachings with Marxism and the revolutionary experiences of Algeria, Vietnam, China, and the Soviet Union, developing an Islamic form of social democracy. For instance, they argued that the Prophet Mohammed's first community was a just and classless society; that the Shi'ism was originally born as a revolt against the usurpation of this ideal community by corrupt caliphs; and that the martyrdom of the prophet Husain in the seventh century was a parable for struggle against oppression today.

In the late 1960s, the tensions inherent in this effort led to a split in the organization, and a significant portion of the leadership left to form Peykar (Organization of Struggle in the Path of Emancipation of the Working Class),

which described itself as a Marxist-Leninist organization.

The Mojahedin opposed a theocracy or a special role for the Shi'ite clergy, and following the revolution criticized Khomeini's Islam as “static, traditional and anti-scientific,” as opposed to the “nationalist, democratic, progressive” Islam they supported (Rajavi, 1982, p. 10). The clerics in turn denounced the Mojahedin as “hypocrites,” apostates from genuine Islamic belief.

Immediately following the revolution the Mojahedin were part of the loyal opposition to the regime. However, following the ouster of President Bani Sadr, with whom they had allied, and the intensification of repression by the regime, the Mojahedin unleashed a campaign of assassination against leaders of the Islamic Republic (succeeding dramatically in some instances).

Following their defeat in Iran in the summer of 1981, the Mojahedin strategy shifted to one of relying upon Western and Iraqi support to topple the Khomeini regime (including setting up base camps in Iraq, armed and blessed by the reactionary Hussein regime, from which to attack Iran and contribute to the Iraqi war effort).

tain popular support for the government.

Those who favor abolishing restrictions on private enterprise and staunchly defend the prerogatives of private capital (for instance, in opposition to any land

The practice of Iran's theocrats not only illuminates the reactionary character of that particular trend; it also points to the limitations of even the most sincere efforts to interpret Islam as an ideology of liberation. Utopian elements of the faith—universal justice, brotherhood, harmony, etc.—can be mustered to promote struggle to a certain extent, but like a powerful rubber band, Islamic ideology snaps people back into support for or passivity in the face of reaction.

reform) are associated with conservative and high-ranking clerics and powerful elements in the bazaar. Neither side opposes ties with imperialism, although the private-sector types may favor opening things up more quickly.

Interestingly, this dispute recapitulates one of the fault lines that existed under the Shah: the conflict between the economically dominant comprador and bureaucrat capitalists closest to the Pahlavi state on one side, and those elements of the comprador and national bourgeoisie not favored or so closely integrated with the monarchy on the other.

Another debate, which intersects with both of the above and reflects some of the basic divisions within the Islamic revival, is over how far to go in reinterpreting and adapting traditional Islamic teachings. This controversy is inherent in the Khomeinist project. Islamists have to operate in today's world—full of forces undermining tradition—and by necessity make compromises and adjust traditional views in order to establish and maintain Islamic power.

But how far can one go without negating the essence of the project, abandoning the core of Islamic tradition and becoming an Islamic liberal or even worse—tolerating modernism, Westernization, and secularism. Khomeini wanted to establish a theocracy today, in history, but he also faced—and his disciples still face—the problems confronted by Rushdie's fictional Imam of Desh.

This Imam, modeled after Khomeini himself, tried to banish history—and clocks—from his kingdom because history and “progress, science, rights” constitute the gravest threat to the foundation of religion—the notion of divinely revealed, unchanging truth.

In ruling the Islamic Republic, Khomeini had to swing in both directions. Early last year Khomeini broke new ground by stating that the needs of the Islamic state were paramount and that it had ultimate authority, even over matters of Islamic practice and interpretation traditionally decided by individual theologians. And he criticized the conservative Council of Guardians for holding to the letter of tradition and blocking some economic reforms, for failing to grasp the needs of Iran's Islamic state. If you are not pragmatic, he warned early this year, Islam will be “accused of being unable to administer the world in the labyrinth of economic, military, social and political issues” (*MEED*, January 20, 1989).³⁴

Yet in the wake of Iran's defeat in the Gulf War and calls for a quick resumption of ties to the West, Khomeini also lashed out against becoming overly flexible. He denounced liberalism and dismissed his chosen successor, Ayatollah Montazeri, for, among other things, becoming too close to the liberal ex-Prime Minister Bazargan. And Khomeini's denunciation of Rushdie was not simply a matter of demagogic posturing; critiques of the fundamentals of Islam (or religious beliefs generally) are anathema to his brand of revivalism.

What might Khomeini's death mean for the unity of Iran's ruling theocrats? Iran's clerics realize that factional infighting weakens and could destroy their theocracy, and at critical junctures (such as Khomeini's death) they have been able to submerge their differences and pull together. But Khomeini played a very important and unique function within the Regime for over a decade. His stature as both the leader of the revolution and a leading religious authority helped maintain what popular support the regime possesses. And it enabled him to mediate conflicts

34. After Khomeini's death, the Islamic Republic took a significant step away from a strict theocratic order—and in the direction of further accommodation with current political necessities—by changing its Constitution to enable clerics ranked lower than Grand Ayatollah to be appointed as the country's “supreme religious authority.” The change was made to allow former President Ali Khamenei, who is not a high-ranking cleric, to be named Khomeini's replacement (and give the regime more post-Khomeini flexibility generally). Iran's six remaining Grand Ayatollahs are not staunch supporters of the theocracy, and Khamenei's appointment was seen as one that would be acceptable to all elements within the regime. The change also weakens the institution of *wilayat al-faqih*, the “guardianship of the jurist,” and is linked to the strengthening of the office of the presidency.

between rivals within the regime. His passing will only make these tasks more difficult for his successors.

THE LIMITS OF THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT

The practice of Iran's theocrats not only illuminates the reactionary character of that particular trend; it also points to the limitations of even the most sincere efforts to interpret Islam as an ideology of liberation. Utopian elements of the faith—universal justice, brotherhood, harmony, etc.—can be mustered to promote struggle to a certain extent, but like a powerful rubber band, Islamic ideology snaps people back into support for or passivity in the face of reaction.

The problem with even radical, anti-imperialist versions of Islam isn't limited to a few obsolete passages or to their legitimization of a weapon that traditionalists can then wield against the masses—and Islamic radicals as well. The problem is that the *Koran* and the Islamic teachings don't represent universal truth and justice bastardized by the likes of Khomeini, or a neutral vehicle that can be interpreted as one wishes; literally all religions are infused with the outlook of the oppressor.

The *Koran* sanctifies and puts the seal of the everlasting upon the domination of one class by another. It contains passages condoning slavery: if you "fear that you cannot maintain equality among" wives, "marry one only or any slave girls you may own" (cited in Avakian, 1983, p.48). Islamic law upholds bourgeois and feudal property relations, as various reformers discovered when their efforts to enact limited land reform measures and urban housing redistribution "came to grief against Islamic texts and traditions supportive of private property, inherited wealth, and freedom to engage in economic activity and in contractual arrangements, such as sharecropping, rents, and wage labor" (Bakhash, 1984, p. 212).³⁵ And Islam is quite explicit about the inferior, subordinate status of women.³⁶ (Christian doctrine, which sanctions slavery, class oppression, and the inferior

35. The *hadiths* (traditions), for instance, state that "On the day of Judgment, the honest Muslim merchant will stand side by side with the martyrs" and "If you profit from what is permitted, your action is a *jihād* (a holy struggle), and if you use it for your family and relatives it will be a work of charity" (Rodinson, 1981, p. 59-60).

36. In the *Koran*, the male is the unquestioned head of the household, with the right to polygamy: "marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four" (IV:3, p. 79); the right to control women's sexuality: "Tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands or fathers or husbands' fathers. . ." (XXIV:31, p. 255); to

status of women, is obviously no better.)

Revivalists argue that Islam provides the basis for independence from foreign domination; in fact following Islamic ideology guarantees continued domination by imperialism, regardless of the subjective intentions of its proponents. Liberation from imperialism is not simply—or even mainly—a matter of breaking political ties with one or more imperialist powers. The internal foundation of imperialist domination, in the base and superstructure, must also be uprooted. As Bob Avakian put it:

The grip of imperialism. . . must be shattered for revolution to win victory and go forward. However, it must be stressed, this cannot be done without also attacking the domestic props of imperialism and in particular striking at and uprooting the pre-capitalist relations and social forces representing and upholding them, in particular feudal or semi-feudal relations. . . ." (Avakian, 1982, p. 9.)

Yet these are precisely the relations and social forces that Islamic ideology and Islamist trends support and defend.

In order to liberate themselves, the masses have to grasp the class character of social and political events. As Lenin put it, "People always were and always will be the foolish victims of deceit and self-deceit in politics until they learn to discover the *interests* of some class or other behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises" (Lenin, 1978, p. 73).

