

An Open Letter to Those Attracted to the ISO: *Not* Internationalist, *Not* Socialist, and *Not* Organizing for Revolution... But There Is a Path to Emancipation

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To Those Attracted to the ISO:

You look at the world and it's a fucking horror.

Life is a living hell from the slums of Mumbai to the favelas of Rio, from the brothels of Bangkok to the sweatshops of Shenzhen, from the mines of South Africa to the prisons of the United States. Global climate change; U.S. wars and aggression; global food crisis; repression; attacks against gays and lesbians, against women, against Black people, against immigrants, and against the poor; toxic social relations and a world of alienation – all driven by the workings of this system of capitalism-imperialism.

Humanity needs revolution, **communist revolution**. This is a revolution that defeats and dismantles the whole repressive apparatus of the current order. A revolution that establishes a new state power that enables people to carry out the most thoroughgoing economic, social, and ideological transformations towards a communist world: where people work and struggle together for the common good...where everyone contributes whatever they can to society and gets back what they need to live a life worthy of human beings...where there are no more divisions among people in which some rule over and oppress others, robbing them not only of the means to a decent life but also of knowledge and the means for really understanding, and acting to change, the world.

But the ISO has nothing – absolutely nothing – to do with real revolution. The ISO has nothing to do with communism or forging a radically different world. As I will show, the ISO:

*papers over the nature and workings of imperialism.

*rejects the instrumentalities needed for real emancipation: the dictatorship of the proletariat as transition to communism and the leadership of a genuine vanguard party.

*joins with the bourgeoisie in vilifying the most liberating revolutionary experience in history – that of the Soviet Union from 1917 to 1956 and China from 1949 to 1976.

What is in contention here are **two utterly different projects**. One is **genuine communist revolution**, what Marx describes as the “two most radical ruptures”-- with traditional property relations and with traditional ideas--and that ushers in a new epoch of human emancipation and in which humanity can act as caretakers of the planet. The other project is the ISO's paltry and puny vision of a “**worker's democracy**”-- which leaves the world fundamentally unchanged and which, in the real world, can only amount to socializing the spoils of imperialist plunder.

Or as Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, succinctly put it, speaking to someone in the forerunner to the ISO years ago, “The problem with you and your group is that **you hate communism much more than you hate capitalism.**”

PAPERING OVER IMPERIALISM, A “SOCIALISM” LOCKED WITHIN THE PRESENT ORDER

In their publication, “Where We Stand: The Politics of the International Socialist Organization,” the ISO attempts to define capitalism and describe its negative effects – such as the fact that, “In the United States, the top 1 percent of people own more wealth than the bottom 90 percent combined.” However, not once in this opening indictment do they mention **imperialism**, in particular the great global divide between the handful of oppressor nations and those they dominate!

By leaving out any real scientific sense of imperialism, the ISO obscures the fact that the top 1% of the U.S. did not gain their wealth mainly through the exploitation of the 90% in the U.S., but through the plunder and exploitation of oppressed humanity throughout the world. The stark reality is that even the bottom 90% in the U.S. have their standard of living subsidized by this world-wide exploitation.

This is not merely an omission. When the ISO does finally get around to discussing their version of “internationalism,” and naming imperialism, they argue that production is increasingly internationalized, that

“interdependence is so deep-rooted that no nation is capable of economic life cut off from the rest of the world without suffering severe dislocation,” and they recount many horrific invasions and occupations waged by the U.S.

But imperialism is not just that capitalism is more globally interdependent than ever before. Nor, is it simply the greater use of force, military aggression, or the quest for being the number one power. Imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism in which the competitive accumulation of capital proceeds through huge monopolistic concentrations and blocs of finance capital...through the division of the world into oppressor and oppressed nations...and through rivalry between a handful of rich capitalist countries for global supremacy. The ISO declares that colonies have disappeared; they do not speak about the no less brutal *neocolonialism* in the Third World.

The U.S. economy is in fact the “home base” to a global network of exploitation, oppression, and plunder. This reality shapes *everything* about the way the U.S. functions, internationally *and* domestically. It underlies the vast wealth of this country and conditions the huge middle class and layers of what Lenin called “bourgeoisified” workers. And on the basis of the international position of U.S. imperialism, the ruling class relentlessly promotes U.S. chauvinism, which permeates the thinking of people very broadly throughout this country.

The ISO softens all of this. Why? Because their’s is a “socialism” locked within the confines of, and acceptable to, the current imperialist order. It is reformist and chauvinist.

