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# **The End of a Stage – The Beginning of a New Stage**

**by Bob Avakian**

Greetings, Comrades!

Let me begin by speaking to the fact that I am unable to attend this meeting. This has its negative aspect for sure, but mainly it must be seen in a positive light. I deeply regret being unable to attend and to take up the tasks and challenges at hand with you personally, and this is a negative thing. But on the other hand—the positive aspect—the reasons for my not attending have to do with the seriousness with which we are taking up our responsibilities and the prospects of revolutionary storms and revolutionary days ahead. For me, and for us, it is not a question of running and hiding with an eye to the past but accelerating our preparation to make leaps with an eye to the future.

I once heard a story about the period when Mao was leading the guerrilla warfare in the mountains of China, and over this period peasants in other parts of China would keep asking, “Is he still up there in the mountains?” By this they meant, is he still keeping up the fight—is the revolution still alive? Well, using this as a metaphor, we have our own kind of mountains—our own road for preparing to seize power in society as a whole—and we intend to *stay* on that road.

That leads me to the main theme of this talk. If I can be pardoned for doing so, I’ll introduce this by speaking in the terms of “popular American culture.” “Nice guys finish last” is a widely propagated piece of so-called “popular wisdom” in the U.S.—and this is really very revealing of the kind of society it is and the kind of society its rulers *want*—it is a willing self-exposure on their part. But *we* are out to do something very radical, to overturn all this. We are out for nothing less than to finish *first* and *remain* “nice guys” all the way through: to win victory for the proletariat, not just in the U.S. but worldwide, and bring into being a radically different world with radically different people—a world of freely and consciously

cooperating human beings, without inequality, oppression and class distinctions—a communist world.

To put this in terms of one of *our* often-repeated principles-to-live-by:

“In the final analysis, as Engels once expressed it, the proletariat must win its emancipation on the battlefield. But there is not only the question of winning in this sense but of how we win in the largest sense. One of the significant if perhaps subtle and often little-noticed ways in which the enemy, even in defeat, seeks to exact revenge on the revolution and sow the seed of its future undoing is in what he would force the revolutionaries to become in order to defeat him. It will come to this: we will have to face him in the trenches and defeat him amidst terrible destruction but we must not in the process annihilate the fundamental difference between the enemy and ourselves. Here the example of Marx is illuminating: he repeatedly fought at close quarters with the ideologists and apologists of the bourgeoisie but he never fought them on their terms or with their outlook; with Marx his method is as exhilarating as his goal is inspiring. We must be able to maintain our firmness of principles but at the same time our flexibility, our materialism and our dialectics, our realism and our romanticism, our solemn sense of purpose and our sense of humor.” (*Harvest*, p. 152)

Before turning to the main points of this talk, I want to touch briefly on the “end of the ’80s” point. This will only be a very short summary, because you comrades will be discussing a paper written on this question and in that discussion you will be going into this in some depth. Here what I want to speak to is what our orientation must be in coming to grips with some significant shifts in world contradictions, the interimperialist contradiction in particular. I am referring to the fact that things did not work out as we had predicted through the ’80s, in terms of the question of world war and the relationship between world war and the advance of the world revolution—in particular our analysis that, in the time frame of the ’80s, only a leap in the world revolution could prevent world war.

It is very important that we maintain a correct perspective on this. First of all, we were very correct in stressing the real and heightening danger of world war. Second, it is true that things did not work out the way we anticipated, and there have been the shifts in world contradictions—and in particular the interimperialist contradiction—that have resulted in a temporary and partial mitigation of this contradiction and have put off for a

certain time a direct, all-out confrontation between the rival imperialist blocs. But we should not lower our guard and flip to the other side, ignoring or underestimating the very real, deep-going and still intense contradictions between the imperialists and the continuing danger of world war. It is true that recent times have witnessed dramatic changes in what has been the Soviet bloc as well as the emergence of some imperialist states to more prominent positions (for example Japan and a Germany moving toward reunification), and there is the possibility of further significant shifts among the imperialists. But, with all this, the interimperialist contradiction remains very real and profound—there still remains the real possibility that this contradiction could erupt into all-out war. And it remains true that the most likely alignment in such a war would be two blocs facing off against each other with the U.S. heading one bloc and the Soviet Union heading the other.

I would also like to stress that it is very important to have a correct attitude toward one’s mistakes. And in this regard I would like to tell a little story that I heard about when W.E.B. Du Bois was in China and had a meeting with Mao. Apparently in the course of this discussion, which ranged rather broadly, Du Bois at one point said, looking back over his whole life’s work, “Well, it looks like all that I ever did was make one mistake after another.” And apparently at this point Mao sort of spit out the word “mistakes” in disgust and looked at Du Bois and said, “But at least you never made the mistake of giving up. We ourselves have made all kinds of mistakes through the history of what we’ve done, but we too have never made the mistake of giving up, and that’s the important thing.”

Besides, we are not at all “disappointed” at the prospect that world war may not come right away. Our impatience has not been for world war but for advancing the world revolution!

This point of basic orientation is especially important now, because the most important thing about the way world contradictions are expressing themselves now is the positive aspect—the “opening” (a “window of heightened opportunity,” to use one of the other side’s phrases) this is providing us—internationally and within the U.S. itself. It is to our advantage that the interimperialist contradiction and with it the immediate danger of world war and nuclear devastation have been temporarily and partially mitigated at the same time as mass movements and struggles, including revolutionary movements and armed struggles, are rocking the old order, East and West; and the guardians of the old order are confronting increasingly explosive problems in trying to keep the lid on and keep the masses down. In other

words, through the '80s we may not have gotten the conjuncture that we had foreseen, but we have gotten a kind of momentary conjuncture (which may last for a number of years) that is itself favorable to the advance of revolution, and it is up to us to make the most of this (and by "us" I mean our Party and the international communist movement, as concentrated in the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement).

### **Our basic orientation toward the present situation**

This orientation is summed up, I believe, in the statement I made that has been quoted in the Party's newspaper: Fear nothing. Be down for the whole thing. To this we can add Mao's comment that "If you want others to stand firm, you must first stand firm yourselves." This orientation is very appropriate and very important now, in a time when there is great stress and great storm—including gathering storms of mass rebellion and upheaval.

*This is not at all a matter of hype or fronting like we're bad in an empty way, divorced from anything real among the masses. No, it has real and immediate practical meaning now. It has everything to do with what is put forward in our Party's May First Manifesto—with leading the basic people, who are increasingly in an angry and aroused mood, to "Take a bold stand, with cold revolutionary politics in command, and not let them carry out their plan: to pen us in, lock us up, hammer us down, and kill us off, while they're putting up that front, telling that Big Lie that this is what we want!" It has everything to do with leading this in such a way that the link is drawn and the bridge is built between this and the all-out revolutionary struggle we are aiming for: "And more, while we're battling them back, politically like that, we got to make this part of getting ready for The Time—and it can come soon—to wage revolutionary war."*

We have continually emphasized the importance of revolutionary optimism and strategic confidence in our cause. And we are right to do so. This has a real basis.

As just one example, take the whole uproar and repressive reaction around the flag and flagburning. Yes, for now at least, the ruling class decided not to outlaw flagburning in a way that would involve openly tearing away some of their facade of "freedom and democracy for all—free expression, even for unpopular viewpoints." But they seriously considered the possibility of doing this, through an outright amendment of the Bill of Rights; and they have made very clear that, around the question of "loyalty to the flag and all it stands for," they intend to insist even more aggressively on unquestioning obedience, and that in general they intend to be further turning

the screws of repression. This shows their viciousness but even more it shows their panic, their concern and fear about the breaking apart and breaking down of their internal "unity" and order imposed from the top. Imagine all the uproar and upheaval that was created just over the question of torching their "symbol of national unity!" In other words, here is a living illustration of how correct the basic orientation is of tactically respecting the other side but having strategic contempt for them and strategic confidence and optimism about our cause.

And look at what is happening around abortion. Look at what the ruling imperialists must do—the lengths they must go to, the risks they must take in terms of tearing up their whole social fabric—in pursuit of their reactionary agenda, internationally and within the U.S. It is clear that they intend to continue their assault on women, particularly focused right now around the question of abortion, and that even though they will continue to try to attract people to an illusory "middle ground" position around this, in reality they will continually cut away any such "middle ground." While this whole move by the ruling class is a deadly serious attack that must be fiercely resisted, strategically this is very positive and favorable for our side.

Looked at overall, the polarization that is shaping up in the U.S. itself and the potential alignment are strategically favorable for us, if we look at what is happening—the way the ruling class is moving and the resistance this is bound to call forth and is already beginning to call forth—in terms of Black people and other poor people in the inner cities; immigrants, especially those from Mexico and Central America; women; and even many who had been relatively well-off "blue collar" strata—miners, farmers, many long-time factory workers, and so on—who are being told to "eat the flag" and may start choking on it! The U.S. economy is, in reality, far from the picture of uniform stability and robust all-around prosperity that they like to paint: while it still retains some real strengths, owing to the position of the U.S. imperialists in the whole network of international imperialist-dominated relations, the U.S. economy is marked by sharply contradictory factors and contains serious cracks and fissures. And the world economy, which does provide some real strengths and "reserves" for the U.S. imperialists, also contains elements, in particular the whole debt crisis, that make for great volatility and potentially devastating crisis to which U.S. imperialism is especially vulnerable precisely because of its international position.

Also very important in all this is "the crisis of morality and values" in the U.S. This is not simply an ideological question but is an acute expression of major material changes in society—in production and social relations. The fact

is that "traditional morality" is acutely in contradiction with these changes—including very importantly the changed situation with regard to the family, with the greatly heightened numbers of women who must work. And yet, this "traditional morality" is a crucial ideological and social prop of the rule of the imperialists, which they are in need of now more than ever. This, to say the least, involves some very explosive social contradictions!

And internationally, while there may be a partial and temporary mitigation of the interimperialist contradiction, as I have said this does not mean that inter-imperialist contradictions are not still very intense—they are and there remain a number of "hot spots" which could develop into "flash points" that could trigger a direct confrontation between the imperialist blocs. Certainly this remains true of the Middle East. Perhaps ironically, Europe itself, especially with the tumultuous events going on now in Eastern Europe, remains an area of great tension that could erupt into an all-out confrontation between the Soviet imperialists and their allies on the one side and the U.S. imperialists and their allies on the other. And there are other areas of the world where this is also the case.

Closer to the U.S. itself, despite recent gains by the U.S. in Panama and Nicaragua, the situation in Central America (and the Caribbean) remains one fraught with difficulty and danger for U.S. imperialism—it is a situation that is far from firmly under their control yet one they must attempt to get more tightly in their grip. And countries like Mexico—as well as others like Brazil, and even Argentina and Venezuela—are also potentially big trouble for the imperialists, with the huge debt the cutting edge of this. All this, too, is strategically favorable for our side.

And then there is the particular situation of Peru. More and more it is clear the U.S. imperialists are creating public opinion for heightened intervention there against the people's war—though conducted in an underhanded and cowardly way—camouflaged as their so-called "war on drugs"! While this will put increasing necessity before our Party in particular to fulfill our internationalist duties in support of the people's war in Peru, from a strategic standpoint this too is extremely favorable for our side—in the U.S. specifically and internationally—because here is a revolutionary war led by a party based in Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and winning great victories on that basis, striking real blows not only at the local reactionaries but at U.S. imperialism (and Soviet imperialism as well).

Given all this, why should we not keep talking about revolutionary optimism and strategic confidence in our cause? As Mao put it, we should "crave greatness and

success" for the cause of our class, for the proletarian revolution, in the U.S. and worldwide. (See *Chairman Mao Talks to the People*, edited by Stuart Schram, Mao's "Talks at Chengtu," p. 120.)