But Islam is useful to the defenders of the old order because it does exactly the opposite; it covers over class conflict and class interest with pious (and sometimes

punish those who violate these strictures: "As for those of your women who are guilty of lewdness. . . confine them to the houses until death. . ." (IV:15, p. 81); to run their wives' affairs and exchange one for another at will: "And if ye wish to exchange one wife for another and ye have given unto one of them a sum of money. . . take nothing from it" (IV:20, p. 81) (citations from Pickthall, 1961). Some have argued that Mohammed's teachings concerning women are progressive because they were a step forward from the beliefs and practices that preceded them. This may well be the case, but this hardly justifies upholding these same principles today.

The bourgeois limitations of even the most radical and democratic Islamic forces stand out in their position on women. The Mojahedin, or "radicals" like Libya's Muammar Qaddafi, do not follow some of the most heinous views and practices of the fundamentalists; and they declare themselves in favor of women's equality, freedom, and participation in social life. But they still accept the kernel of Koranic teachings on women: that biological differences between men and women necessitate a different, and inferior, social role for women; their prime duty should be tending to the family and raising children. The example of Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, is often put forward as a model. She participated in the struggles of early Islam, while still attending to family duties and maintaining her female "dignity." They also endorse, to a certain degree, the veiling and segregation of women to "protect" them from being degraded as sex objects.

even militant!) declarations of universal truth, classless justice, and the equality of man before God. The Islamic movement's political vocabulary reflects this blurring of things: it doesn't condemn the oppressing classes but rather the *taghuti* (tyrants), the *mustaqbirin* (the vain and arrogant), and the "Great Satans" of the world, while it extols the *mahrumin* (the deprived) and the *mustazafin* (the humiliated).

Its proponents claim that Islam, "[f]ar from being an opium of the masses," would "wake them up from the sleep of centuries, putting a sword in their hands and sending them into battle against the forces of Satan" (Wright, 1985, pp. 27-28). But Islam is no doctrine for putting history in the hands of the masses. The philosophic core of Islamic teachings, even the most "modern" and "scientific" versions, is idealism: reality is ultimately unknowable to man because it resides not in matter in motion, but in the mind of God.³⁷

With reality and history ultimately beyond their grasp, the people have no choice but to submit to God and his self- or institutionally appointed representatives. Islam itself means surrender—to the word of God (a Muslim is one who surrenders). The *Koran* enjoins Muslims to submit to authority. "O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the messenger and those of you who are in authority" (IV:59, Pickthall, 1961, p. 85)—something Khomeini has explicitly invoked to compel obedience to the Islamic Republic. A key tenet of the faith is *taqlid*—the submission to or imitation of the authoritative direction of a religious figure in matters concerning the faith, which, in the revivalist framework, would include politics as well.

37. Efforts to combine Islam and science are inherently flawed methodologically and philosophically. Even those thinkers who have tried to update Islam in light of modern discoveries remain mired in eclecticism, metaphysics, and idealism. Ali Shari'ati, the leading philosopher of Islamic modernism, posited a form of dualism—the existence of both matter and spirit. He held that certain areas of reality were beyond human comprehension and that "the ordered and intelligible quality of events in the universe" (as opposed to a universe defined by motion and development) were "attestations to the existence of an Intelligence Who rules over nature" (Shari'ati, 1980, p. 55).

Islamic modernists have likewise rejected dialectics. The concept of *tauhid*, upon which this trend bases so much of its thought, is described by its proponents as "the Islamic worldview in which the universe is regarded as a unity, with a single form, possessing will, intelligence, and purpose that is God. Its opposite is *shirk*, the worldview which regards the universe as discordant, possessing conflicting tendencies and contradictions" (Bani Sadr, 1980, p. 193). Such a worldview is a barrier to scientifically understanding the material roots of oppression and transforming them on that basis.

TASKS AND TACTICS

Liberating the masses in the oppressed countries from domination by imperialism and reaction first requires a new-democratic type revolution. Islamic movements are incapable of waging and Islamic ideology is incapable of leading such a revolution, but every Islamic trend is not identically reactionary. Proletarian revolutionaries need to concretely analyze the particular character of such trends in each country. On that basis it is imperative to strive to win over those masses under the influence of religious leaders, and even to unite with some particular Islamist trends to the degree that they oppose imperialism and domestic reaction. And revolutionaries can take

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advantage of the political openings created by conflicts between Islamic trends and ruling regimes in the region, even if such trends represent reactionary interests.

But maintaining ideological independence and fighting for proletarian leadership are paramount. While the criticism of religion and religious trends is not the centerpiece of a proletarian program in the oppressed countries (nor an easy or always popular task), it is an essential component of winning proletarian leadership.³⁸ Revolutionary Marxists should learn a lesson from Iran's clerics; they grasped the importance of ideology in general and the ideological struggle against Marxism in particular and waged it continuously before and after the revolution.

In the imperialist countries, an understanding of the ultimately reactionary character of Islamic ideology and the bankruptcy of many Islamist movements does not

38. This isn't just a matter of exposing the character of religion. As Lenin put it, "No educational book can eradicate religion from the minds of masses who are crushed by capitalist hard labour, and who are at the mercy of the blind destructive forces of capitalism, until those masses themselves learn to fight this root of religion, fight the rule of capital in all its forms, in a united, organised, planned and conscious way" (Lenin, 1973, p. 406, emphasis in original).

imply tolerating chauvinist propaganda branding Islam an "inferior" religion in relation to Christianity or castigating the masses in the Middle East as uncivilized barbarians and terrorists. And upholding the right of nations to self-determination also means opposing imperialist attacks against even reactionary governments or movements in the oppressed countries—be they U.S. assaults on the Islamic Republic or Soviet aggression against Afghanistan.³⁹

However, opposing imperialist chauvinism and aggression does not mean tailing religious sentiments or prettifying religious obscurantism and reaction—even in the name of sympathy for wounded "Muslim sensibilities." Such a posture is neither anti-imperialist nor internationalist; it is solidarity with the peoples' oppressors and those, like Khomeini, who are the domestic agents of imperialist domination—whatever their particular differences at the moment.

The Islamic revival illustrates the historical youth of the proletarian movement, the continued strength of feudal and precapitalist relations, and the complex, tortuous road that lies ahead to communist society. It highlights the difficulties confronting the proletariat in leading the democratic stage of the revolution—where the pull of spontaneity in the form of traditionalism and nationalism is powerful and numerous class forces contend for leadership.

But Islam's current influence doesn't simply reflect the inevitable strength of feudal relations and ideology in the Middle East. It results from specific historical circumstances—setbacks and reversals experienced by genuine revolutionary Marxism, the discrediting of secular nationalism, and the particular way in which powerful elements of the ulama were thrust into the opposition and gained leadership of the revolution in Iran.

The founding of the Islamic Republic in Iran has given impetus to the trend of Islamic revivalism (although Iran's hopes for Islamic revolutions in Iraq, Lebanon, and the Gulf states have not panned out). But now the experience of that state, its oppressive and capitulationist character, has also increasingly exposed the real bankruptcy of this trend and further opened the way for genuine revolution.

39. Apologists for the Soviet Union have employed the particularly hypocritical and reactionary tack of justifying the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as necessary to combat Islamic fundamentalism. Not surprisingly, these arguments are nearly identical to those mustered by supporters of the Shah and U.S. imperialism in opposition to the Iranian revolution and Khomeini's rise to power.

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Book Review

Knowing the Enemy: The Pentagon Doctrine of Low-Intensity Conflict

by Lenny Wolff

Review of
*Low-Intensity Warfare:
Counterinsurgency, Proinsurgency,
and Antiterrorism in the Eighties*
Michael T. Klare and Peter Kornbluh, eds.
New York: Pantheon Books, 1988

Today, fifteen years after the American defeat in Vietnam, armed struggle still lights the skies of the Third World. Masses continue to take up arms against regimes backed either by the U.S. (Peru, the Philippines, El Salvador, etc.) or the USSR (Afghanistan, the Eritrean struggle against Ethiopia). The classes leading these insurgencies vary, as does the breadth and depth of mass mobilization, and some leadership forces are totally beholden to an imperialist power. Indeed, among the more large-scale insurgent wars underway at this writing, only in Peru can it be said that the proletariat and its party has firmly assumed leadership. Nonetheless, taken as a whole these insurgencies continue to strike blows against the imperialist blocs East and West, even with the recent spate of "regional peace settlements" overseen by the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

At the same time, the '80s witnessed the grotesque phenomenon of U.S.-backed guerrilla war (in practice, something akin to gangster operations) against the governments of Nicaragua, Angola, and Mozambique. War—whether revolutionary, reactionary, or somewhere in between—is clearly the political currency in vast and strategic sections of the Third World today, and these fires will intensify and spread.