WHAT WILL REPLACE THIS SYSTEM – A NEW REVOLUTIONARY STATE POWER, OR THE ISO'S “WORKER'S DEMOCRACY”?

Let’s compare and contrast a scientific understanding of socialism with that of ISO. Real socialism is three things. It is a **new economic system** based on socialist state ownership, socialist planning, and social cooperation--where social production is carried out to meet social need, to overcome all oppressive relations and divisions, to advance the world revolution, and to safeguard the ecosystems of the planet. Socialism is a **new form of class and political rule**, the dictatorship of the proletariat, in which the formerly exploited and oppressed, in alliance with the great majority of society, have the right and ability to take responsibility

for the direction of society and to carry out the all-around transformation of society. And socialism is a **revolutionary transition**, of continuing struggle, experimentation, and transformation toward communism, a society and world without classes.

Socialism requires digging up and overcoming all vestiges of exploitation. It requires digging up and overcoming all the inequalities and oppressive divisions generated by and deeply embedded within class society: the division between mental and manual labor, the domination of women by men, the oppression of whole nations and peoples, enforced ignorance and superstition, and more.

But this is not what the ISO is about. In place of the revolutionary overthrow of this imperialist overlord of humanity, and the most radical transformation of society, the ISO offers instead a paltry vision of workers seizing control of “the whole machinery of production and distribution” and reorganizing production and distribution according to a contentless “democratic plan.” They write:

“Socialism must involve the active seizure of control over the workplaces by workers themselves, as well as the formation by workers themselves of democratically elected institutions of struggle and control, in order to socialize production and transform it into the property of the people as a whole. Without this component, it will not be possible to reverse the distorted priorities of capitalism and replace them with the humane priorities of socialism.”

Here are a few questions that those serious about emancipation should consider:

- **Should it be left to a mass vote by “the workers” to decide whether to undergo the tremendous sacrifice of building an economy no longer grounded in exploitation around the world?** *No! Genuine internationalism must be a foundational principle of the new revolutionary state – the dictatorship of the proletariat – and the unparalleled democracy that is practiced in socialist society is inspired by and aims to emancipate all of humanity.*
- **What about the social relations within the workplaces and throughout the rest of society?** Should it be left to these

“democratically elected institutions of struggle and control” to decide whether society should exert special efforts to overcome the legacy of the oppression of Black, Chicano, and other oppressed nationalities, or to advance the struggle for women’s emancipation, and to protect the rights of gays and lesbians? *No! These rights and priorities must be enshrined in the new state and the vanguard party must lead in focusing attention and fostering struggle, dissent, protest and rebellion until all the vestiges of oppression and traditional thinking are uprooted.*

- **What of education and culture?** Should it be left to a vote as to whether evolution will be taught in the school? *No! This must be mandated by the revolutionary authority because people have a right and a need to understand the foundations of science and the scientific method more generally.* Will people in the new society still be bombarded by a culture that fosters ignorance and selfishness, that degrades women and oppressed peoples, that elevates the trivial and a gossip-culture? *No! A radically liberating culture that raises peoples sights to a whole new world and way of being and relating must be promoted, at the same time that there must be space for diverging views.*

It is a basic truth: the oppressed must emancipate themselves. But this can only happen if there is the leadership of a far-sighted, scientific communist vanguard which has a firm grasp of the communist goal and a method of leading that unleashes conscious and multi-channel struggle from among the people to radically change the world and themselves. This can only happen if there is a state of a new kind, the dictatorship of the proletariat: to defeat attempts to restore capitalism, to ensure the rights of the people, and to provide conditions for the revolution to continue to advance.

EVERYTHING YOU'VE BEEN TOLD ABOUT COMMUNISM, INCLUDING BY THE ISO, IS WRONG!

The ISO rejects the dictatorship of the proletariat. They reject the seizure of state power. They liquidate the need for a genuine communist vanguard party.

And they join with the capitalist rulers and ideologues to heap lies and slander and scorn on the first attempts

in modern history to create societies free of exploitation and oppression. They join the chorus condemning Mao and Stalin as power-hungry tyrants who intentionally caused great suffering. They negate the experience of hundreds of millions of slaves rising up and the most advanced revolutionary leadership that had been forged through that time.

In the Soviet Union from 1917 to 1956 and going even further in China from 1949 to 1976, the masses not only took great strides in overcoming chronic hunger, epidemic diseases and staggering poverty. In these societies, millions of formerly exploited and oppressed were led to lift their heads and stormed the heavens – radically transforming social relations, casting off ignorance and superstition, bringing forward new and liberating culture, and inspiring people worldwide in the process.

