

*“A Fitting Welcome”  
for Deng Xiaoping*

The booklet from the Mao Memorial was barely published when we faced the question of defending Mao’s legacy in practice as well as theory. After the coup and then the consolidation of a new revisionist, capitalist regime in China headed by Deng Xiaoping, the U.S. imperialists saw a big opening to further develop their relations with China, to more firmly bring China into the U.S. camp and open China up more fully to imperialist domination and exploitation. So a visit was arranged where Deng Xiaoping would come and hold meetings with the U.S. president at the time, Jimmy Carter.

*Confronting Deng*

As Maoists, and in particular as Maoists within the U.S. itself, this was a political and ideological gauntlet that was being thrown down to us. We recognized that we had a responsibility to do something that would make a clear statement against this, and we decided to mobilize people from around the country to go to Washington, D.C. when Deng Xiaoping was there, to demonstrate and to create public opinion as much as we could, through the mainstream media but also through our own means—leaflets and publications of various kinds—to expose what had happened in China and what Deng Xiaoping represented, and to uphold the revolutionary banner of Mao.

So that’s what we did.

Deng Xiaoping came in January 1979, and he was staying in the Blair House, which is near Lafayette Park and the White House. We had a rally in a church and then we left to go on the march through the streets of D.C. to politically confront Deng Xiaoping, to make as powerful a statement as we could in opposition to what he represented and to raise the banner of Mao. We marched with Red Books and banners upholding Mao and opposing Deng Xiaoping and the revisionist coup, and our main slogan—which I still remember ringing through the streets of D.C. as we marched—was: “Mao Tsetung Did Not Fail, Revolution Will Prevail!”

I remember very vividly people in the largely Black neighborhoods of D.C. coming out of their houses as we marched through, at first to see what was happening; but then—as they would hear the slogans we were chanting, and as they would see some of the banners with pictures of Mao and people marching while waving Red Books—a number of them ran back into their houses and came out with their own Red Books. Some joined the march, while many others lined the route of the march—a number of them were waving Red Books and others were shouting encouragement and in other ways indicating support for what we were doing. This was very inspiring and strengthened our resolve to stand up in the face of the revisionist coup in China and the way the U.S. was moving to further its support for the direction in which Deng was taking China.

As we began the march, it was already very clear that the authorities really didn't like this demonstration. And as we got to the area of Lafayette Park, the police unleashed a violent attack, beating as many people as they could, and finally succeeded in breaking up the march. They especially went after the women, brutally beating them; some were so disfigured from being hit with billy clubs and pummeled in the face that you could hardly recognize them, in some cases even for weeks afterward. Some people came very close to being permanently disabled or even killed. The assault the police unleashed was *extremely* vicious, and over eighty people in that demonstration, including myself, were arrested. I know some people who even to this day have kept the Red Book that they carried in that demonstration—their own blood was shed onto the Red Book, and they have proudly kept that as a blood-stained memento of the revolutionary and internationalist act of holding this demonstration, and upholding the revolutionary banner of Mao, in

the face of these attacks.

While a number of us were arrested and taken to jail, some others who needed medical attention were driven around in paddy wagons for a long time before they were taken to the hospital. I and most of the people arrested with me spent the first night in jail handcuffed and chained outside our cells because we were continuing to chant revolutionary slogans and this pissed off the jailers. The men were held separately from the women but the lawyers who came forward to defend us told us inspiring stories about how the women continued to chant revolutionary slogans and shout from one cell to the other in Spanish, so the jailers couldn't understand exactly what they were saying, and how, in general, the women kept up their revolutionary spirit in the jail cells.

The Carter government, and the ruling class in general, was infuriated by this demonstration. Beyond the way the whole thing disrupted “business as usual” in the capital city, it *politically* disrupted what they were doing, it drew attention to the questions we were raising, and from a number of angles it politically embarrassed them. After all, here was this powerful demonstration against Deng Xiaoping—and other things happened around the same time, like two reporters from the *Revolutionary Worker* disrupting Deng's White House press conference by waving Red Books in his face and denouncing him as a revisionist—and this seized the spotlight, so to speak.

The demonstration, and the activities surrounding it, became an international incident. This was before the Internet and satellite news and all that kind of thing, but news of what we did went out over news services all over the world, and I later talked to people from many parts of the world for whom this demonstration was a very important and inspiring event. And that was part of what we were doing also—we were fulfilling our internationalist responsibility to let people know that, right in the U.S., there are people who uphold the banner of Mao and oppose what Deng Xiaoping represents and how he has taken China back to the hell of capitalism.