The stand of the revolutionary communist movement is clear on this: as Mao wrote, "The seizure of power by armed force, the settlement of the issue by war, is the central task and the highest form of revolution. This Marxist-Leninist principle of revolution holds good universally, for China and for all other countries" (Mao, 1972, p. 269). But Mao also quoted the Chinese military philosopher Sun Tzu to the effect that, in addition to knowing oneself, one must also know one's enemy: its interests, intentions, designs, capabilities, and limitations.

Of help in that "knowing" process is material contained in the 1988 collection *Low-Intensity Warfare*, edited by Michael T. Klare and Peter Kornbluh. (The Pentagon defines "low-intensity conflict" as any conflict fought principally by guerrillas or irregulars. In practice, such conflicts are quite "intense" for the targets. The U.S. "low-intensity" war against Nicaragua, for instance, has taken over 35,000 lives. "Mid-intensity" refers to regional wars like Iran-Iraq, and "high-intensity" designates general war between the U.S. and Soviets.)

Low-Intensity Warfare begins with a firsthand account of the development and execution of counterinsurgency doctrine in the '60s. The editors then examine today's low-intensity conflict doctrine (LIC) in that context and from various angles, a framework that this review will follow.

The Coming of Counterinsurgency

The U.S., of course, has a long history of combating guerrilla insurgencies. It began with the genocidal suppression of the Native American (Indian) resistance and continued from there into the Philippines, Nicaragua, Cuba, Haiti, and other countries. Still, U.S. military thinkers only began to systematically focus on the strategic problems involved during the 1950s. At that time a number of revolutionary wars of national liberation and/or civil wars for socialism had erupted (in China, Greece, Indochina, the Philippines, Malaya, etc.). These revolutionary wars struck directly at the newly dominant U.S. empire, and in the case of China won a world-historical victory.

At the same time, the imperialists were also fighting a more or less conventional war in Korea (though on the other side the Chinese were applying the principles of people's war) and, even more, were embroiled with the challenges involved in planning all-out war with the Soviet Union. The weight of this latter contradiction took precedence. It found expression militarily in the Dulles doctrine of massive retaliation—that is, reliance on nuclear bombs to deal with any situation posing the possibility of going over to general conventional war with the Soviet Union.

But the rise of Khrushchev and the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union caused the immediate explosiveness of the U.S.-Soviet conflict to temporarily recede, while the national liberation struggles intensified. Hence U.S. military planners and strategists shifted their focus to the challenges posed by the guerrilla insurgencies. Writers in military journals expressed dissatisfaction with the limitations of massive retaliation doctrine, gave short courses in the military thinking of Mao Tsetung, and

called for new counterrevolutionary doctrine and initiatives.

With the election of Kennedy in 1960, a new prophet came to Washington with a new gospel: that of "flexible response" and counterinsurgency. The U.S. ruling class closed ranks around the new orientation. The *New York Times Sunday Magazine* went so far as to publish a substantial excerpt from Mao's "Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War" in December of 1961.*

Charles Maechling, Jr. served as a high-up in the Kennedy administration, and contributes one of *Low-Intensity Warfare's* most valuable articles, "Counter-Insurgency: The First Ordeal by Fire." Maechling outlines the development of U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine and its actual testing in Vietnam.

In the early '50s, the U.S. and Britain had successfully suppressed revolutionary armed struggles in the Philippines and Malaya. Maechling rightly regards these as key events in the development of counterinsurgency doctrine. Coming near the time of the Chinese Revolution's stunning and monumental victory in 1949, and the Vietnamese defeat of the French five years later, these "success stories" seemed to offer imperialist strategists a way to combat the Maoist doctrine of people's war. Further, the Malayan campaign produced a theorist, one Robert Thompson. Thompson generalized a doctrine of counterinsurgency from his experience and found an eager audience for his thoughts in Washington.

As if they were reading Mao in the mirror, Thompson and other counterinsurgency theorists tried to understand and exploit the specific weaknesses of the revolutionary or insurgent forces. The insurgents are severely outgunned and outnumbered at the beginning by the regular army, they lack training and supplies, and (unless they are bordered by a friendly country) they lack a secure base.

But despite these weaknesses Mao Tsetung's theory of people's war, and the twenty-two years of revolution in China that it guided, had shown the way to step-by-step build the revolutionary forces from weakness to strength, overcome the power of the imperialists and their domes-

*Klare, oddly enough, barely mentions Mao. However, most of the bourgeois experts, especially within the military, did then and do now regard Mao as the preeminent thinker and practitioner of guerrilla war, particularly in its new role as the key element in wars of national liberation. Many formulated their theories in explicit recognition of and opposition to his. As recently as February 1985 the article "A Strategy of Counter-Revolutionary War" in the official U.S. Army journal *Military Review* devoted its first half to the ABC's of Maoist military theory, filled with quotations from Mao himself. In this respect, the bourgeois colonels are sharper than Klare.

tic agents, and win liberation. That was the problem that the counterinsurgency specialists were trying to address.

A comprehensive recounting of Mao's military line is beyond the scope of this article, and the reader is urged to consult the *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tsetung*, as well as *Mao Tsetung's Immortal Contributions* by Bob Avakian. Briefly, however, the following principles are central to Mao's strategic doctrine:

- that war is the highest form of struggle, and in most oppressed nations like China it is the main form from the very beginning;
- that the party commands the gun and, linked to that, that people are principal over weapons;
- that the road to revolutionary victory in the majority of oppressed nations lies in surrounding the city from the countryside, with guerrilla war performing a crucial function through most phases of the war (as opposed to the model for imperialist countries, in which the armed struggle begins with simultaneous insurrections in the main cities and branches outward from there);
- that the key to victory is reliance on the masses, in particular through building rural base areas in which the party leads the masses to exercise political power (often underground at first) and from where the red army draws its recruits, its supplies, and its crucially important superior intelligence.

Along with this, Mao's military thought contains a treasure house of rich tactical doctrine. Maoist tactics enable a numerically and materially inferior force to chop up its enemy through making use of mobility, superior intelligence, and the conscious dynamism of its troops and commanders.

This study of Mao, along with their own experience in counterrevolutionary warfare, led the counterinsurgency theorists to insist on a patient, but relentless, policy against the revolutionaries. They argued against either chasing down and combating the guerrilla units right away or trying to overwhelm them with a massive knockout blow. The standard practice of relying on massive firepower for search-and-destroy sweeps of areas had often proved counterproductive. If the insurgents were well organized and deeply rooted among the masses they could often temporarily vacate the area, soon to return; or if caught, they would break off the engagement as soon as possible. Often the subsequent slaughters carried out by the government army against the masses would boomerang and win new recruits to the guerrilla's cause, *particularly* if the guerrillas successfully evaded the govern-

ment hammer blow and then delivered counterblows either later or in other areas.

Instead, the new counterinsurgency theorists aimed first to cut off the supporting infrastructure of the revolutionaries, that is, their base and organization among the people of an area. As Thompson writes, "[I]f the infrastructure is damaged or broken by government action, the whole movement will lose momentum and begin to collapse. Guerrilla units, dependent on the infrastructure for their daily needs and for recruits, will be forced to cease offensive operation and to forage instead. This will soon cause them to disperse and break up, thereby making their gradual elimination comparatively easy for the government" (Thompson, 1970, p. 19).

To do this, the counterrevolutionary plan called for first securing the more or less pro-government areas. Next came clearing the zones adjacent to these, which might be contested, but not necessarily dominated, by the guerrillas. This almost always meant moving the area residents off their original lands into the tightly monitored walls of the so-called strategic hamlet. Once the hamlet is set up, the police stay in the village while the army moves on to the next zone. These were dubbed "clear and hold," as opposed to search-and-destroy, missions.

In Malaysia this had gone along with the institution of a national identification system, strict curfews, food denial (the authorities at one point outlawed transporting uncooked rice, as cooked rice spoils quickly and cannot be kept for supplies by the guerrillas for more than a few days), and, finally, free-fire zones in specified areas.

Counterinsurgency theorists further argued that the government cannot just prop up the status quo but must institute reforms and grant concessions to broaden its political base. In Malaysia the government eventually granted independence; it also played an effective divide-and-conquer game between the Malay peasants and the mostly Chinese rural proletariat. The theorists also opposed (at least in theory, and at times in practice) corruption and gross brutality in the prosecution of the war as tending to lose more by alienation than it gained by intimidation. The whole thing, wrote Thompson, operates on "an adroit and judicious mixture of ruthlessness and sympathy" (Thompson, 1966, p. 146).

