

WHAT HUMANITY NEEDS

Revolution, and the New Synthesis of Communism

An Interview with Bob Avakian

At the beginning of 2012, an in-depth interview with Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, was conducted over a period of several days by A. Brooks, a younger-generation revolutionary who has been inspired by the leadership and body of work of Bob Avakian and the new synthesis of communism this has brought forward. Brooks is the author of "God The Original Fascist" (a series of articles which appeared in *Revolution* in 2005, and is available at revcom.us). From the outset and through the course of this interview, Brooks posed probing questions, dealing with a wide range of subjects, including: the challenges of building a movement for revolution in a powerful imperialist country like the U.S., and initiating a new stage of communist revolution in a world marked by profound inequalities and antagonisms, and repeated upheavals, but also the weakness of communist forces at this time; the content of the new synthesis of communism, its vision of a radically different and emancipating society and world, and how this applies to many different spheres of society and social life, such as art and culture and intellectual inquiry and ferment; previous historical experience of the revolutionary and communist movements; and the personal experience, as well as broader social experience, which led Avakian to become a communist and contributed to his development as a communist leader. The fact that Avakian did not know in advance what the questions would be, and that many of them came up through the course of the interview itself, adds to the liveliness of the interview and the living sense of the method with which Avakian digs into, examines from many angles, and "breaks down" the kinds of far-reaching and often complex questions which were posed in this interview and which have to be grappled with in confronting the challenges of radically transforming the world through communist revolution.

The following is the text of the interview. In preparing this for publication, while maintaining its integrity and character as an interview, some minor editing of the text was done by Bob Avakian for purposes of clarity, and subheads and endnotes were added.

For ease of reference, a listing of the subheads for this interview can be found following the endnotes.

A. Brooks: I actually wanted to start by referencing a Tupac lyric, because I think that this lyric, whatever Tupac's specific intent was, speaks to sentiments that weigh on a lot of people, including a lot of the oppressed masses. He has this lyric in one of his songs: "We gotta fight back, that's what Huey said—two shots in the dark, now Huey's dead." Obviously, as you have pointed out before, by the time Huey Newton was murdered he had not been a revolutionary for some time, and I don't know exactly what Tupac was trying to get at, but I do think there's something in there that speaks to a lot of things that weigh on people. Both the sense of: if we do try to fight back, much less make revolution, the

people who run this country are just too powerful; or, there was this whole upsurge of revolution in the 1960s and then it was just crushed; or, if leaders come forward, they'll just be taken from the people in one form or another—a lot of things that you've spoken to before. And I'm just wondering—obviously, you're somebody who came up through this revolutionary upsurge of the '60s, and not only did not give up but did the opposite and went deeper—so I'm wondering if you could speak to what's captured in that line from Tupac.

Bob Avakian: Well, that's obviously a big question with a lot of different parts to it. I'm not sure either what Tupac meant by that, but one implication of it is that in the end it doesn't do any good to fight back because you'll only be crushed and the leaders will be killed. And that, I think, is a sentiment that is pretty widespread among a lot of people, especially the most oppressed people. In some ways, they're even afraid to get their hopes up that things could be changed, because it's so devastating to have your hopes dashed over and over again. So sometimes people are even afraid to hope, or to believe in the possibility of some kind of radical change and the real lifting of oppression off their backs. But, as I said, there are a lot of different parts to that question.

Rising Up and Searching for a Solution... Fight the Power, and Transform the People, for Revolution

BA continues: First of all, it is essential that people do rise up and fight back. We have a slogan in the Revolutionary Communist Party: "Fight the Power, and Transform the People, for Revolution." And all three parts of that—"Fight the Power"; "Transform the People"; and "for Revolution"—are very important, and they're all interwoven together, it is all one whole. If people don't rise up to fight back against their own oppression, as well as other oppression and injustices in society, and outrages in the world as a whole, then there is no chance that they will ever get free, and that the oppression will ever be ended. Also, if they don't rise up to fight back, there's no way they're going to be able to raise their heads and begin to really think about and wrestle with the big questions: Why are things the way they are? What is the source of all this oppression and madness in the world? What is the solution to it? And if people don't raise their sights and raise their heads to think about, and to grapple with, those big questions, then they also will never get free.

Further, to go on with "Fight the Power, and Transform the People...": if people rise up—first of all let me step back a second; if they don't rise up, it is much more difficult for them to be transformed, to transform themselves, that is, to see and understand the world in a different way than they do because of the pressures of everyday life and because of the constant bombardment of people through the media and in a thousand other ways—bombardment with the ideas and the outlook of the ruling exploiting class, the capitalists, the imperialists, who rule this society and who control all the major media, as well as the educational system and everything else. Which is not to say there's nobody in the media, nobody in the arts, nobody in education who tries to bring some truth to people—but, let's face it, they're greatly outweighed by the massive weight of the propaganda and miseducation that constantly flows forth from the dominant institutions and the ruling class which controls those dominant institutions. So, if people don't rise up, if they don't fight back, they also are not gonna be able to transform themselves, as well as not being able to transform their conditions, their circumstances, the situation in which they find themselves.

And, on the positive side, by rising up and by raising their heads in the way I was just talking about, the conditions become much more favorable for them to begin to see the world in a different way—to transform themselves, in terms of their understanding, and in terms of their feelings—in terms of their

orientation toward society, toward the world, toward other people, and what kind of relations there should be among people.

We see this all the time, whenever there is some kind of massive uprising and upsurge—whether it's more recent things, like the "Occupy" movement, or going back to what you were referring to, the great radical movements of the 1960s and early 1970s, through which I, and many, many other people came forward—we see this happening over and over again. But then the key question is: for what? And that's why it's "Fight the Power, and Transform the People"—**for Revolution**. Because, if you don't really get to the root of the problem, which lies in the system, all these things that people rebel against, at first spontaneously, and just sort of as a direct response—either to something that's weighing on them and oppressing them, or brutalizing them, or to some injustice that they see that they find intolerable—when people first rise up, they don't see the source of all this, they don't see how it's all rooted in the same system. They don't see, therefore, what the solution could be—that you need to sweep away this system and bring into being a whole other system that can lead to the eradication, the elimination, of all these relations of exploitation and oppression and the way in which the environment is being despoiled to the point of real emergency for humanity, and indeed for life on the earth, for many other species and interconnected webs of species.

Getting to the Root of the Problem, and the Role of Leadership

BA continues: So that's where the role of leadership does come in. There can be—there has been, and there will be—lots of mass upheaval, lots of people resisting oppression, lots of people rising up spontaneously, and with varying kinds of ideas, to fight back, various ideas about what the problem is and therefore what the solution is. But to really get to the root of the problem, and be able to transform things in a fundamental way, requires a scientific understanding of what is, in reality, the problem, and what is, in fact, the solution. These things are not immediately apparent.

An analogy has been made many times—and perhaps it's been overused, but it's still, I think, a very relevant analogy—to a sickness. People who are sick know what at least many of their symptoms are. They know how they feel. They know that they don't feel well. And, if you wanna get rid of that sickness, understanding what the symptoms are is an important part of it. But that won't do it, in and of itself. You need to go to somebody who has the science of medicine, in that case—who can analyze deeply what the problem is and therefore what the solution is. And, of course, a person with that medical knowledge, that medical science, has to have a good method to learn from the patient. They have to ask the right questions and listen carefully, draw the patient out to really understand the symptoms, how the patient is feeling, how that's different than how they normally feel, when these symptoms appeared, what other things might have been going on that were related to the symptoms, and how do you sort out what might be related to the symptoms and what's coincidental. All that is part of being able to apply a scientific approach. But you need to then make another leap beyond just understanding what are the symptoms to get to the real cause.

And, again, that's where leadership comes in—with the question of transforming society, making revolution, uprooting oppression and exploitation, ridding human society of antagonistic conflicts, enabling human beings to have an entirely different relationship with the rest of nature, with the environment, to be fit caretakers of the earth. That requires the science of communism—as it's been developed from the time of Marx to now, and is continually being developed—in order to get a scientific understanding, to dig beneath the surface and get to the root of things, and come up with a real, a correct—or essentially correct—analysis of the problem and the solution: what's the cause and

what needs to be done to uproot the cause of all these different things, in the case of ridding society of exploitation and oppression, wars, devastation of the environment, and so on.

They Are Powerful, but Their System Is Riddled With Contradictions

BA continues: Now, here's where we get to the other part of the question, the other part of Tupac's statement that you started out with: "two shots and Huey's dead." Well, yes, it's true, as you pointed out, Huey was not a revolutionary by the time he was killed, but there have been plenty of revolutionaries who have been killed by the powers-that-be, including quite a few members of the Black Panther Party, Fred Hampton and others; and it is a fact that the powers-that-be, the ruling capitalist-imperialists, will use whatever means they think they need to use and can use to wipe out any serious opposition to them, and most especially any real scientifically grounded, serious revolutionary organization. They won't wait around, necessarily, until that leadership has a mass following. As soon as they recognize that it represents any kind of potential threat to them that could get a mass following, they will try to find the ways to move against it.

Now, they're just people too. They're not omnipotent and omniscient—they're not all-powerful, they're not all-knowing—they make mistakes, sometimes they don't recognize what's a threat to them coming up from among the masses, or in terms of conscious revolutionary leadership, scientific communist leadership. But, to the degree, and when, they do recognize it, they will go after it. And there are no guarantees in this. This is a struggle. It's a fight between contending forces—one of which, the ruling imperialists, the powers-that-be, is much more powerful right now. They do have massive means of repression and destruction at their disposal, and it is a real fight as to whether they can hold on to power, including by crushing opposition and revolutionary leadership that's rising and leading people to rise up against them, or whether their attempts to do that can be defeated—and whether in fact their attempts to do that can be turned into further advances for the revolutionary movement, because in the course of standing up and fighting against that repression, and shining a light on that repression, the system is further exposed for what it actually is and more people see the need and feel compelled to rise up against it and resist it, and even are won to the position of revolution through the all-around work of the revolutionary vanguard leadership.

And we have to keep in mind that not only are they not all-knowing, they're also not all-powerful. Just because they hold power, just because they exploit the masses of people in the world brutally, and accumulate massive wealth, and use that as a basis for developing all kinds of means of surveillance, repression, war, and destruction, doesn't mean that they don't have a lot of problems themselves. Their system is riddled with contradictions. We can see it right now in the profound economic crisis that's persisted over a number of years now, and it's hit even the most advanced economies in the world, let alone the economies that are under the domination of imperialism in the Third World. It's hit all these economies very hard, to varying degrees—especially hard in the Third World, but even very hard in a number of other countries, from Greece to Italy to Spain, and even the U.S. itself.

Also, they have serious political contradictions. For example, the rulers of the U.S. are forever talking about how they are a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people," that they are a democracy where the people's rights are respected and protected, and so on. That stands in contradiction to the fact that what they really have is a **dictatorship of the ruling capitalist class**, which controls all the repressive organs—like the army, the police, the courts, the prisons, the bureaucracy—and uses them to maintain and enforce its rule and its exploitation of masses of people, not only in one country like the U.S. but, in the case of U.S. imperialism, throughout the world. That's a

very sharp contradiction for them, and it affects how they can carry out repression. The contradiction is that they have a dictatorship, in fact, but they pretend that it's something other than a dictatorship and make a big noise about how it's a democracy in which the people's rights are respected. So that poses real problems for them. It doesn't keep them from exercising that dictatorship, it doesn't keep them from acting brutally in exercising it, and viciously repressing people, but it does mean that, as they do that, if there is a core of people who not only have, in a general sense, but actively apply, a scientific understanding of what's involved and bring that to greater and greater numbers of people, and mobilize them to understand this is what we're actually dealing with, a dictatorship, and this democracy of theirs is hypocrisy—then the system loses more and more legitimacy in the eyes of growing numbers of people. And when it gets to the point where, for millions and millions of people, it has no legitimacy, and especially if that's in the context of a many-sided crisis—economic, political, social, ideological—then there's much more of a chance to actually mobilize the masses to go for power, to actually defeat and dismantle the repressive and murderous organs of the state which enforce the rule of the capitalist-imperialists.

But, again, this is a struggle, it's a fight. There is absolutely no guarantee in any round of the struggle, or any particular period, that just because the revolutionaries and the masses of people have right on their side, they will win. But it is also the case that there are certain tendencies which are rooted within the various contradictions—and the basic contradiction, in fact, of the capitalist-imperialist system itself, between the socialized production and the private appropriation of wealth—which continually give rise to the basis to expose this system, and give rise to the kind of spontaneous uprisings that we're talking about, which can, if the communists actually consistently apply "Fight the Power, and Transform the People, for Revolution," be part of, and be an important element in, bringing forward the masses that need to be brought forward, so that when the system is in deep enough crisis, and there are millions and millions of people for whom the system has been shown to be totally bankrupt, and the rule of the capitalist-imperialist class has lost its legitimacy for those masses, then the possibility of revolution becomes real.

So it's a fight, in short. Including the protection of the leadership that does come forward—that is a fight. It has to be seen by the masses as part of, and a crucial part of, the fight to actually be able to rise up and rid themselves, but more than that, rid the world and rid humanity of this oppressive system and bring something much better into being. So that's kind of a long answer to your question, because it had many parts, and I wanted to try to speak to all the different parts.

The Limits of Spontaneity and a Scientific Approach to Revolution

Brooks: One aspect of what you said—and I want to come back to what you were saying about the decisiveness of leadership in a second—but one aspect of what you were saying that I thought was important was this point that, in order to transform themselves, the masses need to rise up, and the relationship between the masses rising up and transforming themselves. Like you were saying, there are three parts—fight the power... transform the people... for revolution—but what seems important is what you were saying in terms of the relationship between fighting the power and transforming the people.

And it seems to me that a couple of things that come into that is the question of legitimacy, which you were talking about, and the masses seeing the illegitimacy of the way things are, but then also something else that you've spoken to, which is a kind of deterioration, or a shattering, of the masses' belief in the permanent necessity of the way things are. And so I wondered if you wanted to speak a

little bit more to this point about the relationship between the masses rising up and the breakdown in the belief in the permanent necessity of the way things are?

BA: Yes, I would put it this way. The masses rising up to fight the power—resisting oppression, fighting against injustice—is an absolutely essential part (or ingredient, if you will) of any movement for revolution. Without that, if the masses are constantly beaten down, and they never rise up, then there is very little, if any, possibility of their ever being able to fight for anything bigger—namely, to sweep away the whole system and bring in a much better system. So, on the one hand, that's absolutely essential, an absolutely essential part, or ingredient, of building a movement for revolution. On the other hand—the other side of the picture, or contradiction—is that, in and of itself, just the masses rising up will not lead to the necessary revolutionary understanding and determination to fight all the way through to rid themselves of the source of this oppression, and to rid the world and humanity of the source of this oppression and suffering, the capitalist-imperialist system.

That has to come—that has to be brought to the masses of people—from outside the realm of their own spontaneous rising up against oppression. That requires, as I said earlier, a scientific understanding. In order for people to fully transform their understanding, and to transform themselves, to see the possibility as well as the need for them to relate differently to other people, for them to have different values and morals, in terms of what they think is important, and how they think they should, in fact, act in relation to various other people and groups in society: that has to be brought through a force—a vanguard, a leadership force—that has the scientific understanding that I was referring to earlier, and doesn't have it as a dogma or some kind of finished, once and for all, doctrine, but something which does have a basic scientific grounding and, as such, is constantly being developed, including by the people who have taken up this science constantly wrestling with it, to put it that way—interrogating it, raising questions about its applicability to new circumstances. Are there some aspects of that science which were believed to be true in the past but have been shown to be not true, or not true in part? Are there parts which are valid and true under one set of circumstances, but are no longer valid and true because the circumstances have changed in a major way? All that is part of the process, the scientific process, of grasping, grappling with, and applying this science of revolution, the science of communism.

And it is a process of theory to practice and back to theory, in a broad sense—learning not just from any particular experience, or the immediate work that the communists might be involved in, or any particular struggle, but the broad experience of humanity, not only at any given time and in any particular country, but historically and internationally.

So "transform the people"—the understanding that it is possible, right, and necessary for masses of people to change their outlook and change, yes, their values and morals, and change their way of relating to other people in order to actually transform all of society—that has to be brought "from without," from outside the realm of their own direct experience. And that requires, again, the application of science.

Here we get back again to the analogy made earlier about sickness and needing a doctor and medical science. Or we could think in terms of, say, things that you want to understand about the planets, or the solar system, or the galaxies—or, on the other hand, much smaller particles of reality: those things require the science of physics. And you're not gonna understand them just by observing a few things which are part of the picture, but only a part of the picture. The same applies to changing society. There's a science to this. It is a developing science, a living science, not a dogma or a dead doctrine, but it is a real science, and it has to be taken up, studied and wrangled with, and applied.

And more and more people have to do this. It's not that you want just a small group of people to take this up—you wanna win more and more people to see the importance of this, the need for this, and to be won to make the leap to really taking it up and applying it, and being part of a collective and disciplined group of people—an organized communist revolutionary vanguard—that is actually applying this in a systematic way to bring forward more people in waves, in order to actually get to the point where, together with a really deep crisis in society, and the loss of legitimacy of the ruling forces, there can actually be a real attempt at seizing power and then transforming society by defeating and dismantling the existing oppressive and repressive forces of the present ruling class and replacing them with revolutionary institutions that serve the radical transformation of society.

To preach at the masses of people all day long: you should act differently, you shouldn't be selfish, you shouldn't fight with each other, you shouldn't do all these other things that are, in fact, harmful to the masses—to just preach at them about that, in the absence of the masses rising up, but even more fundamentally, in the absence of building a movement for revolution, which is to a significant degree captured in the formulation, "Fight the Power, and Transform the People, for Revolution"—to just preach at them, in the absence of that, will never do any good, in fact, will only do harm, and just further demoralize the masses of people. It will lead different sections of the people to see others as enemies or as people who are unworthy, and even in some cases to see them as people who are less than human.

That will never lead to the changes that are required. What is needed is the combination—or, as we might say, the synthesis—of those three elements: the people rising up to fight the power; the people themselves raising their heads and beginning to think about big questions; but, also, the crucial element of a revolutionary vanguard bringing the science of the transformation of society, the science of revolution, the science of communism to this process, and enabling the masses to actually fight in a more determined way, with a deeper understanding of the problem and the solution, to put it simply, and to transform themselves and their world outlook and values and morals in the process of doing so—all in order to actually make revolution when the conditions become ripe.

Resistance... and Revolution

Brooks: I want to keep going on this point about the decisiveness of vanguard leadership and actually connect it back a little bit with my first question off of the Tupac lyrics, because part of what I thought that was, at least, calling to mind was again this point that all these people rose up in the 1960s and there was this huge revolutionary and radical upsurge involving millions of people, and then, I think, particularly maybe for younger generations who weren't around during that time, it kind of weighs on people who don't actually understand what happened. It's kind of like, what happened? All these people rose up, and then it was crushed, or it was rolled back, or people gave up, or sold out—these are a lot of the dominant verdicts that people have accepted.

And I guess as a way to get more into that, somebody was saying to me the other day—comparing the situation in the '60s to the situation now, they said: In the '60s there were actually millions of people who wanted revolution and a whole new world, but there wasn't yet fully the leadership to take things to the other side, to take things there. And now the situation is kind of the opposite—maybe I'm oversimplifying a little bit, but the situation is kind of the opposite: there is the vanguard leadership to actually make revolution and get to a whole new world, but there isn't yet a situation where millions of people want revolution. And so I was wondering if you could speak a little bit to that and some of the challenges that poses, or ways to transform that.

BA: Well, there are a lot of different ways to come at that. Right now, for example, there was the prisoners' hunger strike, which was focused in California particularly in these horrific prison units, where people are held in conditions of isolation, and what is in fact torture, for not only days, weeks and months, but for years and even decades. So there was a really heroic hunger strike of prisoners this past year, which reached out, in terms of support, into the broader society. Now, it didn't go as far as it needed to go, particularly in terms of broad support coming forward for that, and that's where people who do have an understanding of the importance of that particular strike, that struggle—but also people, and in particular the communists, who have an understanding of how this fits into the whole larger picture of the oppressive nature of this system, and the need and possibility of actually ridding humanity of this system—need to figure out how to spread things like that even more broadly and bring forward even more people in support. But that was a very significant act of resistance, a very heroic act of resistance—people under extremely difficult circumstances—and it did win significant, if still just beginning, and only partial, support from among broad sections of society. But, again, not nearly as much as it needs to be. Things like that need to be spread and developed. But that's just one example of resistance, the prisoners' hunger strike.

There was also mass outrage and outpourings around the execution of Troy Davis¹ recently—the way in which the authorities were determined to carry out that execution, in order to not only unjustly carry through with a railroad of that particular person, Troy Davis, but also with a conscious purpose to intimidate masses of people, especially in circumstances where the economy's in trouble, people are becoming disaffected, there is a kind of a feeling that's getting spread more and more broadly among people that the political system doesn't really work for the people. In these kinds of circumstances, they have both the carrot and the stick: They both try to make promises to people, and try to make people believe that "yes, we're aware, we feel your pain, we're aware of your suffering, we know that people are having a hard time, blah, blah, blah"; but they also come with the stick—in other words, "meanwhile, we're gonna execute somebody who it's very clear was wrongfully prosecuted, unjustly convicted, and has been unjustly denied his appeals over and over again—we're going to execute him anyway, just to make the point to you, that, yes, you can make a few noises, but if you actually get out of hand, we can execute you on a mass scale, one way or another we can repress you as viciously as we need to."

But that did call forth a lot of protests. And there have been beginning protests against the phenomenon of mass incarceration of people, particularly Black and Latino youth in the inner cities—with the massive numbers, very high percentages of Black and Latin young men, filling up the prisons, and a growing number of women. The U.S. has, I believe, the highest level of incarceration of women in the entire world, and that number is growing.

And there have been protests, like the ones in New York against the massive outrage of stop-and-frisk, where, especially concentrated in the inner city neighborhoods—again, directed mainly against Black and Latino youth—tens and hundreds of thousands of people are illegitimately, and in violation of what's supposed to be their rights through the Constitution, and so on, stopped, harassed, even often brutalized, thrown on the ground, humiliated, degraded, for absolutely no valid reason. Over 90% of them, even by the police's own admission, are shown to be doing absolutely nothing wrong. And then you have other forms of that in other cities: for example, anti-gang injunctions which prohibit youth of a certain type—let's face it, Black youth in particular, Latino youth, again inner city youth—things like preventing four or more of them from gathering on a street corner.

