

Bob Avakian

The Vision, the Works, the Leadership for a New Stage of Communist Revolution

REVOLUTION newspaper

Bob Avakian

Revolutionary
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TIMELINE— Political Activism and Revolutionary Leadership of Bob Avakian (BA), During the 1960s-1970s, and Continuing to the Present Time

Editors' Note: In response to frequently asked questions about the history of Bob Avakian as a radical political activist and his development as a revolutionary and communist leader, the following Timeline has been assembled. This is drawn from BA's memoir *From Ike to Mao, and Beyond: My Journey from Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist* (Insight Press, 2005) and some additional information provided by BA. While this is not intended to include all the many different events and elements that have gone into BA's political involvement and his development as a revolutionary and communist leader, it does give a sense of the scope of this, and some of the key highlights, over the course of five decades.

1964

Was active, as a student at UC Berkeley, in the Free Speech Movement (FSM), from its beginning stages in September 1964. Was one of the 800 arrested in the mass sit-in, in the campus administration building, which was the decisive turning point for the FSM in winning its demands in December 1964.

1965

Was involved, from early on, in the Vietnam Day Committee (VDC), which organized some of the earliest teach-ins and demonstrations in the U.S. against the Vietnam war, beginning in 1965. Along with participating in rallies, demonstrations, teach-ins and other VDC activities, and being a constant presence at the VDC's literature table on the UC Berkeley campus, "taking on all comers" who wanted to discuss and debate the Vietnam war, BA was the most active member of the VDC's speakers bureau—speaking at rallies and demonstrations, as well as to many different campus, community, church, business and other groups in the Bay Area, and frequently debating defenders of the Vietnam war.

1966

Worked as a researcher and writer for *Ramparts* magazine, contributing to many articles opposing the Vietnam war and racism and in support of Black power. BA was instrumental in arranging for the article in *Ramparts* featuring Donald Duncan, a sergeant in the U.S. army who was one of the first U.S. soldiers to turn against and

publicly denounce the Vietnam war. BA continued, over the following years, to carry out discussion and struggle to convince soldiers and veterans of the U.S. military to come out in opposition to the Vietnam war and to build support for them in doing so.

1967

Began working closely with the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (which later became the Black Panther Party), from the time it consisted of Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver, Bobby Hutton and a small number of others.

BA was one of the originators of Stop the Draft Week, which aimed to raise the level of resistance to the Vietnam war by staging sit-ins to shut down the Army Induction Center in Oakland, California. This led to a massive and brutal police assault on the demonstrators, which gave rise to street fighting as the protesters defended themselves against repeated police attacks. Throughout the week, BA was very active organizing for the protests and taking part in them.

Beginning in the latter part of 1967, BA worked tirelessly to organize political defense and support for Huey Newton, who was arrested and charged with murder as a result of a shoot-out in Oakland, in which Newton was wounded and a policeman was killed.

By the end of 1967, BA had moved to Richmond, California, in order to take revolutionary politics—including, as a key part of that, the fight against racism and support for the Black Panther Party—to poor whites and other poor people in that city, while continuing to be active, working with the student movement and in the community, against the Vietnam war.

Toward the end of 1967, people in California—outraged over the Vietnam war and U.S. foreign policy overall, as well as the savage inequalities within U.S. society itself—launched a petition campaign to put the Peace and Freedom Party on the ballot for the 1968 elections, as a radical alternative to the Democratic as well as the Republican Party. At the urging of Eldridge Cleaver, BA joined with these efforts—going on a tour across California (together with members of the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the newly emerging band Santana) which played a significant part in rallying the necessary numbers of people to get the Peace and Freedom Party on the ballot. During the course of this tour, BA was arrested twice: once as a result of an impromptu protest against ROTC at a high school in Los Angeles; and another time while joining in an antiwar rally at San Jose State which was violently attacked by the police. BA was instrumental in convincing the Peace and Freedom Party to align itself with the Black Panther Party and to take up the defense of Huey Newton. By the summer of 1968, the Peace and Freedom Party had developed as a national party, and BA played a major role in the successful effort to have Eldridge Cleaver nominated as its presidential candidate.

1968

Represented the Peace and Freedom Party as its speaker at a major rally in Oakland in support of Huey Newton and featuring leaders of the Black Panther Party as well as Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, and others from SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee).