To further force the guerrilla to fight on terms favorable to the imperialists, Thompson and his ilk proposed to mimic the insurgents. Instead of relying on massive firepower, the British formed lightly armed units of three to five men who lived in the jungle, as the guerrillas did. These "counter-guerrillas" learned the paths used by the guerrillas, set ambushes where they could, and only occa-

sionally touched base for supplies and intelligence. While these units hunted in the jungle, the villages supporting the guerrillas on the jungle edges were hemmed into strategic hamlets. The point was to force the guerrillas out of the bush by breaking down their infrastructure. They would then have to hunt for supplies and get into battles on terrain chosen by the government—the border where jungle and strategic hamlet met.

Politics Demands Its Due

This neat little package enchanted the technocrats of the Kennedy era. Efficient administration, highly professional counter-guerrilla squads, political and economic reforms: how could it lose? But the Kennedy men left one thing out of their equations: the *revolutionary politics* of people's war.

In the first place, the tenacious new political infrastructure that takes root in the villages does not result from clever administrative work by the vanguard party; it flows out of the political mobilization of the masses behind a program representing their fundamental class interests and giving concrete direction and form to their aspirations for a new life. While the party must arm the masses with guns, it cannot *stop* there. The party must also arm the masses with an ideology that answers the question of how to change the world; a program that meets their interests and politically isolates the oppressing classes; and organization (a party, an army, and other forms) that enables them to endure and bounce back from the inevitable severe government repression and terror. The revolution can *only* win by boldly arousing the masses and unleashing their initiative, while the counter-revolution must inevitably suppress those same masses.

The Kennedy "whiz kids" compounded their error by overestimating the political flexibility of the social structures which had driven the masses into rebellion in the first place. These institutions are not all that easy to change. Maechling dryly sums up the contradiction as seen from the imperialist side of the court:

In some cases literal implementation [of reform] would have torn up the existing social and economic fabric, including age-old systems of rewards and punishments; this might have resulted in genuine progress, but it might also have weakened the authority of the prevailing regime (upon which the entire counter-insurgency effort depended). (Klare and Kornbluh, 1988, p. 34)

Related to this was (and is) the character of the armies in the oppressed nations. Counterinsurgency doctrine emphasizes small, highly trained commando units, lightly

supplied for jungle warfare. But this often runs up against the desire of various forces in the army to demand more prestigious modern and conventional equipment. More important, the senior officers, often from the feudal-based families, tend to resist even the mildest reform, and often prefer to use their position for ruling class infighting and short-term self-enrichment rather than fighting insurgencies. In addition, the poorly paid soldiers are trained to treat the peasantry as prey, pure and simple. The British, who built the army in Malaya more or less from scratch, did not have to contend with as much of this kind of institutional inertia.

Vietnam: The Model is Tested

The counterinsurgency theory of the Kennedy team soon met its practical test in Vietnam. By 1960 the repressive Diem regime was enmeshed in crisis, and rebellion was beginning anew in the countryside. In response, the Kennedy administration poured in workers from U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) as well as anthropologists, missionaries, university professors,

"Sure we have the skills—and thousands of dollars worth of sophisticated radios, helicopters, C-47s to fly contacts, choppers to stand by in case we get in trouble, helicopters to bring us home.... We have to be skillful with our equipment because it's all we've got. As we've learned the hard way, nobody living in the area will help us. The VC have the people, we have our helicopters. I don't call that effective, and I don't think it's the same game."

and peace corps workers. More than that, 12,000 U.S. military advisors were sent in to whip the puppet regime's Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) into shape. The original idea, as Maechling notes, was to "minimize the likelihood of direct U.S. military involvement in internal war."

But the U.S. ran up against extreme contradictions in pursuing the counterinsurgency program. They could ill

afford the "patience" needed to prosecute and win a war in Vietnam on the Malayan model. The continual crises in Saigon, especially during the early and mid-'60s, sharply revealed the centrifugal contradictions polarizing Vietnamese society. At the same time, the U.S. constantly had to calculate everything from a global perspective, and even in the '60s they viewed the prospect of being indefinitely tied down in Vietnam as very dangerous and unacceptable. Moreover, the U.S. intended Vietnam to be a symbol of the strength of the new imperial order; but the longer the war raged, the more the essential vulnerability of that empire showed through.

All this cut against the "strict" counterinsurgency model. By late 1964 the National Liberation Front (NLF) had regained and redoubled the initiative; counterinsurgency was not working. The U.S. shifted its stress to conventional power and conventional war, in spades, to defeat what it now (falsely) claimed was an invasion by the People's Army of (what was then North) Vietnam (PAVN). Beginning in early 1965 U.S. troops steadily expanded, ballooning to over half a million soldiers by the Tet offensive in January 1968.*

U.S. efforts to wage a conventional war against the Vietnamese, of course, failed dismally. A former U.S. officer, who later turned against the war, recalled explaining to a friend why the U.S. was losing:

Sure we have the skills—and thousands of dollars worth of sophisticated radios, helicopters, C-47s to fly contacts, choppers to stand by in case we get in trouble, helicopters to bring us home. With all that going for us, if we survive the first couple of hours [of a patrol], we have a 50-50 chance of getting out five days later. We have to be skillful with our equipment because it's all we've got. As we've learned the hard way, nobody living in the area will help us. The VC have the people, we have our helicopters. I don't call that effective, and I don't think it's the same game. (Asprey, 1975, p. 1152, brackets in original)

Yet another marine officer observed that [an NLF intelligence officer]

*In fact, the U.S.'s own agencies and quasi-official researchers were reporting that the bulk of the fighting from 1964 on into 1966 was still being done by the NLF and not the PAVN. Only in December 1966, with heavy NLF losses as well as a shift to a more conventional strategy by the North Vietnamese for reasons of their own, did the North Vietnamese regulars really take on the major fighting role. And even then the NLF were still fielding 180,000 of the estimated 230,000 PAVN/NLF total force.

does not have aerial observers; no infra-red, no SLAR, no TV, no digital data "real time" readout computerized equipment. But he is successful. This confounds Americans. The result is a communist psychological operation by accident; more effective than if by design. How does he do it?

[He] relies on two things: (1) the People's Military Intelligence Concept [i.e., coordinated use of mass reconnaissance] and (2) the American military penchant for the SOP [standard operating procedure], a commander's tactical signature. (Asprey, 1975, p. 1157)†

The result was an American defeat which still reverberates. For all this, of course, the U.S. exacted a terrible toll, but the painstaking sacrifice helped to defeat the greatest conventional military power in the world.

The '70s: Slippin' & Slidin'

The American defeat in Vietnam seriously tattered the political credibility of the U.S. ruling class and badly compromised the fighting capacity and morale of its army. The vaunted counterinsurgency doctrine had failed. And all this at a time when the contradiction between the U.S. and the Soviet bloc was rapidly moving into the foreground of world affairs. The imperialists bitterly hate defeat in a neocolonial war at any time, but to be tied down (and battered) by armed struggle in the oppressed nations at a time of heightened interimperialist rivalry and a looming world war verged on the intolerable. And in the wake of Vietnam the Soviet imperialists made gains at U.S. expense, particularly in southern Africa and

†The war did somewhat change character, at least militarily, with the Tet offensive. While Tet crippled the U.S. politically, it also resulted in the exposure and virtual elimination of much of the NLF structure and shifted much more of the fighting to PAVN regulars. But certainly before Tet it was the guerrilla war on a massive scale which was defeating the U.S.

In a certain sense, the Vietnamese fought neither a strictly Maoist people's war nor a conventional war. Rather, they fought a hybrid reflecting the eclectic military doctrine of Vo Nguyen Giap (and, of course, the politics of the Vietnamese Party leadership). While Mao had heavily influenced a section of the Vietnamese leadership, by the late '60s the dominant line viewed rural insurgency more as a staging ground for spectacular and nationwide attempts at seizure of power. Giap in his written works tended to focus on the main problem as being one of "nationwide uprising" as far back as 1940; and the Viet Minh (i.e., the liberation forces in World War 2) only began armed guerrilla actions towards the very end of World War 2, in late 1944, with a fairly direct eye on positioning themselves to move into the anticipated vacuum that would ensue after the coming Japanese defeat. Throughout the years of war against the French and later the U.S., Giap exhibited a penchant for premature major offensives and set-piece battles. Giapism remains very influential among many contemporary insurgencies, e.g. El Salvador.

the Horn of Africa.

More trauma was on the way. 1979 opened with the fall of the Shah of Iran and the Somoza family in Nicaragua and drew to a close with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In none of these instances did the U.S. effectively use military power. Jimmy Carter built up the "rapid deployment force" (particularly intended for the Persian Gulf) and began a massive increase in nuclear arms, but the stain of these defeats helped render him politically ineffective. The time had come for Ronald Reagan's particularly arrogant and unapologetic brand of imperialist aggression.

Reagan came to office with a new military buzzword: "prevail"—from counterinsurgency operations and regional wars on up to all-out thermonuclear conflict. The trick was to wage the counterrevolutionary campaigns and regional wars in such a way so as not to compromise—indeed, to *strengthen*—the U.S. position in the (overall principal) head-to-head showdown looming with the Soviets.