Now this is where, on the one hand, the real raw oppressive nature of this system stands out objectively—but work needs to be done to make people understand where this comes from. Even the people who

are the direct victims of this repression don't understand fully where it comes from and why it happens. They think it's just some bad cops, or some bad politicians, or just that the politicians are racist—which most of them are, but that's not the heart and the essence and the fundamental cause of why this happens. It's because this system has no future for—first of all, it has a whole history of oppression of Black people in particular, but also of immigrants and other people who are called "minorities," but it also has no future for the youth, particularly among these different oppressed nationalities, like Blacks and Latinos. The unemployment rate among many of these youth is as high as 50% in some neighborhoods, and it has no prospect—this system has no prospect of giving them meaningful work with a decent wage. So it has to find some way to deal with this contradiction, that it has all these youth but it has no future for them. This represents a very volatile and potentially, in terms of their system, a very dangerous phenomenon, of all these youth who are naturally outraged at the kinds of conditions they're in, and who become further outraged by the fact that in these conditions they're constantly repressed and humiliated by the forces of so-called "law and order"—the pigs who come in and constantly brutalize and even murder them in wanton ways. So, all these kinds of elements are going on.

And then there are broad political movements like the "Occupy" movement and other movements that are standing up against either particular outrages, or with more a general kind of feeling that the system is unfair, that there is inequality which shouldn't be there, which runs against how things are supposed to be, as people see it—and a general sense that things are not working in the people's interests. Some of this is quite broad at this time, and some of it is percolating and has the potential to become very broad as well as very deep, even if it's still just sort of in its beginning stages.

So there is resistance. There is more resistance than there was a couple of years ago, for example. Now, I have to admit that I sort of laugh when I see people repeat a lot of the things that I was part of, and that millions of people were part of, when we came forward in the 1960s—yet many of the people involved now seem to think this is completely new. There are many similarities, for example, that come immediately to mind between what goes on with the "Occupy" movement and its General Assemblies, and so on, and what went on in the Free Speech Movement [FSM] on the Berkeley campus in California back in 1964, which I was a part of, which was really the first sustained political movement that I was part of. I took part in some demonstrations against segregation, against discrimination in hiring in the Bay Area, where I grew up. But the Free Speech Movement was the first sustained political movement that I was part of. And a lot of the things that are happening now, some of them are different, because the world is different now, but many of them are very similar, if not literally the same, as what went on in that Free Speech Movement. That's why I said I have to laugh, because there is the question: do we have to "reinvent the wheel," so to speak, and go through the same things, literally, over and over and over again?

The Fundamental Problem Is: We Didn't Make, We Haven't Yet Made, a Real Revolution

BA continues: Now, part of that is our responsibility, people of my generation. In a fundamental sense, the problem is we didn't actually make a revolution then. Things became very radicalized in the 1960s and early '70s. Revolutionary forces, including our Party, did come forward through that period, but our Party wasn't formed as a party until 1975, when that upsurge of that time was already beginning to ebb. At the crucial high point of that upsurge, in the late '60s, there was the Black Panther Party, and it had a very broad influence and impacted a lot of people, way beyond just Black people—people of other oppressed nationalities, women, it inspired and helped to call forth or to strengthen all kinds of

resistance that was going on, and it helped radicalize things—the Black Panther Party and the uprising and upsurge of masses of Black people, of which the Black Panther Party became the most advanced expression. This had a tremendous impact. It had a big impact on the whole student movement, based among more privileged college students, of which I was a part—the FSM was one major expression of that—and the anti-war movement, the movement against the Vietnam War. All those things became much more radical because of the influence of, first of all, the Black people's struggle and advanced expressions of that, like the Black Panther Party; and also the whole way in which there was a wave of revolutionary upsurge—anti-colonial struggles—in the Third World, and there were inspiring struggles going on in China, with the Cultural Revolution taking place from the mid-'60s to the mid-'70s, there was the spread of communist ideology throughout much of the world on a very big scale, with a lot of people who engaged that, and many of whom took it up to one degree or another and in varying ways.

But, when I say it was partly our fault, I'm hyperbolizing. It wasn't really our fault in a fundamental sense, but what I'm trying to get at is that, out of all that tremendous upheaval there was not a revolution, even though the conditions, I would say, looking back on it—and there's an element of uncertainty in this, because things didn't come together in a certain way, including there wasn't the necessary leadership—but looking back on it, I could say that things came very close to an all-out revolutionary situation at the high point of that 1960s upsurge, in the context of what was going on in the world as a whole. The ruling class really did lose political legitimacy, to a very wide degree, and fairly deeply, among significant sections of the people: first of all, those most directly and brutally under its boot, the Black people, masses of Black people and others in the inner cities, those who were discriminated against and the victims of police brutality and murder in a very direct and vicious way; but also, significant sections of the middle class, even beyond the students and the intelligentsia, who became very alienated and radicalized in huge numbers during that period.

But we did not get to the point where there was actually a revolution. The word "revolution" gets thrown around a lot, and it's good if the concept of revolution is in the air—that's very positive when it's being popularized—but if you have a scientific approach, you understand that revolution means a very specific thing: **Revolution means breaking the hold of the reactionary ruling classes, their hold over society, as I've referred to it—defeating and dismantling their state power, their organs of repression and murder which enforce the exploitative and oppressive relations that this system is based on.** It means breaking the hold of all that, sweeping it away, dismantling it, and **bringing into being a new state power that can lead masses of people to transform society**, and that can actually embody new and non-exploitative economic, social, and political relations, and relations with the rest of the world which are not exploitative and oppressive; and relations with the environment which are not plundering the environment, but enable humanity to be fit caretakers of it. Relations through which human beings are engaging in production which is both economically viable and sustainable in terms of the environment, and is not exploitative. That's what needed to happen. That's what we were coming right up against in the 1960s, and we weren't able to break through and actually make it happen.

And the main reason that didn't happen is because, even though the Black Panther Party was the most advanced force at that time, first of all they came up against a great deal of repression—murder and imprisonment and driving into exile of huge numbers of its members and supporters—but also, the Black Panther Party was contradictory; or, to put it in the popular terms of that time, it represented a "mixed bag" of ideology. They were strongly influenced by Mao and the Cultural Revolution in China, and as a result of that took up communist theory to some degree, although unevenly; but they were also influenced by a lot of nationalist trends, which weren't thoroughly scientific and didn't really represent both the outlook and the scientific methodology that could actually lead to the uprooting and abolishing

of all systems and relations of exploitation and oppression throughout the world, and actually emancipate all of humanity, as the end result and the ultimate goal of all that. So, for a combination of those reasons, they were not able to lead the movement where it needed to go. Once again, we should never forget the vicious repression that was brought down on them, but there is also the question of what line, as we say—what ideological outlook and political program—did the most advanced forces at that time have.

The Crucial Thing That Was Missing, and the Crucial Thing Achieved, Through the 1960s Upsurge

BA continues: There were some of us who were gravitating to the scientific communist viewpoint, and the political program that was a part of that whole outlook and flowed from it—the program of communist revolution—but, overwhelmingly, those of us who did that were new to all this. We came forward out of that upsurge. We didn't go into that upsurge already having an organized force that was thoroughly and fundamentally grounded in that scientific communist outlook and the corresponding program and objectives. We developed that through that upsurge—which was a great achievement of that upsurge—but going back to my earlier comment, the reason I say it was "our fault," in a certain sense, is that we weren't able to forge the leadership fast enough and well enough, and apply what we were learning fast enough and well enough, to actually lead a real go at revolution, so to speak. Now that's not fundamentally our fault—but I'm saying it in a certain way, to make the point that this was the real crucial thing that was missing in that whole mass upsurge.

On the other hand, and the reason I said I have to laugh a bit, is that we did go through all that experience to get to where we actually saw the need and then waged the battle—and it was a battle, it was a struggle, it was a fight in the ideological realm and the political realm, and in terms of organization—to actually develop a vanguard party. I know for myself—and I think I can speak for just about everybody else who was part of this process, because it's a common experience—none of us came to it "automatically" or "out of nowhere." I didn't go into the Free Speech Movement saying, "we need a communist vanguard." In fact, I was an anti-communist when I first got involved in this stuff, as were most other people. I believed the lies and propaganda against communism, many of which are similar to all the lies and propaganda against communism that are spewed out everywhere, through the dominant media, and intellectuals who are the "camp followers," so to speak—the "intellectual camp followers"—of the imperialists.

And the same was true then. Over a period of time, we learned through this very process we were talking about just a little while ago: fighting the power, and being introduced to these ideas, and struggling through in the realm of, yes, practice, and policy, and actually going into the streets and learning by going up against the forces of the state, seeing the role of the state, and seeing the role of the media, seeing the role of different authorities and how they were all part of a system, but also grappling and struggling—sometimes night after night, or day after day, in coffee shops, in meeting places, and out in the street in the lulls in the street action—carrying on struggle in the ideological and theoretical realm about what is the correct understanding. Is it this communist one? Is it what we're getting from China and Mao? Or do we just need to "clean up democracy," or "make democracy really work the way it's supposed to"?

Many of the questions that are coming up now, I have to say, they're not new questions. Yes, there are some new questions that come up, and some of the questions that are not new do come up in some new ways. But fundamentally, these are the same questions we battled out and came through. In the decades

since then, there hasn't been a mass revolutionary upsurge of a sustained character—and, in fact, there's generally been reversals and lulls. We lost socialism in China, with the coup carried out there under the direction of Deng Xiaoping in the latter half of the 1970s. When I say "we" lost this, I mean the people of the world, the masses of humanity, lost a tremendous base area—a living force of the new coming forward in the world, socialism in China—when the revisionists (the people within the Chinese Communist Party who pretended for a time to be communists, but who actually were fighting for an outlook and for lines and policies that would lead back to capitalism) actually seized power away from the revolutionary forces in China in 1976. And that came on top of the same thing having happened two decades earlier in the Soviet Union. Wave after wave, we've been hit by the objective effects of those losses.

And, on the basis of those monumental losses for the people of the world, there's been an unrelenting, all-sided ideological assault on communism—the worst kind of slanders and lies about the actual history and what really went on. Of course, it's perfectly understandable that the ruling exploiters would want to do that. But there's been a ganging up on communism by some intellectuals who should know better, and some of whom once did know better. Not all, but far too many of them have joined in with this unrelenting ideological assault on communism and distortion of the experience of socialist society in China as well as the Soviet Union. And one of the worst things that happens is that young people, for example, come forward, and it's one thing if they hear some open right-winger or some obvious big-time exploiter saying communism is no good. But they hear it from these liberal professors—and that is even more poisonous, because these are people who do make some critiques of some of the excesses of this system, but then they join in, they pile on, with the slanders of communism, and this confuses a lot of the youth who think: "Well, these are not people who are open reactionaries, these are not people who are open defenders of the worst abuses of this system; in fact, they've even shined a light on some of these abuses and said they're wrong."

So, this has created a situation along the lines of what you were describing—or you were characterizing what someone else described—about the present situation: There is a revolutionary leadership now. There is a communist vanguard—we did forge this vanguard out of the upsurge of the 1960s. And, through all the difficulties and with the real losses that we've taken, we have maintained a core vanguard party, which is a real vanguard on the basis—not that it has millions of followers right now, but that it has that scientific grounding and it does have the ideological and political basis, or the ideological and political line, which it is continuously both applying and further developing, and with this line it has that basis to actually lead a revolution when the conditions come into being for a revolution; and it has the basis now to go out and work among the people and in the political struggles of the day, to prepare the ground—to unite with and lead people to fight the power, but also to transform themselves and to transform the political terrain, so to speak, in order to lay the groundwork for when there is a revolutionary crisis, and then to actually lead a revolution.

Do We Have to Keep Repeating the Same Experience Over and Over—Or Is There a Way to Really Break Through?

BA continues: So, we've learned a tremendous amount from both the great positive but also the great negative experiences of the past number of decades, since the time of the '60s. And it would be a great irony and terrible shame if that experience and what we've summed up out of it and are putting forward on that basis is ignored—or in fact if people are turned away from this by distortion and slander, by the whole ideological assault that goes on against communism and what we represent—and if, as a result, there were a repeat of not only some of the positive experience of that previous upsurge in the 1960s—

and perhaps now on a less broad and deep scale, with a less radical character—but also a repeat of the negative experience, with people not learning from the lessons that we have drawn that brought us to the point of understanding why you need a communist revolution.

To put it positively, it is very important that people do learn from all this. Yes, people have to go through their own experiences, and things don't ever repeat themselves in exactly the same way, even when some of the fundamental things are the same, or many of them are the same. And, yes, there is the basic dynamic, or dialectic, of Fight the Power, and Transform the People, which has to go on whenever there is a new upsurge and new people come forward. You can't expect that, just because this knowledge has been accumulated, everybody will gravitate toward it right away. There is a process people do have to go through—of standing up, fighting back, raising their heads, and thrashing out different lines. The important thing is that people's attention be focused precisely on that: on the question of lines; on the question, to put it another way, of what world outlook and what political program actually corresponds to the reality that we're confronted with, to the profound problems that the masses of people in the world face, to the real reasons why people are in the conditions they're in today. Is it because of "human nature"—or is, in fact, so-called "human nature" actually a product and a function of the system and the ideology of the system that people are forced to live under? And can that be transformed, too, in the course of people fighting the power and transforming themselves—for revolution?

These questions do need to be thrashed out. The important thing is that people's sights be raised and focused on those big questions. On the questions, to put it simply: what is the problem, and what is the solution? All these things that people are outraged by, or are beginning to learn about, where do they come from? Do they all, in fact, have a common source? If so, what is that common source? Is it, in fact, this system of capitalism-imperialism? How so? What are the driving dynamics of the system? How does it continually lead to these outrages and to massive suffering for humanity throughout the world? Is there a real alternative to that? What is that real alternative? The radical alternative put forward by the communists and the scientific outlook and methodology of communism—does that enable you to understand the problem and the solution correctly? And does it point the way to—not some automatic or magical solution to the problem—but does it provide the pathway that can be further forged and, to use an analogy, hacked out through the massive overgrowth of obstacles that lie in the path? Does it provide the means for forging forward and hacking out the way forward to actually get to a whole different world that won't have all these outrages, or does it not?

Those are the questions that need to be vigorously brought forward to people, and that people need to be raising their sights to and struggling over, so we don't keep going around and around in a circle—so that successive generations don't come forward and say: "Well, the previous generations, they didn't get it right. They failed. They sold out. They didn't get to the real problem. They didn't get to the real solution." Do we have to keep hearing a repeat of the mantras about "making democracy work," when in fact it works exactly in the U.S. the way it's supposed to work—that is, it's a cover for the dictatorship of the ruling class. It's a means of drawing the masses of people into things on the terms of the ruling class and paralyzing them from being able to see—let alone to fight back against, and finally to uproot and eliminate—the real causes and the real relations that actually do enslave masses of people throughout the world.

Do we really have to just keep repeating this—or can we, in fact, take this advanced understanding that's been forged, can people's sights be directed to that, and can we struggle to win more and more people to see that this is, in fact, in line with reality? Yes, contradictory reality. Yes, there is the nature of this system; and, yes, there is the power of this system. And those two things form a contradiction.

We have to expose the nature of this system, we have to unite with people fighting back against it, and we have to enable them to see that the contradictions of this system, together with our revolutionary work, can bring into being the conditions that make it possible to rise up all the way and sweep away this system; and that there can be a radical alternative, which gets rid of, not every problem for humanity—there will always be problems for humanity, humanity will always face necessity and things it has to transform, it will always face difficulties—but we can get to a whole new stage where relations of exploitation and oppression, and the warped outlook that goes along with that, do not stand in the way of humanity grappling with those problems, and in fact we can be approaching it from a whole new and higher plateau.

Theory and Reality... Knowing and Changing the World

Brooks: Well, carrying forward with some of what you were just talking about, I wanted to get a little bit more into this point about the importance of theory and line, including because I think this is sometimes something that the younger generation doesn't give enough weight to. I mean, obviously, it's not just the younger generation. But, when I was re-reading your memoir,² one thing that came through is that in the height of the '60s there were all kinds of different lines and programs out there, all different kinds of understandings that were being put forward about the problem and the solution. I know that you speak a lot in that memoir to the importance of theory and line, in terms of navigating through all that, and it is clear that there was importance to polemics, in taking on incorrect lines. It seems like that becomes all the more important when things are sharpening up and a lot of people are becoming politically awake and trying to figure out what the problem and solution is.

So, I wondered if, in relation to these times right now, when there is all this stuff going on in the world and people are kind of raising their heads—and, as the RCP's statement "On the Strategy for Revolution" puts it, questioning and resisting what they usually accept—how you see the importance of line and theory, and polemics, in that context.

BA: Well, theory is important in an overall, overarching sense, and is important in an ongoing way. Theory is what leads to an understanding, in one way or another, of reality, or parts of reality. And the question always is: Is the theory, in the broadest sense, and in the deepest sense, a correct reflection of reality, or is it not? You know, everybody has theories. Even the "man and woman in the street" have theories about all kinds of things. And then other people who are intellectuals, more full-time, you might say—people who work with ideas in a more continual way—have more developed theories about a lot of different things, theories as applied to particular things or as applied to the world, nature, existence in general. So, the question is not: is there gonna be theory or no theory? The question is: what kind of theory, and does the theory, in its main lines—not in every detail, but in its main lines, and in essential ways—really correspond to reality? Another way to say this: is it scientific?

Let's not mystify science. Science means that you probe and investigate reality, by carrying out experiments, by accumulating data, and so on; and then, proceeding from that reality and applying the methods and logic of rational thought, you struggle to identify the patterns in the data, etc., you've gathered about reality. If you're approaching it correctly, you are striving to arrive at a correct synthesis of the reality that you've investigated. And then you measure your conclusions against objective reality to determine if they are in correspondence with it, if what they sum up and predict about reality is confirmed in reality. That's the way breakthroughs in science have been made—whether it's in the realm of biology, like the understanding of evolution, or whether it's things about the origins of the universe (or the known universe), like the Big Bang theory, or whatever. That's the process that goes

on, and the question is: is it scientific? That is, does it, in its main and essential lines, correspond to reality?

And, particularly for people who are seeking to change the world—which, in fact, all scientists are in one way or another, but especially when you're seeking to change things in the political realm, when you're seeking to change society in a major way—then the question is not just does it correspond to reality, although that's fundamental, but can it actually lead to changing the world, and is it actually applied to changing the world? And then, in the process of that, is there more raw material gathered, so to speak, from which to learn more and to develop further your scientific understanding, about particular things and overall?

So that's on the role of theory and line in general. The question, once again, is: Is it scientific—in the way that I just was discussing that, and not with some mystical notion about science, as something which only a small weird group of people called "scientists" could possibly understand. Now, just as an aside, not all scientists are weird, by any means. Some of them are weird, but a lot of them are weird in good ways, creative ways. But they're just human beings grappling with different aspects of reality. Now, in a sense, there is a "rarified quality" to any particular sphere, or any particular area, of science. It is necessary to immerse yourself in those spheres in order to actually learn about them. But they're not mysterious, they're not magical, they're not things people can't learn. Some people, for a combination of reasons, may have more aptitude for, or may more readily be able to deal with, different dimensions of reality and understand that part of reality in a scientific way better than others. But there's nothing mystical or magical about this.

Theory is an attempt to explain reality, and once again the question is: Is it scientific—does it correctly, in its main lines and in essential ways, reflect reality? Now, theory cannot be unchanging, because reality is constantly changing. That's one of the main features of reality. So theory has to continually develop, even when it's fundamentally correct. For example, despite what all these religious fundamentalists try to say by way of denial, the theory of evolution is not only well established, it's one of the most firmly and fundamentally established understandings of reality in all of science. Darwin made the initial breakthrough in synthesizing the theory of evolution—other people were coming to understand some aspects of evolution, but Darwin is the one who systematized and made a leap forward in terms of human beings' understanding of what evolution is all about, the evolution of life, including the evolution of human beings. Yet there are many things that Darwin did not understand. Now the religious fundamentalists always leap on that to say: "See, they're saying Darwin was wrong." No. This is the way any science develops. What Darwin discovered, or systematized, remains fundamentally true. But there are always new developments—for example, the field of genetics, and other things that didn't exist at the time that Darwin lived and systematized, synthesized the theory of evolution.³

But that's what theory is—it's an attempt to explain reality. The question, and in an important sense the basic dividing line, is: does it correctly explain reality in its main features and along essential lines, or does it not? And then, how can it be applied to transform reality, and what is learned in the ongoing process of theory to practice and back to theory? Not just in a narrow sphere, in the sense of merely what can be learned from any particular activity, but in the broad sense, learning from all different fields of human activity. So, that's one thing on theory.

A Scientific Approach to Society, and Changing Society

BA continues: Some people think—and it's sometimes even argued, including mistakenly by some

natural scientists—that there can't be a scientific approach to society. Now, why that would be, I don't know. Society consists of nothing but particular forms of matter in motion—in this case, people, interacting with each other and interacting with the rest of nature. Why should that realm be closed off to science any more than any other sphere of matter in motion that exists? Whether it's the planets, or whether it's microbes, bacteria, whatever it might be: all these things can be subjected to scientific analysis, and breakthroughs can be made in all these different areas, even while everything about any particular aspect of reality, let alone all of reality, will never be known by human beings, including because there's too much reality out there and because it's always changing, and because human capacities are limited in some ways, even with the technology that continually develops. But a great deal can be learned, and in many spheres the essential dynamics and the fundamental things about reality can be learned, can be systematized and synthesized.

At the same time, some people believe that you can just go out and engage in politics, for example, without having a scientific approach, without the need for theory. But that's completely wrong. As soon as you actually try to change something in the political sphere—or at least as soon as you try to really change an important part of society—you run up against how complicated it is, and how much resistance you are gonna meet from the forces of the old order, which are going to move to maintain that order and to crush any resistance against it. So you're up against that, on the one hand, and then you're up against all the different contradictions that exist among the people, that become very complex at times—the pulls on people in different directions, and what are the spontaneous things people in different sections of society tend to gravitate toward, and why. It requires science, too, to understand all that. How can you actually overcome the divisions among people in the course of building the movement for revolution—fighting the power, and transforming the people, for revolution? How can you actually take on the established, entrenched, and very powerful forces of the old order and defeat them? These questions require continual work—and they require science. They require the application of the scientific method, and not subjectivity—not falling into what you would like to be true—or not falling into just accepting what's conventional wisdom, or "what everybody knows," which is sometimes true, but is often wrong. "Everybody in the world knows that god exists"—well, not everybody, but the great majority of people "know" this. But it's wrong. The fact that "everybody knows it" doesn't make it any better—it makes it worse—because it's wrong. And we could cite many other examples.

If you're being scientific, you don't go by "what everybody knows." You proceed by probing, investigating—and, yes, in the process changing—reality, and then systematizing what can be learned: what are the patterns; what is the essence of what you're learning; what ties things together; what differentiates some things from other things—for example, how is this plant different from that plant; how do these plants interact; how does this plant interact with that insect? All that kind of stuff is true in the "natural sciences." And it applies as well in the "social sciences," in the science of understanding and changing society, and the human beings—yes, including the outlook and values of the human beings—who make up society. This can be changed—and, in fact, changes continually. For example—and I see that this is something that's been brought out by other people in discussions—take a basic development like the introduction of the horse into the culture of many Native Americans: this completely changed their way of life, and their way of thinking. And that's just one of dozens, or hundreds, or thousands of examples that could be given, including in the modern world today.