### **"The end of a stage"**

With this as a basic orientation, let me turn to what is raised in the title of this talk, in particular the first part: *Why do I speak of "the end of a stage," what exactly do I mean by this?*

By "stage" in this context I am not referring to a new era in world history in the same way that Stalin did when he identified the present era as that of imperialism and the proletarian revolution. In the fundamental sense in which Stalin spoke of it, the era today remains the same: this is still the era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution. Nor am I referring to stages in the development of our revolutionary science. Indeed that science has developed to a new stage, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, but I am using "stage" here to refer to something else. The stage I am referring to that has ended is the whole historical period that began with the First International, and took a leap—but was quickly set back—with the rise and fall of the Paris Commune; that took a new qualitative leap with the October Revolution, the establishment of the Soviet Union and the founding of the Third (Communist) International; that reached its highest pinnacle with the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China led by Mao; and that has finally seen the reversal of the revolution and the restoration of capitalism in China, following the same setback in the Soviet Union in the 1950s. This period has ended with a situation where once again there are no socialist countries in the world and no Communist International, but it has *not* ended back where it began.

We, the international proletariat and the international communist movement, have come out of this whole period not with nothing but with a great deal. First and foremost we have the ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, which is the product of this whole period and which enables us to sum up the historical experience of this period and move forward—as we are doing. And we not only have Maoist parties and organizations in a number of countries, in virtually all parts of the world, but we also have the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM), a regrouping and rallying force and a political and organizational center on a certain level for the international communist movement, strengthening its revolutionary struggles now and contributing to the future formation of a new Communist International that will draw deeply from the lessons of the positive and the negative

experience of previous Internationals. In terms of what is most fundamentally important and what is most strategic, this is a lot to have, even as there is a great deal more to be won.

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It is good to have some historical perspective on the gains and losses during this stage that has ended.

Check out the rising bourgeoisie and its difficulties and reversals:

There were hundreds of years from the emergence of the bourgeoisie in feudal society to its rise to the ruling position in a new society cast "in its own image": capitalist society. (This is spoken to by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*.)

The English bourgeoisie. It took them a couple of hundred years to bring about the triumph of capitalism and the bourgeois system of rule (from the 1600s to the 1800s)—and they still can't get rid of the "royal family" (in-bred mutants though they are!).

It was nearly 100 years after America won independence from England before the bourgeoisie in the U.S. put an end to slavery. And it did that only in the service of strengthening its own system of exploitation—capitalism.

As Mao and his comrades in China used to point out, if it took the rising bourgeoisie hundreds of years to bring about the more or less complete triumph of capitalism, and if this involved a number of setbacks and reversals, then why should we be disoriented or lose heart if the proletarian revolution does not go forward in a straight line from triumph to triumph—if it, too, involves real leaps backward as well as great leaps forward and undergoes many twists and turns before it can win final victory not just in one or a number of countries but worldwide? After all, the proletarian revolution is a much more radical revolution than the bourgeois revolution or any previous revolution in history in which one class overthrows another.

The proletarian revolution means not the mere replacement of one system of exploitation by another, but the abolition of all systems and all relations of exploitation, of all social inequality and oppression, of long-standing divisions in society and the world, of class distinctions themselves. As Marx and Engels put it, this revolution involves the most radical rupture with traditional property relations and with traditional ideas. So we can be forgiven, I think, if we do not become downhearted and defeatist if our revolution encounters real difficulties, and even bitter defeats, along the way to the final goal of communism.

In this light, a comment on Ronald Reagan and his description of communism as an "outmoded 19th-

century philosophy." This is interesting coming from someone upholding a truly outmoded philosophy, from the 18th century—at the most! Let fossils like Reagan gloat over the difficulties and upheavals that the rulers of the Soviet Union, China, and other such countries are experiencing. The so-called "demise of communism" is really just revisionism becoming more openly bourgeois. This does not constitute a "crisis" for genuine communism and it is not a bad thing for us—for the international proletariat and the international communist movement, as represented specifically by the RIM and the parties and organizations affiliated with it. Strategically, it is a fine thing for us.

#### ***The defeat in China— the international dimension***

Something very important to grasp in understanding the world-historic battle between the two fundamentally opposed forces in this era—the bourgeois-imperialist forces and the proletarian-communist forces: The defeat in China (like the defeat in the Soviet Union before it) is primarily a defeat inflicted by the *international bourgeoisie* and is not primarily due to weaknesses or flaws in the socialist states themselves. And the mistakes of the revolutionaries—including of Mao Tsetung himself—are mainly mistakes in dealing with the very real problems and dangers caused primarily by imperialism and its still-dominant position in the world.

What was involved, particularly in the case of Mao, was emphatically not a question of fundamental ideological orientation. As a point of basic ideological orientation Mao made very clear and he meant that he was willing to give up a great deal in order not to give up the revolution. In other words, at one point he said that if the imperialists should attack China, or if there should be other setbacks, then they would be prepared to go back to the mountains and wage guerrilla warfare and start the revolution over again in a certain sense. For example, in 1957 he said, "We wish a peaceful world but we must put ourselves in the worst position and be prepared for major disasters. We came from Yenan and must be prepared to return there." And a couple of years later he said again, "If the enemy occupies Peking, Shanghai and Wuhan, we will go into the mountains and engage in guerrilla warfare. We will go 10, 20 years backward and return to the Yenan period." (*Mao Miscellany*, Volume 1, pp. 47 and 222)

So it was not a question of fundamental ideological orientation. Rather, what was involved was an error in policy, although there is an ideological aspect to Mao's error—a tendency toward nationalism, toward viewing the problems and tasks of the world revolution a bit

narrowly through the prism of revolutionary experience in China and the concerns of defending socialism in China. This policy error was linked to a real material/technological problem: China's material/technological strength could not match up to that of the Soviets (or the U.S.) at a time when the Soviets were making real and concrete threats and moves toward attacking China, including with nuclear strikes, in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In various places, memoirs and elsewhere, both Nixon and Henry Kissinger have recalled the situation around 1969 when the Soviet leadership made indirect or even more direct feelers, you might call them, to the U.S. imperialists, indicating that they (the Soviets) were thinking about launching nuclear strikes in China and sort of inquiring what the U.S. would do in response. Now Nixon and Kissinger both say, and I have no reason to disbelieve this, that they indicated very strongly that they would be opposed to this and that they were likely to do something in response. Not, of course, because they had any love for socialist China, but because they felt that this would unhinge things and unbalance world relations in a way that would be very detrimental to U.S. imperialism. And I think this is a very important thing to take into account. This sets the general framework and gives a sense of the very real necessity, difficulties and dangers that Mao and other revolutionaries in China had to deal with in the period of the late '60s and into the early '70s and up to the time of Mao's death and then the coup which brought revisionism to power in China in 1976.

In this light, what I want to touch on particularly is the Soviet danger and "the opening to the West" that was the policy adopted by the Chinese leadership in response to this and the deal with Lin Biao and what brought things to a head with him, specifically in terms of the international situation and the dangers faced by China.

An important objective factor in all this were the setbacks in Third World liberation struggles in the late '60s and early '70s—that is, increasing influence and control by the Soviets (Vietnam, Palestine and Dhofar/South Yemen, and liberation movements in Angola and Mozambique, among others, are indications of this). This, along with the intensifying Soviet threat to China itself, seemed to lead to the abandonment of the line represented by *Long Live the Victory of People's War*, which was written by Lin Biao but generally reflected the line of the Chinese Communist Party at that time—the 1960s.

On the positive side, *Long Live the Victory* was an attempt to provide a rallying call and a general program for advancing Third World liberation struggles and strengthening the communist pole within them. It went straight in the face of the Soviet backstabbing and

betrayal of these struggles and the attempts of the Soviet revisionist rulers to bend these struggles to their imperialist interests in colluding and contending with U.S. imperialism. On the other hand, as I pointed out in *For a Harvest of Dragons*, "Long Live the Victory" represented "the absolutizing of what was then the principal contradiction in the world (between the oppressed nations and imperialism)—raising it out of the context of world relations and contradictions in which it actually exists and treating it as a thing unto itself and virtually the only significant contradiction in the world." (*Harvest*, p. 150)

Related to these errors was the tendency, in correctly insisting on the need to wage the armed struggle, particularly in the Third World, to raise this above the question of *what line*, representing *which class*, is leading this armed struggle. Yet when the reality became clearer that many of these Third World liberation struggles were led by bourgeois forces who were inclined to accept offers of Soviet "aid" as a hoped-for "shortcut" to "quick victory," a serious split developed and deepened within the Chinese Communist Party:

Lin Biao, along with his general tendency toward militarism—toward raising the military above the political—"tilted toward" the Soviets. (His view: a bad socialist country is better than imperialism; to him the Soviet Union was not imperialist itself but just a bad socialist country.) This objectively amounted to treachery and capitulation to the enemy—the Soviet Union—that did then represent the greatest danger to China.

On the other side were forces within the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, generally grouped around Chou En-Lai, who wanted to deal with the Soviet threat by capitulating to Western imperialism and coming under its wing.

Mao's response to the very real Soviet threat to China was to attempt to build an international anti-Soviet United Front. There is too much evidence that Mao was behind this line—it cannot simply be blamed on the revisionists. For example, there is Mao's receiving of a parade of lackeys of Western imperialism, from Haile Selassie, "emperor" of Ethiopia, to the Shah of Iran. Everyone who was an active revolutionary at that time can't help recalling the parade of "puppets of the week" through Peking who unfortunately all too often met with Mao and therefore were given the stamp of approval—and through this the stamp of approval was given by Mao to this general orientation of international anti-Soviet United Front.

It seems that the problem was that the U.S. imperialists, if they were going to enter into some sort of united front with the Chinese on the basis of common opposition to the Soviet Union, were insistent that China

prove in practice that it really was serious about this and that it meant it would go along with at least putting a certain gloss on reactionary rulers who in fact were lackeys of Western imperialism throughout the Third World. It wasn't enough that China do certain things with the U.S., but the U.S. in turn insisted as the price for all this that they do this parade of "puppets of the week" kind of thing and openly embrace, at least on a certain level, reactionary leaders in the Third World who were aligned with or who were in fact controlled by Western imperialism. One of the most unfortunate—it is not even too strong to say shameful—instances of this was the fact that, apparently because of the strong influence of pro-Soviet revisionists in the Allende government in Chile in the early 1970s, China was quick to recognize and carry on business with the regime headed by Pinochet that overthrew the Allende government in a military coup, which was orchestrated and backed by the U.S., and then carried out bloodstained repression in which tens of thousands of Chilean people were massacred and many more were jailed or forced to flee the country.

As further evidence that Mao was behind the anti-Soviet United Front line there were a number of articles (in the *Peking Review* and elsewhere) written under the name Liang Hsiao—the name of a writing group which put forward the line of Mao and the "Gang of Four"—which argued for the "Soviet main danger, most dangerous source of war" line. And there were other clear indications that in fact Mao was behind this line.

As opposed to the capitulators, Mao did try to carry off this united front without abandoning socialism in China itself and without fundamentally abandoning the revolutionary struggles of oppressed peoples and nations in other countries—he tried to maintain independence and initiative while building such a united front as he had succeeded in doing in the war of liberation against Japanese imperialism during the 1930s and up to the end of World War 2. But this time around there were significant differences that made such a united front policy incorrect: The Soviet Union was not the sole or greatest danger to the oppressed people of the world as Japan had been to China during the time of the anti-Japanese united front. U.S. imperialism (and its allies and lackeys) continued to be no less of an enemy to the people of the world.