Later that year, BA was arrested and eventually served a 30-day jail sentence for desecrating the American flag at a Free Huey rally at the Alameda County Courthouse in Oakland.

BA was instrumental in the founding, at the end of 1968, of the Revolutionary Union (RU), forerunner of the Revolutionary Communist Party. During the period of 1968-1974, BA wrote much of the *Red Papers* (1-7), the journal of the RU, including major theoretical articles and polemics in *Red Papers* 4, 5, and 6.

1969

Was actively involved in support for striking oil workers in Richmond and in forging links between those striking workers and movements of students, including “Third World” student strikes on the campuses of San Francisco State and UC Berkeley. During this oil workers’ strike, BA was arrested as a result of a confrontation with company “goons” who attacked the workers’ picket lines and were attempting to break the strike.

BA led the RU in relating to the struggle in Berkeley around People’s Park and took part in a number of demonstrations relating to this, and in resisting the imposition of virtual martial law in the city of Berkeley in the context of this struggle.

BA continued to be involved in the movement against the Vietnam war and in support of the liberation of Black people, Chicanos and other oppressed nationalities. He spoke at a rally of thousands in San Francisco, sponsored by the Black Panther Party, on May Day 1969. Later that year—a year in which police murdered Fred Hampton, head of the Chicago Black Panther Party, and waged massive assaults on the Black Panther Party and its offices in a number of cities—BA was instrumental in organizing a squad of people to join with others to defend and help prevent an attack on the Panther national office.

BA played an active role in national conventions of SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) in the spring and summer of 1969, putting forward the position of the RU on revolution and the role of students and youth, and upholding the struggles of Black people, Chicanos, and other oppressed peoples within the U.S.—engaging in sharp struggle with representatives of opportunist trends, in particular the Progressive Labor Party (PL), which was opposing and denouncing these struggles as

bourgeois nationalist deviations from and obstacles to the movement of the working class, as this was conceived of by PL in narrow, economist and “workerist” terms.

1970

As one of the main leaders of the RU, BA played a key role in reviving the celebration of International Women’s Day as a revolutionary holiday in the U.S. During the course of the 1970s, BA was a featured speaker in IWD rallies and demonstrations in many different cities.

In the summer of 1970, BA was part of a group of leading members of the RU who travelled across the U.S. to spread the RU from its founding base in the Bay Area and develop it as a national organization. He was elected as a member of the Central Committee of the national RU and was increasingly recognized as its leading member.

1971

When a split occurred in the RU, as a result of some of its members in the Bay Area adopting a line of adventurist opportunism, which would have led to the destruction of the RU and a serious setback for the revolutionary movement, BA led the struggle against this opportunism and rallied the majority of the RU to the fundamentally correct line of approaching revolution in a serious and scientific way, with the orientation that the communist revolution that is needed to seize power and build a new society must not be the act of a small number of radicals divorced from the masses of people but must ultimately involve millions of people in order to have a possibility of defeating the repressive force of the existing system and its state power.

As a leader of the national RU, BA was instrumental in reviving May Day as a revolutionary holiday in the U.S., and he spoke at a number of May Day rallies, in various cities in the U.S., over the course of the 1970s.

In the fall of 1971, BA headed a delegation to China, gaining a deepened understanding of the achievements in building socialism there and what the character and goals were of the Cultural Revolution in China, and engaging in discussion about the communist movement historically and internationally.

1972

Spearheaded the organization of an anti-imperialist contingent of 5,000—which denounced U.S. imperialism and openly took the stance of calling for the victory of the Vietnamese people in their resistance to U.S. aggression—within the “Moratorium” demonstration against the Vietnam war in San Francisco.

Later in 1972, BA moved to the Chicago area as part of an effort to strengthen the RU as a national organization; he served as the leader of the national leadership core of the RU.

1973-74

Led a struggle within the RU—which also involved a split between the RU and the Black Workers Congress and the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization (formerly the Young Lords Party)—over the question of whether what amounted to nationalism and a suffocating dogmatism, or in fact internationalism, and an orientation and application of a living scientific communism, must be the theoretical and political basis of the new revolutionary party that needed to be formed. This struggle resulted in a deepening of the scientific foundation of the RU overall, but secondarily was also accompanied by developing tendencies within the RU toward economism—toward reducing the work of communists to merely being the best fighters for the day-to-day economic struggle of the workers, rather than representatives of the fundamental revolutionary interests of the proletariat, in striving for the end to all exploitation and oppression, throughout the world.