That's part of the reason why they unleashed this vicious police attack. Initially, they only charged us with misdemeanors; then they came back with heavier charges for a smaller number of us who were arrested—we were now charged with felonies, like assault on police officers. If we had been convicted and been given the maximum sentence for all of this, it would have amounted to over two hundred years

in jail. In other words, they decided that in response to what we'd done they needed to come down with even more heavy political repression. So then, facing these heavy legal charges, there was a need to mount both a legal defense—but more importantly a political defense.

### *Pranking the Parrots*

Before getting into the seriousness of that, I want to briefly touch on something a little bit lighter—though with its own sharp edge. There was another group, the October League, which then turned itself into a party and called itself the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), or CP(M-L). They had gone right along with the coup in China and in their newspaper, *The Call*, they had put out all this stuff just parroting whatever was said by the revisionist leadership in China. The CP(M-L) leader, Mike Klonsky, had run right over to China and met with Hua Guo-feng, who nominally was the head of the government and nominally led the coup—though it was really Deng Xiaoping behind it—and there was a picture of Klonsky in the *Peking Review*, all dressed up and shaking hands with Hua Guo-feng. Some people in the movement at that time, like the *Guardian* newspaper, tried to turn things inside out and upside down and say that the reason that we didn't support the coup in China was because Klonsky got there first and got the mantle, so to speak, from Hua Guo-feng, and we were supposedly pissed off about that; and so, according to this distorted version of things, it was our competitiveness with the CP(M-L) that led us to take a position against the coup.

I have outlined in some detail the position that I held, and that others in leadership of the Party who weren't part of this Menshevik faction held, from the time of the coup in China; and I have summarized the basis for our position as well as the whole way we unfolded the struggle within the Party around this and why, in large part because of this Menshevik faction, it took us quite a period of time to get to where we could arrive at a final determination on this issue through a Central Committee meeting and then unite the whole Party around it. Those of us who held this position felt that what Klonsky had done, in rushing to embrace the coup, was disgusting—we were strongly inclined to oppose what had happened in China, and we recognized that Klonsky had just acted uncritically and unthinkingly, since there hadn't been any time to study and analyze the momentous events in China before he showed up

in Peking and was shaking Hua Guo-feng’s hand. But his visit is obviously not what motivated us to take the opposite position.

Anyway, we thought it would be good—it would make an important point, and also involve some fun—to ridicule the position Klonsky and the CP(M-L) had taken, and their basic approach to things. So we put out a phony issue of *The Call* which parroted and slightly, but only slightly, exaggerated the ridiculous positions that they were taking on China. For example, at the time we put out this parody of *The Call*, the Chinese revisionists were beginning to attempt to improve their relations with the Dalai Lama. And so in this “*Call*” we put out, we had an article which talked about a meeting between the Chinese leadership and the Dalai Lama and how there was so much emotion generated over the wonderful things that had been done by the Dalai Lama. The article said that, for this ceremony, they brought drums that had been made with human skin in Tibet under the rule of the Dalai Lama to celebrate the occasion. And this was referring to a very real fact of history—things of this kind had been done under the rule of the supposedly “benevolent” Lamas, including this Dalai Lama, and in writing this parody we made a point of referring to this reality and to the torment and the horrendous oppression and literal torture the masses of Tibetan people suffered under the rule of the Lamas.

Despite widespread misconceptions about this—due in large part to the “repackaging” of the Dalai Lama to make him appear as a worldly (or “other-worldly”) wise man of peace and benevolence, and the promotion of this myth in the mainstream media—the truth is that, under the rule of these Lamas, the masses of people in Tibet were brutally exploited in conditions of feudal serfdom: they were denied health care and education and punished severely if they tried to get access to these things, with the flaying off of their skin a common punishment. And, of course, the oppression of women in that society was even more extreme. So, even as we were doing a parody of *The Call*, and inventing this scene involving the Chinese revisionists and the Dalai Lama, we pointed to the reality of what life had actually been like for the masses of Tibetan people under the rule of the Dalai Lama and his predecessors.