In the very first month of the new administration, Secretary of State Alexander Haig went before Congress to insist on the need to quickly crush the insurgency in El Salvador. He raised a call, moreover, to "go to the source"—that is, to threaten (and if necessary carry out) military action against Cuba and even, by implication, the Soviets.

Haig was quickly shut down within the administration by forces around Caspar Weinberger. Weinberger did not dispute the need to "project power" (that is, to rain down murder and violence) in regional conflicts, but insisted that preparation for global war with the Soviets (especially the nuclear buildup) must take precedence. The question was *how* to suppress insurgency and, in cases where their Soviet rivals were involved, how to effectively bludgeon and bleed them without walking into another political and military disaster like Vietnam. It was in this insane context of risk that the doctrine and practice of low-intensity conflict evolved.

Low-Intensity War in the '80s

George Bush got elected president as the candidate of "peace and prosperity." This only meant that not too many Americans have been dying of late in America's wars.

But during the 1980s, in the name of "low-intensity conflict," the U.S. has:

- sponsored a major counterinsurgency effort in El Salvador, in which over 70,000 people have died, as well as a smaller, but equally vicious, counterinsur-

gency campaign in Guatemala;

- carried out the "Contra war" against Nicaragua, costing an estimated 35,000 Nicaraguan lives and untold suffering and economic catastrophe;
- backed similar operations in Angola, through its agent Jonas Savimbi, and in Mozambique. The *New York Times* recently estimated that in Angola over 200,000 people have died in the UNITA "pro-insurgency." In Mozambique, RENAMO—trained and equipped by South Africa—has killed over 100,000 civilians and exacerbated the Mozambican famine;
- armed reactionary forces within the Afghan insurgency in an effort to add to the troubles of its imperialist rivals and gain a major voice in determining the makeup of the post-civil war regime;
- further built up the Rapid Deployment Force to be able to strike, especially in the Persian Gulf, with massive amounts of troops in a very short period of time, and also expanded troops, weaponry, and finances for "special operations forces";
- bombed Libya and attempted to kill its chief of state, Muammar el-Qaddafi;
- continued and intensified the ongoing arming and training of armies of reactionary regimes in the oppressed nations, with particular attention to the Philippines;
- invaded Grenada and overthrew the somewhat anti-U.S. regime there;
- backed Israel's 1982 blitzkrieg into Lebanon, which cost some 20,000 Lebanese lives, and then later landed U.S. Marines in Beirut to "keep the peace";
- intervened in the Andes against the people's war in Peru, as well as various insurgencies in Colombia, under the cover of "antidrug" operations;
- used the same cover to increase military capability in the event of uprisings in Mexico and/or the Caribbean;
- and much more, some of which, no doubt, remains secret.

The long list and staggering figures, let it be said, cannot do justice to the massive suffering inflicted in the cause of U.S. domination. Whole nations have been crucified and entire peoples put on the altar of that holy crusade of "peace through strength" and "standing tall."

Klare traces the development of the theory behind this blood-soaked practice. It stretches through a number of articles in military journals in the mid-'80s to a major Pentagon conference on low-intensity conflict in 1986

addressed by both Weinberger and Schultz, and a series of new army manuals on the topic, including notably Field Circular 100-20, *Low-Intensity Conflict*, published in 1986.

As to the difference between the counterinsurgency doctrine of the Kennedy era and the low-intensity conflict doctrine, on the most obvious level the latter comprehends a greater variety of military actions. Klare, in his essay "The Interventionist Impulse," lists six specific mis-

Low-intensity conflict doctrine does contain some important new developments. The range of capabilities and options gives the U.S. a great deal of latitude for operations short of the kind of massive but gradual invasion done in Vietnam. This inclination and ability to shift at a moment's notice from one mode into another gives the U.S. a sort of multiple mini-blitzkrieg capability in the Third World.

sion categories defined in the current literature on low-intensity warfare: (1) classical counterinsurgency actions; (2) "pro-insurgency", i.e. sponsoring guerrilla insurgencies against governments unfriendly to the United States; (3) short-term military operations—rescue missions, air strikes, etc.—of the type undertaken in recent years against Libya; (4) "anti-terrorist" operations; (5) "anti-drug" operations; and (6) "peace-keeping" forces, as in Lebanon in 1982-83, as well as the ongoing U.S. military presence in the Sinai Desert.

There has *not* been a major change in counterinsurgency doctrine *per se*. Indeed, recent articles in military journals have criticized tendencies to underestimate the importance of this component of low-intensity conflict, and a recent low-intensity conflict "theme issue" of *Military Review* devoted articles to the lessons of Vietnam and the Malaysian campaign. U.S. thinkers continue to prefer, where possible, the Thompson prescription, although some have warned against a "cookie cutter" application of it and recognize that they may have to rely more on conventional forces and methods in the actual event.

In El Salvador, to take the major current example of

U.S. counterinsurgency, the U.S. client regime relies on air strikes against areas sympathetic to the insurgency (combined with terror in the capital) rather than lightly armed, highly mobile counter-guerrilla forces and "hearts and minds" social programs (though stop-and-start attempts at the latter continue, and many elements of classical "counterinsurgency" have been in the U.S. mix for El Salvador from the beginning). Of course, the U.S. government has underwritten the whole project with massive infusions of military and economic aid, from massive arms transfers and training Salvadoran army officers to sophisticated intelligence and medical technology.

On the other hand, low-intensity conflict doctrine does contain some important new developments. The range of capabilities and options gives the U.S. a great deal of latitude for operations short of the kind of massive but gradual invasion done in Vietnam. Further, low-intensity doctrine posits closer coordination between different types of actions, and the Pentagon has developed units which can flexibly perform all the desired operations.

This inclination and ability to shift at a moment's notice from one mode into another gives the U.S. a sort of multiple mini-blitzkrieg capability in the Third World. A recent example occurred in 1986 when the U.S. ran a major operation against Libya, complete with attempted assassination of Qaddafi and a game of naval chicken with the Soviets, while it simultaneously moved massive numbers of U.S. troops to Honduras to threaten invasion of Nicaragua. (These twin operations also served as a practice run for multifront global war.)

In line with this, the military has in the main summed up that *if* American troops are committed to battle, it should be in numbers and force overwhelming enough at the outset to achieve a clear and quick victory. At least this is their overall desire. This is meant to speak to the U.S. experience of getting "bogged down" and chewed to bits in Vietnam.*

*The debate within the ruling class, and particularly within the military, over the whys and hows of the U.S. defeat in Vietnam continues. Harry Summers' influential *On Strategy* goes so far as to argue that the U.S. should have fought the war as an entirely conventional one from the very start, with all that entails, militarily and politically. That is, Summers argues that the U.S. should have undertaken massive immediate infantry invasions of at least the southern part of North Vietnam and an even heavier bombing campaign. (U.S. bombing of Vietnam far outweighed the total bombs dropped by all belligerents in World War 2, let it be noted.) Summers makes a major point out of Johnson's failure to go to Congress for a Declaration of War against the DRV—a Declaration which would have presumably "solved" the problem of domestic dissent and resistance via massive "wartime measures"-type repression.

Klare points to Grenada, where the U.S. mobilized 7,000 troops, backed by ten warships and one aircraft carrier, against an island with a population of 100,000 people. Klare also notes that in 1985, when the administration was publicly promoting the idea of a U.S. invasion of Nicaragua in the pages of the major media, the scenario hinged on a massive but swift blitzkrieg style operation.

Finally, the new doctrine calls for greater and more closely coordinated attention to securing the homefront ("sustained political intervention at home," in Klare's words). The manipulation of the press and suppression of dissent that went on in the Reagan years was not totally new, although the Reagan-era Ministry of Truth was surely more shameless, deliberate, and successful than its immediate forerunners.

On the other hand, Oliver North's plan to intern 500,000 immigrants and "dissidents" in the event of the proposed invasion of Nicaragua did mark a major leap in the government's will, capacity, and preparations for repression. The Reagan team had planned for domestic repression on a scale unprecedented in the U.S. And this plan, leaked and then hushed up during the congressional hearings on Iran-Contra, remains operational.

In sum, this new blitz mindset, and the enhanced capability to carry it out, mark one very important development in low-intensity warfare.

Pro-Insurgency

The prize exhibit of the low-intensity warfare champions is "pro-insurgency"—that is, the bankrolling of armed quasi-guerrilla forces to go against regimes that are dependent on the Soviet Union. These operations are designed to raise the cost of empire for the Soviets, tie them down militarily, and in some cases reverse Soviet gains.

Peter Kornbluh summarizes U.S. pro-insurgency operations in Nicaragua in "Nicaragua: U.S. Pro-insurgency Warfare Against the Sandinistas." There the U.S. uses a combination of economic warfare, CIA destabilization, threat of massive invasion, and, of course, the vicious Contra war. (As of July 1989, since the Sandinista-Contra cease-fire, Contra forces have killed over 200 people.)