For China to take this international anti-Soviet United Front line was disorienting to revolutionaries and communists and to the masses of oppressed people all over the world who had, correctly, looked to China as a revolutionary base area and a revolutionary center. And in fact, this united front against the Soviet Union line objectively weakened the revolutionary forces within China itself—those who followed Mao's leadership—and made it more

difficult for them to maintain the initiative: it strengthened and gave initiative to the revisionists who were moving to suppress socialist revolution in China, restore capitalism and bring China under the domination of imperialism, particularly the Western-Japanese imperialist bloc.

Still, it is very important to keep in mind what was after all the context for all this—the necessity, the very real threat, that Mao was attempting to deal with: the very real danger of a major Soviet attack on China. Mao went with the "Soviet main danger in the world" line not out of fear—nor certainly out of a desire to capitulate to imperialism!—but out of a mistaken attempt to apply a policy that had been correct in another situation but was not correct in this situation. And all this once more highlights the point I stressed earlier: The defeat in China for the proletariat (like the defeat in the Soviet Union before it) is primarily a defeat inflicted by imperialism (the international bourgeoisie), and the mistakes of the revolutionaries, including Mao, are primarily mistakes in dealing with the very real problems and dangers posed by imperialism. (If socialist China had not been in the situation of being surrounded by imperialist states and their allies, the revolutionaries in China would have had far less difficulty in dealing with revisionist and other bourgeois forces within China itself.)

Something that has come to light, including through the recent upheavals and repression in revisionist China, is that even some former and now disaffected Red Guards from Cultural Revolution days don't understand all this. They buy the line, put out by the imperialists, the revisionists in China, and others who hated the Cultural Revolution, that what the Cultural Revolution was really all about was factional fighting among big-shots at the top of the Chinese Communist Party, including Mao. They blame Mao for the fact that repeated struggles did in fact break out among the top leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, not understanding that this is a part, a very crucial part, of the overall class struggle in socialist society in the context of the international situation and the international class struggle. They criticize Mao all out of proportion—and for the wrong reasons.

Despite certain errors Mao made—in very complex, intense, and dangerous circumstances—and despite bourgeois/revisionist slanders that his approach to socialism and the advance to communism amounted to "equalizing poverty" and so on, Mao was profoundly right in his whole emphasis on revolution before and as the basis for production and "modernization." Haven't recent events in China made this abundantly clear?!

### **Incentive and initiative**

This touches on the question of incentive and initiative—the two fundamentally opposed world views on this, the bourgeois and the proletarian.

Marx and Engels spoke to this already in the *Communist Manifesto*, answering the charge that communist society would take away all incentive from people because they wouldn't be able to get ahead further by working harder and so on. They pointed out that if this were true, if the bourgeois view were correct, then bourgeois society itself would have gone to the dogs long ago because in bourgeois society those who work the hardest and the most get the least, and those who work the least get the most.

Once again, the bourgeois view on this is a *self-exposure*. You can get a fundamental idea about a system and the class that rules in it by what *they* put forward as standards to be upheld and followed, by what they glorify or insist must be the rule. The bourgeois system *insists on selfishness*—that selfishness is the “bottom line” of all human motivation, and that any society not rooted in this is “unrealistic” and bound to fail. And apologizers for this system play on the fact that most people in the world have never known any other kind of system and, living under a system like this all their lives, find it difficult to even conceive of a different kind of system.

In a report from an area Party organization on work in a housing project, a woman in the project is quoted as saying this: “You keep talking about ‘the system,’ but it is the people that make the system; it is not the system that makes the people.” This woman was speaking out of disgust and dismay at some of the vicious and rotten things people around her, particularly a number of the youth, were drawn into. But she was also speaking under the influence of the bourgeois viewpoint and its never-ending propagation through the media, culture, the educational system, the churches, and many other vehicles.

This viewpoint puts things exactly upside-down. It is, in fact, the system that makes people—that determines people's relations with other people and that shapes and molds their values and ideas. People are not free to just choose any system they want. People come into the world with social systems already in effect, and they are made to “fit in” and “find their place” within the system.

As for people's ideas, Marx and Engels pointed out in the *Communist Manifesto* that the ruling ideas of every age are always the ideas of the ruling class. Where, after all, do people get their ideas from? Who controls what ideas they have access to and how different ideas and theories are presented—or not presented?

The system forces people to relate to each other in certain ways. It forces them through its “normal work-

ings”—the economic system and how people must earn a livelihood and what people are pushed into and driven to by the workings of this system and the “lot” it hands them. The system coerces and represses people through the use of its state power and armed force when people try to go up against the system and do things a different way. For example, if homeless people try to take over housing—and this has happened in reality many times already in recent years in the U.S.—we see that the state power comes down on them and drives them out of the housing and subjects them to the punishments of the law, as well as outright brutality.

Or take something like People's Park in Berkeley, which is actually a struggle that flared up again and has been going on in one form or another for twenty years. Here were people trying to develop an alternative lifestyle, trying to develop a different way of relating, trying to put people above property and do something creative with an area that was just being kept for speculation by the university and other capitalist interests. And what happened there? People were killed as well as other people brutalized by the police, the National Guard came out, there was martial law imposed, and so on. And all of this is to say nothing of the continuing murders of Black people and other oppressed people in the U.S. and the general brutal murderous oppression brought down on anybody who seriously steps out of line or goes up against the whole system.

But, like everything else in life, the capitalist system is full of contradiction, and this contradiction erupts in all kinds of ways and calls forth all kinds of struggle. And in this struggle people, particularly the people on the bottom with the least stake in the present order, seek out ways to go up against the system and defeat it, and they seek out ideas to guide them in doing this. They are bound to be drawn toward those things that are in most fundamental contradiction to the whole system—toward the revolutionary proletariat and its ideology, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. In taking up the revolutionary struggle against the system and taking up the most revolutionary ideology to guide that struggle, people can and do change themselves. In rising up and overthrowing the system, they begin to make themselves into new people.

Look at the powerful example of how revolutionary China, with Mao's leadership, dealt with the drug question—as described in the pamphlet by Clark Kissinger—how they eliminated this as a social problem when it had been an extremely serious problem in the old society. How could this have been done if it was “the people who make the system” and not what it is in reality—“the system that makes the people.”

And here I remember a story from visiting in China



where it was recounted how a miner who was then in his fifties had in fact been an opium addict from the time he was six or eight, because that was the time he began working in the mines. And he was asked why he began smoking opium and how he eventually overcame this. He told the story of how his family was so poor that he had to begin working in the mines at that early age, and he worked continually, seven days a week for twelve or fourteen hours or more, and he said that literally for years on end he never saw the sun. And eventually, as others before him had, he came upon opium as a way of trying to deal with the situation, being able to bear up underneath it without totally cracking. And then he said after liberation, after China was completely liberated in 1949 and the new system came into being, he saw the sun, both literally as well as symbolically. And then he said he had no more need for opium, so he cast it aside as part of joining in the struggle to revolutionize society as a whole.

This is a true story, it has real meaning, and there are millions of such stories in China which illustrate the basic point that I am making here. No, the masses of people do not *make* this system—but they can and will *overthrow* it and create something far better in its place.

Mao Tsetung led the Chinese masses not only in overthrowing the old system but in making historic changes in how people relate and what motivates them. Mao upheld and applied the communist viewpoint on this question of initiative and incentive, taking this farther in theory and in practice than had previously been done in the experience of socialist countries.

“Serve the people”—that was the ideal and the practical slogan that Mao popularized, as opposed to Deng’s motto: “to get rich is glorious,” or “serve yourself”! Work not for personal gain but to advance the cause of the masses of people and the struggle for communism, all over the world. This was the orientation that Mao led the Chinese people in taking up and applying in practice.

These were not just lofty principles in some abstract sense—high-sounding but unrealistic—they were the guiding principles that tens and hundreds of millions of people in China strove to live by in their daily lives and that hundreds of millions of people in other countries were inspired by. And now that the revisionist-capitalist system in China that was installed with the overthrow of socialism is more and more revealing its all-around bankruptcy, material and “spiritual,” even the imperialist media must report that increasingly masses of Chinese people are openly expressing their fondness for the morals and principles of serving the people and serving the collective good that were the guiding principles in socialist China led by Mao.

The position of Maoists is very clear: Yes, we most

definitely want initiative—the initiative of individuals and above all initiative expressed through movements of masses of people. Our ideology and political line can and will unleash this in a far greater way than the bourgeoisie or other exploiting classes would ever think of doing, *but* this will *not* happen in the service of a commodity system where initiative is in fact stifled or perverted to serve the end of profiting at the expense of others. Our vision and our practical program point to the overthrow and elimination of all such systems and to the triumph of new, liberating and far more uplifting relations among people.

In these days when the imperialists are trying to make something fashionable and “trend-setting” out of “commodity-fetishism” (the outlook that treats everything and everybody as something to be bought and sold and used to make a profit); when they are on an offensive to declare their outmoded system and its corrupting, degrading values the “wave of the future”(!); it is all the more important that we wage a bold ideological counteroffensive—indicting their system and its values and putting forth our communist principles in opposition—as part of taking them on in a determined and militant way overall. We should instill in the victims of this system an attitude of despising this system and all it stands for—of recognizing that this system represents not the “wave of the future” but the dregs of the past—that it is the thing *standing in the way* of a much brighter future. As Mao said, “Unless we despise the old system and the old reactionary productive relationships, what do we think we are doing? If we do not have faith in socialism and communism, what do we think we are doing?” (Schram, Mao’s “Talks at Chengtu,” p. 121)

### ***The question of Stalin and “Stalinism”***

It is necessary, in summing up the stage that has ended and the historical experience of socialism so far, to speak once again to this question. I made a rather extensive analysis of the positive contributions as well as the serious errors of Stalin in *Conquer the World*. But right now especially, with the changes going on in the revisionist countries and the increasing repudiation and attacks there directed at Stalin and “Stalinism” from many different quarters, it is necessary to return to this and to make clear what it is we uphold and won’t renounce and what we cannot uphold and must criticize in terms of Stalin’s role as the leader of the Soviet Union and in the international communist movement over a decisive period of thirty years, from the early 1920s until his death in 1953.

Mao used the formulation that Stalin’s achievements were 70 percent and his errors 30 percent of his overall

role. The essence here is not the quantitative analysis—not the percentages, 70 percent positive, 30 percent negative—but the overall assessment this suggests: Stalin mainly should be upheld but he did make errors, including serious errors.

First, the positive side—the reasons why it is correct to uphold Stalin overall—his contributions to the international communist movement that outweigh his negative side:

Following Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin led the Soviet Union in taking the socialist road in opposition to right and "left" opponents whose lines would have led to openly abandoning the goal of socialist transformation or in any case would have led to socialism being overwhelmed and defeated by the forces of capitalism, inside the Soviet Union and internationally.

Stalin led in the complex and acute struggles to carry out collectivization of agriculture and to socialize the ownership of industry, putting the economy on a whole new foundation. This was something that had never been done before. While some significant mistakes were made, the fact is that, contrary to the slanders of the defenders and apologists of the old order, this monumental upheaval was marked by the enthusiasm and initiative of millions and millions of people in the countryside, especially the poor peasants, who were radically transforming centuries-old relations of oppression and casting off thousands of years of enslaving, mind-numbing tradition.

Stalin gave emphasis to the revolutionary struggle and the formation and development of communist parties in the East—that is, the colonial world—which was a very important development for the international communist movement. Along with this, Stalin made very valuable contributions in developing Marxist theory concerning the national and colonial question and the liberation struggles of the oppressed nations.

Stalin led the Soviet people in arduous and heroic struggle to defeat German imperialism, led by Hitler, in World War 2.

In the last years of his life Stalin not only refused to buckle under to the imperialists, who were threatening the Soviet Union with atomic weapons, but he continued to grapple with the problems of how to carry forward the socialist transformation of society and what would be the transition from a socialist economic system to a communist one.