The Importance of Line... and of Polemics

BA continues: Now, on the question of line and polemics. Line is the application of a world outlook

and method to reality. It's a probing of reality and the drawing together and synthesizing of the lessons that are learned from probing reality. Line can be either correct or incorrect. Line, to put it another way, is an expression of, first of all, your world outlook and your method, how you approach reality—and everybody does that with one outlook or another. Religion is a world outlook. The idea that everybody is out for themselves, and screw everybody else, is a world outlook.

And there's also method. Is your method scientific, or is it something else? Is it subjective? Is it, for example: "Well, that may be true for you, but it's not true for me"? Let's go back to god again: "God may not exist for you, but god exists for me." No. Either god exists for everybody or there is no god. Or else your god is a very personal one, a matter of your personal feelings, so we can all ignore it, in terms of its being some kind of supernatural power or force. What people normally mean by god is not something that's merely personal to somebody—it's something that has a transcendental, a "larger than all the rest of reality" existence, which fundamentally and ultimately determines existence and how it goes, and what happens to people. So, that kind of relativist thing—"you have your truth, and I have my truth"—no. You may have your preferences, and I may have my preferences, but those are not the same thing as truth. Truth is a correct reflection of objective reality, at least in its main lines and its essential features.

And so line is a reflection of world outlook and method, and then its application programmatically, so to speak—in other words, what you are setting out to do on the basis of, or flowing from, your world outlook and your methodology. Going back to the formulation I've used a number of times here: what is the problem in the world, and what is the solution? What is humanity up against—to invoke Richard Pryor, why are we in the situation we're in today—and is there anything that can be done to change it, and if so, how fundamentally can it be changed? That's the application of your world outlook and method to the problems of society, to the problems of human existence, if you will. So that's what line is.

Now, people learn by having line—in particular a correct line, that is, a scientific and a fundamentally correct understanding of reality—brought to them, and then by taking that up, engaging, and struggling with it. Maybe pointing out some things that are wrong with it, even if it's essentially correct, but deeply engaging it. People also learn a tremendous amount—and this is where the role of polemics comes in—by seeing different lines in confrontation with each other. If individuals, or groups, have fundamentally opposed understandings of what the problem and what the solution is, then people can learn by engaging this, comparing and contrasting the opposing lines—particularly if things are on a high level, where you're really getting to the essence of things. Not focusing on minor details, and especially not on petty personal things (as all too often happens with the culture today, with all this tabloidism and rumor-mongering, and all that), but actually focusing on raising your sights up to the big questions: does this, in its main lines, correctly reflect reality, or does it not? When you see two opposing views, or lines, confronting each other, especially if this is done in a principled way—where people are actually going after the substance of what the other person or group says, and refuting it, or attempting to refute it—seeing that kind of confrontation enables people to learn in ways that they wouldn't otherwise learn. This is a critical element in people learning. Without that, people can be introduced to certain ideas; they can compare them to reality—and, yes, they can learn a great deal—but they can learn even more when, in addition to that, there is the confrontation of opposing views, and when there are polemics focusing on the essential aspects of those opposing views.

If you understand that line is an application of a world outlook and method to actually saying what should be done—what is the problem and how do we go about changing that?—then you understand that line matters a tremendous amount. If the problem is that people are selfish, then

the solution either lies in doing something to change that, or there is no solution, because you can't change it. Well, that would have big consequences. But, if the problem is the nature of the system—the fundamental relations of exploitation and oppression of this system, and the ideas that go along with that and reinforce that—and the way to change that is to uproot and abolish this system and transform those relations, and transform the thinking and outlook of the people, then that leads to a very different understanding of what should be done. So, it makes a tremendous difference.

Lines, and contention between opposing lines, are not just some sort of sectarian squabbles—and they should not be reduced to sectarian squabbles, let alone to personal vendettas or personal grievances, but should be focused on the question of how do you go about understanding the world, what do you understand about the world, and what does that lead you to believe needs to be done. If things are joined on that level, and people are enabled to see what the differences are, and where the one and the other leads, then that provides a much richer basis for people who are serious—who really feel compelled to understand the world, and further to change it—to actually be able to sift through these things and come to a better understanding. Not all on their own, but through people engaging this with them and going through the process together with them of sorting this out and sifting through it.

When People Are Falling Into Bullshit, They Should Be Told So: The Need for Sharp, and Principled, Struggle

Brooks: I know that, in terms of your own development into a revolutionary communist and in terms of your relation to other people in that process, the role of struggle has been really important—people struggling with you during your development, and then you, at different points, very sharply struggling with other people.

BA: [Laughs] That is true. In my own development, there were people who struggled with me—some of them correctly, some of them incorrectly, some of them mainly correctly, and some of them mainly incorrectly. But all of that was part of the process of my learning—going through this process of really deeply grappling with these things because you understand it matters, it has real implications in terms of what's gonna happen to masses of people, not just yourself. You get into this—and the reason I laughed is because people did struggle, sometimes very sharply, with me. If you're going to get offended if things get sharp, and you respond to people struggling with you by thinking, "you're being oppressive because you're challenging my views strongly, and you're not giving me space to think," then you're not going to learn what you could learn. Now, we should have good methods with people, we shouldn't "jack people up" and shove them up against the wall, ideologically speaking. But there is a need and a role at times for very sharp struggle.

When people are falling into bullshit, they should be told so. Now, that's not all you should say. You should show them why. You should give them the substance. You should explain to them what's wrong. But this idea that everything has to be all so super-polite—this goes along with the relativist notion that everybody's ideas should be considered equally valid. Well, no. It's not a question of the person, it's a question of the ideas. It's not that one person counts for less than another person, but it's a question of whether the ideas are correct or incorrect. If they're incorrect, and if they're doing harm, they need to be called out sharply. Not in a way that puts people down. Not in a way that's antagonistic toward them—unless what they represent is really, fundamentally antagonistic to the interests of the masses of people, and they're digging in their heels around that. But among the people, so to speak, wrong ideas should be struggled over. Where people are putting forward different notions that are really wrong, and they are digging in their heels around them, they should be struggled with sharply. And where people say

things that they don't have a basis for saying, where they haven't really investigated, they need to be told: you don't know what you're talking about.

Especially in this culture today, as I was referring to earlier, there is all this "tabloidism." You go on the Internet and there's all this nasty, low-level crap. People hide behind the pseudo anonymity of the Internet to attack people in low and vicious ways—not being at all principled, not lofting things up to the level they should be on. And, by the way, I say "pseudo anonymity" because the state can find out who you are any time they want to. Now, if you're not going up against the state, maybe you don't have to worry about that. But, for anybody who thinks they're really anonymous on the Internet—think again. You may be able to hide from other people for a while, but the state will certainly be able to find out who you are, if they want to, if you're all over the Internet. In any case, not to get too far afield on that, the point is: It does go back to that Mark Twain thing that I'm fond of quoting, because it's so applicable [Laughs]. He said: What you need to get along in America is the perfect combination of ignorance and arrogance. And there is way too much of that.

Ignorance is one thing. Let's demystify that word. It just means you don't know. In and of itself, this word isn't an insult. "Stupid" is different: "stupid" implies you can't think, even if you are given information. But ignorant just means you don't know. There's nothing wrong with ignorance, in itself. But if you pass judgments based on ignorance, and you insist on things based on ignorance, that's where the Mark Twain point comes in: the combination of ignorance and arrogance—arrogance that is grounded in ignorance. "I haven't bothered to really find out what you stand for, but I know it's no good." That kind of thing is all too common in the culture these days—and that needs to be called out for what it is. Do some work. These things matter.

If people are saying—either our Party or anybody else—that they believe they have an understanding of the fundamental problem humanity is up against and the solution to it; if we say that the problem is the capitalist-imperialist system, and the answer is communist revolution to bring into being an entirely different world without exploitation and oppression, without antagonistic conflicts among humanity or between humanity and the rest of nature; if people are saying that, that's obviously a very big deal. That's very serious. It matters a tremendous amount to the masses of humanity. If the people saying this are right, it's a very big deal; and if they're wrong, that is a very big deal. But your responsibility, if you're newly encountering this and you're ignorant about it—that is, you don't know because you have just encountered it—don't get sidetracked by what "everybody else" says about it. If you're serious—and this is serious—dig into it and learn about it. That's your responsibility.

That's the responsibility we took, back in the day, when we confronted the truly big things that were going on in the world, back in the 1960s. Not just the people who became communists, but many more people broadly, had that kind of serious orientation. There was, in the '60s movement, a different culture, a better culture, than what prevails today. Not that there weren't opportunists—people who were underhanded and unprincipled, and people who were out for personal gain and attacked other people in ways that were unprincipled and harmful to the general movement. There was some of that, of course. As long as there are class distinctions, as long as there are divisions among people that are oppressive, and as long as there is the corresponding ideology, there will be that shit in the mix. But, let me put it this way: There was a very powerful thing that ran counter to that in the '60s, where people understood that things mattered tremendously to the people of the world. The Vietnam War was going on. Your government, if you were an American, was waging this horrific war—massacring people, burning down villages, dropping napalm on little children, bombing dams and flooding whole areas, killing literally millions of people over the decade of that war. And you felt a sense of responsibility to resist that, and to do what you could to stop it, by joining together with others in massive political

resistance to it. And so there was a different kind of culture among the very broad numbers of people who were deeply alienated from and determined to stand up against not just certain policies, and not just around certain particular, and more limited, grievances, but against the whole system, or the whole "power structure," as it was often called, and the whole "ethos," the whole prevailing philosophy and culture, that went along with that.

And there was a positive thing about communism in the mix. That raised people's sights also. Many people were drawn to that, instead of being bogged down in trying to figure out how we can make this system work in the interests of the people—which is impossible, and which, frankly, also ends up turning people against each other. If you are limited to the confines of this system, you will end up in conflict and competition with other individuals and with other sections of the people. You will be in competition in the attempt to get "your share," or to have the grievances of your particular identity group addressed, as opposed to that identity group, and so on. But, through the very broad and radical upsurge of the 1960s, people's sights were being lofted up. That's what we need to fight for now—and that is a fight.

What is going to be the culture? What is going to be the morality? How are people going to approach the question of what different individuals and groups represent and where they would take things? Are they gonna do it on the basis of the lowest kind of shit that people can get dragged down to? Or, are they gonna do it on the basis of what people actually stand for, what they actually say is the problem, and the solution? Let's see that in confrontation with other ideas about what the problem and the solution is—let's dig into that, and struggle through to figure out what's really right and what's really wrong.

The Culture, the Principles, the Standards We Need

Brooks: What do you think is the responsibility—particularly of revolutionary forces but, even more broadly, of anybody who's serious about or even questioning about whether the world could be different? Isn't there the responsibility of setting whole new standards and taking on this vicious culture of gossip and slander, setting the standards that you're talking about, where people are proceeding from what it's actually gonna take to change the world? How do you see people's responsibility in terms of that?

BA: Well, again, people have to fight to make the focus of things: what is the way we're gonna actually understand the world and change the world? If that's what we're setting out to do, if that's what we really wanna do, then we're gonna proceed from the need to get a real understanding of what it is that different people and groups actually are for and where it would actually lead. What is their line, and what are the implications and the consequences if that line is carried out and if people are mobilized around that line, as opposed to another one? And it is a fight to make that the focus.

There's also a fight to have the standard be: That other stuff—that "tabloidism," that low-life gossiping, slander and rumor-mongering, the personal backbiting, and the rest of that—we don't want that, that doesn't go here. We're about something serious here, we're about trying to make a new world, and that other stuff is part of the old world we need to get rid of. If you have a criticism of somebody, let's raise it up to the level of things that really matter.

And, along with that, let's raise it up to a level where people, beyond just the parties in conflict, can figure things out. If I say, "you punched me, and anyway you're an asshole": for people who were not there, who are not directly involved, how are they gonna sort that out? And is that really where their attention should be focused? You could go around and around and, first of all, you might never sort it

out. Second of all, and even more fundamentally, it's not what people's attention should be focused on. If we have political differences, we're not gonna resolve them—and people are not gonna be able to know what's right and wrong—by descending down to that level.

It will also not get things onto the level where they need to be—but will actually drag them down and away from what needs to be focused on—if, when an individual or group forthrightly puts forwards its views and aims, instead of responding to the substance of this, it is "answered" by accusing them of arrogance for putting this forward, or trying to dismiss them as a "cult," or demanding: "Who are you to say that you know what the problem is and what should be done?" Instead, the focus needs to be on: What does this person or group stand for, and what does that other person or group stand for—and which one, if either of them, really is in correspondence with reality and with the interests of humanity, and which is not? Or, which ones go part way and then turn back, and which ones can actually break through and go where we need to go?

People need to be insisting that those are the questions that should be focused on. And there's a related and important point of method. In contrasting opposing views, in polemics, what should the approach be? For example, we wrote a long polemic against Alain Badiou's political philosophy, his so-called politics of emancipation—which is really just the politics of staying within the world as it is, confined within the bourgeois world. When I say "we wrote," I am referring to the polemic written in *Demarcations*, an online theoretical journal which puts forward the perspectives of our Party, the Revolutionary Communist Party.⁴ The people who wrote that polemic worked very hard on it. They read a lot of what Badiou has to say, and they applied the method of taking on the best arguments that Badiou himself makes about what he sees as the essence of things, as opposed to taking cheap shots. If you read that polemic, you'll see that it's not taking on all of his philosophy, but it's taking on his political philosophy and his political orientation, and it goes deeply into what he has to say about that, and shows why it's wrong—in a way that people who are serious can actually get inside of and get an understanding of—as opposed to taking cheap shots, chopping up things that people say, misrepresenting them in so doing, and so on. Rather than that, let's really examine what somebody has to say, in the best representation that they themselves can make of what they're arguing for, and then let's examine whether it's right or wrong, and whose interests it actually serves. Those are the standards that people should be striving for—and insisting upon.

Also, people should understand that not only does gossip and rumor-mongering, personal backbiting, "personal grievance narratives," and all the rest of that, do a lot of harm in terms of dragging people's attention down toward the gutter, and keeping people from focusing on the big questions that really make a difference in terms of whether the world's gonna stay the way it is, or whether it's gonna be radically changed and how; but it also greatly aids the repressive forces of the present system. It provides a lot of fuel for them, and it creates an atmosphere in which they can actually send in agents, and make use of this whole atmosphere to stir up a lot of shit between people.

There has been a lot of bitter experience with this. For example, there were political differences that developed within the Black Panther Party at a certain point, particularly at the end of the 1960s and into the early '70s. There was a division where people were grouped around Huey Newton on the one hand, and Eldridge Cleaver on the other. They had big differences. But, all too often, instead of those differences being struggled out on the high plane of what is this one saying about the problem that the revolution is facing, what's the other one saying—and which one is right, or are they both partly right and partly wrong, or are they both wrong?—instead of that being what people focused on, a lot of personal shit got thrown into the game, and personal attacks were made. This created an atmosphere in which the political police—the FBI, the repressive forces of the state—could thrive. They could get

people at each other's throats, and sometimes they could even get people to go at each other physically, attack each other, while the state could say: "Look, it's not us, they're just fighting each other—that shows you these revolutionaries are no good, they're fighting each other."

So this kind of atmosphere not only leads away from a correct understanding of things and interferes with the ability to get to the essence of things, but it also demoralizes the masses of the people whose hopes have been raised that there can be a radical change for the better, while it creates an atmosphere in which the forces of the present order, which are not only oppressive but are literally murderous, can have more favorable conditions in which to operate. And I'm not engaging in any exaggeration or hyperbole—they're murderous on a massive scale. If you don't think so, look into it, and see what they've done throughout the world, as well as within the U.S. itself. There are literally millions upon millions of people that they've murdered or enslaved, or driven off their land and herded into concentration camps, in what's now the U.S. itself, as well as in every other part of the world.

This is what we're up against. And to feed an atmosphere where things are on a low, petty and nasty level—giving vent to personal grievances or personal narratives, rather than focusing on the big questions—this can only aid those truly murderous forces of the repressive state, whether people intend to do that or not. Some people may be consciously doing this, consciously seeking to aid the state—either they themselves are agents of the state, or they've become so thoroughly corrupted by their own narrow outlook, that they are willing to actually do things that they know will aid the state—or they're doing it unknowingly, but it has the same effect.

So there has to be a fight. People have to say: No, let's raise our sights. This is not the level things should be fought out on. This is not the level where criticism and struggle should be carried out. And, furthermore, this is not the way we're gonna sort out what's right and wrong. If things get down to the level of these personal narratives and backbiting, then those who are not directly involved are very unlikely to be able to arrive at a correct understanding of what happened. But you can sort out what different people stand for, what they say the problem is and what the solution is. That's where people's attention has to be focused. And there has to be an insistence: No, we are not gonna sink down into that gutter, and we're not gonna play into the hands of the enemy, of this ruling class that is literally a world class bunch of murderous gangsters—and, again, I say that without any exaggeration or hyperbole—we're not gonna play into their hands by keeping things on that level. And we are gonna struggle in the culture at large to tell people: Let's get out of that cesspool, and let's get up here into the realm of the future of humanity; and over that, yes, let's have lots of very sharp, but principled struggle—about the substance of what humanity's up against and the substance of what we need to do about it.

Major Developments in the World, and the Responsibility of Communists

Brooks: In terms of people's sights being raised and what is the actual problem and the solution, just to go back a little bit to some of what you spoke to before, this last year, 2011, was a pretty incredible year in a lot of ways, both in terms of developments in the objective situation—in other words, developments in this society and in the world as a whole—but also in terms of the "subjective factor," in other words, what revolutionaries were doing in their own right and in relation to these developments. It was striking looking at *Revolution* newspaper recently, the amount of work that you put out in 2011: *Basics*, "All Played Out," your "Reflection on the 'Occupy' Movement," and your statement on Egypt ("Egypt 2011: Millions Have Heroically Stood Up... The Future Remains To Be Written"), and then different work that's come out on the foundation of your whole body of work, like the Constitution—okay, that was last year, actually at the end of last year, the *Constitution for the New*

Socialist Republic in North America (Draft Proposal).

BA: You mean the end of 2010?

Brooks: The end of 2010, thank you, yeah. So that was actually, technically, at the end of the year before, but obviously it has had a huge impact getting out over this year that has just ended. And then there's the statement "On the Strategy for Revolution," and a number of other important things. And then there's these new initiatives that have been launched, in terms of fighting the power, and transforming the people, for revolution, including the one that you mentioned about taking on STOP "Stop and Frisk" and the movement to stop mass incarceration—and I'm sure I'm not even nearly covering everything. But what I'm trying to get at is, it's been a really big year, in terms of both new resistance coming forward and developments in the world, but also in terms of what the subjective factor has been doing, the work of revolutionaries. And then, obviously, at the very end of this year, there was this new campaign launched, the "BA Everywhere" campaign, to raise big money to get your works and vision out into every corner of society. So I'm just wondering if you want to riff a little bit off of that—everything that's been happening and the significance and the potential, and the crossroads things are at.

BA: Well, as I referred to earlier, the past year has seen some very significant positive changes on the political terrain, in the conditions out there in the world, with more people resisting in various ways. I touched on some of it. You mentioned the mass initiative that's been launched against mass incarceration. There's also the mass initiative against the degradation of women, to fight against pornography and patriarchy, and the ways in which that concentrates key aspects of the enslavement and degradation of women. There is, again, the "Occupy" movement. There have been the hunger strikers in the prisons in California that I mentioned, and the outrage and outpouring around the execution of Troy Davis.

And then, of course, there has been, as you just alluded to, this whole phenomenon of mass uprising, particularly concentrated in the Middle East, which began with Tunisia and covered the whole of 2011 and became very focused in Egypt, while also going on in other places, with different features and different forces involved in different countries. It hasn't been one uniform thing. In the case of Libya, for example, the imperialists got involved, in the form of NATO carrying out massive bombing, and that essentially changed things in Libya, changed things in a qualitative way. Things in Libya initially started out in terms of some form of mass upsurge, with a lot of different and contradictory forces involved, opposing the Qaddafi regime. This bears further investigation, but in that case I think it's very likely that the imperialists, or operatives of the imperialists, were involved in that from very early on, even when it was still, in its main aspect, a mass upsurge—and then the imperialists obviously became directly involved and became the dominant factor when they started this massive bombing. Essentially, that particular situation became transformed from a more or less spontaneous uprising with different forces, and undoubtedly—or I won't say undoubtedly, but very likely—imperialist operatives (of the CIA or whatever) involved, to something that became essentially a NATO attack on the country of Libya, with the result that the government of Libya is overthrown.

Now, Qaddafi and his government didn't represent what's needed in the world. That was not a government that was going to lead the people in uprooting and abolishing exploitation and oppression and contribute to that struggle in the world as a whole. But much less are the imperialists going to contribute to that! In fact, they are the fundamental source of the suffering of humanity, and they are the force in the world that needs to be swept aside in order to be able to finally rid humanity of all these conditions and these relations of enslavement in one form or another, and all the consequences and

suffering that flow from that, including the wars.

Everything's not the same. Tunisia's not the same as Egypt... not the same as Libya... not the same as Syria... and so on. Right now we can't get into analyzing—nor do I feel in a position to make a detailed analysis of—all these things. And I don't want to do what I criticized just a little while ago—speaking out of ignorance. But some things are apparent. And some things do need to be recognized in their different features. Clearly, there has been a very significant element of mass upsurge in the Middle East in particular over the last year, which in its main lines—and there are, obviously, counter and contradictory tendencies, Libya being a very sharp example, or concentrated example, of that—but, in its main features, it has been a positive uprising of masses of people. And the more there are mass upsurges, the more there's resistance—the more that people are fighting the power, to put it that way—the more demands this does and should put on the communists, who have a scientific understanding of the fundamental terms of what this all flows from and where it all needs to go, ultimately. Communists need to be both uniting with these mass upsurges wherever they can, but also speaking to the big questions that are thrown up, or that can be identified, in relation to these mass upsurges.

So, when you mention all the things that have been happening, there's both in the realm of political struggle—practice, in that sense—and in the realm of theory, or line, a need to be relating to these things, but not simply to be tailing them. And, by the way, you're not just tailing some uniform and undifferentiated thing. In all these mass upsurges, there are different social forces—or, if you want to put it that way, different class forces—involved. They don't all have the same interests. They don't all have the same spontaneous aspirations. They don't all see things the same way. There may be a broad unity, but there are also very real contradictions among different sections of the people who are involved. Some of the outlooks and aspirations will lead in a positive direction, but not go all the way where things need to go. Some will actually lead back in a negative direction—take things or keep things within the confines in which they're already being contained and suffocated.

There is a need to relate to these things—to unite with the positive aspects of them, but also to bring forward a scientific understanding of what this all is rooted in, how it relates to other key things going on in the world, and where it all needs to go. And, yes, here again is the need to wage some polemics, to struggle over questions of line with different outlooks and programs that are contending within all these things.

These are not "homogeneous" movements. Within any of these phenomena—whether it's the upsurges in the Middle East or something within the U.S., like "Occupy"—these are not one homogeneous thing where everybody sees things exactly the same way. Yes, in terms of "Occupy," for example, there's a broad unity and the feeling that things are being dominated too much by the rich and powerful, to put it in a very general sense. But there are also a lot of differences in terms of how people see that, what they understand that to be connected to, and how it relates to the different experiences, not only of individuals, but of different groups in society.