The Contras, for all the hype about winning peasant support, have specialized in bloody terror. They have targeted farm co-operatives, health clinics, trucks carrying agricultural workers, technicians, and the like. When these kinds of raids are executed by 15,000 heavily armed, well-fed thugs operating out of nearby sanctuaries, they can do a terrible amount of damage.

The CIA briefly tried to train the Contras to win sup-

port from the peasant masses, including with their infamous "organizers' handbook." But such efforts tend, in I.F. Stone's image, to resemble the movements of people who cannot hear the music, trying to imitate the dancers. The CIA itself carried out many of the more complex attacks, or else subcontracted them to other "assets" throughout Latin America.

The U.S. military campaign against Nicaragua actually has showed how "low-intensity" war can prepare the way for something heavier. The U.S. Army regularly undertook massive "training exercises" and "war games" near Nicaragua. These served as direct threats (after all, the invasion of Grenada began as just such an "exercise") as well as dress rehearsals. One scenario leaked to the press envisioned the Contras storming into a marginal Nicaraguan city near the Honduras border and holding it just long enough to declare a government and appeal for aid. The U.S. would then, according to this plan, recognize the Contra regime and immediately land a massive invasion force. In this way a program of pro-insurgency, CIA destabilization, and so-called war games and/or training exercises can lay the groundwork for full-scale war. And such an invasion could well have forced a Soviet countermove, either in Nicaragua or elsewhere, and ultimately detonated global war.

The multipronged character of imperialist intervention in this doctrine points strikingly to the continued relevance of the basic Maoist orientation for revolutionary forces in the oppressed nations of surrounding the city from the countryside. The kind of one-two punch against a revolutionary regime envisioned by LIC doctrine would pose the most problems for one that came to power on a mainly urban base. The "insurrectionalist" strategy of the Sandinistas could possibly have made them more vulnerable to such an approach, had the U.S. put it into practice, than a revolutionary regime that had followed the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist road would be. This is speculation on "might-have-beens" (and "might-yet-bees"), of course, but such speculation is not without value.

The situation in Central America continues to defy U.S. dictates. While the imperialists won a certain standoff in bottling up the original revolutionary impulse in and from Nicaragua, they still could not "win one for the Gipper" in Nicaragua, and the insurgents in El Salvador continue to field a significant army. Despite the considerable problems (from a revolutionary standpoint) with both the Sandinistas and the FMLN in El Salvador, they are still bones in the throat of Yankee imperialism; and notwithstanding peace accords and other duplicitous maneuvers, the U.S. has not reconciled itself to the current

state of things. Indeed, a major imperialist ideologue summed up the main failure of the Reagan administration as not boldly overcoming the "Vietnam syndrome" by moving "decisively" in Central America.

Afghanistan

If there is a "success story" for pro-insurgency, it is Afghanistan, covered in *Low-Intensity Warfare* by Selig Harrison's "Afghanistan: Soviet Intervention, Afghan Resistance and the American Role."* The U.S. has thrown a tremendous amount of aid into the anti-Kabul insurgency—well over a billion dollars, with \$630 million in 1987 alone—much of which went to Islamic fundamentalist armies that rarely left the Pakistani refugee camps.

The so-called war on drugs not only covers for repression within the U.S., it may develop into the preferred "holy crusade" to justify counterrevolutionary war in the '90s.

On the other hand, enough of the aid found its way into the field to have a major impact—including, in particular, the Stinger missiles which are credited by many with neutralizing the Soviet helicopters.

For the U.S. this sort of pro-insurgency has had much short-run success. (In southern Africa the U.S. record is bloodier still, if less publicized, and has led to the promised withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola and the forcible bending of Mozambique to Afrikaaner will.) But it should be noted that Harrison also makes a convincing scenario for ways in which the Afghan conflict could also have escalated into "high-intensity" conflict, had the Soviets not decided to cut their losses. Beyond that, the Soviets are strategically no more reconciled to an unfriendly Afghanistan on their border than the U.S. is to a Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. Peace treaties and withdrawals become tactical moves in a world of multiple low-intensity operations. . . any one of which could spiral up the ladder of escalation.

* Events have somewhat overtaken the useful and perceptive analysis of Harrison, since the Soviets have withdrawn their ground troops.

War on Drugs:

Counterinsurgency Gets a New Suit of Clothes

Low-Intensity Warfare only begins to discuss antidrug operations of the U.S. government, a point really demanding more attention. The so-called war on drugs not only covers for repression within the U.S.; it may develop into the preferred "holy crusade" to justify counterrevolutionary war in the '90s.

In 1981 Congress authorized intelligence-sharing between the Drug Enforcement Agency and the Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard. By 1986 things went into a whole different ballpark: a presidential directive authorized the Pentagon to plan strike operations against "drug laboratories and processing plants" in foreign countries, to transport U.S. civilian agents and foreign police during these operations, and to conduct expanded intelligence activities. A few months later the Defense Department, acting under this authority, ran a prolonged and elaborate search-and-destroy mission in the coca-growing regions of Bolivia. U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopters ferried DEA agents and Bolivian police to the site of suspected cocaine-processing facilities. At least 160 U.S. military personnel participated in this operation (*Revolutionary Worker*, No. 365, p. 1).†

The 1986 directive has also opened other pathways for military involvement. These include: the use of military aircraft and radar on the Mexican border; the use of Air Force special operations helicopters for drug raids in the Bahamas; and the loan of helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft to civilian law enforcement agencies in the U.S. The above operations may, in fact, enhance the control of the government over the drug traffic, but that is surely secondary. Their main usefulness involves the preparation of U.S. troops and police forces for a number of scenarios: people's war and other forms of insurgency in Latin America, political turmoil in Mexico (or even perhaps the Caribbean) erupting across the border into the U.S., and rebellion within the U.S. itself.

Lest readers think this may be stretching a point, Klare points to the public remarks of Colonel John D. Waghelstein, writing in *Military Review's* special issue on low-intensity conflict. Waghelstein ruminates on the public support within the U.S. for insurgent movements in Central America and then asserts without the slightest attempt at verification that "there is an alliance between some drug traffickers and some insurgents." (Although the alliance

†All this took another leap with Bush's September 1989 nationally televised speech and the issuing of a new "war on drugs" plan at that time. This occurred as this article was going to press.

between "some drug traffickers" and the Contras, the CIA and George Bush himself has been amply documented in many places, Waghelstein finds that beyond his view.)

At this point the candid colonel comes out of his bag, and his remarks deserve to be quoted at some length:

[This] aspect of insurgency in Latin America . . . offers the greatest threat but . . . may yet provide us with a weapon with which to regain the moral high ground we have appeared to have lost.

A melding in the American public's mind and in Congress of this connection [between drugs and revolutionary insurgency] would lead to the necessary support to counter the guerrilla/narcotics terrorists in this hemisphere. Generating that support would be relatively easy once the connection was proven and all-out war was declared by the National Command Authority. Congress would find it difficult to stand in the way of supporting our allies with the training, advice and security assistance to do the job. Those church and academic groups that have slavishly supported insurgency in Latin America would find themselves on the wrong side of the moral issue.

Above all, we would have the unassailable moral position from which to launch a concerted offensive effort using Department of Defense (DOD) and non-DOD assets. The recent operation in Bolivia is a first step. Instead of responding defensively to each insurgency on a case-by-case basis, we could act in concert with our allies. Instead of wading through the legislative snarl and financial constraints that characterize our security assistance posture, we could act with alacrity to the threat. Instead of debating each separate threat, we can begin to see the hemisphere as a whole and ultimately develop the vision that has been sorely lacking. (Waghelstein, 1987, pp. 46-47)

A rather frank admission!

The connection between attempts to repress rebellion and the "war on drugs" cover has been extremely tight in Peru. In a January 1988 *New Yorker* article about the revolutionary people's war in Peru, Raymond Bonner—in a piece overall very antagonistic to the Communist Party of Peru—asserted that the sizable DEA mission in Peru was actually almost solely occupied with counter-insurgency against the people's war. In late 1988 several major U.S. newspapers reported that American pilots were flying American planes and helicopters in operations taking place in areas that appeared to be liberated

zones of the Communist Party of Peru. The excuse was "antidrug operations."

Reports in the press linked the U.S. pilots in Peru to a larger "Inter-regional Narcotics Eradication Air Wing" run under the direction of the U.S. State Department. The wing already has 150 aircraft and is rapidly expanding its operations throughout South America, as well as Central America, the Caribbean, and Burma (the latter currently the scene of simmering rebellion and periodic revolt) (*Revolutionary Worker*, No. 486, p. 3).