All this is more than enough reason to continue to uphold Stalin's historical role as a leader of the Soviet Union and in the international communist movement.

As I wrote in *Mao Tsetung's Immortal Contributions*, in noting some of Stalin's main historic achievements and putting his errors in historical context:

"To bring about socialist collectivization together with socialist industrialization and transform the Soviet Union from a relatively backward to an advanced country economically—all of which was accomplished in the two decades between the end of the civil war in Russia and WW2—was a great achievement of the Soviet working class and people under the leadership of Stalin. And it had much to do with the Soviet Union's ability to defeat the Nazi invaders in WW2, another great achievement of the Soviet people carried out under Stalin's leadership.

"At the same time, in giving leadership to an unprecedented task of such tremendous proportions—the socialization, transformation and rapid development of the economy of such a large and complex country as the Soviet Union under the conditions where it was the only socialist state in a world still dominated by imperialism—Stalin did make certain errors. To a significant degree this is explainable by the very fact that there was no historical precedent for this task, no previous experience (and previous errors) to learn from. On the other hand, as Mao has summed up, certain of Stalin's errors, including in the sphere of political economy, economic policy, and socialist construction, arose because and to the extent that Stalin failed to thoroughly apply materialist dialectics to solving problems, including many genuinely new problems that did arise." (*Mao Tsetung's Immortal Contributions*, pp. 89-90)

It would be extremely wrong to negate Stalin's positive side and refuse to uphold his historical role overall. It would also be extremely wrong to underestimate his errors or refuse to thoroughly criticize them. As we know, Mao spoke of Stalin's errors as representing "30 percent" of Stalin's overall role. But when Mao speaks of the actual content of this "30 percent," it is clear that he is not talking about minor mistakes with minimal consequences. Here are some of the things he says concerning the negative side of Stalin:

The Chinese revolution was made by acting contrary to Stalin's will! "If we had followed Wang Ming's, or in other words Stalin's, methods the Chinese revolution couldn't have succeeded. When our revolution succeeded, Stalin said it was a fake. We did not argue with him, and as soon as we fought the war to resist America and aid Korea, our revolution became a genuine one [in his eyes]." (Schram, Mao's "Talks at Chengtu," pp. 102-103).

"Stalin felt that he had made mistakes in dealing with Chinese problems, and they were no small mistakes. We are a great country of several hundred millions, and he

opposed our revolution, and our seizure of power.” (Schram, Mao’s “Talk on Questions of Philosophy,” p. 217)

While recognizing Stalin’s great achievement in leading the collectivization of Soviet agriculture, Mao was at the same time sharply critical of important aspects of Stalin’s policy toward the peasants and the effect of this on the relations (contradictions) between workers and peasants, industry and agriculture, and the city and the countryside. Here is how I characterized this criticism in *Conquer the World*:

“As Mao put it, you want the hen to lay eggs but you don’t feed it; you want the horse to gallop but you don’t give it fodder and so on. Basically they took a tremendous amount from the peasantry as the basis for a breakneck industrialization program at the same time as they were carrying out rapid and wide-scale collectivization of agriculture; . . . In the comments and criticisms made by Mao in places like the *Ten Major Relationships* and consistently throughout. . . Volume 5 of Mao’s works and also in the CIA-collected *Miscellany of Mao Tsetung Thought* and in the *Chairman Mao Talks to the People* collection there is a consistent thread of criticism of the Soviet policy toward the peasantry. If you want to put it in a rather stark form, to a significant degree, they carried out industrialization on the backs of the peasantry while at the same time carrying out collectivization.” (*Conquer the World, Revolution #50*, p. 19)

Mao also criticized Stalin for placing too much emphasis on technique and technically trained personnel and not enough reliance on unleashing the initiative of the masses in carrying out socialist construction and transformation of the economy. For example, in commenting on Stalin’s *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, Mao said, “Stalin emphasized only technology, technical cadre. He wanted nothing but technology, nothing but cadre; no politics, no masses. This too is walking on one leg!” (Mao, *A Critique of Soviet Economics*, “Concerning *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*,” p. 129)

This was linked with a more general problem of orientation that Mao summed up: Stalin’s tendency to rely on administrative procedures rather than relying on and mobilizing the masses. This tendency asserted itself and became more pronounced the more Stalin’s leadership was consolidated and the more the Soviet Union made gains in socialist construction. As Mao put it, “At that time [the 1920’s] Stalin had nothing else to rely on except

the masses, so he demanded all-out mobilization of the party and the masses. Afterwards, when they had realized some gains this way, they became less reliant on the masses.” (See *Mao Tsetung’s Immortal Contributions*, p. 147)

And I think we must call attention to the fact that Stalin’s “top-down” tendency became very pronounced in the way he attempted to bring socialism to Eastern Europe after World War 2.

Through the course of summing up the triumph of revisionism and the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union after Stalin’s death, Mao made the pathbreaking analysis that in socialist society, even after ownership of the means of production is in the main socialized, there are still classes and class struggle and most centrally the antagonistic contradiction and struggle between the proletariat in power and the bourgeoisie which still exists and is constantly regenerated out of the contradictions of socialist society overall. This was in direct opposition to Stalin, who by the mid-1930s was declaring that antagonistic class contradictions had been eliminated in the Soviet Union, that all exploiting classes had been eliminated. (See, for example, Stalin’s report, “On the Draft Constitution of the USSR,” in 1936, and Stalin’s report to the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1939.) This was a most serious error on Stalin’s part and it was bound to do damage to the proletariat in carrying out the class struggle against the bourgeoisie in Soviet society—which objectively did exist.

This was connected to a tendency on Stalin’s part to mix up what Mao referred to as the two different types of contradictions in class society—those between the people and the enemy, and those among the people themselves. The first, said Mao, are antagonistic and must be dealt with by the methods of dictatorship. The second, contradictions among the people, are not antagonistic and must be dealt with by democratic means—through ideological struggle, criticism and self-criticism, and so on.

Stalin’s tendency to mix up these two fundamentally different types of contradictions meant that methods of repression and dictatorship were used against people who were not enemies but were merely making mistakes or simply expressing disagreement with the policy of the Soviet government. At the same time, relating back to the fact that Stalin failed to recognize the continuing existence (and constant regeneration) of the bourgeoisie within socialist society, Stalin tended too much toward seeing opposition as all externally based—as being a matter of imperialist agents at work within the Soviet Union. All this contributed to a situation where, on the one hand, the target of repression and dictatorship tended to be too broad—including not only actual enemies, who should

have been repressed, but also individuals and groups among the people whom it was wrong to repress—and on the other hand the decisive class struggle against the actual bourgeois forces existing and being constantly regenerated within socialist society itself was not carried out as correctly and powerfully as it should have been. Again there was a growing tendency not to rely fully on the masses—both to recognize and repress actual enemies and to carry out struggle to resolve contradictions within the ranks of the people themselves.

Linked to all these errors were certain tendencies toward woodenness and a mechanical approach to problems in Stalin's outlook and methodology. Mao put this rather strongly: "Stalin had a fair amount of metaphysics in him and he taught many people to follow metaphysics." (Mao, "Talks at a Conference of Secretaries of Provincial, Municipal and Autonomous Region Party Committees," *Selected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 367)

This connects up with Stalin's tendency toward one-sidedly insisting on "monolithic unity." Mao strenuously argued against this kind of outlook: "To talk all the time about monolithic unity [he said], and not to talk about struggle, is not Marxist-Leninist" (Schram, Mao's "Talks at Chengtu," p. 107). While Mao does not refer specifically to Stalin in this particular statement, it is clear that this criticism applies to Stalin's outlook and method—particularly in his later years when the Soviet Union had "realized some gains" and "they became less reliant on the masses," as Mao put it.

This is tied in with the fact that, during Stalin's later years especially, things became rather "cold" in the Soviet Union and initiative was seriously stifled. Contrast this with the whole spirit of Mao, who says, "Whenever the mind becomes rigid, it is very dangerous," and "Unless you have a conquering spirit it is very dangerous to study Marxism-Leninism. Stalin could be said to have had this spirit, though it became somewhat tarnished." Mao also said that "If you are too realistic you can't write poetry" (Schram, Mao's "Talks at Chengtu," pp. 110, 115, 123). And I would add, in keeping with the thrust of what Mao is saying here, that if you don't have a poetic spirit—or at least a poetic side—it is very dangerous for you to lead a Marxist movement or be the leader of a socialist state.

To these criticisms Mao made of Stalin, our Party has added a sharp criticism of the United Front Against Fascism (UFAF) line adopted by the Communist International (Comintern) in 1935 and the related lines and policies of Stalin in carrying out a united front with the "democratic" imperialists against the fascist imperialist bloc of Germany, Italy, and Japan in World War 2. Some of Stalin's errors of that time were really rather extreme

and even smacked of rank opportunism—including appeals to Great Russian chauvinism and to a patriotism that was tied in with a number of reactionary things, such as patriarchy and "traditional relations" between men and women (it was during the period leading up to World War 2 that Soviet law was reversed on abortion and it was made illegal, to cite one significant example). These serious deviations from Marxist-Leninist principle jump off the pages of Stalin's speeches *On the Great Patriotic War*, and I have made fairly extensive analysis, in *Conquer the World* and elsewhere, of serious errors of principle in the UFAF line, so it is not necessary to go into this at greater length here.

It is necessary, of course, when making such sharp criticisms, to keep in mind the objective situation and the very extreme and dire necessity faced by the Soviet Union—at that time the world's only socialist state surrounded on all sides by hostile imperialist states and their allies and forced to deal with a massive all-out invasion from what was, at the start of World War 2, the most powerful, and seemingly invincible, imperialist armed force—Nazi Germany. And here I can only add that in reading over histories of World War 2, particularly the battles on the Russian front with the Nazi armies, there are incredible stories of how soldiers on both sides died of such things as going out in the dead of the Russian winter to relieve themselves and literally having their bodies freeze to death. And you can also recall the stories and accounts, so vivid, of the masses of people who died of starvation by the thousands and hundreds of thousands in Soviet cities such as Leningrad—and they literally had almost no clothes and perhaps actually in fact no food—along with the thousands of people, the tens and hundreds of thousands of Soviet civilians, who died in the war directly from bombardments and so on. When you read these accounts you get a very vivid sense of the dire necessity that was involved here and that Stalin and the Soviet Union were up against, and you get extremely angry at those people who flippantly criticize Stalin without taking into account in any kind of serious way the tremendous difficulties that he had to deal with and that he could foresee on the horizon even before World War 2 broke out.

But even keeping all that in mind, and even allowing for the fact that Stalin and the Soviet Union had no other, previously existing socialist states whose experience they could learn from—even making the necessary allowance for that—it is still necessary to criticize Stalin for very serious errors along the lines I have indicated here.

Of course, it is even more necessary to maintain the fundamental distinction between our criticism of Stalin and the unprincipled and in many cases totally unfounded

slanders of the reactionaries against Stalin and "Stalinism." Our criticism is fundamentally different from theirs—ours is a *revolutionary* criticism, made from the standpoint of the proletariat, not from the standpoint of the bourgeoisie, the imperialists and reactionaries. We make unsparing criticism of Stalin's mistakes and shortcomings because this is in accord with reality and it is necessary to make this criticism in order to serve the proletarian world revolution; and we continue to uphold Stalin's historical role overall for exactly the same reason. It is something worth pondering seriously that those who treat Stalin as, on balance, a negative figure—or as someone who may have initially been more positive but then became essentially negative—themselves either from the start oppose the revolutionary interests of the international proletariat or degenerate into such a position. More specifically, those who attempt to approach things as Marxists but negate Stalin's role overall end up as social-democrats (socialists in name, bourgeois-democrats in fact) or plain and simple bourgeois-democrats or more openly reactionary defenders of the exploiting system. As Mao pointed out very insightfully in responding to Khrushchev's slanderous denunciations of Stalin as far back as 1956, when the sword of Stalin is dropped—as they were then openly doing in the Soviet Union—it will not be long before the sword of Lenin too is dropped (and, we can add, the sword of Mao as well).