Look, let's face it, a graduate student who grew up in the suburbs and went to one of the major Ivy League universities does not have the same experiences as someone who grows up in an inner city where Black people and Latinos, and other poor people are concentrated. They have a very different experience. To take one sharp example, women in areas like this, all over the country, have been evicted out of their housing in very large numbers. Yes, people are being foreclosed on in the middle class, and that's a real thing that should be identified and struggled against. But there have been massive evictions of poor women from the projects, going on for years now, and accentuating in the context of this heightened economic crisis of the last few years. And there's a massive incarceration of

the youth in the inner cities. There is brutality, and outright murder, against the youth by the police—that is an everyday occurrence and forms a crucial part of everyday life conditions for the youth in inner cities.

These are not all the same experiences, and they don't lead to seeing the world spontaneously in the same way. In order to build the revolutionary movement that is needed, it is important not to be tailing after any section of the people—even those, such as the people in the inner cities, whose experience does actually more closely get to the essence of the system than the experience of someone who's a graduate student at an Ivy League college, for example. Not to say the latter don't have real grievances, and not to say they're not capable of identifying with and moving around the grievances of others. But it's not all the same.

Still, even with those people whose experiences more closely get to the essence and foundations of the system, that cannot be tailed either. They are constantly being beaten on by the system, forced to scramble and scuffle to survive under the workings of this system, which constantly denies them the basic necessities of life—or makes it an intense daily struggle to try to get the necessities of life—as well as denying them basic things like a fundamental education. So, people in that situation have a lot of rich understanding of what they're going through, and they can teach you a tremendous amount, if you're willing to learn—and one has to be constantly attuned to learning what they can teach about how this system actually works, in different important aspects of it. But, again, it's not a matter of tailing even that. It's a matter of bringing a synthesized scientific understanding that encompasses all these different experiences, but shows how they all relate to the fundamental source of all this, in the capitalist-imperialist system. That's not just something we invented because it would be convenient for what we're trying to do. No, it's because that's actually true. That's actually scientific—if you go at this scientifically, that's what you actually come to understand.

If you dig into this scientifically, you see that this system has a fundamental contradiction: the contradiction between the socialized way in which production of the things that people use in everyday life, and the things, like technology, that are used in building up the economy—all that is produced by thousands of people working on them, not by individuals all working in their own little workshops—and yet a handful of wealthy capitalists dominate the accumulation of all that, and determine the use of it, in fundamental terms. Well, that's the basic contradiction which lies at the root of this whole system, and all these other manifestations of the way people are treated under this system ultimately have their grounding in that—or, to put it another way, they all fit into the framework and dynamics that are established by that fundamental contradiction of capitalism. That's something you have to work at scientifically to come to an understanding of, and to see the inner connections of all these things—not only how they're all connected with each other, but how that connection resides fundamentally in the very nature and workings of the system.

So, it's not a matter of tailing this or that section of the people—it's a matter of bringing that understanding to all the different sections of the people, bringing forward an understanding of how we have to fight, and how we have to transform things, including people's thinking, in order to uproot and abolish this and bring something better into being. And, as part of that, bringing forward a scientific analysis of which are the forces in society that have, first of all, the most fundamental interest in fighting for that—as we put it in the statement "On the Strategy for Revolution," the people who are catching the worst hell every day under this system—and which are the other forces who may not be catching the worst hell every day under this system, but who have a basis to be united around a program of actually driving through and uprooting this system, abolishing and dismantling its repressive institutions, and replacing them with revolutionary institutions, and supporting and carrying

forward a common struggle with people throughout the world towards the final goal of communism, when all this will be uprooted and abolished, once and for all.

A Sweeping, and Concrete, Vision

Brooks: But in terms of what you're talking about, part of what I'm getting at is this: into this particular political moment and political terrain, things like the Constitution and *Basics* and the Statement on Strategy, and "All Played Out" and your "Reflection on the 'Occupy' Movement" and "Egypt 2011: Millions Have Heroically Stood Up... The Future Remains To Be Written," and these different initiatives that we're talking about, fighting the power, and transforming the people, for revolution—obviously these things would be very significant in their own right, in terms of where things ultimately need to go, but then there is their role specifically entering into this whole mix that you're talking about.

BA: Yeah, I kind of got away from that, didn't I? [Laughs] But I was trying to provide the broader context, or to speak to the way all this fits together, so to speak. All of this—the objective developments that are happening, including the massive resistance, but also more negative things that are happening in the world, such as the wars that are being waged, or the wars that are being threatened, like the growing threat of war by Israel, or the U.S. directly, or both, against Iran, for example (and, yes, Iran is a reactionary regime, but an attack on it by Israel and the U.S. would be something that would be massively against the interests of the great majority of people in the world, and ultimately humanity as a whole)—all these kinds of objective developments, either positive or negative, put more demands on those who are seeking to play the leading role—yes, a vanguard role, in terms of leading things where they need to go, on a scientifically grounded basis. And because there are more demands, that's why more things have been brought forward.

The role of a communist vanguard, and of communist leaders, is to respond to the needs in relation to the fundamental goal that we're fighting for, flowing from our scientific analysis of the problem and the solution (to use that shorthand formulation). So, the more that there are things happening in the world—positively, very importantly, but also negatively—the more it puts demands on us.

In other words, I didn't just say, "Oh, a statement on Egypt—oh, that'd be fun to write." If you want to know the honest truth, in fact, it's just the opposite. The upsurge in Egypt happened, I went, "Oh, goddamn it, now I'm gonna have to write a statement!" [Laughs] I'm half-joking, or more than half-joking. What I'm trying to get at is that it's because there was a need there. It's not because I "wanted" to write a statement—there was a need. This was a big phenomenon and there were different understandings, if you will—different lines, to put it that way—contending within or in relation to that struggle, about where it needed to go, and more broadly about how to understand it, what it was all about, and how it fits into a whole broader picture of things. So there was a need for that. Now, that's in the realm of theory and line.

Similarly, there's this whole question of the new synthesis of communism that I've been working on in the context of the collectivity of our Party for decades now and, in a concentrated way, in the recent decade. In one key dimension of it, grappling with questions of how you would actually handle all these different contradictions in socialist society better than they've been handled in the past—learning from the mainly positive experience in the past, but also the errors and problems of the past. Questions of dissent, questions of the arts, questions of the sciences, questions of education, the media, the revolutionary armed forces in socialist society and how do they relate to the masses of people in a way that's radically different than the way the army and the police relate to the masses of people now, in this

society and around the world. All these different things.

So there was a need to take another leap: to actually apply that developing new synthesis, for our Party to actually bring forward, on the basis of that new synthesis, a concrete, but yet at the same time sweeping, vision and program, to give people a vision, and a living sense, again in very concrete terms, of how these contradictions, these problems—including problems of production in the economy—how all those different things would be dealt with and interrelated in the new society that needs to be brought into being on the basis of sweeping away capitalism, as a transition toward the goal of communism—and as a key base for the internationalist struggle toward the goal of communism on a world scale. These were recognized needs that we were seeking to meet. This is your responsibility once you've taken up the understanding, and you recognize the need to act on the understanding, of what the problem is and what you have to do to actually address that problem and bring something radically different into the world. And that is what led to the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America (Draft Proposal)*.

Major Concentrations of Social Contradictions and the Movement for Revolution

BA continues: And then there's also the mass initiatives you're talking about. It wasn't the case that there was already spontaneous mass struggle around these things. There was important exposure being done. For example, many people have done exposure around the attacks on the right to abortion. Other people have done exposure of the very harmful effects, and the degrading nature, of pornography and the sex-trading in women and even young girls. But there was a need to take this to a higher level and give it a political, programmatic expression, in terms of developing mass struggle around it.

Michelle Alexander wrote this very important book, *The New Jim Crow*,⁵ exposing mass incarceration, and some people were taking that up and seeking to take action around it. But there was a need to work to get this onto a whole other level of mass resistance, while, at the same time, from our perspective—from the perspective of our Party and with our scientific understanding of this—to put it in the larger context of the whole system: how this is rooted in the system (or, how this mass incarceration is a particular and concentrated expression at this time of the oppression of Black people, and others, and how all this is rooted in this system) and how this relates to all the different manifestations of this system and its oppressive nature among different sections of people. That's the perspective we brought to it, in taking this up.

But in this drive to build mass resistance, initiated by Carl Dix and people like Cornel West, and others, there was a recognition that there was a need to loft the struggle against mass incarceration—to loft the understanding and the stirrings of resistance to this mass incarceration—onto a whole other level, to actually strive to bring forward massive resistance to this; and, again, from our perspective, to link this to, and make it a part of, the overall building of a movement for revolution.

That's how we came at this, that's an application of that formulation that has been in our paper a number of times, "Some Principles for Building a Movement for Revolution," where it talks about, focusing—I'm paraphrasing now—focusing on concentrations of major social contradictions.

The oppression of women, particularly in the form of this aggressive, violent pornography and the sex trade, and all that, as well as the enslavement of women in the form of seeking to deny them the right to have reproductive freedom, to be able to choose when and whether to have children, for god's sakes, if you'll pardon the expression—something as fundamental as that—denying them the right to that is tantamount to slavery, is virtually slavery, is a form, in fact, of enslaving them.

These we could identify as being concentrations of major social contradictions. So, while there wasn't already a massive outpouring of struggle around them, even though there were stirrings of it, we recognized the need for there to be, in fact, a massive outpouring of struggle around this—and, at the same time, for us to approach this from the point of view of how this fits into the overall building of the movement for revolution that's needed.

So, all this involves identifying, through a scientific analysis, the needs, and especially the critical needs, at any given time—what are, in fact, key concentrations of the nature of this system and of the resistance that needs to be developed against that system, and how that can be part of building a movement for revolution—and then to act on that understanding. All this is the responsibility of a vanguard and of leadership that's playing the role that needs to be played in terms of actually building the movement for revolution, with the Party at the core of it, which is necessary for there really to be a revolution.

A Strategic Approach—to Revolution

Brooks: I think what you're saying is really interesting, in terms of the need for these different things to come onto the scene and how that was identified. And then there's the question of—I know that, obviously, it can't be predicted by any means exactly in advance of the specific impact that all these different things are gonna have, but there's the question of, more broadly speaking, the potential impact of things like *Basics* and the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic* and the strategy statement and these other things we've been talking about, and these initiatives to fight the power, and transform the people—all that coming onto the scene and the impact that could have from the standpoint of hastening while awaiting a revolutionary situation.

BA: Yeah, and to go back to what I was saying about major concentrations of social contradictions: These things are real outrages, the things that there's mass struggle developing around, including the issues that are raised in a broad sense in the "Occupy" movement, but also the two initiatives we referred to—around the degradation of women, for short, and around mass incarceration—these are absolutely intolerable outrages. Nobody with a sense of justice, let me put it that way, should put up with these things or tolerate them. Everybody should feel a driving compulsion to want to stand up against this and bring forward resistance, and unite with other people to stand up against it; and communists, certainly, given the perspective and understanding we have, should and do feel this at least as deeply as anyone else.

So, on the one hand, these are major outrages. They are, at the same time, as I was referring to, major concentrations of the basic nature and the contradictions of this system. And they are ways that people can be brought forward to fight against an intolerable injustice, and to carry out that orientation of "Fight the Power, and Transform the People, for Revolution," by putting it in the broader context, and getting to the deeper roots of how all this has its source in and flows from this system, and that all of it can be eliminated, in all of its different manifestations, only by sweeping away this system and establishing, yes, the dictatorship of the proletariat, a whole new political system to back up a whole new economic system and whole new social relations, and to lead people in further transforming them toward the goal of eliminating all these oppressive relations, and with that eliminating the need for any kind of dictatorship, any kind of state, any kind of repressive organs, because you won't any longer have antagonistic social relations among people in society or in the world as a whole. So, these things are an important part of "Fight the Power, and Transform the People, for Revolution."

And then, the statement "On the Strategy for Revolution," which our Party brought forward in the last

year or so, provides an overall framework both for seeing how different aspects of this, different concentrations of social contradictions, fit into the overall picture, and also how all of this can be developed as part of actually building up the basis to go, when the conditions have come into being, for the seizure of power and the establishment of a whole new revolutionary state—that's what the dictatorship of the proletariat is. All states are dictatorships, let's just get that clear. They represent the rule of one class in society, and the suppression of those classes or forces that are antagonistic to what that ruling class represents. The difference—the fundamental, the radical difference—is that the proletariat is the exploited class under capitalism, but it also has the unique situation that its emancipation can only come about by uprooting and eliminating all relations of exploitation and oppression, everywhere in the world, and, with that, eliminating the need for any kind of repressive force in society, and any kind of antagonistic relations among different parts of society or different parts of the world.

This is what we're aiming for, and the Statement on Strategy, as I'm sure you're aware, begins by talking about what is in the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America (Draft Proposal)*, which puts forward an inspiring and concrete vision of a new society, one in which there would be the dictatorship of the proletariat and in which a transition would be carried forward to the abolition of all the relations and ideas that oppress and exploit people and reinforce that exploitation and oppression. Then the Statement on Strategy goes on to say: but in order to make this a reality, we need a revolution. In other words, it's not enough—it is very important, it is a part of building the movement for revolution, to put forward something that is both sweeping and concrete in terms of the vision and the actual contours of the new society that's embodied in that *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic*—but, if you just do that, then it gets reduced to, or turned into, just another "good idea," and then it becomes not a good idea, because nothing's being done about it [Laughs]. It becomes a substitute for doing anything.

So that statement "On the Strategy for Revolution," starts out saying: to make this real we need a revolution. And then it goes on to talk about the basic strategic approach to actually making revolution. It gets into the questions of how you work when there's not yet a revolutionary situation: how you work in general in those conditions, and how you work specifically when there are, however, crises in society and political upheavals—jolts and breaks in the normal functioning of society which cause people to come forward and rebel in various ways, or which raise, in any case, major questions—how you work in relation to that, in order to make leaps forward in building the movement for revolution, how you would utilize that and work with that to establish a new plateau from which to carry forward the work in an ongoing way, and leap after leap with further jolts and eruptions in the system. All building toward the point when you have a deep enough crisis, a deep enough loss of legitimacy for the system among broad numbers of people in the society—not just small numbers, but broad numbers—and you have a revolutionary people that's come forward and is prepared to fight and to lay everything on the line to actually get rid of this system and bring a much better one into being.

This statement lays out the whole strategic approach. It refers to "On the Possibility of Revolution" (which is part of a larger pamphlet, *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*⁶). "On the Possibility of Revolution" speaks, in broad strokes, to some of the basic strategic questions of how you would actually go about carrying out the struggle for power once you did have the emergence of a deep-going and broad crisis in society and a revolutionary people, numbering in the millions and millions.

But the point of that Statement on Strategy is that we're not just gonna go from today to that situation, somehow magically—or one fine day everything's gonna appear. It takes continual work, in many

different dimensions, to actually prepare the ground for that, and to bring forward, through continual work but also wave after wave, more forces who are consciously working for—who are, to use that phrase, constituting a growing solid core for—that revolution, who have a deep grounding and understanding of the need for that revolution and the possibility of that revolution, and are therefore deeply committed to working for it.

New Initiators of a New Stage of Communism

BA continues: And there is a dialectical, or back and forth, relation involved. On the one hand, there is the need to be influencing millions of people now—through the wielding of our Party's newspaper, through the popularizing of the new synthesis of communism, and through this campaign that you mentioned to go out and raise massive funds, what we've called the "BA Everywhere," campaign, to actually get the new synthesis and my leadership and body of work out there in a truly major way, with societal impact. That campaign is a key element of influencing millions of people now: getting the concept of this revolution and the scientific grounding underneath it, in a basic sense, out to millions, so millions of people are encountering it, so that people are debating it very broadly in society—so it's a point of reference. We have used the formulation "making BA a household name." What that means is not that people are gossiping about BA everywhere, but that the new synthesis of communism and what that represents is being engaged and debated broadly in society—some people agree, some people disagree, some people say, I like some of this and some not—but they're actually engaging what it is, the substance of it, at least in its very basic contours. There is a dialectical relation between all that and bringing forward a new wave of people fighting to bring about a new stage of the communist revolution—to take these ideas, this theory, and actually make it a living reality. We need to influence millions of people now. And we need to be bringing forward wave after wave of what we call these new initiators, these initiators of a new stage of the communist revolution.

Our orientation is exactly the opposite of "this is our thing"—some little temple of secret knowledge that just a few of us are initiated into, something that we want to keep to ourselves, and we don't want anybody else to find out about it or, for god's sake, to become a part of it. It's just the opposite. More and more people need to take this up. And, yes, they need to contribute to further developing it, as they're taking it out into the world and making it a powerful force politically—to mobilize people, to "Fight the Power, and Transform the People, for Revolution"—and summing up the results of that and learning and keeping that process going forward.

Mao made this statement: human life is finite, but revolution is infinite. Well, that's very true, very real and very important. Individuals, all individuals, are going to go out of existence at some point, some sooner than others. It's one of the horrific things about the world and the way it's so lopsided, with masses of humanity and vast numbers of nations in the world being oppressed by imperialism, that there's a huge gap between the life expectancy—just under "normal conditions," let alone with wars and everything else—a vast disparity between the life expectancy of the masses of people in the Third World and people in a handful of imperialist countries. But, beyond that, every life is finite, as Mao said, and is relatively short. There is the question of what we do with our lives, and what they're part of, what they contribute to. And we need to win more and more people to be inspired by—on a scientific basis but, yes, to be inspired by and passionate about—devoting their lives to this. We need this while we're influencing millions; we need to bring forward wave after wave of people who are firmly grounded in and deeply won to the need to fight for this and devote their lives to it. We need to bring forward, through the course of our work, thousands of new people who are won to that.

We need to make leaps in doing that right now. And then we need to continue, wave after wave, to bring forward greater numbers of people, so that we get to the point where, when there's a deep crisis, and millions of people have been influenced by these revolutionary ideas, and millions of people more broadly—tens of millions, tens and tens of millions—are waking up on a massive scale, questioning what's going on, and deeply feeling they don't want to live this way any longer; and when the system is in enough crisis, has enough of its contradictions sharply affecting it in a way that makes it harder for the ruling class to rule in the way it normally rules—then those thousands who've come forward as initiators of a new stage of communist revolution can be the core that brings millions into the revolutionary movement, and, in turn, influences tens of millions more to actually fight for this revolution.

That's at the heart of it. People should read this statement, "On the Strategy for Revolution." I'm only touching on some of the key points here. But that is at the heart of what it's speaking to. And then, as I referred to earlier, there is the essay "On the Possibility of Revolution"—and in an ongoing way this is being further grappled with. For example, in *Birds Cannot Give Birth to Crocodiles, But Humanity Can Soar Beyond the Horizon*,⁷ I spoke to different aspects of questions that are taken up in "On the Possibility of Revolution." And there is a need to continually grapple with these questions.

This is one of the main things masses of people raise: **How are you gonna go up against "all that"?** This goes back to where we started, with your first question—back to Tupac, "two shots and Huey's dead." In other words, this is sort of a metaphor for what you have to go up against if you're gonna try to fight the power, and carry this struggle all the way through. Well, we have to approach this question of how you could actually defeat the repressive forces of the exploitative and oppressive system, when the revolutionary situation has come into being, and a revolutionary people has emerged on the scene—how you could actually defeat their repressive violence, which they will bring down, which they have brought down before but will bring down on a whole other level in a revolutionary situation.

How are you going to meet and defeat their repressive force and violence? That question needs to be grappled with in an ongoing way. Like it says in the Statement on Strategy, revolution will never be made by acting all crazy, trying to go up against the system in a way that you can't, when the conditions don't exist for it—being impatient and just giving vent to frustration. That will not lead to a revolution—that will just keep the world the way it is. On the other hand, as the Statement on Strategy also emphasizes, neither will revolution be made by just waiting for "one fine day" when somehow it becomes possible to make a revolution. We have to keep working and bringing forward more and more people in the realm of struggle—practice in that sense—and in the realm of grappling over line and theory, and in the back and forth relation between practice and theory, in order to prepare the ground and bring forward more and more people to lay the basis for being able to meet and defeat them, when that is the question that does legitimately pose itself in an acute way for millions and millions and millions of people: no, we refuse to live under this system, so how are we gonna get out from underneath it?

This Is a Gigantic Leap... and It Makes All the Difference

Brooks: For people who are kind of advanced, who have been around this movement for revolution for a while and consider themselves revolutionary and communist-minded, or very supportive of the idea of revolution or communism, or are very drawn to BA and what he represents and this movement for revolution or, in different ways, have been around for a while and are kind of weighing what would it mean to join the Party: What is that next leap that they have to take, what difference would it make to

be in the Party? What are some of the things that you might say to people who are weighing that?

BA: Do the right thing. [BA and Brooks laugh.] I would say, it makes all the difference. The Party needs to grow. It needs to grow by leaps and bounds, wave after wave, whatever you wanna say. New people, including young people who have, who can bring, energy as well as creativity, need to become part of this. And yes, they need the scientific grounding. They need to have the fundamental orientation and outlook of why we need this revolution and why it's possible, in basic terms, and how we're gonna go about working toward that. They need to be won to that, and actually be firmly committed to it, on the basis of an essential grounding in that understanding.

But then they need to make the leap: "okay, this is what I'm gonna dedicate my life to." That flows from the understanding that the present world is intolerable, and, more than that (as you were referring to earlier), there is no permanent necessity for existing conditions—or, to put it more simply, things do not have to be this way. Well, then, the next leap is to leap into the Party—to become part of the Party, part of the organized and disciplined force that's working for this in a systematic way.

And, look, for everybody who's done this—myself, everybody else that I know—this is, in a real sense, a gigantic leap. It means this is what your life is gonna be about from now till whenever your life ends—because that's the commitment that has to be made. It's not a cult, it's not some secret society you're joining. But it is a commitment that, in order for this revolution to come about—which is urgently needed by humanity, by the masses of people in the world—in order for that to come about, people have to dedicate their lives to it. Once you've come to that level of understanding—that it's necessary and possible—it can't be a part-time thing, or it can't be, "I'll get into it for a little while, and then, when I 'grow up,' I'll get out of it." No. Don't "grow up." Don't grow up in the wrong sense. You know, like that saying attributed to Winston Churchill: Anybody under 30 who is not a socialist doesn't have a heart, but anybody over 30 who is a socialist doesn't have a head. Well, fuck you, Winston Churchill—you reactionary pig.

The point is that this revolution is more needed by humanity than ever. And it's urgently needed. It's not gonna happen all at once. We may not see that many, or even perhaps any, new socialist states in some of our lifetimes—but maybe we will, and maybe some people will see more than one. But the point is, whatever we see or don't see personally, we have to be working toward that, because that is what humanity needs. And the more you have your heart in the right place, the more that you really care about what happens to humanity, and the more you have your head, in fact, in the right place—never mind Winston Churchill—the more you understand scientifically what is needed in the world, what the problem is in the world and what the solution is, then the more dedicated to this you should be.