In early 1989, major articles in the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* focused on political and military

According to a U.S. colonel, "A melding in the American public's mind and in Congress of this connection [between drugs and revolutionary insurgency] would lead to the necessary support to counter the guerrilla/narcotics terrorists in this hemisphere. Generating that support would be relatively easy once the connection was proven and all-out war was declared by the National Command Authority."

advances in the Tingo Maria region by the Communist Party of Peru and the People's Guerrilla Army which it leads, and at the same time made much of the impotence of the U.S. DEA force in the area. The articles further alleged an alliance between the revolutionaries and the coca growers and traffickers. Objectively these articles amounted to a call for increased U.S. intervention, with the war on drugs as the phony excuse. The writers could have taken a memo from Waghelstein before doing the stories.

For revolutionaries within the citadels of imperialism, it becomes all the more important to even now mount exposures and actions against the "low-intensity" war being waged against the people's war in Peru under the

cover of antidrug operations and to prepare for still more serious escalations.

Problems in Analysis

In sum, *Low-Intensity Warfare* contains much valuable insight. Klare and Kornbluh go rather seriously wrong, however, in posing low-intensity war as the key focus and pivot of U.S. military planning in the '80s, going so far as to counterpose it to supposedly outdated notions that the U.S. must prepare for direct global war with the Soviets. They write that "[Many senior officials identify] Third World insurgencies—and not Soviet troop concentrations in Europe—as the predominant threat to U.S. se-

The emergence of low-intensity conflict doctrine actually makes most sense in the context of how the U.S. military planners deal with a very vexing contradiction—how to gain position and advantage in various regional theaters vis-à-vis their Soviet opponents, while not getting tied down, and even suffering serious defeats, in those theaters—at a time when the possibility of world war with the Soviets continues to loom.

curity" (Klare and Kornbluh, 1988, p. 3).

Maybe so, but when they call this a *consensus* a few paragraphs later, they are clearly off base. Despite Klare and Kornbluh's citations of those who propose a greater emphasis on low-intensity conflict, the preponderance of spending, thinking, and actual troop alignment through the '80s has clearly centered on preparations for global showdown. While some changes in military emphasis are currently underway, this basic strategic picture remains today. The Center for Defense Information, for instance, has shown that the proportion of money spent on *nuclear* war rose steadily through the early '80s (Center for Defense Information, 1987, p. 2). Moreover, the major Pentagon plan for the decade (leaked to the *New York Times* in May 1982) principally stressed the need to prepare to prevail over the Soviets in a possibly protracted, possibly multifronted, and most assuredly nuclear war with the Soviet Union—a major change in professed U.S. doc-

trine, and still in force (Halloran, 1982, p. 1). Other needs were of course figured in—but in that context. The current "peace offensives," mainly coming from the Soviet side, while beyond the scope of this article, have introduced some twists, turns, and new factors. But fundamentally the direction and strategic intensity of this inter-imperialist contradiction continues and underlies the strategic (including military) calculations of both imperialist camps.

My point here is not to deny the importance of low-intensity conflict doctrine (and still less of the many low-intensity operations themselves). Nor should anyone underestimate the steps taken by the Pentagon in upgrading forces and weapons designed for these kinds of operations. And we should take very seriously indeed the increasingly loud chorus of ruling class hacks arguing that the current Soviet maneuvering should allow for greater "projection of U.S. power" in the Third World, meaning more invasions, more massacres, and more all-around viciousness.

But these measures occur within a particular web of international contradictions, in which thrust and counterthrust are conditioned by and react back on the conflict between the imperialist powers, most especially the United States and Soviet Union. The emergence of low-intensity conflict doctrine actually makes most sense in the context of how the U.S. military planners deal with a very vexing contradiction—how to defend and gain position and advantage in various regional theaters vis-à-vis their Soviet opponents, while not getting tied down and even suffering serious defeats in those theaters—at a time when the possibility of world war with the Soviets continues to loom. This is one important explanation of the doctrine's emphasis on finding many different levels of flexible intervention, the fixation on rapid victory in the event of direct U.S. commitment, and the more draconian homefront measures which are envisioned (and in fact prepared) for such an eventuality.

This dicey contradiction also sheds light on the somewhat frantic and spasmodic character to U.S. military aggression in the '80s, which Klare himself notes:

[O]ne senses that U.S. leaders are not overwhelmingly committed to any one aspect of LIC but rather are prepared to move from one to the other as opportunity and circumstances demand. If a counterinsurgency campaign is bogging down in one place, then *bam!* let's try pro-insurgency and antidrug operations somewhere else; better yet, let's move on all fronts at once and see what produces the optimum results. (p. 77)

There is not the "we're the boss around here and we've got the answer to this stuff" attitude that characterized the Kennedy team's fascination with counterinsurgency; it is more in the character of "going to the mattresses" à la *The Godfather*—using everything you can to deal with an extremely heavy situation, while nervously avoiding a trap.

In certain ways, compared to the '60s, LIC represents a *more* "aggressive and freewheeling posture," as Klare puts it. But since the U.S. rulers must, after all, focus strategically on preparation for global war, they are also simultaneously more tense, more aware of the dangers of getting "bogged down," more constrained, and always functioning with a look over the shoulder at the rival Soviets. Hence they can jump from "low-intensity" bleeding operations utilizing pro-insurgency almost overnight to full-scale intervention of the most brutal let's-get-it-over sort. (Note that during April 1988, in the final stages of working out the Sandinista/Contra cease-fire, the U.S. went *literally* overnight from cease-fire talk to flying thousands of U.S. troops down to the border, ready to invade.)

Part of the point of the LIC is to minimize *American* casualties and thus keep the political heat at home on low. In this way Ronald Reagan can be portrayed as a "peace" president after having presided over the murder of over 100,000 people in Central America. This poses sharply the need to go against any spontaneous tendencies towards narrowness and economism among progressives, and to unite with and divert to a higher level those who do grasp the criminal nature of what's being done under the low-intensity conflict doctrine.

At the same time, while the bourgeoisie has drawn the lesson to avoid getting "bogged down" in a situation similar to Vietnam and will go to some lengths to avoid that, they will also do what they think they have to do to protect their interests—and the direct use of U.S. combat troops is hardly ruled out by the low-intensity conflict doctrine. (Of course, U.S. troops have indeed been used in El Salvador and elsewhere during the last decade, but here I refer specifically to mass invasion.) As noted, the combination of low-intensity war linked with the capability and orientation of very high-intensity and instantaneous escalation using U.S. ground forces was envisioned by at least some powerful ruling class forces vis-à-vis Nicaragua. This coiled tenseness of the imperialists must be matched by even greater tenseness and readiness of the revolutionaries, for things can ratchet up to a deafeningly high pitch in the space of hours.

Fundamentally, the adoption of LIC shows the imperialists at the end of the century to be both more vicious and deceitful than ever and *in a more dangerous crisis than*

ever before. A low-intensity operation in Mexico, for example, could quickly reverberate into rebellious upsurge in the southwest U.S. Or take the preparations carried out by the ruling class for a Nicaragua invasion, including plans to incarcerate several hundred thousand immigrants and dissidents. Such a plan indicates the high stakes involved in this, and the high risks—for even the attempt to put such a plan into effect, within a certain mix and given certain political preparation, could itself backfire into the worst nightmares of the planners.

Thirty years ago Mao Tsetung asserted that "imperialism and all reactionaries, looked at in essence, from a long-term point of view, from a strategic point of view, must be seen for what they are—paper tigers. On this we should build our strategic thinking. On the other hand, they are also living tigers, iron tigers, real tigers which can devour people. On this we should build our tactical thinking" (Mao, 1969, pp. 99-100). Mao's words ring as true today as ever.

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Correspondence on Black GIs

April 30, 1988

I'd like to make two minor, although important, criticisms of the Spring 1988 *Revolution* article "When John Wayne Went Out of Focus: GI Rebellion and Military Disintegration in Vietnam." The first pertains to the footnote on the bottom of pages 73-74. The overall question addressed, that the composition of the military is a big problem for the bourgeoisie, I agree with. However, in the second paragraph of this footnote it says that the problem is greater today than it was then and qualitatively demonstrates this with the statistics that in 1970 13.5 percent of EMs in the Army were Black, while 11 percent in all services were Black. In 1981 the figures were 33.2 percent and 22.1 percent respectively. The problem here is that these figures are dated and give the impression that the trend towards the military (especially the Army) drawing in more and more Black ghetto youth continues today. In fact, although I don't have the exact figures right at my fingertips, the percentage of Blacks in the Army today has dropped to something like 20 percent. The initial surge after Vietnam came, in part, because when the draft ended and the volunteer army was instituted, the pay and prestige of the military was so low that the bourgeoisie had trouble attracting enough people and so their recruitment standards were kept low. But, as the article points out, they recognized the seriousness of the problem and to some degree have tried to deal with it. When Reagan came into office part of the increase in the military budget under his administration was for higher military pay. As this occurred and the memories of Vietnam faded, they were able to attract more youth and, consequently, "raised the standard" by accepting a much higher percentage of high school graduates and a lower number of Blacks in general, ghetto youth in particular.