### *The Battle in the Legal Arena*

Returning to the heavy legal attacks that were coming down on us, I’ve said that political defense and political mobilization was the key

thing in terms of defeating them. But it was also necessary, of course, to battle in the legal arena. I did an interview, for example, with a reporter from the *Washington Post*—which the *Washington Post* never ran, but which we published as part of a pamphlet.<sup>33</sup> At one point, this reporter said: “I guess you see this as a ‘win-win’ situation for you—if you get convicted, that will prove that the system is repressive; and if you get off, then that will be a victory for you.”

I answered emphatically: “No, that is *not* the way we see it at all. This is an attack from the state, and we have to beat back and defeat this attack; in the course of that yes, of course, we will be exposing the system, and if we succeed in mobilizing masses of people and fighting in the legal arena and beating back this attack and defeating it, that doesn’t prove that ‘the system works,’ it proves that we were able to prevail in a very intense battle against the system.” So that’s what we set out to do, and it required a lot of attention to the legal arena as well as to the political battle on the part of the Party in general and on my part in particular.

When the government came after us, they apparently believed that we either would just capitulate or else would act like crazy maniacs and fanatics whom nobody could understand or in any way identify with. And we proved that was not the case. But I think that, at the start, this attitude existed to a certain degree even among the lawyers who came forward to take up our defense—or at least they were a bit concerned about whether we would just be sort of “lunatic revolutionaries” or whatever. We were able to dispel that and to make clear to them that we took this very seriously and recognized that there was a need to apply correct tactics and have good sense in battling in the legal arena, even while sticking to and being guided by our larger principles.

A lot of this came down to breaking-the-ice kinds of things, even on a personal level. For example, one time I was talking to one of the lawyers about maybe getting together to go over the legal case and he said he was busy and couldn’t do something that evening, and I asked, “Oh, where are you going?” He told me he was going to the Washington Bullets basketball game. And I said, “Great, I’m gonna be going to a few games myself while I’m here in D.C.” So we started talking about basketball, and then he saw that I was a “regular human being,” at the same

---

33. Bob Avakian *Speaks on the Mao Tsetung Defendants’ Railroad and the Historic Battles Ahead*, RCP Publications, 1981.

time as I was clearly a revolutionary and a communist, and that I didn't conform to some sort of weird notion he may have had about revolutionaries and communists.

These were good-hearted liberal and progressive lawyers, but they still had these misconceptions, and of course some differences developed between us over legal strategy and tactics, which we had to do our best to struggle out in a good way. For example, at one point they wrote up a brief to present to the court as part of this case, and I read it over and wrote a lengthy critique of it. But I didn't just slam it—I pointed out what I thought were the good points in it but also the weaknesses and things that should be done differently. And here, of course, the legal training I'd gotten ever since I was a little kid, at the dinner table and in other ways—such as sitting in the courtroom and watching my dad argue some of his cases, and the whole way in which, directly and indirectly, so to speak, he had schooled me in a lot of the legal arena—came in handy and I was able to contribute through this critique and in other ways to developing and sharpening the legal strategy, as well as the overall political strategy.

### *My Family Grows Closer*

By this time, my relations with my parents had become closer again, but on an even better basis than they'd been before. There had been a gap that had opened between us when I'd become a radical and then a revolutionary and a communist. My parents never came to fully share my political and ideological outlook. My mother in particular remained very religious, although to a significant degree that expressed itself in her being a compassionate, generous person; and my father was somewhat religious also. But by this time they had developed a growing understanding of and respect for what I was trying to do.

They saw me as a person of integrity, who stuck to my principles and who had high ideals, as they put it—someone who was trying to change the world for the benefit of humanity—and they respected the fact that I stood up for that in the face of repression and attack, and that I stuck to it and had not given up in the face of difficulty. Having gone through the whole period of the '60s, and as a result of some struggle between us, they had become much more aware of the larger injustices in American society and many of the injustices the U.S. perpetrated around the world. And they were very sickened by this as well. So we'd grown clos-

er again on this basis, through a process of development and some struggle, and even a period of a some estrangement between us. A little later, around 1980, I actually wrote a letter to my parents setting forth some important aspects of my principles as a communist and how I saw them applying to a number of different things, acknowledging that they didn't agree with all of this and that we had differences, but that I wanted to spell out for them how I viewed these things.<sup>34</sup>

Right after I was arrested in the demonstration against Deng Xiaoping, at the beginning of 1979, my father, who had been a judge for a number of years and was something of a public person, was contacted by the *Washington Post*, and asked for his comment on this. I think they expected they would be able to play on contradictions—believing that my father would distance himself, or even attack me. But, instead, he said that both he and my mother were proud of me. He didn't talk about the particular event—the demonstration that led to the arrest—but he spoke in a general way: “We're very proud of him for his principles and the way he's sticking to them.” This meant a great deal to me personally, and it was also an important statement in a broader sense.