And there's, again, a dialectical relation, if you will, between your heart and your head. Having a heart for the masses of people, first of all, is very important. If you don't care about the future of humanity, you're never gonna be a communist. If you don't burn with a passion to rid the world of these outrages that are brought down on people all over the world every day, if your stomach isn't turning, if you can't sleep well knowing, once you've learned, what people are going through—right around you and in the far reaches of the earth, away from you—if you don't have a burning desire to put an end to that, well you're not gonna be a communist, simple as that. You should have that burning passion once you learn about this.

And then you do have to combine that with getting a deeper and deeper—an ongoingly deeper—scientific grounding in what that all stems from, and how it can be uprooted and eliminated and something much better brought into being. And there should be a positive back and forth. The more your head learns, the more your heart should beat with a desire, and a passion, for doing this. And the

more your heart beats with that passion and desire, the more you should be driven to want to learn more in order to be able to fight better for it, and to be part of a collectivity of people who are fighting for it.

Yes, there are a lot of sacrifices that are involved. In confronting the question of joining the Party, everyone has to choose whether they're gonna make those sacrifices or not. Nobody can or should try to decide that for you. But it is the thing that humanity needs. It is both necessary and possible—not guaranteed, and certainly not easy, or without tremendous sacrifice, and without having to go up against entrenched powerful and, yes, destructive and murderous forces. So, we have a lot of work to do, collectively, to figure out how to fucking beat these people. How to get them out of the way of humanity. Not because as individuals they're evil, but because they are the embodiment and the enforcers of a system that is not needed by humanity, that stands as an obstacle and a direct hindrance to humanity getting to a whole different place, that the basis has been laid for humanity to leap to. And so, therefore, their hold over society and over the world has to be broken, and something new has to be brought into being: not for revenge, but in order to get humanity to a whole different place where there are not masters and slaves, to put it simply; not whole sections of society that are being exploited and oppressed; not one half of humanity, women, being dominated and degraded by the other half and by the whole workings of this system. We need to get to that, and in order to do that, we have to break the hold of these people. And in order for that to happen, people have to become part of the organized, disciplined collectivity of people who are working and struggling together in the realm of practice, and in the realm of theory and line, to actually make this happen.

People who are new to this but have come to the point of understanding what I'm talking about, and understand that this is what's needed and what's possible—and, yes, it's gonna take a tremendous amount of work—need to make the leap. That's why I started off saying: do the right thing. Make the leap that follows from the understanding you've gained. Get in there and become part of the process of wrangling with others, and uniting with others, to make this happen, and bringing forward many more people—again, in an ongoing way, but especially wave after wave through acute crises and jolts in the system—to where we can actually have the basis to make this happen.

Revolution: Difficulties and Sacrifices, Passion and Joy

Brooks: One thing is, without obviously, in any way at all, minimizing what you're saying about the very real and sometimes tremendous sacrifices that are involved in this, just to speak to another angle of it, I know another thing that you've talked a lot about, including in your memoir, is this point that there are tremendous sacrifices involved in all of this, and tremendous responsibility, but there's also tremendous joy involved in the process of making revolution, and struggling to get to a whole new society and new world. I was even struck that there was this part in your memoir where you're kind of talking about how, in the '60s, on the one hand, people did have a very real—I forget exactly how you put it, but, if people thought about it, there was kind of the implication that those sacrifices could go all the way up to people losing their lives—but, at the same time, that there was a sense of joy that sustained people, which came from knowing that they were part of a whole wave of people all around the world who were trying to radically change things. So, I don't know if you wanted to speak a little bit to that aspect of things too.

BA: Well, look, everybody who's ever been involved in any big mass movement, where you break out—break free, frankly—of the normal routine, has experienced both the difficulties that this encounters, when you're going up against the entrenched powerful forces that you have to go up against, but also, yes, the joy, and the liberated feeling of breaking out of the garbage which this system constantly tries,

and works, to drag people down into. Having your mind opened and your spirit (I'll use that expression, your spirit) lifted—I'm not a spiritualist, I don't believe in metaphysical things that aren't material reality, but there is such a thing as the spirit of people, so yes, having your spirits lifted—and when you start to relate to other people in a different way, and you start to wrestle together with other people about big questions: everybody who's experienced this knows the very real exhilaration of it.

And when you go even further with that, and you get to the point where you really understand, in a fundamental and a sweeping way, how the world could be radically different, then, yes, there is tremendous sacrifice, there's tremendous hardship—let's be honest, you will face death, you will face repression, you will face prison, you will face torture. I'm not saying that will happen to everybody, but these are the things that can happen to you as part of this. We have to fight, this has to be a key arena of struggle, to fight the repression of the ruling class: whenever they seek to torture people, either conscious revolutionaries or just "ordinary people"; whenever they unjustly repress and jail people; whenever they set out to murder people; whenever they wage war; we have to build a massive fight against that, and we have to try to win every battle we can, while recognizing that, ultimately, it's gonna take sweeping away this system in order to get rid of those things, as well as all the other outrages that this repression is trying to maintain and enforce.

So, yes, there are all those things. But there also is tremendous joy. Not in a Pollyannaish sense, but in a reality-grounded sense, if you will. It goes back to that perverted Winston Churchill thing—but let's take the first part of it. You have a heart. It gives heart to people to be part of this. It's uplifting. You're not in it because it's personally rewarding to you. If you're in it for that reason, that's the wrong reason. Don't get in it for that reason. But it is, in fact, tremendously uplifting to be part of this broader revolutionary movement, and to be working and struggling together with other people to forge the path forward, both in practice and in theory, and in the relation between the two. And there is, in that sense, real joy. There's passion and there's joy, motivated by the understanding that the world could be a completely different way, and that the mass of humanity—which, without any exaggeration, really is groaning under the weight of this system—could have that weight lifted, could themselves rise up and throw off that weight.

So, there's both sides of it. But there is a very real sense that this is the most worthwhile thing that your life could be about. Not, again, as a means of seeking personal reward, but this is something larger than yourself which lifts you up as well as being ultimately and fundamentally about humanity itself rising up to whole different heights and casting off this weight.

Rage and Joy

Brooks: You have that line in your spoken word piece, "All Played Out," where you're talking about the so-called Left, and one of your criticisms is that they're devoid of rage and joy. Right? And it seems like part of what you're talking about—what we're getting into right now—is the need for communists to have both a lot of rage and a lot of joy, but for both of those things to be scientifically grounded.

BA: That's right, and I think there's a connection, again, between rage and joy. If you don't have a passion for this, if you're not outraged by what's going on, and all the many different ways in which this system really degrades and debases and drags down masses of people, shoves their faces in the mud, and treats them as nothing, as mere human materials to be utilized for the profit of a handful, and then to be cast aside on the garbage heap, with hundreds of millions of people forced to literally live in and around garbage heaps: if you don't have passion, outrage and passion, about that—outrage for what is and passion to see an end to it—then you also can't have the joy.

On the other hand—and the reason I said that about the so-called Left—is that it's just mired in reformism. If you're not really getting down to the essence of what the problem is, if you're not really getting to the root of this and the source of it, and, therefore, you can't really see how it could be radically different, then in a certain way you just kind of go through the motions, you just cling to some ideas that themselves are outmoded, and really don't have anything to do with radically transforming the world. And, along with that, there's no joy, because you're not really about anything radically different.

That's not to say that people who hate injustice, but don't see the need to sweep away this system, can't, at least for a certain time, be passionate about fighting injustice. I don't mean to say that. There's plenty of that, and there's a need for a lot more of it, and that should be united with, even while people should be engaged and struggled with over what does all this stem from, is there a way to get rid of all of it, and what is that way. So, I want to make that clear. There are many individuals out there—people who come forward and are outraged by the injustices they see, and the way they understand them—who do have passion, and even joy in fighting against them. But I'm talking about when a reformist program is systematized into the line of a group which may pretend that it's about something radically different, but is merely settling for staying within the confines of this system: very soon you're gonna lose the passion and joy, any real passion and joy, because you're not really grounded in either the horror of this system, in its full dimensions, or in the liberating possibilities, the emancipating possibilities, of a radical transformation of the world.

We Need to Be Right... and We Need to Win

Brooks: One thing that I think—just to go back a second to what you were saying about do the right thing and the importance of people taking that leap and joining the Party—I think it relates to something that you were saying before we started this interview, which was this point about it's not enough to just be right, you actually have to win.

BA: That's right. Look, it's important to be right. If you're not right, then even if you won somehow, what would it be about? You wouldn't bring anything better into being. It's important to be right, in the sense of it's important that you actually have a correct, scientifically grounded understanding and approach—again, along its main lines. This is not a dogma, or a dead, ossified, dried up doctrine. This is a living science, in the real sense of science. But I'm talking about having a basically correct grounding, flowing from a scientific outlook, method and approach to understanding that this reality that constitutes human society, and the relations of people in that society, the relations among different parts of the world, and between people within those different parts of the world—if you don't have a scientifically grounded understanding of that, and of the way it could be radically changed, if you're not right in that sense, then anything you do is ultimately either gonna run into a dead end or lead to nothing good, even if it "wins."

On the other side of the picture, though, if you have that, but you don't actually do anything about it—or if you "fight the good fight," but you don't win—it doesn't change anything. And then, yes, future generations have to come behind you and go through the same errors. Look, we're all gonna make errors, we're all gonna make mistakes. You can't do anything in the world of consequence, and you certainly can't engage in any major undertaking—and especially one which is trying to transform the whole of human society and the whole relations of people in the world, up against such powerful entrenched forces—there's absolutely no way in the world that you're gonna take very many steps, let alone carry out that whole process, and not make mistakes. The point is: do you learn from your

mistakes, do you learn to learn more quickly and more thoroughly from your mistakes, do you honestly confront your mistakes, do you sum them up, and do you let other people know—do you popularize your understanding of the mistakes you made and why you made them, and enable other people to learn from your mistakes? That's the key thing. Because everybody's gonna make mistakes, okay?

So, certainly, every party and every leader of this whole communist movement, going back to the very beginning, from Marx on, has made many mistakes, that's true. The question is: what's been the main character of what they've done and contributed and, as part of that, have they learned well from their mistakes, and educated other people on the basis of their mistakes?

The point is, yes, you're gonna make mistakes, but you better learn from them—but, also, we have to win. It's not enough to say, we have right on our side, we're the "good guys"—no, imperialists, you're not the "good guys," you're the "bad guys"—we, the masses of people in the world and the revolutionary leadership that the masses need, we're the "good guys." Okay, true. That's very true, and it needs to be said, and it needs to be fought for. These monstrous criminals who rule the world as it is now are not the "good guys" in the world, and their military forces who go out to slaughter people to enforce this system are not the "good guys" in the world. That doesn't mean that none of their soldiers could come over to the side of the people. That's happened—it happened on a very significant scale during the 1960s, and we see some of it happening now, with veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars turning against those wars, and joining the people who are protesting and resisting those wars, and so on. But, as a force, you and your military are not the "good guys" in the world. You are mass murderers—that's no exaggeration or hyperbole—and you're a bunch of massive oppressors and slave drivers in the modern day sense, sometimes literally, but certainly in a real sense, in terms of the way people are driven and exploited and degraded under your system, in massive numbers, in the billions, literally.

So, yes, it's very important: You're not the "good guys," sorry, you are the "bad guys" and we are the "good guys." Okay, that's important—that needs to be said—that even needs to be fought for. But, then, the "good guys" have to win. We have to actually make this real. If we don't win, if we don't break through, first here and then there—and then, if we're set back, learn from that and go forward again with a new stage and a new wave of this revolution, and eventually get to the point where the imperialists are cornered and holed up in a few parts of the world, and then eventually they're swept away entirely—if we don't do that, then the suffering of the masses of people, the things we were just talking about that we should feel real outrage and passion about, are gonna continue; it may be in some new forms, but they're gonna continue. And the future of humanity is gonna be threatened in an even more acute way through what's happening—what this system is doing to the environment, for example, as well as through the wars that these ruling classes wage, directly or through proxies, or whatever—and they have these nuclear arsenals, and all the rest of it. If we don't sweep all that away and not allow them to destroy humanity in the process, then it ultimately doesn't matter that we're the "good guys." It matters, but in the final analysis it doesn't matter if we don't win.

We can't accept this pragmatic thing of who are the "good guys" is determined by who holds power—whoever holds power gets to define who's the "good guys." No. This has to be scientifically determined, like everything else. So it matters a great deal that they're the "bad guys" and we're the "good guys," to use their comic book terms for a second. But ultimately it doesn't matter unless we do fight through and win, with everything that's involved in that, both in the realm of theory and in the realm of practice and struggle down on the ground.

A Far More Radical Rupture, A Far More Emancipating Revolution

Brooks: I think this does go back to some things we were talking about a little while ago, too—the situation and the terrain in the world right now, and also different things that have come out, different works that have come out this past year and different things the subjective factor has been doing in relation to all that. Because, there's kind of this big gap—it's been spoken to in *Revolution* newspaper, and elsewhere, there's this big gap, or I think *Revolution* newspaper called it the agonizing irony—that the world is crying out for communist revolution more than ever, and there's the leadership, there's the strategy, there's a vision of a whole different way the world could be, but most people have no idea about this. And now, in this current situation, people are raising their heads in different ways, rising up and resisting and fighting the power in different ways—obviously with the limitations and incorrect understandings that you were speaking to—but people are raising their heads, and the big questions are posing themselves for a lot of people: Is there a way out of this, what is that way out, is there a different way the world could be, what's the source of all this? But then, the answers to those questions are not yet on the map nearly enough, and at nearly the level that it needs to be.

So, I guess what I'm getting at partly is both the steps forward that have been made in relation to that, with things like *Basics* and the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic*, and the Statement on Strategy, and the other things that we were talking about—but then also the need for those things to get out on a whole, much bigger level.

BA: Well, that, again, is the objective in a broad sense of the "BA Everywhere" campaign, and the whole larger Campaign of which it's now a concentration, addressing the need to really put revolution and communism on the map, to make it a real force in this society and with impact in the whole world, to really make this revolution we're talking about, this communist revolution, a point of reference and of debate among very large numbers of people in society; and, as a concentration of that, having the new synthesis of communism—and, in that sense, having my voice, vision, and works—become a point of debate and reference in society, having BA become in that sense a "household name"; and having new waves of people actually won to, and becoming initiators of, this new stage of the communist revolution.⁸

Now we keep talking about the new stage of communist revolution. The reason we do is because the first stage has ended and been defeated. And, particularly in an American society with its pragmatism—of winners are always right and losers are always wrong, to slightly oversimplify it, but not that much—we have to emphasize that there's a difference between saying that this first stage of the communist revolution was defeated, and the notion that it "failed." This first stage began with the founding of the communist movement by Marx, together with Engels, and then took a leap with the Paris Commune, a short-lived, two-month embryo of a new society in the city of Paris in 1871, and then another leap with the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union for several decades, then a further leap with the Chinese Revolution which achieved victory in 1949, and then for several decades socialist transformation was carried out in China, reaching its high point in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. But then, first, there was the reversal of socialism and the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union in the 1950s, and then essentially the same thing, with some different particular features, in China in the mid-'70s, or more specifically 1976, shortly after the death of Mao Tsetung.

That whole stage of the communist revolution has ended, and it ended with defeat. But, again, the point I want to emphasize, in pragmatic America especially, is that there is a difference, a great and very important difference, between being defeated and being wrong. There's a difference between being

defeated and failing, in that sense. I mean, yes, we failed to defeat the defeats, so to speak, but that doesn't mean that what people were fighting for is a failure. It doesn't mean communism is a failure. Those socialist states were an embodiment of communist principles—yes, with the shortcomings of those states and their leaderships, some of them quite serious, some of them even grievous, but mainly and overwhelmingly this was the positive embodiment of communist principles. The fact that those things have been defeated and reversed does not mean they were wrong, or they were a failure, or that they were bankrupt. It just means they got defeated in a certain round of struggle—in what is historically the early stages of this struggle. Even the rising bourgeoisie had to go through victories and then setbacks before it came to dominate, not only this or that society but the world as a whole in the form of the capitalist-imperialist system, with the bourgeoisie as the embodiment of the capitalist-imperialist system, as the ruling class of that system. They had to go through setbacks and then come forward again.

The historical process which led to the domination of the bourgeois mode of production, and the bourgeois political system, the capitalist-imperialist system in the world as a whole, was itself marked by this kind of a process, with twists and turns. And it's not surprising that something which is far more of a radical rupture, and far more emancipating, the communist revolution—which doesn't seek just to sweep aside one system of exploitation and the rule of one set of exploiters, but seeks to, and must, in order to fully succeed, sweep away all systems and all relations of exploitation and oppression, and all exploiting ruling classes—it's not at all surprising that this would have to go through a lot of twists and turns, and suffer defeats, even significant ones, along the way.

So, it's important to emphasize: there is a difference between being defeated, even in a significant round of struggle, and being a failure in a sense that what you represent has been shown to be bankrupt and no good. There's a lot of confusion of the one with the other—and of course, there's a whole chorus of people, including some who claim to be against the present system, like Slavoj Žižek, or others who in essence say: "Well, there are some redeeming features of imperialism, but communism is utterly bad. You know, I'm an anti-capitalist, but communism is terrible—and imperialism, maybe that's not so bad, or at least we can accommodate to it." I'm not vulgarizing here. In issue #256 of *Revolution* newspaper (January 15, 2012)⁹ there's a polemic written by Raymond Lotta, which also challenges Žižek to a debate about these things, because people like Žižek go around saying that they're anti-capitalist, but really they hate communism much more than they hate capitalism, and they're much more willing to accommodate to capitalism-imperialism than they are to fight for communism, which is the only real radical alternative to it.

That was a little bit of a detour, but it's important to speak to this attempt to seize on the fact that the communist revolution in this first stage—from the time of Marx to the reversal of socialism in China after the death of Mao—to seize on the fact that it's been defeated to try to pile on and say: therefore it was never any good and it was really a horror, after all. The first thing is unfortunately true—it was defeated. The second is not true—it was not a horror; in fact, even with its shortcomings, which are very real and which do have to be learned from, it was the most emancipating experience that humanity has had in all of its history.

So, what were we talking about?

Brooks: Well, I think we were talking about the agonizing irony between the fact that the world objectively...

BA: Oh, yeah, thanks. The world objectively needs this, but it's not nearly the force it needs to be now.

Brooks: Yeah, but then also, on the one hand, some significant steps in the last year, or couple of years,

have been taken, putting that more on the map, but then it's still not nearly anywhere near on the map at the level that it needs to be.

A Big Gap—Confronting, and Transforming, a Striking Contradiction

BA: Yeah, well, I started off talking about this and then went off into the question, which is an important question, about the defeat of the first stage and how to correctly understand that, and how to sort that out from the distortion of it. But, yes, the whole point of the larger, overall Campaign is to get out there and bring forward new initiators of a new stage of the communist revolution, on the basis of making this revolution and what it's all about a real, mass phenomenon in society, and "making BA a household name"—using that as a shorthand—in terms of the new synthesis and what it represents.

It is one of the very important objectives of that Campaign, to address that contradiction: that there's this very advanced theory and program for radically transforming the world but, on the other hand, owing to a lot of these things that I've been speaking about—owing to the defeat of the first stage of the communist revolution, and owing to the piling on by open apologists and defenders of the capitalist-imperialist system, and what we might call shamefaced defenders and apologists for the capitalist-imperialist system: people who pretend to be against it, but end up back within its framework, and apologizing for it in one or another form—all that piling on has made it so that, for decades now, there has been a negative verdict on communism and the socialist societies it brought into being.

This is a vast difference with the 1960s. There are similarities with the '60s in the sense that right now there are mass movements that call to mind some of what went on back in that time. I was referring earlier to things that struck me—some of the similarities between the Free Speech Movement in 1964 and something like "Occupy" now. There are real areas of overlap and similarity. But one of the big differences is that those movements of the '60s—the Free Speech Movement, the Black liberation struggle that developed out of and became much more radical than the initial civil rights movement, all the other movements, including the movement against the war in Vietnam—those were taking place in the context where communism and revolution were being taken up by millions and millions of people around the world, besides the hundreds of millions of people who were actually living and struggling to carry forward socialism in China at that time.

So, that was a very different framework. And a lot of the struggle then revolved around the different trends that called themselves revolutionary, and the question was: which really represented the way forward? There were even different trends among those who called themselves communists. Could you be a communist and be following the Soviet Union, when it had turned around from being a socialist country into being what was identified by Mao as a "social-imperialist" country—in other words, socialist in name, but imperialist in its real nature and in its deeds? Could you be a communist and be following the Soviet Union? Could you be a communist, but say, "I repudiate what Mao stands for, I don't support the Cultural Revolution?" No. But that was a lot of the way the questions got posed by the end of the 1960s, among literally tens of thousands of people, in the U.S. itself. And there were hundreds of thousands and millions more who considered themselves radical or revolutionary-minded. That was a whole different context. The world was vastly different in that way, and it had its effects on the movements of those times.

Today, we have movements which, as I said, have some similarities, even some significant similarities, with movements of that time (here again is the analogy between features of "Occupy" and aspects of the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley in the 1960s). But today this is occurring in a vastly different context—practically, in the sense that there are no socialist states in the world; and, ideologically, in the

sense that there's been this whole massive, coordinated and orchestrated campaign of slander and abuse heaped on communism and on communist leaders, like Mao, for decades now.

The Need for More Defiance—Intellectually as Well as Politically

BA continues: And today there are elements of this, but there isn't quite yet what we had in the '60s. We had that sensibility in the '60s that was basic to the ethos of the times—a basic sense that the people who ran this country were a bunch of hypocrites, that they talked about democracy, but they treated Black people as second class citizens, and stood by—if they did not actually instigate, they stood by while Black people were lynched and dumped in rivers and things like that, just to take a very sharp example of this. Once you saw the hypocrisy in all that, as well as the literally murderous nature of it, then you developed this defiant attitude: "Whatever those motherfuckers say, whatever they're for—I'm against it. Whatever they say is bad, at least I'm gonna check it out, because I know they're a bunch of motherfuckers. So whatever they say is no good, I'm gonna check it out."

You don't have enough of that yet among the people who are protesting. In other words, the attitude that, if these people running this society say that communism is bad, we better all go check it out. Now, there's some of that, and there are people more and more open to that as people do raise their heads—there is this dynamic, again, about fighting the power: people raising their heads to resist, but also opening their minds more, raising their heads also to think about bigger things and to think critically in a way that they don't always do. There's some of that, but there needs to be a lot more of it.

There is this acute contradiction that since the time that socialism was reversed in China, shortly after Mao died in 1976, for three and a half decades, for 35 years, work has gone on, and struggle has been waged in the realm of theory—summing up historical experience, positive and negative, drawing from a lot of different spheres of human activity, and bringing forward a new synthesis of communism, and things like the statement "On the Strategy for Revolution," which has never existed in this country, or in imperialist countries in general, on that level, with that level of synthesis.