As for "Stalinism," here too we must have a very critical approach to criticism. That is, we must distinguish between those aspects of Stalin's methods and policies that deviated from Marxist-Leninist principle and were harmful to the interests of the international proletariat, on the one hand, and those aspects of "Stalinism" that are in accord with and further the fundamental interests of the proletariat. In reality, there is no such thing as "Stalinism," scientifically speaking. Stalin advocated and in the main upheld Marxism-Leninism, not "Stalinism." I have used this term here—and have put it in quotation marks—to refer to how the bourgeoisie and reactionaries generally use this term, "Stalinism," to describe anyone and anything that is identified, rightly or wrongly, with the leadership and influence, with the historical legacy, of Stalin in building socialism, in building communist parties, and generally in the experience of the international communist movement. When the imperialists, the revisionists, and other reactionary fools attack "Stalinism," they include in this attack the exercise of state power by the proletariat and the central and decisive role of the proletarian state in building a socialist economic system, and they include the leading role of the communist party, the vanguard party of the proletariat. And when we see the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

in China and Mao's basic line and methodology attacked as "Stalinism" as well, we know there are definitely very important things about "Stalinism" that we must uphold!

In conclusion on this point, it is correct and necessary, from an historical standpoint, to uphold Stalin's role overall, to counter the slanderous attacks of the reactionaries against Stalin, and to vigorously respond to their attacks on communism in the form of attacks on "Stalinism." But, at the same time, it is also correct and necessary to learn from not only the achievements but also the very serious errors of Stalin—and more than that, to really strive to avoid repeating such errors.

A repeat of the "Stalin experience" is not what the international proletariat needs—that is not aiming high enough. Things advance in spirals. The historical experience of the Soviet Union and the international communist movement under Stalin's leadership, with its positive and negative aspects, is a part of the synthesis we have achieved, it is part of the concentrated summation of that experience that is integrated into our ideology, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.

As we have affirmed in formally adopting Marxism-Leninism-Maoism as our Party's ideology and in summarizing its essential features, this ideology is "not the quantitative addition of the ideas of Marx, Lenin and Mao (nor is it the case that every particular idea or policy or tactic adopted or advocated by them has been without error)." Rather, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism is a "synthesis of the development, and especially the qualitative breakthroughs, that communist theory has achieved since its founding by Marx up to the present time. It is for this reason and in this sense that, as Lenin said about Marxism, it is omnipotent because it is true." (Central Committee Report, 1988, document on Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, published in *RW* #470, August 29, 1988)

We must go forward on this basis and in this spirit, not aiming simply to repeat the past but building off it to reach still greater heights.

### ***More on unity and diversity in the new society***

As noted before, Mao said that "To talk all the time about monolithic unity, and not to talk about struggle, is not Marxist-Leninist" (Schram, Mao's "Talks at Chengtu," p. 107). Here he was talking specifically about socialist society and he was criticizing Khrushchev & Co., the revisionist leaders of the Soviet Union: "The Soviet Union does not talk about the contradictions between the leaders and the led. If there were no contradictions and no struggle, there would be no world, no progress, no life, there would be nothing at all." (Ibid., p. 108)

So in socialist society there cannot be all unity, there is bound to be diversity—there is bound to be contradiction and struggle. The question is, how to look on this and what to do with it. I believe that fundamentally and strategically it should be looked on as a very positive thing and the leaders of a socialist society should strive to give expression to this diversity and to make full use of it to serve the struggle to further revolutionize society.

Socialist society should be the farthest thing from a stagnant and dreary place. It should be a vigorous, vibrant society. But it will never be that if everything is “top down” and if people are told that the leadership always knows what’s right, that it will take care of everything, that everybody must march precisely in step, and so on. How can we, when we’re in power, despise and suppress the very kinds of things we welcome and promote now—non-conformity, critical thinking, the unwillingness to blindly follow authority, and so on?

Does this mean we don’t need unity and people pulling together for the common cause and to carry forward the continuing revolution under socialism? No, we need those things very much, but diversity and struggle need not undermine this unity—they can and should make it more real, more firmly grounded, more solid. And they will make things a hell of a lot more exciting!

If someone gives the same speech over and over, and in a lifeless way besides, people may listen the first time if they like the content—they may even listen a few more times—but sooner or later they will turn their backs. If socialism is lifeless and boring, it will fail.

### ***The question of dissent***

Mao also pointed out that “In the beginning truth is not in the hands of the majority of people, but in the hands of a minority” (Schram, Mao, “On Democratic Centralism,” p. 183). We communists, of all people, should not be afraid of the truth—or of the possibility that others may discover the truth before we do, or discover that we are in error on something. Nor should we fear that others may show that Marxism itself is in error—it is not and they cannot. All this is especially important when we are in power.

Let people dissent. Let’s even “institutionalize” dissent to some degree—but not completely, or it will be suffocated, and that would be bad. Let’s allocate some funds for “independent” and even opposition publications and cultural works, and so on. This will be good, it will enable other points of view to get out there and will force us to reflect more deeply on things and perhaps see ourselves in a truer light.

Even some open reactionaries should be allowed to

publish a few books and have some limited access to the media. If handled correctly, this will help strengthen the understanding of the masses of people about how much better the new system is than the old one and will strengthen their resolve to continue the revolution. And, again, it will force the leadership to take a hard look at things, including itself. Recently, for example, I read a book by Zbigniew Brzezinski. He puts forward all kinds of ridiculous ideas, including his theories on Marxism and so on. And on the one hand this is very maddening, but on the other hand it is a good thing to read things like this. It makes one a better Marxist, and I came out of it feeling much more strengthened in my own understanding of how correct Marxism is, especially in opposition to these ridiculous theories that people like that put forward.

Does this mean that I am calling for liberalism and bourgeois-democracy after all—that I am opposing the dictatorship of the proletariat? No. I am not talking about *whether* the proletariat should exercise dictatorship but *how* it should exercise it. Everything I’m talking about must be carried out in the context that the proletariat has seized power and has consolidated its rule, that the proletariat, with the leadership of its vanguard party, is running society and is in overall control of not only the economy but politics, the media, culture, and so on. But dictatorship and control by the proletariat need not mean, and should not mean, that no opposition is allowed.

At the same time, we should not let the reactionaries get out of hand. And people who do challenge us better expect that we will answer back in kind. Mao made a point of saying that Marxism is a wrangling *ism*, and we should be a bunch of wrangling motherfuckers, no less when we’re in power than when we’re not.

All this is related to the fact that, as Mao pointed out in “The Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People,” in socialist society there are still contradictions between the people and the government. When we say that in socialist society the masses are the masters of society, this is true in a dialectical sense—it is true relatively, not absolutely; it is something in motion, undergoing change, not something static and without contradiction. The masses increasingly strengthening their mastery over society and their ability to transform it in their interests has everything to do with the points I am stressing here about dissent, about unity and diversity, about contradiction and struggle.

### ***Further on the question of “totalitarianism”***

In *Democracy: Can’t We Do Better Than That* I debunked this so-called “theory” of “totalitarianism” and

showed that it is not so much a theory as an obsession—but a madness with a method and a purpose—to serve imperialism, particularly Western imperialism. But there is a point related to this that is important to speak to: Marxism is not a religion, and the proletarian state should not be run like a theocratic state with Marxism the official “state religion.”

In socialist society there needs to be struggle, and criticism/self-criticism, but there also needs to be “air” for people to breathe, room for them to disagree, allowance for them to come to the truths that Marxism reveals in their own way—and allowance for Marxism itself to breathe and grow, to discard outmoded concepts and analyses and to deepen its reflection of reality, as the liberating science it is, in opposition to suffocating religious dogma.

In socialist society we should not act as if the central authority is all-knowing and as if things will be fine if it relies on its authority to get the masses to go along with things, rather than relying on the masses to grasp their own interests and act accordingly, with leadership and through lively, vigorous debate and struggle. We cannot rely on such authority when we don't have it, in the old society, and we should not try to rely on it when we do have it in the new society—or it won't last long either.

### ***The problem with intellectuals***

Intellectuals do have certain strengths. They do have certain training in how to grapple with ideas and a basic appreciation of the importance of coming to some kind of rational understanding of things. And they tend to be flexible in their thinking and willing to consider different points of view. But, on the other hand, all this is marred by the fact that intellectuals, especially in bourgeois society, are trained in the erroneous and upside-down method and outlook of the bourgeoisie. The class bias of the bourgeoisie and the narrow self-interest of such intellectuals themselves tend to get in the way of their correctly approaching, let alone solving, problems. Further, intellectuals tend to be divorced from practice, alienated from the masses of people and far less capable than the basic masses of firmly grasping the essence of things and taking a decisive stand on matters of great social and political significance.

While a small minority of intellectuals in capitalist society become revolutionary intellectuals and take up the stand and viewpoint of the proletariat, in general intellectuals tend to gravitate to bourgeois-democratic ideas and to be seduced by bourgeois-democratic illusions. This is a problem not only under capitalism but in socialist society as well. Why is this?

Mao spoke to this problem: “Intellectuals usually express their general outlook through their way of looking at knowledge. Is it privately owned or publicly owned? Some regard it as their own property, for sale when the price is right and not otherwise” (*Critique*, p. 47).

Ideas and knowledge: those are the particular commodities of the intellectuals. And we can get a tip-off to this by the phrase that's bandied about so much in capitalist society—especially in defending the struggle over ideas—“the marketplace of ideas”: let's see how this idea does in “the marketplace of ideas,” let various ideas compete in “the marketplace of ideas.”

The very phrase—“the marketplace”—should tell us that this is not simply an abstract principle of upholding intellectual inquiry or dissent, or the struggle over different ideas and the confrontation of opposing views, but that it has everything to do with a society where everything is made into a commodity—including ideas, which must circulate and find their “true value” in “the marketplace of ideas.” And even though this is an illusion, because the bourgeoisie exercises dictatorship in the realm of ideas as well as elsewhere, it does express a general outlook—the bourgeois outlook—which does in fact generally seduce the intellectuals in capitalist society and exerts a very strong pull on them even in socialist society.

Intellectuals tend to share in the general misconceptions of the petty bourgeoisie. As Marx put it, they tend to confuse their own narrow interests with the general interests of society.

Let's take an important example from history to grapple with the fundamental problem involved here: The library in ancient Alexandria. Carl Sagan talks about this in *Cosmos*. This was a great center of knowledge and learning concentrating many volumes, thousands and millions of volumes, and it brought together scholars who came from many parts of the world to this library in Alexandria, an ancient city in Egypt. Sagan not only enthuses over this but then he tells the “down side” of how, as this ancient society disintegrated, eventually this library was sacked and burned and all this great learning was lost.

But Sagan goes further. He also talks about how this library and these intellectuals who were gathered there were a tiny sliver of society, a society that was in fact founded on the massive enslavement of the people who created the wealth which made possible such a library as this. And then Sagan goes on to speak directly to this dilemma:

“There is no record, in the entire history of the Library, that any of its illustrious scientists and scholars ever seriously challenged the political,

economic and religious assumptions of their society. The permanence of the stars was questioned; the justice of slavery was not. Science and learning in general were the preserve of a privileged few. The vast population of the city had not the vaguest notion of the great discoveries taking place within the Library. New findings were not explained or popularized. The research benefited them little. Discoveries in mechanics and steam technology were applied mainly to the perfection of weapons, the encouragement of superstition, the amusement of kings. The scientists never grasped the potential of machines to free people. The great intellectual achievements of antiquity had few immediate practical applications. Science never captured the imagination of the multitude. There was no counterbalance to stagnation, to pessimism, to the most abject surrenders to mysticism. When, at long last, the mob came to burn the Library down, there was nobody to stop them." (Carl Sagan, *Cosmos*, p. 335)

Taking this as emblematic of a major contradiction, we can say it is easy to have a society where a privileged intellectual elite has considerable freedom to grapple with ideas—as long as they stay within certain confines and don't fundamentally challenge the existing order. These intellectuals, however, rarely if ever look down. They don't look to really see the society that is the foundation for the elite position they are occupying. They don't concern themselves, or even are unaware in many cases, about the suffering of the masses and the fact that the masses are kept in ignorance.