All of this achieved its greatest heights during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR). The anti-communist narrative is that this was a violent and bloody power struggle led by Mao in order to retrench and consolidate power for its own sake. This could not be further from the truth. During the GPCR, the Maoist leadership brought millions into the defense and wielding of revolutionary state power, led millions to rise up to overthrow those in top authority dragging China back down the road to capitalism, and to criticize and supervise leadership. The Cultural Revolution, and the leadership given by Mao, raised the capacity of the masses to take part increasingly in administering the ongoing transformation of society towards complete liberation. Never before – and never since – has there been such a flowering of liberating culture, of revolutionary energy and enthusiasm, of the values of “serve the people,” or of massive and many-sided society-wide debate and participation.

By vilifying this liberating history, the ISO aids the bourgeoisie in closing the door on human emancipation. Further, because their anti-communism masquerades as “socialism” it is all the more insidious, *precisely among those who are rising up, searching for answers, and who need this truth the most.*

GENUINE COMMUNISM IS ALIVE IN BOB AVAKIAN'S NEW SYNTHESIS AND LEADERSHIP

The Soviet and Chinese revolutions opened whole new vistas for humanity. At the same time, they had shortcomings and errors – even grievous errors. All of

this must be learned from in order to once again make revolution and to go even further this time.

Fortunately for humanity, Bob Avakian has done this work.

Because of Bob Avakian and the work he has done over several decades, summing up the positive and negative experience of the communist revolution so far, and drawing from a broad range of human experience, there is a new synthesis of communism that has been brought forward—there really is a viable vision and strategy for a radically new, and much better, society and world, and there is the crucial leadership that is needed to carry forward the struggle toward that goal.

Based on Avakian's new synthesis communism, the Revolutionary Communist Party has published the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic of North America (Draft Proposal)* which offers a visionary and practical framework for a new economy and political system based on genuine internationalism, care for the environment and meeting people's material needs and at the same time fostering unprecedented ferment and debate, dissent and protest, and cultural and intellectual and artistic expressions that strike out in many directions.

With their disdain for and repudiation of all things genuinely communist, it should come as no surprise that many in and around the ISO have an unprincipled history of discouraging students and others from checking out Bob Avakian. It should come as no surprise that many in and around the ISO traffic in the reactionary notion that the emphasis put on Bob Avakian by genuine revolutionaries reflects the thinking of a "cult."

BECAUSE THEY FEAR REVOLUTIONARY UPHEAVAL AND TRANSFORMATION

At its core, the ISO's politics and program represent the outlook of the petty bourgeoisie: the small capitalists and intermediate strata who can at times be very militant in their opposition to the extremes of imperialism (the increasing gap of wealth and poverty, unjust wars, corporate power, etc.), but who even more deeply fear the upheaval, dislocation, sacrifice and rupture required to transform this world of horrors into something liberating.

While many with the outlook of the petty bourgeoisie can be won to the side of the revolution, when this

outlook masquerades as "socialism," as it does with the ISO, it is *revisionism-reformism*, and can only do harm and lead people away from revolution. What the ISO embodies and fights for is "socialism-lite" – the no-sweat, no-sacrifice, easy way to *not* make revolution.

A CHALLENGE – AND A BASIC STANDARD – TO EVERYONE SERIOUS ABOUT REAL LIBERATION

But for those of you who want to see humanity free of this world of unending horror...

You have a responsibility to deeply engage Bob Avakian's new synthesis of communism. Discover the truth and the real lessons from the most liberating chapters in human history. Discover the vision and the basis to do much better and go much further next time around. Look at *Communism: The Beginning of a New Stage, A Manifesto from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*.

Dig into the ISO's "Where We Stand" and contrast it with the RCP's *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic of North America*. Ask yourself: which opens up the path to real liberation and makes a radical rupture with the existing order?

Do not tolerate – and do fight against – any suggestion that these questions should be dismissed based on anti-communist prejudices against leadership and the history of communism.

Too much is at stake for humanity to do anything less.

To find the main works in this letter:

COMMUNISM: THE BEGINNING OF A NEW STAGE
A Manifesto from the RCP, USA
rwor.org/Manifesto/Manifesto.html

CONSTITUTION for The New Socialist Republic In North America (Draft Proposal)
revcom.us/socialistconstitution/

Where We Stand: The Politics of the ISO
internationalsocialist.org/pdfs/WhereWeStandPamphlet.pdf