Or, there is the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America (Draft Proposal)*: something like that has also never existed, certainly in the U.S., but on that high level of synthesis, it hasn't existed prior to a revolution anywhere in the world, really. And some people say: "How can you write a Constitution when you haven't yet made a revolution?" Well, the point is that we need to have a sense of what we're going for. Now, it is said, right in the introduction to that Constitution: a lot of the particular forms that some of these things will take cannot be determined right now, and will depend on a lot of different factors at the time that the revolution actually breaks through and seizes power, and the new socialist state is established; but there are, in fact, many things, in terms of basic principles—but also in terms of concrete guidelines—that can be laid down for what are the contradictions that will have to be addressed, and what are the basic ways in which those contradictions can be addressed. And, in fact, we're much further ahead because that Constitution exists, in that it gives people a sense of what they should be striving for; it raises their sights to that, but also it gives them a living sense that there could be a radical alternative to this system.

People sometimes say to us, "Oh, you're always so negative." What they really mean is that we're negative about this system, when they want to try to hold on to it, or they want to try to make it work in a way that they like better, or whatever. "If you're against all this, then what are you for?" Well, here, with this *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic*, we're telling you what we're for, and how we're gonna go about it, not only in general terms, but in quite concrete terms, in many cases, while also acknowledging that, yes, some of this will depend on the specific circumstances—and will have

particular features that will have to be developed—at the time. But some of it—and much of it, in fact—can be laid out in its basic strokes and with a fair degree of concreteness right now, and it's very important to do that right now. It's a real breakthrough that something like that has been brought forward.

So, these are all part of raising people's sights. And, as you referred to earlier and as we've constantly talked about in the Party and in our publications, there is no permanent necessity to the existing system, to the existing conditions. There could be—and, in fact, we have to fight for—a radical alternative, and here's what this radical alternative will look like.

But there is still this big gap which we have to work consciously to close, step after step, leap after leap, and that is the aim of this whole Campaign that we're carrying out with its three objectives: making this revolution broadly known and have a major impact in society; "making BA a household name," for short; and bringing forward new waves of initiators of the new stage of communist revolution. And all this is concentrated now in the massive and multi-faceted fundraising campaign to project this new synthesis (and my overall body of work and leadership) out into society, and make it a point of reference and a point of, yes, debate and struggle broadly in society. That is precisely one of the main ways—not the only way, but one of the main ways—we're working to bridge that gap. The "BA Everywhere" campaign, and the fundraising to make it possible, is now a concentrated focus of working for those three objectives.

And that, in turn, is part of the broader work and struggle to build the movement for revolution, which encompasses these mass initiatives that we talked about—against pornography and patriarchy, against mass incarceration. It encompasses getting our newspaper, *Revolution*, out into society in a big way and wielding it as a tool in building the movement for revolution, and in linking people together, enabling them to act with a common understanding, and act in unison around major questions. And it involves relating to mass movements and upsurges that erupt in society and develop spontaneously, or by the initiative of other forces, and bringing revolution to them, while uniting with their positive thrust.

All this is the way in which we're working to bridge this gap, and to bring forward people to concretely bridge this gap. And, again, there does need to be more of that spirit, that ethos, out there—that in terms of the powers-that-be, and their representatives, which people are objectively rebelling against: **If THEY have been saying all this bad shit about communism all this time, at least you oughta check it out, because maybe there's something really good about it, if these people hate it so much and are piling on against it.**

And this is why someone like Žižek needs to be taken on, for example, and why the polemic has been written to challenge him—and, yes, Raymond Lotta has challenged him: Let's debate these issues. Why not debate these issues? Let's have that debate. Let's get into these questions. If you're gonna say communism is a disaster and a failure, let's talk about it, because not only do we not think so, in some subjective sense, but it's not scientifically true. Let's get into it, let's take it on, let's see what the reality really is, let's see what facts and scientific analysis of facts actually show.

We need a lot more of that kind of joining of these questions, rather than just letting this anti-communist barrage go unanswered, and rather than not joining the issues on a high level, as we were talking about earlier. We need to join these issues on a high level. Let people see the confrontation of ideas and analysis. Let's see what people can learn from that. Let other people get into the debate. But let's take people who are putting forward, in a concentrated way, verdicts on things, or analyses of things—let's have them join directly in confrontations so people can learn.

All those are ways in which we're working to bridge this gap. But we need people to have that critical

spirit. And we need to fight for people to have that critical spirit. Alright, you've heard all this shit about communism: who's telling you this and what do they say the problem in the world is? And what do they represent—to use that old phrase from the '60s, are they part of the problem or part of the solution? And let's get into what is the problem and the solution.

Another thing I did want to mention in connection with this whole ideological offensive and multi-sided onslaught against communism is that our Party has taken on the challenge of actually digging scientifically into the experience of the Soviet Union as well as China, and on this basis has taken up a campaign of setting the record straight with regard to this. And it's very important that people get into the material that has been brought forth through this whole effort. They can go to the website thisiscommunism.org.

This is an ongoing task—understanding more fully and deeply that whole experience. But it's very clear from digging into it scientifically, and working through all the slander and distortion, that, once again, this is a whole experience that needs to be upheld and defended and popularized—an experience which is overwhelmingly positive, even while, as I've emphasized, and not surprisingly, there are many mistakes to be learned from, some of them quite serious, even in some cases grievous. But, overall, once again, this was a tremendously emancipating experience of radical transformations that were unprecedented—had never really even been attempted, let alone carried out, in any kind of previous society. So, people should look into this. We really do need to be setting the record straight on this and carrying out ideological struggle to take on these unscientific and distorted attacks on communism; and thisiscommunism.org website is very important in that regard.

A Champion of the "Free World": A Mass Murderer on a Horrific Scale

BA continues: Also, since we're talking about Winston Churchill—which we weren't right now [Laughs], but whom I did mention earlier—lest people think that, when I referred to him as a reactionary pig, I was just engaging in a gratuitous attack or quaint and obsolete revolutionary rhetoric, it is an actual fact that Winston Churchill was a mass murderer on a horrific scale. We're always told about how Winston Churchill came to the United States in 1946 and made his famous speech about how an "iron curtain" had descended over Eastern Europe, etc., etc. And he's always upheld in this way as a great leader of the "free world"—maybe not as great as the American presidents, but nevertheless a great leader of the "free world." Meanwhile, during the course of World War 2, as a result of conscious decisions made by Winston Churchill, millions of people in India were starved to death during that war. And then after that war, when there was the massive uprising—the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya among the Kikuyu people—Winston Churchill oversaw the massive uprooting and sending to concentration camps of literally hundreds of thousands of the Kikuyu people, who were tortured on a mass scale and murdered in the thousands and thousands and thousands, all with Churchill's knowledge and firm approval.

So, once again, it is no exaggeration or hyperbole to refer to Winston Churchill as a reactionary pig. In fact, that doesn't get anywhere close—and I've only cited two examples of many that could be cited of the great and towering crimes against humanity that this "great opponent of the 'iron curtain' and leader of the free world" committed in the name of freedom and the Western way of life.

Brooks: I wanna follow up on one part of that—which is that, as you're talking, it's kind of striking me: the contradiction between, on the one hand, Churchill, one of the key imperialist rulers, and actually millions of people starved as a result of his very conscious and deliberate policy, and that's not talked about; and then I know there's a lot of complexity to it, but people always have these slanders or talk

about the Great Leap Forward in China and things like that, and claim that Mao was responsible for all kinds of deaths in relation to that. And I know there's complexity in relation to that, but whatever happened was happening in the context of actually trying to overcome starvation and misery and poverty, and yet Mao's always accused of causing all these deaths, while people like Churchill, who actually—this was a matter of conscious and deliberate policy—millions of people died and that's not ever talked about. That's one thing that strikes me as you were talking.

BA: Well, there is this book—of course this book doesn't get a lot of publicity, and it doesn't get promoted by the powers-that-be—there is this book, *Churchill's Secret War*, by Madhusree Mukerjee, and there is also the book, *Imperial Reckoning*, about Kenya, by Caroline Elkins, and these books do get into some of these crimes.¹⁰ The decisions by Churchill regarding India that Mukerjee focuses on were made in the context and for the purpose of waging World War 2 on the part of Britain, as part of the alliance with the United States—and the Soviet Union, by the way. But they were conscious decisions based on the idea, frankly, that the lives of Indians were much less important than maintaining stability at home in Britain, and making sure that the people of Britain didn't suffer on anything like the scale that people in India did. The British people had to make sacrifices in the war and suffered some hardships, but that was nothing like the level at which people were subjected to mass starvation in India.

These were conscious decisions that Churchill made. And conscious decisions do have to be made when you're up against real contradictions. But then we have to ask the question: What values and outlook did these decisions reflect? And, in Churchill's case, they reflected explicitly—because he was an open national chauvinist, an open racist, to put it simply—they reflected the orientation that the lives of Indians were not worth nearly as much as those of English people—and that, again, stability in England was far more important than what happened in India, and specifically what happened to the people of India—and if a few million people in India had to starve to maintain stability in England during the war, and to wage the war effort, so be it.

And, with regard to Kenya, the orientation was: England must hang on to Kenya—and, anyway, those people are just "savages"—this was the outlook, explicitly, of Churchill and his inner circle of advisors: this Mau Mau uprising was an uprising of "savages," who deserved to be treated like "savages," like subhumans. And they were treated that way. Again, hundreds of thousands were rounded up, put in literal concentration camps, systematically tortured in these concentration camps, and killed in the thousands and thousands.

Then the question is: besides the outlook that infused this, what was the objective? In both cases—and this is very pronounced in the Kenya example—it was maintaining the interests of British imperialism, in other words, maintaining oppressive domination and exploitation. Maintaining, in the case of Kenya, colonial rule, at the cost of all the things I've described: the massive torture, the mass murder—the rounding up and subjecting to torture in concentration camps of hundreds of thousands of people, all to maintain an oppressive and exploitative system.

Radically Different Systems: Radically Different Outlooks and Objectives, Radically Different Results

BA continues: Now, on the other side, not only with the Great Leap Forward in China, but also with the experience in the Soviet Union under Stalin, there were errors made, and they did have real consequences. It does seem to be the case that—although not on the scale of this tremendous exaggeration that continually escalates—there was starvation, in the early 1930s in the Soviet Union, or

during the Great Leap Forward, from the late 1950s to the early years of the 1960s, in China. There was a loss of life. There was dislocation. Now, part of the objective context for this, in China during the Great Leap Forward, is that there were severe droughts. This also occurred in conjunction with the fact that the Soviet Union was basically attempting to set the terms for how socialism would be built in China; it was supplying some aid, but the terms of that aid were basically that socialism in China had to be built along the lines of the Soviet model, in order to utilize the aid that was being provided.

Mao had summed up that going along on that model was not going to lead to the positive outcome that needed to be striven for; that, in fact, this would work against actually developing socialism in China, and that it would work against the conscious activism of the people themselves being unleashed to transform the economic, social, and political relations, especially in the countryside of China. When, therefore, Mao set out to lead things in a different direction—and the Great Leap Forward was one key expression of that—the Soviets pulled out their aid. This occurred at the same time as there were several years of severe droughts in China. And that—combined with, yes, mistakes and dislocations—did lead to a significant number of people suffering severe malnutrition or even starving. The point is, however—and this is reflected in how you posed this question—unlike Churchill and the imperialists, this was done as part of developing a mass movement to overcome the conditions of privation for the masses of people. Privation they had suffered, not with the beginning of the communist regime, but for decades and centuries and even millennia going back in China, where the mass of the peasantry, making up the overwhelming majority of the population, was continually in conditions of severe malnutrition and there was mass starvation repeatedly. And, very quickly, when the experience was scientifically sifted through in the Great Leap Forward, and when mistakes were recognized and corrected, they actually overcame these severe problems and, for the first time in the history of China, they actually solved the food problem by the mid-1960s. In other words, while there was still some hardship, people had enough to eat in order to be able to be healthy. And that had never happened before in the history of the masses of peasantry in the countryside in China.

And that, all along, was the objective with Mao. It wasn't to wring wealth out of the peasantry, to feed an elite class, so to speak. In fact, that was one of the criticisms that Mao had of the Soviet model of socialism: that it, in a sense, took too much from the peasants in order to develop heavy industry at a breakneck pace. Mao felt that, while it was important to develop heavy industry, if you did it by, in effect, taking too much away from the peasantry, and subjecting the peasantry to too much hardship, that was actually gonna, first of all, cause suffering—unnecessary suffering—and, second of all, it was gonna actually undermine developing a well-balanced and articulated socialist economy in which there were healthy relations between agriculture and industry and they were mutually reinforcing each other in a positive way, so that the economy could grow in a balanced and proportionate way.

So, that was the objective. And, along with that, the objective was to mobilize the masses of people themselves to overcome and transform the oppressive and exploitative relations which had been inherited, if you will, from the old society—which had been carried over and still remained in significant aspects. That was the purpose of the Great Leap Forward. Now, in some ways it succeeded, and in some ways there were serious errors, but they learned from that, and went forward, and they not only solved the food problem, but also, by the mid-'60s, they made tremendous strides in transforming those oppressive and exploitative relations, particularly in the countryside, where the great majority of Chinese people lived, as well as in terms of the workers in the urban factories, and so on.

So, again: completely different world outlooks, completely different objectives, and very different results, in terms of the actual effect for the masses of people and their actual role in society.

The New Synthesis of Communism—Putting This in Historical Perspective

Brooks: I wondered if you could talk a little bit about this point that the new synthesis of communism that you've brought forward is not based on either of the two dominant trends that are mentioned in the Manifesto from the RCP¹¹—either discarding and throwing out the past experience of socialist society, or kind of clinging dogmatically to it. It's standing on the shoulders of that previous experience, but then actually going further. I wondered if you could speak a little bit to that.

BA: Well, one of the ways to get at this—this flows from what I was just talking about, and, again, we do need to focus a lot of attention on setting the record straight around this, because we're fighting an uphill battle against this massive assault, a massive and multi-sided assault against communism coming from the ruling class and the ruling and dominant institutions of society, from academia to the "popular media" to the so-called news media, and so on—but one of the ways to come at this, and to look at the experience in the Soviet Union and in China, is this: We're always hearing about how in democratic, i.e. capitalist, society, the individual is valued in a way that was not true before in history and is not true in any other kind of society, especially not tyrannical or "totalitarian" societies like communist dictatorships. The "rights of the individual" are supposedly at the center of the whole political philosophy and the whole political process in these capitalist democracies.

But the reality is that this ignores the fact—or attempts to cover over the fact—that the capitalist system, and especially in this era of the last century and more, when capitalism has developed into a full-blown international capitalist, worldwide imperialist system, that literally—and, once again, without any exaggeration—grinds into the earth hundreds of millions, actually billions of individuals: the masses of people whom it oppresses, uproots, hurls from one place to another—exploits when it can, and then casts off, literally again, into the garbage dumps when it has no use for them. Those individuals, and their aspirations, are in reality given absolutely no consideration, count for nothing, under the rule of capitalism-imperialism. And that's also true for tens of millions of people—and ultimately for the great majority of people—even in the imperialist citadels, the heartlands of imperialism, like the U.S. itself. There are literally millions and millions of people, tens of millions, who are ground under, right within the borders of this country, including the immigrants who are forced, or drawn, to come to this country, and then ruthlessly exploited and oppressed and repressed.

This idea that somehow, under the capitalist system, there is a "sanctity of the individual" is a complete distortion—is a myth, and a lie. But, then, it's said at the same time that communism, even where it does some good things for the masses of people, does it by trampling on individuals.

So here, I think, is one way to understand what we have to wrestle with. In the history of the Soviet Union and in China, they very rightly gave priority (as I was discussing a little while ago) to solving first, and as a point of priority, the basic needs, and in particular the basic material needs, of the masses of people who were bitterly exploited and oppressed under the old system—the peasants in China who never had health care, period, before the revolution in 1949, and who since the restoration of capitalism in China in the late '70s, by the way, also find it very difficult to get any kind of, certainly decent, health care. The health care system in China since the restoration of capitalism has gone from being one of the most egalitarian, in terms of how it was applied to the population at large, to being one of the most highly unequal in the entire world. And that's the way it was before the revolution which led to the "communist regime" in 1949—in other words, the revolution which led to the new socialist society.

So these were the problems that were given priority: the basic necessities of the masses of people, like health care and food, and decent shelter, and dealing with diseases. There were massive epidemics of diseases in China that were uprooted and eliminated through mobilizing the masses of people, as well

as professional health care workers. Social problems, as well, such as prostitution and drug addiction, were massive problems in the old society in China. I remember—I've told the story in my memoir, *From Ike to Mao and Beyond*—that when I visited China in 1971, we would talk to people who would recount their experiences in the old society, how badly they'd suffered. This included coal miners, who worked in mines that were often owned by foreign imperialists—they worked every day of the week. They would talk about how they went into work before the sun came up and came back from work after the sun went down, so very rarely in their entire lifetime did they see the sun. They were brutally exploited, and without health care, without any of the basic necessities of life, or barely enough to live on in order to keep working. And, of course, then when it was no longer profitable, they were just thrown away like useless waste.

These kinds of things were the conditions that the communist government, the revolutionary government in the new socialist society, gave priority to addressing. And with the miners, a lot of them took to smoking opium, in order to deal with these horrific conditions, in order to be able to go to work in these kind of conditions, in order to even be able to get a little sleep afterward, only in order to get up again in a few hours to go to work. So this was a massive problem. That's just one manifestation, a massive problem of opium addiction. And there was widespread prostitution. There were a lot of foreign businessmen and foreign military people who took advantage of the impoverished and oppressed conditions of the people in China, in particular the women, and used them as prostitutes.

All these social problems were addressed when the revolution triumphed and the new revolutionary government came to power. These were the kinds of things that, along with the basic material necessities like food and shelter, were given priority. And the same had been true, in basic terms, in the Soviet Union when it was a socialist country.

But, then, once again there's the "conventional wisdom": okay, they did all that, but they did it at the cost of curtailing the freedom of the people, especially the intellectuals and the artists, and so on.

Now, in terms of what you're referring to with the new synthesis, what I've tried to do, and the collective effort we've made—again with things like setting the record straight—is to scientifically analyze what is true and untrue about that. It is a definite fact, and a very important truth, that these basic economic and social needs of the masses of people were given priority—and, politically, the masses of people were brought into political life, into various mass movements, but also into political debate and taking up the big questions of the society, in a way that had never been done before, in either Russia before the revolution or in China before the revolution.

But the question does need to be addressed: Was there, secondarily, within that framework of giving priority to those things, some problems along the lines of: well, if we have to curtail certain freedoms and certain initiatives of the intellectuals and the artists, then that's part of the price that has to be paid in order to give priority to these other basic things? Now, nobody ever argued—or at least official policy did not articulate it—exactly in that way. But I do believe that a scientific analysis would reveal that there was some tendency in that direction, as a secondary phenomenon. In other words, there was a tendency for artistic work and intellectual efforts to be tied too much and too closely to whatever were identified as the needs of the time, in terms of the political objectives and the economic and social objectives of the government at that time. That was uneven, and it wasn't crudely the way it's generally presented. But here is the challenge that the new synthesis is speaking to. Let me put it this way:

How do you give the correct and necessary priority to the fundamental needs of the masses of people in society—especially those whose needs have been trampled under, under the old exploitative system, economically, socially, and politically and culturally—while at the same time not undermining the

necessary intellectual and cultural ferment, creativity, and even dissent that's essential in order to have the kind of process in society where both the masses of people as a whole, and also the leadership of the party and the government, is learning from this whole process, including the criticisms that are raised and the unconventional ideas that find expression in intellectual endeavor, and in the field of the arts, and so on—so that you have a richer process?

It's not that they didn't allow for any of that, especially in China. But the question is: how to deal with all this so that you have a qualitatively richer process—how do you do all that without undermining the necessary steps that need to be taken in giving priority to solving the fundamental problems and needs of the masses of people, right down to their basic material needs, and in terms of moving and mobilizing masses to overcome the vestiges, the remaining elements, of the exploitative and oppressive relations which dominated in the old society, and which can't be eliminated all at once? How do you give the correct priority to all those things, but at the same time have the necessary process of intellectual and artistic ferment, debate, dissent, with things going off in different directions? That's a very, very difficult contradiction to handle correctly.

And I do think there was some narrowing in the past experience. Part of the new synthesis is analyzing the ways in which there was some narrowing of that—of this second aspect—the dissent, the creativity, the ferment, the innovation in the realm of intellectual endeavor and artistic creation. There was not enough of allowing people to go off on their own initiative, and then working to embrace all this, in a large sense—not in a narrow, constricting sense, but in a large sense—giving large expression to it, but also embracing it and leading it to all contribute to going forward toward communism, together with the struggle throughout the world.

Another way to get at this point is this: Many people complained that, during the course of the Cultural Revolution in China, all these intellectuals were forced to go to the countryside and live in the countryside. Now, a lot of the intellectuals and other people who grew up in the cities didn't want to go to the countryside [Laughs]. And you can understand why: it's more backward, life is harder. Plus people from the city are unfamiliar, and not comfortable, at least at first, with conditions in the countryside. The culture and the kind of intellectual ferment that you can often find in the city is not there in the same way in the countryside.

I remember when I was in China in 1974 and we met with some young guys who worked in a department store in the city. And one of the people I was traveling with asked some of these young people: "Have you done your turn in the countryside?" And they answered: "No, we don't have to go to the countryside, because the people who have to go to the countryside are the people who are in the superstructure"—referring to the people who are in the political institutions and generally people working in the political realm, or people who are in the arts. But, they went on, "We are working in a department store, so we're not part of the superstructure, so we don't have to go." [Laughs] It was clear they didn't wanna go. And you sit there, as you're listening to this, and you think: "Oh boy, they've got some contradictions here—and I doubt if these young guys are just speaking for themselves, this must be a much more widespread phenomenon, that a lot of people don't want to go to the countryside."

And, of course, after Mao died and then capitalism was restored, and they started heaping abuse on the Cultural Revolution and all of its different policies, then they encouraged a lot of this expression of resentment among intellectuals and artists for having to go to the countryside. Well, there are some real contradictions involved in this. But, one of the points that I've made previously in talking about this—and it is a fundamental point to begin with—is this: Nobody ever asked the peasants if they wanted to be in the countryside, the hundreds and hundreds of millions of Chinese people who grew up in the

countryside and who did all the work in the countryside. Nobody said: would you rather be somewhere else? It was just assumed that the peasants would be in the countryside. And then you have the argument that, for the intellectuals, who have a more privileged position in society, somehow it's a great crime to make them spend a year or so in the countryside. Well, no. If the peasants had to be in the countryside, working in the way they were, doing manual labor there, why is it such an outrage for intellectuals to go to the countryside for a year or two?

But, then, if that's all you point to, you haven't gone far enough. There is a question of how do you give air to breathe to the artists and intellectuals, how do you create the atmosphere in which they can do work, without that work being undermined, with the right kind of atmosphere in which creativity and critical thinking can flourish? And it takes time to do this. Intellectual work is work. Some people may not think so, but it is work. You have to apply yourself, and you have to have time and the right atmosphere to really grapple with ideas. You can't do it part-time. In other words, you can't just play around with something, and then put it down for a while, and then come back to it. Well, some things you can, but you can't just simply dabble in it, let me put it that way. If you're serious, you have to actually get deeply into things in order to understand them, even if you're approaching them in the right way—or especially if you're approaching them in the right way. So, there needs to be, on the one side, that kind of atmosphere.