The hard thing is turning all of this upside down without stifling the critical spirit, the wrangling over ideas and theories and so on. Because we have also seen from history that it might be quite easy to institute a kind of monolithic system where only a few ideas are allowed to be debated out and where there is not real critical thinking and dissent. And we have seen that, to the degree that this is a tendency in socialist society, it works against socialism, against the revolutionary transformation of society, against the advance to communism.

So the real hard problem is how to achieve a correct synthesis of all this on the basis of moving society forward towards communism. The real problem is overcoming the oppressive division of labor in society. The real problem is how the masses become masters in every sphere of society, including intellectual life, and how they remake them in the image of the proletariat.

This is both necessary and possible. It is necessary and possible to do it without constricting the critical spirit, without suppressing the conflict of views and the struggle

over ideas. In fact, doing this requires that there be the most vigorous and lively struggle in society, that there be critical thinking, that there be unconventional ideas, that people challenge authority, and so on, as I have been stressing. But again this is possible as well as necessary because the ideology of the proletariat is both partisan and true. It allows for and demands critical thinking and challenging convention, vigorous debate and struggling over ideas, raising the sights of all of society to cardinal questions and the linking of theory with practice in order to continually deepen our understanding of reality and to transform it—to know and change the world—in the interests of humanity.

The question, which is posed very acutely in socialist society, is how to unite with the intellectuals, how to utilize their strengths not only to serve socialist construction and scientific experiment but to serve the class struggle—by raising important and often pressing questions that would otherwise perhaps not be raised, by stimulating and stirring up debate and ideological struggle—how to unite with them in this way while at the same time getting them to put their training at the service of the proletariat and struggling to remold them in practice and in their thinking.

If the spontaneous tendencies of the intellectuals and their notions of "freedom" are given free rein, this will contribute to the masses being suppressed and enslaved. The interests of the masses and the outlook and method of the proletariat must be in command, but the historic goal of the proletariat cannot be achieved without learning how to correctly lead the intellectuals—how to unite and struggle with the intellectuals and remold them and their outlook—as part of moving society forward to the point where the contradictions between the intellectuals and the masses, and between mental and manual labor, have been overcome. To the point where everyone in society is productive and creative in dealing both with ideas and with material things and where neither material things nor ideas are any longer commodities.

#### ***The positive side of unresolved contradictions under socialism***

I am focusing attention sharply on these questions—of diversity, of dissent, of the role of intellectuals and the wrangling over ideas—not only from the point of view that these are significant problems that will have to be dealt with in socialist society and grappling with them now will help prepare us and the masses both to seize power and to exercise it in their interests. I am also raising these questions because I believe that there is a very positive side to all this—that handling these contradic-



tions in the way I have spoken to here will in fact greatly contribute to dealing with that monumental question that I posed in "Eye on the Prize": How to maintain socialist society as a revolutionary society, and a base area for the world revolution, without trying to constantly maintain society in a state of "war communism," which will not work.

I keep coming back to this problem because we must sum up historical experience around this very deeply and have the basis to make crucial breakthroughs on this as we, the international proletariat, seize power in the future, perhaps in the near future in some places. As we know, Mao grappled over and over with this problem. When we were up in the mountains waging guerrilla war, he said, everyone shared everything equally ("we ate out of the same bowl" is how he expressed it); but when we came down out of the mountains and seized power throughout the country, we encountered all kinds of new problems, he concluded.

In other words, there is the tendency for people whose lot has improved in the new socialist society to become conservative and selfish, and there is the tendency for leading people to follow the capitalist road. And it is not enough, as Mao knew well, to simply recall the hardships of the old society or to preach to the young people who have grown up in the new society about how "back in the old days, we had to make this and that sacrifice." Socialist society is marked by new and different contradictions than the old society, and carrying forward the revolution under socialism depends on correctly identifying and dealing with those contradictions and the forces and struggles they set in motion.

This brings up one very important factor in all this: the positive side of unresolved contradictions under socialism—the bringing to the fore of driving forces for revolutionary transformation in the socialist stage—forces on the cutting edge of contradictions that are coming to the fore as decisive questions in terms of whether society will be moved forward or dragged backward. A very important aspect of all this is the woman question, the struggle for the complete emancipation of women. This will be a decisive contradiction giving rise to crucial struggle throughout the socialist period.

Along with this are other divisions and inequalities left over from the old society—these can be generally characterized as bourgeois right—which give rise to conflicts and struggles. Related to this, there is the basic contradiction between leading people in socialist society who take the capitalist road and the broad masses of people who, as Mao put it, do not like big shots oppressing them. And there are the youth who are generally marked by their daring, their willingness to challenge

authority, and their impatience for change.

Unleashing all these forces to speak out, rally forces, raise criticism, and rise in rebellion can be risky and messy. But such mass upheaval is no less essential under socialism than it is under capitalism. And certainly this is not something communists should fear! Fundamentally, all these are forces that are favorable to the continuation of the revolution. By unleashing them and "jumping in" with them into the swirl of struggle, it will be possible to strengthen the influence and leadership of the proletariat within this mass upheaval and to direct the main thrust of the masses' resistance and defiance against those in authority who are acting like big shots and are seeking to restore a system based on the oppression and exploitation of the masses.

The alternative to this—to simply defend the *status quo* at any given time under socialism and to act like "the party of order"—is a recipe for defeat and for capitalist restoration. If it is true that without state power all is illusion, it is no less true that the whole purpose of proletarian state power is to continue the revolution and advance to communism—and without this, state power itself will become an illusion for the proletariat!

### *The international dimension of all this*

First it is important to recall the basic point on the advance/consolidation dialectic in terms of the world proletarian revolution. This refers to making the greatest possible gains for the revolution, in particular countries and worldwide, in periods of advance, or upsurge, and then consolidating the most that can be consolidated in preparation for a further leap in the future. (This is gone into more fully in *For a Harvest of Dragons*.)

But here I want to raise a provocative question: What answer should be given to Mao Tsetung's question (in "The Ten Major Relationships"): Do you genuinely want atomic bombs? Mao's answer was yes. He said China needed nuclear weapons in order to deal with the threat from the imperialists and not be bullied by them, though of course Mao did not fundamentally *rely* on such weapons to stand up to the imperialists.

Still we must ask: what has historical experience shown about this? Has the possession of these weapons made a qualitative difference in terms of being able to deal with these dangers and stand up to such bullying? And, on the other hand, what has been the effect on the socialist states resulting from their entering into the race to develop and build up a store of these weapons (although for defensive purposes only)?

Does this tie in with the line of having, as a fundamental objective and basic point of orientation, the goal of

fairly quickly “catching up to and overtaking” the imperialist countries in a contest of “material strength”—economically and militarily? We know that Mao had moved away from and criticized this line and orientation in general. As he put it in 1962, “It took from three to four hundred years to build a great and mighty capitalist economy; what would be wrong with building a great and mighty socialist economy in about fifty or a hundred years?” (Schram, Mao’s “On Democratic Centralism,” p. 175)

The question I’m raising here is what are the implications of this in relation to the question of nuclear arms and the overall question of the military strategy and doctrine of a socialist state in dealing with the danger posed by imperialism.

I think the answer to this provocative question would suggest a different position than is put forward in our *Programme*, where it says that while the new socialist state will wage a determined struggle to abolish all nuclear arms, in the meantime it must develop its own nuclear weapons. *Why* am I suggesting a different position here—what does this have to do with the question of continuing the revolution in a socialist country while maintaining and strengthening it as a base area for the world revolution?

What is fundamentally involved here is the question of not simply “standing up to” the imperialists but of doing so in a way that is part of hewing out a radically different kind of society and world—a radically different path for humanity—toward the communist future. It is the question of carrying forward the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat and strengthening the socialist country as a base area for the world revolution, as opposed to “settling into” the network of world relations and simply seeking to “survive” as a state—a state that is, for the moment, socialist.

This is linked to the question of the state—in particular the proletarian state and how it is and must be radically different from all previous forms of the state. Here it is worth recalling again Lenin’s formulation (in *The State and Revolution*) on how the proletarian state is not really a state in the proper sense of the word, and my comments in *Some Thoughts/Some Further Thoughts* on how this means that the more the proletarian state is strengthened the more it should embody something radically different from bourgeois dictatorship and all other forms of the state.

Of course, as we have seen, this doesn’t mean that you can do away with such things as a standing (professional) army—at least not for a fairly long historical period. But it does mean that it is crucial to build up the role—the political as well as the military role—of such things as

mass popular militias, and that the “regular” (i.e., the professional) army must be radically different from the army of any other kind of state in its doctrine and methods of fighting and most fundamentally in its relation to the masses of people and to the question of the masses really exercising state power, revolutionizing society and developing the socialist state as a base area for the world revolution.

Drawing lessons for the future from the whole historical experience of the past stage—and what could be called the “first wave” of socialist revolutions and socialist states, beginning with the Soviet Union and reaching its highest crest in China with the Cultural Revolution—it would seem that entering into the kind of effort that would be required to develop the kind of nuclear arsenal that would put a socialist state in the position to “counterbalance” the nuclear threat from the imperialists would skew and distort this socialist state—economically but also politically and ideologically—and would be very likely to fail anyway in the attempt to reach such a position of “nuclear parity”—as a socialist state.

Then what about other war technology? Should socialist states do without any advanced war technology and simply, literally base their military on the lowest level of technology? Of course not. They should have certain advanced technology, but they should not *rely* on this and certainly they should not rely on others to provide this technology. They should rely on themselves and fundamentally on the masses—just as they were relied on to win state power in the first place. But nuclear weapons are a different question than simply advanced war technology of other kinds. And this has become all the more so with the development of very “high-yield” strategic nuclear weapons (and their “delivery systems”) that are even very different from the kind of “atom bombs” that Mao was talking about in “The Ten Major Relationships” (in the latter half of the 1950s).

As noted before, to attempt to acquire the ability to come close to “counterbalancing” the nuclear arsenals of the imperialists—and to attempt to maintain such “parity,” which means constantly producing new, more “sophisticated” versions of these weapons—would put tremendous strains on a socialist state and would distort it economically, politically and ideologically, and it would almost certainly be an unsuccessful attempt anyway. Further, the actual use of nuclear weapons would dictate a certain kind of warfare that I believe is not in keeping with the principles of people’s war. Certainly this applies to “high-yield” strategic nuclear weapons.

Let’s look again at the statement attributed to Chang Chun-chiao concerning the historical experience of the Soviet Union: “The satellites went up to the sky, and the

red flag came down to the ground." Is there, in fact, a profound truth concentrated in this statement? To be provocative, even as the meaning of this statement was characterized by Chang's revisionist accusers (Deng, et al.), is there something fundamentally correct being said here? In other words, is it perhaps true that there is at least a very strong connection between the attempt to build up things like "nuclear arsenals" (and related things like having satellites in space) and the tendency to become revisionist: to try to "be the equal" of the international bourgeoisie by becoming bourgeois yourself? Very definitely we know that Mao did *not* try to match the imperialists (including the Soviet social-imperialists) "nuke for nuke"; nor did he base his military strategic thinking on matching the imperialists in any war technology. As opposed to this, he continued to insist and rely on the principles of people's war, including the most important principle that, while weapons are of course an important factor, people, not weapons, are decisive in warfare.