This is one of, if not the main, reason why they have not felt the necessity to reinstitute the draft. Of course, as the economic crisis has worsened and the military budget is coming under more severe constraints, this trend might once again reverse itself.

The second criticism is along the lines of the first and I think more of an omission. As far as I can see, what has been occurring is that the military has been bringing a lot of Blacks into the lower levels of the military command structure, especially in those units with a lot of Blacks. In other words, today many more of the combat units that are in the field are commanded at the NCO level by Black sergeants or lieutenants than was the case during Vietnam. This is also true at the basic training level. Of course the upper command structure continues to be very heavily white.

Perhaps an analogy could be made between what has been going on in the military and the question of Black mayors. In both cases, where there are many Blacks and a potential for rebellion, some Black faces have been promoted into the power structure to cool things out. Also the building up of the Black bourgeoisie and middle class in society in general has probably had an impact (for

example, ideologically and politically) within the military. At the same time, as we know, overall national oppression has intensified and this probably has had important ramifications, especially for the lower strata, within the military. I felt this question could have been explored in the article.

So in both these criticisms I felt there was somewhat of a tendency to simplify the national question. Again, this doesn't mean I disagree with the overall point that the national question was an explosive question in the military in Vietnam and continues to be today. In fact the bourgeoisie's attempts to deal with this question certainly come from their recognition of this fact. But exactly because of this some of the forms this national oppression in the military takes in the '80s have their own particularity which may be different than they were in the '60s.

Other than that, I liked the article and thought it was a valuable contribution in its exploration of the underlying causes of the disintegration of the military at that time and, by implication, what lessons could be drawn for the future.

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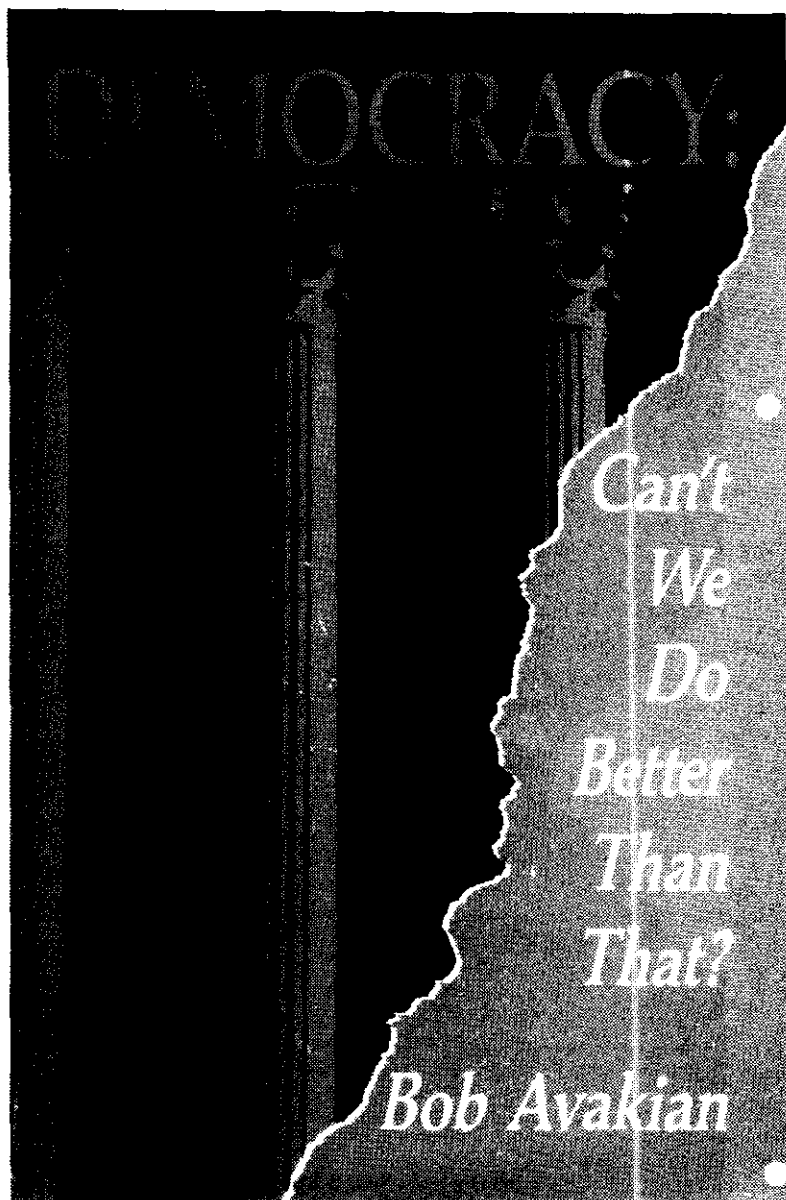
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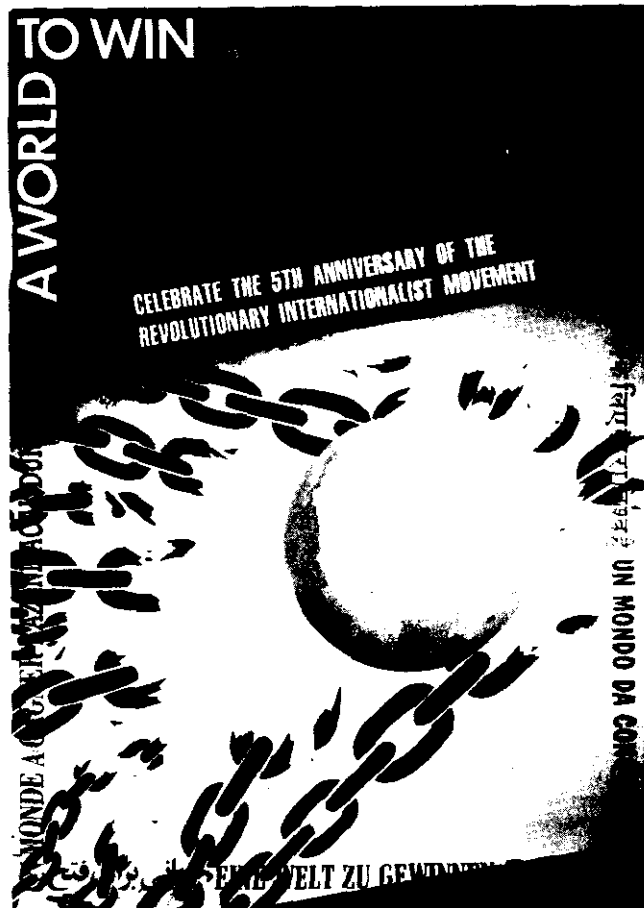
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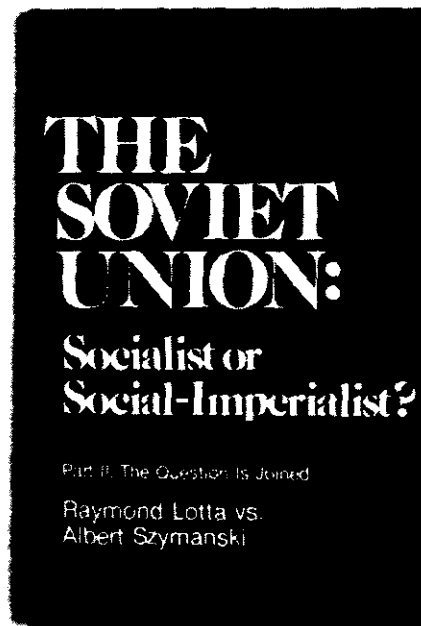
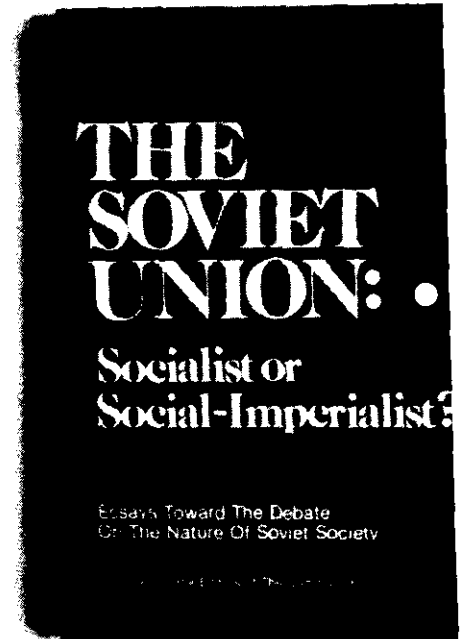
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