Here's the contradiction, then. On the one hand, there's the fundamental point: Nobody ever asked the peasants if they wanted to be in the countryside, so what's so terrible about the intellectuals spending some time there? On the other hand, what about the necessary atmosphere, and air to breathe—the environment, the circumstances and surrounding culture where intellectuals and artists can really flourish and be creative, and actually produce things that are of a high quality and, also, in one way or another—at least in an overwhelming majority of cases—can and will contribute to the cause of revolution, even if all of them aren't explicit or even conscious or full expressions of the communist outlook? Many works of art which aren't fully that can still contribute to the cause of communism, in the right kind of atmosphere and with the right kind of orientation.

So, this point about who asked the peasants if they wanted to be in the countryside, on the one hand, versus the necessary air and atmosphere and culture for intellectual and cultural work, can also serve as a metaphor for getting at this larger problem that I was speaking about—the more overall problem of, on the one hand, giving the correct priority to the fundamental needs and interests of the masses of people, including their basic and immediate needs for essential material things, as well as their social and political needs, while, at the same time, not being too constricting, or even somewhat suffocating, in the realm of art, culture, and intellectual endeavor and working with ideas.

And, while there was some positive experience in that regard in the Soviet Union and in China, there was also some negative experience, in terms of, once again, things being—at times at least, and in certain ways—too much constricted to being direct expressions, sort of directly an accompaniment, of the efforts to meet the basic material needs of the masses, and to carry out the political campaigns that the party and the state leaders identified as critical to carry out at a given time.

Precisely a New Synthesis—of Profound Contradictions

Brooks: And then there's the question, too, of what this is all for, and what the new synthesis is for, including this aspect you were talking about—about all kinds of experimentation and initiative. In other words, as you've spoken to before, it's not like: let's just repeat the past, but this time with a little bit more intellectual and artistic experimentation, so that this society is a little bit better to live in, but that

actually all this is necessary to get where you're trying to go.

BA: Right. Another way to put this is that the new synthesis is directed at answering—among other things, but one of its objectives is to answer the often stated argument that: you can either meet the basic needs of the masses, and that's all good, but you have to suppress people's freedom and creativity and initiative and innovativeness, and so on, or you can give expression to all that—innovativeness, creativity, artistic flourishing, initiative, and so on—and meanwhile the fundamental needs, including the immediate needs, of the masses will be undermined. And the new synthesis is precisely, as one of its key aspects, addressing that contradiction in a way to strive precisely for a synthesis that doesn't fall into one or the other of those errors: either, never mind about the fundamental needs of the masses, let's compromise those in order not to undermine intellectual freedom and curiosity and creativity and artistic expression, and so on; or, we can't undermine those things so... I got mixed up, sorry, let me go back and start again: Either you have to compromise the fundamental needs of the masses, including their immediate basic needs, in order to give full expression to creativity and dissent and unconventional thinking and critical thinking in the arts and intellectual endeavor; or, we can't compromise the fundamental needs of the masses, so we'll just have to pay the price with less creativity, intellectuals will just have to suffer some, so that the basic needs of the masses, including their immediate needs, or basic material requirements, can be met.

And the point of the new synthesis, or one of its main aspects, is to find a different synthesis on that, so that both those things are given due and correct attention; and, yes, as you were just posing it, all this is given expression in a big way, but also embraced in a big way—with broad arms, so to speak—and led toward the ultimate goal of communism, even while there are perhaps things, including in the intellectual sphere, that may run counter to communism, but in the overall process they can contribute to communism, if the communists themselves who are leading this process have the correct orientation toward this and lead people to sift through these things, and even to learn from the things which may be oppositional but may contain kernels of truth, or may inspire creative and critical thinking, or cause people to look afresh at new problems, or cause them to think about things they hadn't thought about before, and so on.

***Basics*: Concentrating Key Principles and Objectives, Rearing a New Generation of Communist Revolutionaries**

Brooks: One thing I wanted to talk about is: this past year *Basics* came out. This is a concentration of more than 30 years of your work, and it's a concentration of the new synthesis that we've been talking about, and a lot of people have made the analogy between *Basics* and the Red Book in terms of the role that the Red Book played in rearing a whole generation of revolutionaries in the 1960s, and then speaking to the role that *Basics* can play in raising a whole new generation of revolutionaries now, on the basis of an even more advanced understanding. So I didn't know if you wanted to speak some to how you see the role of *Basics* and the importance of it coming out.

BA: Well, I think you hit on much of the essence of it. It is intended to serve a purpose analogous to what the Red Book, the *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung*, served in relation to the movement and the upsurge of the 1960s: *Basics* starts off with some exposure of the actual history of the U.S. and of slavery as crucial in the development of the U.S.; and then it speaks to the alternative, the socialist revolution and the goal of communism; it talks about the revolution that is needed and the strategic approach to that; it goes into questions of epistemology, that is the theory of knowledge, how you know about the world, the method for knowing the world; and it speaks to morals in relation to revolution;

and then gets into the revolutionary potential of the masses and the responsibility of leadership and the vanguard party.

So the point is to give people a basic grounding in some of the fundamentals of communist analysis, communist principles and methods, and communist objectives, in a way that people can get into—in a "digestible form." In other words, a lot of things have to be addressed with a lot of complexity, because reality is complex, and many aspects of the problems of making revolution are very complex. You can't get where you need to go, if you don't engage and wrestle with that complexity. If you just try to water it all down to something simple, you're not gonna get where you need to go, because the complexity of reality will assert itself and confront you, whether you talk about it or not.

So you can't avoid that. A lot of things are necessarily complex, even while it should be our objective, and I do the best I can, to try to make those things as accessible and understandable as possible for people—including people who are newer to things. Even when a lot of complexity does have to be engaged, I try to break it down, and come at it from different angles—sometimes going over it in one or two different ways, or three or four different ways—to try to enable people to get inside of the complexity and examine it and learn from it. Still, there's no getting around the fact that there is complexity that has to be engaged.

But at the same time, in order to deal with that complexity, you have to get a grounding in some of the fundamentals. And that's the point of *Basics*. Its objective, ultimately, is to serve the training of new generations of revolutionaries—as well as a further grounding for people who may be veteran revolutionaries, who've been at this for some time—in the fundamentals, in the basic analyses, principles, methods, and objectives of communism. And it needs to play that role. It already has gotten out in some significant ways and had an impact, and has been something that people who are new to all this can take up and get into. You can go to different places in the book—you don't necessarily have to read it in the order in which it is—you can go to different places, get something out of it, then go to another part.

So, I think it has shown—let me put it this way—the potential to play the role that it has to play. But there's still much more that needs to be done—it needs to be catapulted, if you will, onto a whole other level and reach a lot more broadly among many more people, in order to introduce them to and begin to give them a grounding in this.

At the same time, two points: One, this is the fundamentals, it is a grounding—it is a platform, if you will, from which people then need to get into the more complex and the more all-around character of what this is all about. It is an indispensable tool, it's a very valuable tool, but it cannot be a substitute for people engaging the theory more broadly—and not just what I've written, but the whole body of communist theory, beginning with Marx and Engels, and Lenin, and Mao—and, yes, some of Stalin is good. But this new synthesis is both a continuation of and a leap forward from all that. It is precisely a new synthesis drawing from, and founded in, that whole body of communist theory, beginning with Marx. And so people also need to get into these broader works of communist theory. They don't just need to read what's been written in the last few years by myself and our newspaper, and so on. They also need to look into some of the "classical" works of Marx and Lenin and Mao, and so on.

So that's one point. *Basics* is a foundation and an introduction, but it's precisely that. It's not something that should be the end of the process; it should be a beginning and jumping-off point, and a constant source of reference, to come back to, because it does present in concentrated form many of the key analyses, principles, methods and objectives. So, constantly returning to it will provide a basis for a deeper grounding in that and a basis for wrestling with the more complex theory that not only myself,

but others, have brought forward since the time of Marx.

The other point—this goes back to what we were discussing earlier: We have more of an uphill battle now because, unlike the '60s, this is not a time when, as a mass phenomenon yet, people are searching for theory that is revolutionary and many people are positively inclined toward communism and are actively taking up communist theory, with varying degrees of understanding, and coming from various positions, and with various outlooks. It's not that kind of period. We talked about that earlier. And, in fact, communism has been given a bad name. I mean, the imperialists always try to give it a bad name, but there was a massive phenomenon going the other way in the 1960s. Not that their propaganda and slanders against communism didn't have any effect, but there was a powerful force pulling the other way: because of the existence of socialism in China, because of this whole wave of revolutionary struggle in Vietnam and in many other parts of the Third World—which, to varying degrees, identified itself as socialist or even communist, took up the Red Book to some degree, and so on and so forth. And this had a big impact on people in other parts of the world—including people, especially youth, in the U.S. In this period today there's a massive assault against communism, but there's not the same gravitation toward it, because many of those things I just mentioned are not there on the terrain at this point.

That means we're up against more of an obstacle here, but it also means that we have to recognize that and find the ways to wage all the more of a fight to get this concentration of basic principles, methods, objectives, and so on, that's embodied in *Basics* out among people broadly, and to engage them with it. The book itself does a lot of the work. You can get into that book itself, and you can learn a lot from it, you can wrestle with what it says, and it can point you to a lot of things to follow up with. There is a long bibliography at the end (and then there are other works of communist theory, beyond what's in that bibliography). So it does a fair amount of the work—just reading the book itself does a lot of the work for you, so to speak—but it doesn't do all of it. And, let's face it: people take this up, they get excited by it, and then they go out into the world where, first of all, there are the imperialists, the ruling class, and those who are aligning with them in the field of academia, or among the intelligentsia generally. And there are also other trends out there. We talked about this earlier: lifeless, without passion and joy, a so-called Left—people who, ironically, have a stake in people believing that there's no alternative to the present system, because these forces have, if you'll pardon the pun, staked out a position as a sort of feeble left opposition within the present order, from which they can launch critiques, and offer alternatives that are no real alternatives. First of all, they themselves actually may believe some of the slander against communism; but, beyond that, it's reinforced by the fact that they've carved out, or staked out, a position of being a kind of "left opposition" within the existing system. So they wage a lot of struggle against people taking up communist theory in general, and specifically the new synthesis of communism, which finds concentrated expression, or fundamental expression, in *Basics*.

All this has to be taken on and engaged—in principled but fierce struggle to win people, not only to open the book and begin reading it, but then to actually grapple and engage the key principles, methods, and objectives that it does concentrate, and (here again is the importance of polemics and the confrontation of different worldviews) to compare and contrast that on a high level—not on a petty, down in the gutter level, but on a high level—with what other people are arguing for, and the ways in which they are arguing against what is embodied in *Basics* and the whole larger communist theory and communist objectives that it is a significant concentration of.

These are questions which, once again, need to be fought out. We don't have a lot of things going for us in the same way as the '60s, but there still is a potential for this book, *Basics*, to be analogous to the Red Book, as more and more people do begin searching out radical alternatives, and as we fight to raise

their sights and their standards to really compare and contrast on the level of line, outlook, and program, and to loft their own aspirations, as well as their own approach, onto that high level. And I think we have to understand that there has to be a conscious fight for this.

In conceiving of and in planning the book, I will say that we did deliberately organize it so it could be a counterpoint to and in opposition to the Bible. So that's why, like you have Leviticus 20:13 in the Bible, horrific things in there; and then you have *Basics*. Or John 3:16: for God so loved the world, blah, blah, blah; and then you have *Basics* 3:16, calling on the masses of people—those who have been cast off by the system—to rise up. And so on. So that—we did consciously do that. But not so that it would be conceived of and treated and wielded as some kind of religious catechism or dogma. The point was, we had a vision, which I think is a good vision, taking into account how the religious fundamentalist forces are given a very wide rein in the prisons to go in and indoctrinate people in religion—either Christianity or Islam, or whatever—and they're given a lot of assistance and support from the state, with the notion that steeping people in the reactionary ideology that's embodied in those scriptures will somehow cause them to be better people. But then, on the other hand, revolutionary literature has a very hard time getting into the prisons. But we had a conscious vision that we wanted to have contests going on in the prisons, where some of these religious-indoctrinated prisoners would be saying, "Oh, we gotta learn from John 3:16"—and one of the other prisoners, who is revolutionary-minded, says: "fuck that—*Basics* 3:16."

On the other hand, the concept was not and is not that somehow this is supposed to contend on the level of religious dogma. First of all, it has a revolutionary and not an outmoded reactionary content—a liberating, not an enslaving content—which the Bible and the other scriptures, such as the Qur'an, do have. But, second of all, it is a distillation of a scientific approach and method; if you read it and grapple with it, you can see that. It is not encouraging people to blindly follow this or that, or to worship this or that. Quite the contrary: it's calling on people to rise up consciously and think critically. That is both explicitly stated, and the whole character and approach of it, and the whole orientation of it, is that.

So, in short, *Basics* does have tremendous potential; but, like everything else that we're all about, it's going up against a tremendous amount, including spontaneity, including the outlook of other classes—which, by the way, have representatives who fight for their outlook and their program—not only the ruling class, but also the middle classes, various strata of the petite bourgeoisie, if you will. And then there are the conscious representatives of communism, who are wielding this book *Basics*, as well as *Revolution* newspaper, and other works of communism by our Party and by others from the history of the communist movement. We need to fight even more vigorously—in a very lofty and principled way, but very vigorously, sharply, and, in the correct sense, uncompromisingly—for what we're all about, and for *Basics* as a key thing to wield in waging the fight for what we're all about.

We Want to Challenge and Provoke People to Think

Brooks: It also seems like there's a dialectical relation here. On the one hand, the totality of *Basics* and people getting into that over time, and learning from the full sweep of what's in there, and being trained in that way; and then there's the immediate effect that happens when people respond to or encounter specific quotes in the book, even as they're just getting introduced to it. Like, for example, I've heard a lot of stories of the very first quote in the book having a really powerful effect on people and really grabbing them. So, I don't know if you have any thoughts about that kind of back and forth, where on the one hand there's the totality of it, but then there's even people who are brand new to things, and

have never even thought about revolution and communism, or all these different questions, but are just being struck by a particular section, or a quote, or something.

BA: Yeah. There was a very conscious decision made to start the book the way it did. There were different alternatives that were considered, and it was consciously decided to start it with a very basic statement about the relation of slavery to the whole development of the U.S., and that "**There would be,**" as the quote says, "**no United States as we now know it today without slavery.**" That is a simple and basic truth."

That is also a very provocative thing, given how people are educated—or, more correctly said, miseducated—in this society. So, there's that quote, right from the jump: Boom, you're into it. Is this true or not true? And what does that say if it's true?

And then you go on. And, as people go on, there are things that are gonna be more controversial among different sections of the people. Among a lot of the basic masses, many have not only been indoctrinated with religion, but have also turned to religion out of a feeling of despair and desperation, feeling weighed down and objectively being oppressed by the constant workings of this system, and by the brutality of the enforcers of this system, and who have been made to feel degraded, as if their own shortcomings and their own "failures" and their own "lack of moral fiber" is what has landed them in the situation they're in, rather than the workings of this system. A lot of them are drawn toward religion for those reasons, as well as the constant indoctrination. So, some of them may pick up the statement about slavery, and how the immigrants are treated, and how people in other countries are treated, and it may draw them forward; and then they get to Chapter 4, and it talks about religion, and they go, "Whoa, wait a minute." [Laughs] And other people, who maybe are more from the intelligentsia, let's say, are reading along, and they don't have a problem with the religion part—they agree with that—but then they get to the part about leadership, and individual leaders and vanguard parties, and they go, "Whoa, wait a minute."

So, there's that contradictory experience—which is good. In other words, we're not trying to hide from people what we're about, and the reason we're about it: what is actually necessary to understand in order to identify what the actual causes of the horrors in this world are, and how to go about uprooting and transforming and eliminating those things? So, we want people to be shaken up a bit, because you're not gonna make a revolution if people aren't shaken up, if they aren't shaken out of the ways in which this system has conditioned them to think, and even to feel, in a certain sense. We want to challenge people in a way that provokes them to think. That's the point.

So, *Basics* has things that draw people and also things that people have trouble with in various ways. And, again, the book does a lot of work, but it can't do all the work. The people who are fully with this, who are coming to be fully with it, have to get in there, in the ideological trenches, so to speak, and struggle these things out with people—get into it with people and go through things with people, in a certain sense. Not pretending you don't understand what you do understand, but actually going through the process together with people, and engaging in struggle with them, as well as constantly bringing them back to some of the basic things with which they either agreed or found themselves unable to deny when they first got into it, and then showing the connection between that and what they find to be more troubling, or have a harder time understanding, and so on and so forth.

Note: the following section of this interview was previously published in *Revolution* #258, February 5, 2012. It appeared with a "final note" by the author which is also included here.

Tim Tebow and the "Tuck Rule"

Brooks: One aspect of the new synthesis that you were just talking a little bit about—and it's obviously a key aspect of the new synthesis—is a much deeper recognition and appreciation of the role of art and culture in making revolution and transforming society, and so I wanted to maybe shift gears a little bit and talk about some of that. And I guess one place to start is that you were telling me that you have something that you're working on, something about Tim Tebow and the "tuck rule"—so I don't know if you wanted to get into some of that.

BA: Well, first of all, before turning to Tim Tebow and the "tuck rule," I do want to briefly make clear that prior communists, and in particular theoreticians and leaders of the communist movement such as Marx, Lenin, and Mao, had a significant appreciation for the role of art and culture in relation to revolution; but, as I touched on a little bit earlier, there was a tendency—maybe this is a little oversimplified, but it does get at something—a tendency to see art and culture too much one-to-one with the political revolutionary movement. To see it as a part of the machinery of the revolution, in a more linear or direct sense. Not that they didn't appreciate this at all, but perhaps there was a tendency working against fully appreciating the way in which the realm of art and culture has its own dynamics and has to explore a lot of different questions or phenomena from a lot of different angles, including new and unusual angles. Some art and culture should be directly related to the struggles of the day, so to speak—there's a definite need for that—and some of it should be addressing more explicitly political questions, and ideological questions directly related to the contrast of world outlooks, for example. But some art and culture needs to be, so to speak, more indirect, not one-to-one or in any kind of immediate sense tied in with the major political and ideological questions of the day. Now, in an overall and ultimate sense, art and culture does give expression to one worldview or another, and it does become part of the arena of ideological and ultimately political struggle, even where it is given a lot of rein to go in a lot of different directions and is not so directly tied to political and ideological struggle. There's a difference between being ultimately related to this and being directly and more linearly and one-to-one related to it. So that's one point I wanted to make at the start.

Now, to turn to Tim Tebow. Since, for many years now, he has prominently promoted fundamentalist Christianity—including by literally wearing references to Biblical verses on his face during football games when he was a prominent "star" in college—I was thinking it might be a good idea to send Tim Tebow some quotes from the Bible that he should promote and popularize—ones that get to the essence of what the Bible is about—like the passages in the Bible that call for the oppression of women, for slaves to be obedient to their masters, or those which insist that children who are rebellious should be put to death, that women who are accused of witchcraft should be executed, that homosexuals should be executed, that women who are not virgins when they get married should be executed in the town square, that people who practice religions that are opposed to the supposed one true God should be slaughtered, with the women raped and the heads of babies bashed in. Or the Biblical verses in which Jesus thinks that epilepsy is caused by demon possession instead of understanding it scientifically, which is pretty piss-poor for the son of god, if you think about it. And on and on. I think there are a number of verses like this that I would like to forward to Tim Tebow, along with a copy of *Away With All Gods!*, to provide him an opportunity to get a true understanding of what the Bible really represents, and have a chance to get up off of all of this reactionary shit and stop spreading a bunch of Dark Ages mentality and morality, when there's already far too much of it in the world. Whether Tebow himself can be moved in this way, I can't say for sure—it certainly doesn't seem very likely—but in any case it is important that a real understanding of what the Bible actually represents, and all the very real horrors it promotes and indeed insists upon, be brought to light. [12](#)

But as for Tim Tebow and the "tuck rule," let's get into this subject this way. It's clear that "somebody up there" likes Tim Tebow. I'm not referring to a non-existent god, and I'm not referring just to somebody in the ownership and management of the Denver Broncos, for which Tebow plays. I think of a comment by Michael Cooper when he played for the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team in the NBA back in the early 1980s: During one of the championship series that they seemed to have in those times as an annual spectacle, between the Los Angeles Lakers and the Boston Celtics, when the Lakers lineup was announced, right before the start of the first game, instead of doing the traditional "high-five," the Lakers players did a "low-five" (slapping hands down low instead of up high). And I guess for the people in the NBA offices it was something like what Richard Pryor once described, in terms of the reaction of certain white people upon seeing Black people doing something that those white people didn't understand—whenever Black people get together and are doing something like that, Pryor observed, these white people say, "Hey, there's a whole bunch of 'em, what are they doing, what's going on here, what are they up to, are they plotting and conspiring?" So, it seems the NBA executive office had a similar reaction: "Uh-oh, what's this thing they're doing? We just got used to the high-five, now they're down 'low-fiving' like that—is this some kind of dangerous thing they're doing here?" So, according to Michael Cooper, the Lakers players were told that they could no longer do this low-five. And when asked who told them that, Cooper answered: "somebody higher than the team and lower than god." So when I say "somebody up there likes Tim Tebow," I'm thinking of somebody "higher than the team and lower than (a non-existent) god."

And the reason I say that is because it's clear that Tebow has, at this point at least, inconsistent and mediocre skills, to be charitable, as a professional NFL (National Football League) quarterback. Yet he has led all these "miracle" comebacks toward the end of games, where his team has not been doing anything all game long on offense but then suddenly comes from behind, and wins right at the end, or ties the game up at the end of the fourth quarter and sends it into overtime, where they, once again, miraculously pull out a win. Somehow, in these situations the defense of the other team suddenly forgets how to play defense. Somehow, for example, the defensive backs, who are supposed to "cover" the offensive players ("pass receivers") who are trying to get "open" to catch a pass—somehow those defensive players forget how to "cover" the receivers, leaving them wide open to catch passes from Tebow, who is anything but an accurate passer, on any consistent basis, and has a hard time completing passes to his "receivers" unless they are wide open.

The point is that there seems to be some sort of program involved here—once again, beyond just the team and beyond just Tim Tebow and the circle around him and his agents. Marketing Tebow commercially is certainly part of this, but beyond being part of a marketing strategy, this promotion of Tim Tebow is serving an ideological purpose. It's serving the purpose of projecting the kind of reactionary Dark Ages religious fundamentalism that Tebow represents and insists upon spewing forth and imposing on everybody—it's a matter of giving that a lot of free rein and wide expression. Having Tebow come out as a "winner" on the football field—and particularly having him pull out "miracle comeback wins" at the end of games—is crucial in order to give Tebow credence, to make him more effective, in spreading his reactionary religious fundamentalist viewpoint (after all, this is America—and nobody will listen for long to a "loser"). In fact, a recent survey indicated that nearly half of the people polled in this survey believed that intervention by god had something to do with these "miracle comeback wins" that Tebow has been credited with producing (and even if a survey of this kind might involve an unusually high percentage of people who are Tebow fans and religious fanatics themselves, it still reveals something about what is "up" with this whole promotion of Tebow).