All this relates to the basic principle that ideological and political line is decisive and that the question of what line is being carried out in practice will determine the actual class nature of a party and a state. How do you know *who really* has state power? This cannot be answered in a formal way, as we have learned from bitter historical experience, with the rise to power of revisionist bourgeoisies in former socialist countries who follow the capitalist road but continue to put up road signs saying "socialism" and "communism."

Whether the proletariat has power is not so simple as whether the army is called the "people's army" or whether the masses are organized into militias—this should be clear from the recent experience in China or a place like Ethiopia (where the reactionary dictatorship calls itself "Marxist-Leninist" and has organized "popular militias" to oppose revolutionary wars against the regime). Once again, the question of what line is in command and being put into practice makes all the difference.

Again I am not trying to give complete answers here but to further pose crucial—and provocative—questions which I believe we, all of us in the international communist movement, must ponder and struggle over very deeply and unflinchingly.

These questions are not just abstract philosophical questions but will have increasing practical importance for the international communist movement, because we can see great battles ahead and the question of actually seizing power in a number of countries is coming more and more sharply into focus.

***Some observations on the particular problems of not only winning but keeping the dictatorship of the proletariat in a place like the U.S.***

This problem was brought more sharply in focus in my own thinking by hearing a report about how a basic person raised this question when talking with one of our people about our whole revolutionary outlook and objectives. He said this, which I thought was very insightful and provocative—he posed it as a question which I thought was very insightful and provocative—"Okay, I can agree revolution is definitely needed and I'm down for it, but I see one problem: in this country there is such a broad range of people who are middle class and kind of well off, and maybe we can get them over to our side in a real revolutionary situation and get them to go along with a revolution for awhile, but sooner or later they'd get unhappy, they'd want things the way they were before and then we'd have to start exercising dictatorship over them and the whole thing would come apart and wouldn't work." Again, I thought this was a very insightful and provocative question that can't be shined on or brushed aside but has to be really dug into very deeply. So let's dig into this problem.

Carrying out the seizure of state power and the socialist transformation of society and advancing to communism must be done and can only be done by relying on the masses of people. This fundamental principle remains strategically valid and very important.

Here again is the importance, and perhaps a new dimension, of the fundamental truth—without state power all is illusion—and the related point that I have made previously (in *Reflections, Sketches, and Provocations*) about what state power and socialist states are good for after all. With state power in the hands of the proletariat guided by a party armed with the liberating ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism there are all kinds of seeming "miracles" that can in reality be achieved—all kinds of changes in the basic relations in society, in how people relate and in how they see the world and what they are motivated by. And conversely, the big thing about the enemy—the thing that gives them such influence and ability to corrupt and pervert things—is after all that they hold state power!

Of course, this has its material foundation. These imperialists do have the material strength—which translates very importantly into military strength—that they have built up over a couple of hundred years of rule. They do have their position as big-time international exploiters. And they have the "force of habit" and "the weight of tradition's chains" going for them. But with all that, their hold on people, politically and ideologically, can still

come unraveled.

Here again we should recall the point that in the '60s in the U.S., while of course state power never changed hands—while there was never a fundamental change in the social system—there was a situation where the political and the ideological initiative was lost by the ruling class and was in fact gained by the forces rising in opposition, including a significant revolutionary current within them. I think if we look at this we can see that, for example, to pose it somewhat metaphysically, if there hadn't been the armed forces and the whole state apparatus in the hands of the bourgeoisie we would have come out of the '60s with a very different society than the one we did come out of it with.

That's not to say that it would have been a revolutionary society in the full sense, that it would have been socialism moving on to communism. Again, this is somewhat metaphysical, yet it does make a point: if you remove the question of state power society would have changed very radically. There were all kinds of people who were trying to make radical changes, and without the state power of the ruling bourgeoisie in their way they would have made them, although it would have required things going far beyond where they were to make a real socialist transformation of society. This is somewhat metaphysical, but it does bring out a very real and important material point—the question of state power.

As for the imperialists' military might—which is the “bottom line” of their political power and the “ultimate answer” they have to any criticism of them—well, as Marx said, the weapon of criticism can never equal the criticism of weapons; material force must be met with material force. But this does not mean that we will try to match them, literally, force for force.

Just because in an imperialist country like the U.S. it is necessary to follow the strategic road of political work and struggle leading to insurrection in key urban areas, followed by civil war throughout the whole territory to fully and finally defeat the other side's armed forces—and just because the other side thinks more “conventional” fighting in more defined battle areas is “the kind of war they like”—this doesn't mean that we will give them the kind of war they like anyway. As we have repeatedly stressed, once we are into warfare with them, we will fight *our way*—and we will fight to deprive them of the ability to fight “their way.” This is what it means to wage *people's war*.

No one is saying this is easy—in fact, people's war is in one aspect the hardest kind of war to fight, because it means avoiding seductive “shortcuts” and “get-rich-quick” schemes for illusory “quick and easy victory”—but people's war has one fundamental bastion of strength

that only those fighting in accordance with the fundamental interests of the masses can rely on, and that is the conscious, voluntary, determined action and support of the masses, above all the masses of poor and exploited people. Relying on this and combining this with operational principles, doctrines and methods of fighting concretely bringing into play the strategic strengths of our side—developing and deepening these in the course of carrying out the people's war (“learning warfare through warfare,” as Mao put it)—it is possible that our side could wage, and win, a people's war even in a country like the U.S.

Right now, as far as battles go, the immediate question for us is strengthening our ability to take the other side on in militant *political* battles and in so doing increasingly seize the political initiative from them. Learning to do this as we do it—learning this kind of political battle through waging it—we will heighten our ability to wage warfare for real and in the most all-out revolutionary way when the conditions for this do come into being—and that could in fact come soon.

Waging mass militant political battles in this way—going right up against the whole repressive offensive of the other side and developing and utilizing organizational methods that preserve our forces while strengthening our fight—will not only sharpen up the battle lines throughout society but will influence the political terrain in a way that is favorable for our side—for our people, our class. Carrying out this political battling in the overall context of exposing the enemy and arousing the people, and building the conscious organized fighting strength of the oppressed masses—above all building the Party as the vanguard force—with our Party's newspaper as the heart and hub of all this activity and struggle: this will give life and vitality to the task of preparation—getting ready for revolution.

One of the most important things it will do is to bring forward, steel and temper a revolutionary hard-core, with the Party as the most solid force at the very core of the whole revolutionary struggle. The importance of this must not be underestimated and cannot be stated too strongly—it will have a tremendous effect and will have a crucial bearing on whether or not we can get the military struggle off the ground when the time comes and whether we can carry it through all the way and win.

And in the framework of carrying out our overall political work and building this militant battling as a key part of that, we must wage some very bold and sharp ideological struggle, especially with the youth of today, most particularly the youth among our class. This goes back to the slogan: Fear nothing, be down for the whole thing.

I believe very strongly in the whole orientation of this slogan and in the need to boldly popularize this among basic people, particularly the youth. The fact that many of these youth grow up surrounded by violence is not all bad. Of course, much of the *kinds* of violence involved is bad—it is without dignity or lofty purpose, and this is not liberating but degrading. But there is also a positive side to this situation. We spoke to this in the May First Manifesto, including in the quote from my article, “The Myth of Non-Violence,” where it is said straight-out how uplifting it would be for these youth to break out of the vicious cycle of degrading violence they are subjected to by the police, and even by each other, and to rise up instead in revolutionary war with the leadership of the revolutionary proletariat.

It is true—and we should not hide the fact—that waging revolutionary war, especially to defeat such a powerful enemy as we are directly up against—U.S. imperialism—will involve great destruction and sacrifice. But this truth must not be allowed to blot out the even greater truth of the liberating nature of such a revolutionary war—especially one that wins! As Mao so powerfully put it:

“A great revolution must go through a civil war. This is a rule. And to see only the ills of war but not its benefits is a one-sided view. It is of no use to the people’s revolution to speak one-sidedly of the destructiveness of war.” (*Critique*, p. 50)

This is not just a question of tactics, but of principle. And in this basic point of orientation, too, we ourselves must set an example and lead the way.

If youth who are desperate and demoralized can be out there risking their lives for a gold chain, then certainly we can set an example and call forward youth—and others—to be willing to risk whatever it takes to break all chains of oppression!

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Returning to the question of the particular difficulties that will be faced by the dictatorship of the proletariat in a country like the U.S., somewhere I read or have heard it said that if there were a revolution in the U.S., people would have to change their whole way of life and their whole way of looking at things. In a basic sense, this is true of revolution in any country—revolution does involve a complete change in society and in people—and revolution does change everything. But this is especially true when applied to revolution in a country like the U.S.

What must be remembered is that in fundamental terms this “change in the whole way of life” would be a great change for the better—a change to a *much better way*

of life—not just for the most exploited and oppressed people but for the majority of people overall. And the whole struggle, and all the turmoil and upheaval—political, ideological, and eventually militarily—to build up to and then carry out the seizure of power and bring into being a new, revolutionary system will itself bring about great changes in people as well as in social conditions and relations.

Yet it is still true—the observation of that basic person remains very insightful and provocative—that in a country like the U.S. it will be very difficult, even with state power, for the proletariat to keep the allegiance of, or maintain an alliance with, more middle class people, because fairly extensive sections of the “middle classes” (broadly defined) enjoyed a relatively well-off condition in the old capitalist society, certainly as compared with the basic masses in the U.S. and even more so as compared with the vast masses of people in the Third World. This will be a great challenge that can only be met by really wielding our ideology, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, in a concrete and living way, and at the same time a sweeping way.

The proletariat in power can to a certain degree make tactical use of the respect, even awe, that especially intermediate and backward sections of the people feel spontaneously for whoever is in power. But the proletariat can *never rely* on this. In the final analysis, spontaneity will go against the revolutionary proletariat. Fundamentally it must rely on the initiative, the conscious struggle and self-sacrifice of its most advanced forces and on the fact that it does represent the interests of the masses of people and a much brighter future for humanity—and that this will have real meaning, will make a tangible as well as an intangible difference in people’s lives.

What will be decisive for the proletariat in power is the orientation of not fearing or trying to suppress or rigidly control but instead giving full expression to the contradictions and struggles that socialist society will be full of, that will characterize that society and be the driving force in its development—one way or the other. And, as spoken to before, it will be decisive for the proletariat in power to fully unleash forces that can be powerful driving forces in carrying forward the revolutionary transformation of society—such as women (and men) fighting for the complete emancipation of women as part of the fight to abolish all forms of exploitation and oppression—forces on the cutting edge of key contradictions that will be coming powerfully to the fore in socialist society.

As I pointed out in *Some Thoughts/Some Further Thoughts*, this whole problem must be analyzed in terms of class forces and alignments within what is now the U.S. itself, but more fundamentally it must be taken up in terms of how it will take shape and be battled out on a

larger scale, in a larger context, ultimately a global context. And here I'm referring not only to the general question of how the revolution in a particular country must be subordinate to the overall world revolution, and how a socialist state once it's achieved in a particular country must be above all a base area for the world revolution. I'm also referring specifically to the question of what the yankee imperialists in their arrogance refer to as their "backyard," in particular to Mexico and Central America.

And, again as I said in *Some Thoughts/Some Further Thoughts*, despite their imperial arrogance this is strategically very favorable for us—this unique situation where Central America, or in particular Mexico, joins the United States, where a country under imperialist domination joins and has a long border with, is literally connected to, an imperialist power of the magnitude of the United States. This will pose special challenges but also will provide special opportunities and strategic advantages for not only achieving the revolution but also for carrying it forward—not just maintaining the dictatorship of the proletariat, but continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat in what is now the United States and in these other countries.