My dad also gave me some general legal advice about this case. He was incensed at the whole indictment. He commented many, many times: “This is the most ridiculous and outrageous thing I've ever seen—look at all these charges where you and others are accused of ‘assault on an unidentified police officer.’ I've never heard of such a thing—how can you defend yourself against a charge of assaulting an unknown, unidentified person?!” To him it represented the whole outrageous character of the indictment to begin with, coming on top of this assault that the police had launched against the demonstration, and he frequently talked to his friends and legal associates about this as an example of political prosecution and persecution.

I remember thinking very soon after I got arrested that he might be contacted. And I didn't want my parents to be surprised and caught off guard if they were asked for a statement. So, as soon as I was able to do so after being arrested, I sent a message through a lawyer to someone I trusted, asking them to contact my parents and let them know what had happened. But sometimes people would make crank calls to my parents, and sometimes people who claimed to be speaking on my behalf, but

---

34. This letter was actually published as a pamphlet, *Communists Are Rebels*.

were probably actually working for the government, would ask my parents all kinds of questions about me. As a result, my parents were understandably wary about phone calls from people they didn't know, and I was aware of that. I tried to figure out a way that I could let them know that this person was really calling on my behalf. Then I remembered one of my father's favorite stories, about when he was in law school in the Bay Area and had gone with his uncle in San Francisco to an open-air farmer's market, and there was this guy hawking tomatoes at a fruit and vegetable stand. He was saying: "Step right up and get your ripe tomatoes, the most beautiful tomatoes—fresh from the farm, great juicy, plump tomatoes." This guy was going on and on like that, and then he saw my uncle and my father gravitating toward this fruit and vegetable stand where he was doing this hawking; he was a friend of my father's uncle, and he didn't want them to be taken in, so he changed his spiel, to work in a warning that only they would understand: "Step right up," he said this time, "get your tomatoes; absolutely the best tomatoes in the world, 'dardun tapeh' brand—great tomatoes."

Well, in Armenian, "dardun tapeh" means: "take 'em home and throw 'em in the garbage." So this was his way of letting my father's uncle and my father know, "Don't buy these tomatoes; I gotta sell these tomatoes as if they're really great, but in fact they're terrible." So I sent this message to the person who was contacting my parents on my behalf: "When you call my parents, ask to speak to my father, say that you're calling on my behalf, and that this is not a 'dardun tapeh' call, and then he'll know that you really have talked to me and are calling on my behalf." And this worked very well.

### *The Preliminary...Railroad*

Before the trial, we had a preliminary hearing, and that was also a real lesson and another thing that outraged my parents and in particular my father, given his legal training and background. The preliminary hearing is supposed to determine whether the prosecution can establish "probable cause" that the defendant was engaged in an unlawful act and therefore has to stand trial for that offense. But, being aware that this had been a political demonstration, at the start of the hearing the judge felt obliged to say that it wasn't sufficient to show that the defendants were present at the demonstration—that would not be evidence of a crime, because demonstrating itself is legal, Constitutionally-protected activity

—it was necessary to show, under these circumstances, that there was probable cause that the defendants had engaged in *specific* unlawful acts. Otherwise, he was indicating, he would dismiss the charges.

Then, we went through a couple of days of hearings and the prosecution didn't have any concrete evidence or testimony that pointed to any specific acts committed by anyone—they couldn't identify particular people with specific acts. This went along with the whole approach of charging us with "assault on an unidentified police officer"; the frame-up nature of the whole thing was very clearly on display. So what was the judge going to do? Well, at the end of the hearing, after listening to all this and hearing absolutely no concrete evidence pointing to any defendant committing any specific act, the judge solemnly said: I have listened to the testimony and evidence, and I am satisfied that it has been established that each and every one of the defendants was present when unlawful acts were committed, and therefore I find probable cause to continue with prosecution.

In other words, after it had been shown that the prosecution couldn't meet the standard of proof that the judge had established at the beginning of the hearing, he simply threw out that standard and ruled for the prosecution anyway. It was clearer than ever that, while we could lose this battle through legal mistakes, we could not *win* this merely by mounting the best possible legal defense.