BA went on a national speaking tour in 1974 to help strengthen the basis for the formation of the new, revolutionary communist party that the RU was working to bring into being.

BA visited China again in the latter part of 1974, when the Cultural Revolution was intensifying, in what became the last great battle of Mao Tsetung and those who were fighting for the revolutionary line Mao represented, against the revisionists within the Chinese Communist Party—communists in name who were in fact seeking to restore capitalism in China and were gaining strength within the Party, and were finally able to seize power and brutally repress the revolutionary forces after Mao’s death in 1976. During this 1974 visit to China, BA engaged in lively discussion and struggle with various representatives of the Chinese Communist Party about the continuation of the revolution within socialist society and the relation between that and the international role and revolutionary responsibilities of a socialist state such as China.

1975

The founding congress of the Revolutionary Communist Party was held. BA was elected Chairman of the Central Committee of the Party, chosen by the Congress.

1976

After a coup was carried out by the revisionists in the Chinese Communist Party, following the death of Mao Tsetung, different lines developed within the leadership of the RCP with regard to this. As it became clear that the resistance to this coup in China had been forcibly suppressed, and that the revisionists were consolidating their power but for a time were continuing to pose as communists and upholders of the legacy of Mao Tsetung, some within the leadership of the RCP, who had for some time been pushing for an economist/revisionist approach to the RCP's work, took up the position of supporting those who had seized power in China, while BA and some other leaders of the RCP were strongly inclined to see this as a triumph of revisionism and to oppose it, while also recognizing the importance of making a thorough, systematic and comprehensive study and analysis of these critical events in China and their world-historic and worldwide impact and importance. BA led the RCP in undertaking a deep-going process of study and analysis of the critical events in China—a process which was carried out over the course of a year, both because of the need for a systematic scientific approach and because of the resistance and organizational sabotage of those within the RCP who were working to undermine this approach and to use factional means to gain support for their position of supporting the revisionist coup in China and fighting for an economist/revisionist line within the RCP itself.

1977

As the culmination of the process of study and analysis led by BA, and despite the attempts at sabotaging this by the revisionists within the RCP itself, a Central Committee meeting was convened to resolve the struggle within the RCP over what stand to take toward the events in China. At this meeting, the Central Committee adopted the line put forward in a position paper written by BA (“Revisionists Are Revisionists And Must Not Be Supported; Revolutionaries Are Revolutionaries And Must Be Supported”), which exposed and opposed the revisionist coup in China and supported the revolutionary forces in China, led by the so-called “Gang of Four,” who had been overthrown and suppressed by this coup.

1978

In the face of their defeat at the 1977 Central Committee meeting, the revisionists within the leadership of the RCP—who had supported the coup in China and had worked to have an economist/revisionist line take hold within the RCP itself—pretended for a very short time to go along with the decisions of the Central Committee. But before long, they revealed that they actually had no intention of doing so, and they launched an attack on the Party leadership, and on BA in particular, seeking to rally whomever they could within the RCP to their revisionist position. This led to a full-blown struggle and a split within the RCP, with about a third of its former members joining the revisionists in quitting the Party and launching attacks on it, once it became clear that they could not win the struggle within the Party. BA led the struggle to defeat the counter-revolutionary attacks of these revisionists, to expose the bankruptcy of their line, and to consolidate the political and ideological advances brought about through this struggle against revisionism. On the basis of the clarity that had been achieved, through this struggle within the RCP, about the monumental events in China, and the opposition between revolutionary communism and revisionism overall, the RCP organized the Mao Tsetung Memorials, on the East Coast and on the West Coast, to share these lessons with a broader public. At these Memorials, each of which were attended by more than a thousand people, BA gave the speech, “The Loss in China and the Revolutionary Legacy of Mao Tsetung,” which was then printed as a book.