Without obliterating the fact that different revolutions in different countries have their own discrete processes, that is, that revolutions have to be made generally country by country—and certainly being a party in the United States we have to avoid the orientation of even backing into some kind of chauvinism where we see our revolution as being the savior of the people oppressed by imperialism, in particular the people in Mexico and Central America—without falling into that wrong orientation we should, strategically speaking and in our fundamental orientation, view the revolution in the United States and in this nearby part of its so-called backyard as one strategic process. A process that is, in a fundamental sense, part of the overall world revolution but also has a particular, special place within that in terms of how revolution will go down in this area of the world.

And as they want to say, in their imperialist arrogance, that this is their backyard and they want to tightly control that backyard as well as access to the back of the house, as they see it; we, with just the opposite point of view, from our strategic interests and with our outlook, want to say: knock down the back fence, open up not only the back of the house but the whole house and let's from a strategic standpoint make revolution together, not only in overthrowing the old order, but let's have increasing unity in terms of building the new world after the old order is overthrown. Once again, in general terms—and not ignoring the contradictions involved with this and certainly not taking a chauvinist stance of obliterating the

need for revolutionary processes in these separate countries on their own initiative with their own dynamic—we can say that this is very favorable for us if we correctly view this question of the so-called backyard and turn it around against the imperialists, while at the same time viewing this in a larger context as part of the overall world revolution.

### **The Question of the "Cult of the Personality"**

Again, this was raised more sharply in my mind by a penetrating question that was raised by a basic person: what would the Party do if the Chairman is killed? On hearing this question a recently recruited basic Party member commented that we would get this question a lot from oppressed people with experience in losing leaders—Black people in particular.

Taking off from this, I think it's important to summarize what we've said on this question of the role of individuals, individual leaders, the Chairman's role in particular, and how this relates to Party collectivity and the collective leadership of the Party. Now first of all, on the cult of the personality itself, in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*, I had this to say on this question:

"However much it may drive liberals, social democrats, and bourgeois democrats generally up a wall, there is also a dialectical relation—unity as well as opposition—between cult(s) of the individual around leading people and on the other hand ease of mind and liveliness, initiative, and creative, critical thinking among party members and the masses following the party. In the future communist society, this need for firmly established revolutionary authority as an 'anchor' will no longer exist and would run counter to developing the critical spirit and critical thinking; it too will have to be abolished as an important part of the advance to communism. But to demand its abolition now runs counter to that advance, and to unleashing and developing that critical spirit and critical thinking."  
(*End . . . Horror*, p. 212)

Over the past decade or so our Party has made a strong point of emphasizing the important role of the Chairman as leader of the Party—his role in terms of whether or not the revolution can advance and perhaps whether or not it can succeed in the U.S. This has been very correct and necessary to do, and we should continue to give emphasis to the crucial role of the Chairman. At the same time, however, it is important to have an overall and a dialectical view of this, and in particular to grasp what is fun-

damentally involved and what is the principal aspect here.

The principal aspect in the contradiction between any individual in the Party and the Party overall is the Party, not the individual. In other words, the collectivity of the Party and the collective leadership of the Party play a more important and decisive role than any particular individual within the Party, even those individuals who play a very important role. And those individuals who do play such an important role in the Party play it within the context of the Party and its collectivity, not outside of that. So while it is important and continues to be important to stress the role of certain individuals and in particular the Chairman's role, it is also very important to stress the question of the collectivity of the Party and collective leadership of the Party.

Lenin, in answering those people who made a lot of criticism and noise about how among the Bolsheviks there were always the same old leaders year after year after year, very strongly and sharply pointed out that it takes a long time to develop these "same old leaders"; that having a real core of people who develop the ability to lead and the collectivity of leading is a very precious thing for a Party and for the class that it leads. And I think that in fundamental terms this is our answer to this question of what we would do if the Chairman or other important leaders of the Party are killed. On the one hand, of course, seeing that this does not happen is an important part of the class struggle. We have to wage this fight very seriously and we have to win it. But we are going to suffer setbacks, and we have to be prepared for these. One of the ways to be prepared is to emphasize and to even further strengthen the collectivity and the collective leadership of the Party, and this we have to put forward very strongly as well and explain very deeply and thoroughly to the masses.

Furthermore, it's important to stress that while we are putting forward very strongly the role of certain leading people, and the Chairman in particular, and while we are putting forward the collectivity and the collective leadership of the Party, we must emphasize also that neither the Party nor the leader of the Party is in any way infallible or should be followed blindly. And here I'd like to recall the statement that I made during a speech at a rally for the Mao Tsetung Defendants about ten years ago. I emphasized the point that the bourgeoisie does not like people to ask "why" when they order people to do things and that on the contrary our outlook, the outlook of the proletariat, is to encourage people to ask why. Ask why, I said, whenever anybody tells you to do anything; and ask why whenever we call on you to do something. And this is very important. We do not—in stressing the importance of individual leaders and the leading role of the Party—

want people to follow the Party blindly, either those on the basic levels of the Party or masses who are working with the Party and coming in contact with the Party.

### **Reverence and irreverence**

This brings me to the question of *reverence and irreverence*. Concerning the question of the cult of the individual, Mao had this to say: "There are two kinds of cult of the individual. One is correct, such as that of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and the correct side of Stalin. These we ought to revere and continue to revere for ever. It would not do not to revere them. As they held truth in their hands, why should we not revere them?" (Schram, Mao's "Talks at Chengtu," p. 99)

We have great reverence for Mao, but we have also learned irreverence *from* Mao. Otherwise, if we did not have such irreverence, how could we have the courage to criticize and overthrow the ruling class! And how could we move on to make the two radical ruptures—with traditional property relations and traditional ideas?

### **More on the question of youth and age, and "youth and us"**

Here again I want to stress the point I made in talking about the relation between individuals and the collectivity and collective leadership of the Party: developing a core of leadership which is tested and experienced and which has been forged in the midst of upheavals and struggles is no easy task and is a very precious thing. On the other hand, we have to be aware of the great importance of new and fresh forces coming forward in society.

Here is something we can learn, something very important we can learn, from Mao. He said, "As soon as they have grasped the truth the young founders of new schools embarked on discoveries, scorning the old fogeys. Then those with learning oppressed them. Isn't that what history is like? When we started to make revolution, we were mere twenty-year-old boys, while the rulers of that time . . . were old and experienced, they had more learning, but we had more truth." (Mao on youth vs. the "old fogeys," in the Schram book, p. 20)

We must have *both* experience *and* truth, but we must learn from and be invigorated by the boldness of youth, we must be good at learning new things and learning from new forces emerging from among our class and other sections of the people. And we must be good at *combining* these newly emerging things with the experience and truth we have gained through years of struggle.

### **The Question of "Popularization vs. Raising Standards"**

This was raised by Mao in "Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art," but it has more general application.

The need to emphasize popularization first and foremost is especially important now, with increasing signs of the atmosphere becoming more politicized and a rebellious mood growing among key forces in society, as reflected in popular culture but also increasingly in popular revolts and political struggles.

In other words, there have been important positive changes with regard to the first of the "three needs" I referred to in *Some Thoughts/Some Further Thoughts*—positive changes even in the relatively short time since those talks were given. This first "need" refers to the need for a politicized atmosphere and the development of a revolutionary movement and a revolutionary mood among basic people as well as more generally in society. Largely because of changes in the objective situation and the actions of the ruling class there have been these important positive changes in the mood of the masses, including masses of women, as well as masses of proletarians, with much more of a fighting mood developing among Black people in particular. And increasingly we are immersed among and influencing these masses. In such a situation, overintellectualizing and an orientation toward "slow, patient education" in an aimless way stands out all the more sharply in opposition to what we must be engaged in—doing sharp exposure to hound the enemy and mobilizing masses to wage militant political battles against that enemy.

Theory is important—very important—but, without degrading theory and reducing its role, it is crucial to always remember that the fundamental role of theory is as a guide to action—above all a guide to change the world in radical ways. And here we can again learn something from Mao, who talked about how such people as Bernstein, Kautsky, and Plekhanov of the Second International had read more Marxism than Mao and his comrades, but, said Mao, although they had read more Marxism than us, perhaps we are a little bit better than they were(!): "They transformed the Second International into the servant of the bourgeoisie" (Schram, Mao's "Talks at Chengtu," p. 117). And about such people, Mao said very aptly, the more they read the more ignorant they get.

The point, after all, is to make revolution.

### **Returning to and concluding on the point of why this is the beginning of a new stage**

Again, it is very important to emphasize that while we are temporarily back to a situation where there are no socialist states in the world, *we are not back to where we started*. In terms of both the subjective factor—that is, the genuine communist forces—and the objective situation, there are a number of important positive elements.

The subjective factor. We have a great storehouse of accumulated experience, and we are armed with the ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, which is the product of the whole previous stage. But more, in countries all over the world we are engaging the other side in revolutionary struggle in various forms and on various levels but all aiming toward the same goal: the seizure of power as the immediate goal as well as the long-term goal of continuing the revolution to achieve communism worldwide.

The objective situation. Here I'm not just speaking in general terms—nor focusing only on the changes referred to at the beginning of this talk (in terms of "the end of the '80s," the ways in which contradictions have shifted rather than coming to a head through the '80s as we had foreseen). More specifically, I am pointing to the more immediate situation—and opportunities—the strategically favorable elements in the international situation but also in terms of the polarization and faultlines within the U.S. itself, as I spoke to earlier.

Again, the essential problem is that the other side has state power, and the essential question is seizing state power from them. This, of course, is not simply a military question but also a political question and a question of correctly handling the relation between the objective and subjective factors. It is a question of waging people's war with revolutionary politics in command when the conditions exist for this—a people's war guided by the ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and fought in order to carry out a political program based on concretely applying that ideology to the particular situation in a given country, in the context of the overall world situation. And where such conditions do not yet exist at this particular time—as in the U.S. right now—it is a question of carrying out the necessary political work and building the militant, politically conscious struggle of the masses to help bring into being conditions and accumulate forces that, together with changes in the objective situation, will make it possible to launch and carry out a people's war with a serious prospect of winning.

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So let me conclude on this question of winning.

We have said that one of the main things to learn from Lenin is his pit-bull grip on this question of winning. Learning from this, we can say that winning is the whole point—it is the prize we must never take our eye off.

But there is also the question of winning in the *fullest sense*. This means not just the seizure of state power, though that is the crucial first step without which all *is* illusion. Beyond that it means carrying forward the revolutionary struggle not just in particular countries but worldwide, doing everything we can for the world revolution and contributing everything we can to the world-historic goal of the international proletariat: winning a whole new world, a communist world.

The difficult thing, the greatest challenge and the most decisive thing, is to maintain the *unity* between these two aspects of winning—to fight now toward the goal of seizing state power, and upon seizing state power to continue to fight, in a way that is consistent with that world-historic goal and that lays the basis for great leaps forward and for summing up deeply and surging forward again in the face of setbacks and momentary defeats.

We do have the whole rich historical experience of the stage that has ended—concentrated in Marxism-Leninism-Maoism—and we have not only a political and ideological but also an organizational foundation, within particular countries and in a beginning way worldwide, from which we can and must rise to the challenges of the stage that is opening.

With this in mind, let me close with another statement from the conclusion of *For a Harvest of Dragons*—a statement that rings true today even more so than when it was written just a few years ago:

“the problem in this period is not that revolutionary possibilities may not arise but that they may not be seized—or may be thrown away. We must not be unprepared and must not leave the international proletariat unprepared for those great days in which decades are concentrated, and we must not repeat the historical error of sounding a retreat just when the opportunities no less than the difficulties are the greatest.” (*Harvest*, p. 153)