1979

In January of that year, Deng Xiaoping—who was the leader of the process of overthrowing socialism and restoring capitalism in China—visited the U.S. and met with then U.S. President Jimmy Carter. The RCP organized a demonstration in Washington, D.C. in opposition to this, denouncing and exposing what was represented by Deng Xiaoping and his meeting with Carter. This demonstration was viciously attacked by the police, seriously injuring some of the 500 demonstrators and arresting dozens, including BA. The authorities in D.C. ended up charging BA and about a dozen others with multiple felonies, carrying a maximum sentence of 241 years. The RCP rallied hundreds of supporters to come to D.C. itself and organized political support around the country for what came to be known as the Mao Tsetung Defendants.

In connection with this, BA went on a speaking tour, reaching thousands—speaking to sizeable audiences in a number of major cities across the U.S.—bringing out the importance of beating back this attack on those who had braved massive police violence to denounce Deng Xiaoping and uphold the banner of Mao Tsetung and revolution, and boldly putting forward the revolutionary position and goals of the RCP.

Owing to the political support that was rallied, and to the work of the legal team representing the Mao Tsetung Defendants, the charges against BA and the other Mao Tsetung Defendants were temporarily dismissed, although it was clear that the government could, and very possibly would, work to reinstate these charges. At the same time, in connection with BA's appearance in Los Angeles, as part of his national speaking tour, an article appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* which distorted things to make it seem that BA had threatened the President of the United States. Even though the *LA Times* was then forced to print a partial retraction, agents of the Secret Service came to BA's residence, seeking to “question” him about this alleged threat to President Carter.

Noting the developing pattern of repression directed against BA, taking the overall picture into account—and looking at this in light of the historical experience of how the ruling class of the U.S. and its state have dealt with revolutionaries, and even dissidents who represent serious opposition—the decision was made that BA should leave the U.S. in order to disrupt what were clearly mounting attempts by the powers-that-be to move against him. In 1981, BA applied for political refugee status in France. During this period, the charges against the Mao Tsetung Defendants, including BA, were in fact reinstated. BA's application for political refugee status was denied—this application had been a definite embarrassment not only to the U.S. imperialists and their posture as the world's greatest democracy and "leader of the free world," but also to the French and UN authorities, who try to act as if there is not, and could not be, political repression in a country like the U.S. Only through a continuing campaign to rally political support, along with fighting this in the legal arena, was a successful resolution achieved in the case of the Mao Tsetung Defendants, with no defendants having to serve jail time and the charges against BA dropped.

Over the course of the several decades since then,

in spite of the difficulties of his situation, and whatever his particular circumstances have been, BA has continued to provide crucial leadership to the RCP, as its Chairman, and to wage continuing struggle for not only the RCP but the international communist movement as a whole to be firmly based in, and to carry out revolutionary work and struggle on the basis of, a systematic scientific method and approach, pointing the way to the emancipation of humanity through the achievement of communism on a world scale.

In 2003, faced with a powerful tendency toward revisionism which was gaining momentum within the RCP itself, in the context of a world situation marked by serious setbacks for the communist revolution and the remaining, and in some ways heightened, power of imperialism, and in particular the continuing effects of the reversal of the revolution and the restoration of capitalism in China (as well as the fact that what had been the revisionist Soviet Union, and states aligned with it, had broken down into a number of openly capitalist states); recognizing the very real danger that the RCP could be transformed from a revolutionary party into a revisionist shell, betraying the masses of people for whom communist revolution is the only way forward out of their desperate conditions of oppression and exploitation and the looming destruction of the environment—BA launched a Cultural Revolution within the RCP, with the aim of achieving a radical reconstitution and strengthening of the Party as a force worthy of the name of Revolutionary...Communist...Party, capable of acting as a vanguard force of the communist revolution that corresponds to the fundamental interests of the masses of oppressed people, and ultimately humanity as a whole. This Cultural Revolution has prevented the triumph of revisionism within the RCP, and it is continuing—to further uproot revisionist influences and strengthen the revolutionary communist character and vanguard role of the Party.

Through his continuing work and leadership, in the realm of theory and the application of theory to the practical revolutionary movement, BA has brought forward a further advance for the communist movement—a new synthesis of communism, grounding communism even more firmly and consistently on a scientific basis and providing the means for applying this scientific method and approach to the many crucial dimensions of the struggle to radically transform the world toward the goal of communism.

Bob Avakian's memoir, available
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