So, it seems clear that forces "higher than the team and lower than (a non-existent) god" feel that this is

not only good for marketing, but it's important ideologically to spread this religious fundamentalism through a major cultural figure, a sports icon that they've worked to create in Tim Tebow. The reasons for this should be obvious if you think about it: Here you have a crisis in society, upheaval in society, resistance mounting, deep questions starting to be grappled with more broadly about the whole way of things and the whole direction of society—and one of the main means through which powerful sections of the ruling class see for cohering the society and holding it together on a reactionary basis is precisely the spread of religious fundamentalism, Christian fundamentalism in particular. And that's why we've seen such a flowering, if you will—which is really a misnomer since this is something really putrid, but let's just call it a flowering—of religious fundamentalism in such a major way over the past several decades in the U.S., and once again intensely so in recent years.

It's not that there weren't already people who adhere to fundamentalist religious views. Even without encouragement from "on high" (among the ruling circles of society), there would be this phenomenon of religious fundamentalism in this society, given that this kind of religious viewpoint has been promoted since the beginning of this country. You can think of things like the Scopes trial (the trial of a teacher in Tennessee in the 1920s, who was charged with violating a law in that state which prohibited the teaching of evolution) and the ways in which reactionaries have tried to prevent people from learning about evolution, right up to today. That is just one sharp example of what I am referring to. But the point is, in more recent decades—and now, once again, in a sharp way in recent years—there has been a concentrated effort, by powerful and influential people, to cohere this kind of religious fundamentalist belief into an ideological and political force, and to exert and magnify its influence in society in that way. Scattered and dispersed as just a bunch of individuals, such a phenomenon would have far less influence. But as a more cohered and organized force, which is given powerful backing and financial resources—as this Christian fundamentalism is in the U.S.—it becomes a whole other phenomenon with much more major impact.

So into this fits Tim Tebow. Now I follow sports as closely as I can, and it's very interesting: Tebow played a few games as quarterback for the Denver Broncos last year but he was beaten out for the starting position during "training camp" before this season began. Yet a clamor was raised and a campaign orchestrated to have Tebow become the starting quarterback for the Broncos. And when the Broncos were doing poorly at the beginning of this season, the guy who beat Tebow out as the starting quarterback, Kyle Orton, was dumped, demoted, and Tebow took over as quarterback (and then Orton was eventually let go and ended up with another team). But in any case, they brought Tebow in, and he started having these "miracle" wins, which I referred to earlier.

Now, listening to all this, some people might say: "Are you really trying to tell me that there's some kind of conspiracy, that what happens in a football game is not determined on the field by what the players and what the coaches do, but somehow something else is going on—is this another conspiracy theory of how there are powerful forces that are manipulating things?" Well, yes. It is definitely the case that this happens in sports, particularly (though not only) professional sports, and there are very good reasons to believe that this is what's happening here, with Tim Tebow.

As I said, I follow sports as closely as I can, including football, and I noted that shortly after Tebow became the starting quarterback for the Denver Broncos this season, they were trounced by another team, the Detroit Lions. And, to use the metaphor commonly employed in "football parlance"—a very revealing metaphor—Tebow was "sacked" many times by the Lions' defense (this means that when he went back to pass the ball, the opposing team broke through and tackled him behind the line of scrimmage before he could throw the ball). And they intercepted a Tebow pass (meaning that, instead of the pass being caught by the "receiver" on his team, to which Tebow was trying to throw the ball, a

defensive player on the other team caught the ball instead), leading to serious setbacks for the Broncos. The Lions routed the Broncos, and Tebow looked miserably poor as a quarterback on a professional football team. But on top of that, it seems that on a number of occasions when these defensive players from the other team would "sack" Tebow, they would then mockingly do a version of "Tebowing"—which has become a widely promoted phenomenon—referring to the fact that Tebow will be seen on the sidelines bowing in prayer during the course of, or at the end of, a game. So these Detroit Lions defensive players would come in and tackle Tebow for a loss, and then they would do a mocking version of Tebowing. And it seems very clear that this was deemed highly undesirable, and unacceptable, by those powers "higher than the team and lower than (a non-existent) god." It was after this game with the Detroit Lions that the Broncos suddenly went on a whole string of "miracle comeback wins," helped along by defensive players on the opposing teams who somehow suddenly forgot how to play defense. (As I recall, there was one game, before they were demolished by the Detroit Lions, where the Tebow-led Broncos came back to win in overtime, but it was after the game with the Lions that the Broncos went on a string of "miracle" comebacks.)

Again, it seems pretty clear that "somebody up there" didn't like the fact that not only was Tebow being shown up to be not that good, but that "Tebowing"—which was being promoted as a mass phenomenon—was being mocked. Couldn't have that. So, all of a sudden, Tebow and the Broncos went on this string of "miracle" comebacks. No more mocking of Tebow and "Tebowing."

Now, again, some people might say: "Oh c'mon now, this is just another conspiracy theory. You really think powerful people care that much about things like football?" Yes, they do. Because football is an important part of the cultural realm, and it has mass influence in this society. The Super Bowl (the national championship of American professional football) is a major event, for example—watched by literally hundreds of millions of people, if not more, around the world, as well as in the U.S. And football certainly does have a major influence, particularly on guys and "guy culture"—which is not a healthy culture—it's a male chauvinist culture, for short, which incorporates the celebration of violence, real as well as ritualized violence. I'll leave for another time a whole discourse about football and violence—that's another story. As I said, I do follow football and I have to admit that I like a lot of the athleticism involved. There is a beauty to that. But there are definitely things about the culture surrounding football, including the culture of violence that's an integral part of it, that is very negative.

Returning more directly to Tebow, for those people who say, "this couldn't be happening that way, there couldn't be that kind of conspiracy"—I have two words for you: "tuck rule."

What does this refer to? Back in the National Football League playoffs that followed the 2001 season—note well, 2001—the Oakland Raiders were involved in a playoff game. The Raiders, by the way, are the designated team to be penalized and dumped on by the hierarchy of the rest of the NFL.¹³ The Raiders were playing the—now, pay attention—New England PATRIOTS. That is worth repeating: the New England PATRIOTS. And this was in the playoffs after the two thousand and one season—2001, the year of the 9/11 attacks.

The Raiders-Patriots playoff game in 2001 was a close game, hotly contested in the snow in Boston. It came down to the final few minutes, with the Raiders leading by 3 points. The much vaunted Patriot quarterback, Tom Brady, went back to pass... he was rushed and tackled by an Oakland Raider defender... he dropped the ball (what's called a "fumble" in football)... and the Oakland Raiders fell on the ball—recovering the fumble and thereby getting the ball back. All they would have to do then was to "run out the clock" (keep possession of the ball while time ran out), and they would win the game, advancing in the playoffs, and eliminating from the playoffs—the playoffs following the 9/11 events in

2001—the New England PATRIOTS.

But wait a minute. The play is being "reviewed upstairs." This is how things are done in the final 2 minutes of an NFL game: officials sitting somewhere above the field have the responsibility for reviewing plays, on a TV monitor, showing the play from different angles. They look at the play to make sure that the "call" by the officials down on the field (for example, whether a player "fumbled" the ball) is correct. But, in this case, "upstairs" refers not just literally to the officials sitting up in a booth above the field who are responsible for reviewing plays in the final 2 minutes of the game. "Upstairs" here also refers—to paraphrase Michael Cooper—to people "higher than the game and lower than (a non-existent) god." In this case, first of all, it wasn't even clear why there was a "review"—since, even in the final two minutes in an NFL game, plays are reviewed only if there is a legitimate question about whether the "call" by the officials on the field was correct. And in this instance, there didn't seem to be any doubt—it was very clear that there was a fumble and it was recovered by the Oakland Raiders. So, why was an obvious fumble even being reviewed in the first place? Brady was tackled while standing up, the ball dropped out of his hands, it was recovered by the Raiders—what's to review? Second of all, the review took a very long time—much longer than normal—and then all of a sudden it's announced by the referee on the field, getting the word from "upstairs," that, lo and behold, what you thought was a fumble wasn't a fumble after all. Wait a minute: We saw him being tackled, and he dropped the ball. How could that not be a fumble? He wasn't moving his arm forward to throw the ball, so it couldn't have been an attempt to pass—he was just holding the ball—it had to be a fumble. What do you mean no fumble?

Well, some obscure part of the rule book, called the "tuck rule," was invoked. Here we're going to get into some fine points of the mechanics of football, but it's important, so stay with it. What they invoked, in overturning the ruling of a fumble, and giving the ball back to New England, was that there's a rule that says: If the quarterback brings forward his arm to start to pass the ball, and then decides not to pass it, but doesn't bring the ball all the way back to his chest (doesn't "tuck the ball in"), then, while his arm is still extended somewhat, holding the ball, that constitutes part of throwing a forward pass, and therefore if the ball is knocked out of his hand in that situation, it's not a fumble. Bullshit!

Bullshit on two levels. First of all, that's an impossible rule to have, or to apply, because it would mean that every time a quarterback started to throw the ball, if he didn't see anybody to throw it to, and he was worried about being tackled and fumbling, he'd just have to hold the ball out like this (in front of him) and never bring it back to his chest, and then if they tackle him and he fumbles, you invoke the "tuck rule." Never happens. You can look at miles and miles of film and video of professional football and you can see quarterbacks holding the ball out like that, and then losing it, or having it knocked loose, and it's called a fumble, as it should be.

But what happened in this case? Note this well. Not only did they conjure up and invoke this "tuck rule" but, even if you strictly applied this ridiculous rule (which is never applied and never invoked) the truth is—and you can see it clearly by watching the replay or looking at the still pictures of this play involving Tom Brady—that he, in fact, had brought the ball all the way back to his chest ("tucked it in") in exactly the position it's supposed to be in, in order for it to be ruled a fumble. So, on two levels, this was outrageous bullshit. First of all, they dug around and came up with this ridiculous "tuck rule," which never gets applied in any other circumstance. That's why it took so long reviewing the play "upstairs"—they had to go dig around for an obscure rule. Second of all, even according to this ridiculous rule, it was still a fumble. And yet the ball was given back to New England. Then New England moved down the field and kicked a 3-point field goal, sending the game into overtime, and the

PATRIOTS ended up winning the game in overtime.

And then what happened? This may be familiar to people who have lived through the experience of "weapons of mass destruction" that didn't exist in Iraq, but which every significant official of the Bush regime insisted did exist. In that case—in the invasion and occupation of Iraq—they said: Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction, that's why we have to go in there. It's a danger to us. We don't want the next thing we see to be a mushroom cloud over the United States, said Condoleezza Rice. We know he has them—north and south and east and west—said Donald Rumsfeld. Dick Cheney insisted: There's absolutely no doubt he has weapons of mass destruction. And on and on with these deliberate and calculated lies. They went in, waged a war, looked all over, and couldn't come up with any weapons of mass destruction. Then the mainstream media, which had been consistently complicit in propagating these lies about weapons of mass destruction, changed its story: The claim that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction turned out not to be true, it was admitted, but it was declared to be just a matter of "faulty intelligence"—when in fact, it was a concerted campaign of systematic, conscious, and deliberate lying to try to rationalize and sell a war that they decided to wage soon after Bush took office. And they definitely decided to seize on the "opportunity" of the 9/11 events in order to wage war against Iraq and eliminate a regime that they had previously worked with but now wanted to get rid of, because it was no longer useful to them in their calculations.

So, what did the mainstream media do then? Well, besides claiming the whole thing was just a matter of "faulty intelligence," it was said: Yes, it's true that there weren't any weapons of mass destruction—but, anyway, everybody thought there were. Which is another lie. "Everybody" did not think that. Most notably, the inspectors from the UN who were on the scene in Iraq were reporting that they weren't finding any evidence of weapons of mass destruction. At the very time when Bush and his whole retinue were repeating these lies, including Powell at the UN, these UN inspectors, who were on the ground in Iraq, were reporting repeatedly that they were finding no evidence of any weapons of mass destruction. They even made a report after Colin Powell went to the UN and lied before the whole world about alleged weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Powell brazenly declared: We have the definite proof, this is not speculation, this is proof. Then Hans Blix, one of the main inspectors, gave a report to the UN, as he was required to do, and he said: We have checked out Colin Powell's allegations, and we can't find anything to them—there's no evidence—these claims by the U.S. government aren't backed up by any evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

In other words, Powell just got up and lied, presenting shoddy and fabricated "evidence." Mr. Morality, Colin Powell, you know. This was not the first time that he had been involved in war crimes. You can go back to Vietnam and the My Lai massacre during that war—when U.S. soldiers slaughtered, in the most perverse ways, hundreds of Vietnamese people in the village of My Lai, most of whom were women, old people, and children. Colin Powell, who was an officer in the U.S. military at that time, was involved in an attempted cover-up of this egregious war crime. And you can go to the first invasion of Iraq by the U.S. in 1991—when, among other things, Colin Powell, then a high official in the U.S. military, lied to cover up the slaughter of hundreds of Iraqi civilians in an air raid shelter which was deliberately bombed by the U.S.

Perhaps it seems we've gotten far afield from football and in particular the incident with the "tuck rule" and how this relates to Tim Tebow. But, the point is, there is an analogy. What did the media do in the "tuck rule" situation? They said: Well, yes, it's too bad, it was really unfair to the Raiders, but what could you do? That was the rule. Even though it's a stupid rule, and it's not usually applied, this is a playoff game and you do have to go by the rules—and there is a "tuck rule"—and so, therefore, Tom Brady, the quarterback, didn't fumble, it was an incomplete pass, so it was correct, even though it was

unfair.

That is analogous to saying: Yes, it turns out that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but everybody thought there were, or it was just "faulty intelligence." The fact—and the reason I say there is an analogy here—is that, in the case of the NFL playoff game involving Oakland and New England, and specifically with regard to the "tuck rule," if you looked at the actual evidence—that is, the replay on video and the still pictures—you could see that, even according to the ridiculous "tuck rule," which is never applied in any other circumstance, it was a fumble. It fit the definition of a fumble, even according to the "tuck rule." So what was really going on was that some powerful people were determined, secondarily, that the Raiders wouldn't get very far in the playoffs—but primarily that, shortly after the events of 9/11 in 2001, the New England—what?... the New England PATRIOTS—had to advance in the playoffs. And, in fact, the PATRIOTS went on to win the Super Bowl that time.

And this is analogous as well to Tim Tebow and the backing he's getting from "upstairs." I raise this to say—for those who claim, "things like this don't happen, conspiracies like this don't take place in sports"—that, besides all the evidence I've cited for how it happens repeatedly in professional basketball, in my talk "The NBA: Marketing the Minstrel Show and Serving the Big Gangsters,"¹⁴ this also happens in other professional sports, including the National Football League. It happened with Tom Brady, the "tuck rule," and the New England—wait for it... the New England PATRIOTS—and something analogous is happening now with Tim Tebow and the promotion of the medieval Christian fundamentalism of which he is a fanatical advocate.

A Final Note Added By Bob Avakian:

The interview, from which this article ("Tim Tebow and the 'Tuck Rule' ") was taken, was conducted before the NFL playoffs this year (2012). As it turned out, after beating an injury-riddled Pittsburgh Steelers team, Tim Tebow and the Denver Broncos were trounced by the... New England Patriots, led by quarterback Tom Brady. Perhaps there is irony in this, but it seems that it was acceptable for the people "upstairs"—"higher than the team and lower than (a non-existent) god"—for Tebow and the Broncos to lose to Brady and the PATRIOTS. In any case, these people "upstairs" certainly should feel gratified that they have already gone a long way in fabricating an icon in Tim Tebow, fueling an irrational mania around this icon, and promoting everything outmoded and reactionary that is represented by this.

"All Played Out"... How It Came About

Brooks: I wanted to ask you about "All Played Out," which was the spoken word piece that you did early in 2011, and then it was set to music by the jazz bassist, William Parker. And I wanted to ask you a little bit about your process, and your inspiration for doing it, and what the experience of doing that spoken word piece was like, and anything else that you wanted to say about it.

BA: [Laughs] Well, I guess it started with a lot of things that were just pissing me off, one after the other, over a period of time—all the kinds of things that are spoken to throughout that piece. I feel like this ruling class of imperialists and their ideological machinery—they get away with murder twice: They literally go out and murder masses of people, millions and millions throughout the world and throughout their history; and then, on the other hand, they get away with lying about all this and spreading all this poisonous culture and poisonous ideology and ways of thinking. I feel like they're just

getting away with this, and it's not being called out. So, as it says at the beginning, these are things that need to be called out.

And some of the things that are touched on in "All Played Out" are also things that are backward shit among the masses of people, or different sections of the people, that I also felt was not being called out the way it should be.

So, it really began with my just feeling this very strong passionate sense that something needed to be said about this. I didn't originally plan to do this in any kind of spoken word form—I just started writing down things that were really bugging me, and then, after a certain point, I started putting them together. I just sort of put them together in sentences at first, 'cause I wasn't sure what I was gonna do with them. I just thought they needed to be written down, so I didn't forget them. And there was always more of them accumulating all the time: this system constantly produces more and more outrages, and the way its reactionary shit gets reflected in backward thinking and backward acting among different sections of the people—it was constantly going on, so there was more and more accumulating.

And finally I decided: I gotta do something with this. So then I started, you might say, playing with it. I had sentences that didn't have any rhymes—no rhymes at the end of the lines, no internal rhymes within lines, or anything like that—and then I just started thinking: well, maybe this would be more powerful if I could make it rhyme and give it a little rhythm. So that's kind of how it evolved. I didn't really start out thinking: I'm gonna do some kind of spoken word piece.

This is the way I approach everything: I felt a need, and I tried to address the need. That's what I think our responsibility is. When you see a need—in this case, when you see outrages piling up and they're not being spoken to—then you have to address that need. You have to do something to speak to it, in this case. So that's what ended up happening.

And then it was really great that William Parker was inspired to put music to it, which I think added a whole other beautiful dimension to it, and raised it to a whole different level of a piece of music with spoken word. I was very excited about that: it's something that turned out to be much more than I had originally conceived.

A Radical Revolt Against a Revolting Culture

Brooks: There's also this point that you've spoken to, about the need for a radical revolt against this revolting culture, and it sounds like, to at least some degree, from what you're saying, you had that consciously in mind when you were doing this?

BA: Yeah, to some degree. Like I said, the genesis of it—if you'll pardon the expression, I don't want to make biblical references here, but the genesis of it was, as I said, outrages that were piling up, and then it kind of went the way I said.

At the same time, yes, there is a need, a crying need, for a radical revolt against what is really a putrid and revolting culture, all the way down through everything is a "brand," everything is owned—"own" your own mistakes, "own" your own self-degradation—everything's "brands" and "ownership." Someone described it as like we're living inside of a plastic Walmart—that's the culture [Laughs]. Everything's commercialized and commodified—besides all the misogyny that's out there, and the racism, and the national chauvinism, the jingoism of "America first."

I mean, even when these ruling class figures talk about their problems in education, what's the first thing on their minds? It's "we're slipping from being the number one power in the world, so we've gotta

improve our education." Everything is in terms of great power chauvinism—I mean, not everything, but that's a big part of it—and then there's all the other things I was speaking of: the male chauvinism and misogyny and degradation of women, and the degradation of people in the inner cities and the oppressed nationalities, and on and on and on. This is what the culture largely reflects. I mean, you can't even watch a TV commercial or anything without being deluged with this putrid, revolting culture.

So, yes, there definitely is a need for, and I have explicitly said there is a need—in *Birds Cannot Give Birth to Crocodiles, But Humanity Can Soar Beyond the Horizon* I explicitly pointed to the need for a radical revolt against this revolting culture. And let me make clear, there should be a real florescence, a real flowering of a lot of different forms of this. "All Played Out" ended up being a spoken word piece—and, as I said, when William Parker added music to it, that was adding a whole beautiful dimension to it that raised it to a different level—but there are a lot of people out there with a lot of creative abilities and inclinations and innovativeness who could produce a lot of great works. I mean, I didn't put out "All Played Out" as like, "this is the spoken word piece." It was just my attempt to do something I felt needed to be done, and then, as I said, when William Parker got involved it became something even much better, artistically.

But there are a lot of people who could create a lot of great works, big and small, that could all contribute to this radical revolt against a revolting culture.

The key thing is to inspire and unleash people to do that, and to have a lot of wrangling and wrestling with the question: how can we give expression to that culture, what are the different forms that could take, how can we do something in the realm of culture, all the different realms of art and culture—music, poetry, movies, just on and on and on—that will give expression in many different and creative and innovative ways to this radical revolt, and to a liberating culture—a culture that raises people up and points to the emancipation of humanity in many different ways, and on many different levels, with many different perspectives and levels of understanding about things. And, so, hopefully, this is what's gonna get unleashed.

And, once again, I think the key in all this—the key point of orientation, if you will—is to rise to a need. There's a real need for this radically new culture, in direct opposition to this revolting culture that's being pumped out everywhere. And many, many people can be unleashed and can contribute in many different ways, on many different levels, big and small, to actually bringing this into being, and to waging a real struggle in the realm of art and culture and ideology, without that being vulgarized, without reducing it to some kind of hackneyed and stereotyped "po-litical" culture. I mean, culture that's explicitly political, if it's good art, is great. But there needs to be a flowering of a lot of other things in many other different forms, with many others giving expression in many different ways to the uplifting and liberating ideas that should infuse all this culture.

Hip-Hop: The Need to Wage a Fight

Brooks: One thing, both related to that but also that I would ask you about in its own right, is hip-hop, because obviously there's an influence of hip-hop in the spoken word piece, "All Played Out," and I know you've spoken before about hip-hop as a tremendously creative art form and that, in its origins, there was a tremendous amount of political consciousness, and it was, to a large extent, the music of the oppressed. And there is still some of that, but then there's also so much shit on the radio, and so much crap in terms of mainstream hip-hop. And obviously it's not limited to hip-hop, but I didn't know if you had any thoughts on that, either in its own right or kind of as "All Played Out" polemicizing

against that, too, and kind of putting forward something more inspiring in terms of that form, too.

BA: Well, it's polemicizing definitely against certain ideological outlooks within that. For example, it directly polemicizes against the whole "Scarface" phenomenon, and the whole "Scarface" mentality—enough of that already. That's harmful to the masses of people, and people need to get out of that and get into something better. People need to turn away from that kind of stuff and not give it air to breathe, 'cause it's doing a lot of harm. And so is all the misogyny and the rest of the bullshit that unfortunately characterizes far too much—not all, certainly, but far too much—of hip-hop.

And, as you alluded to, there has been a certain trajectory with hip-hop. When it started out, in the late '70s, or mid-'70s, it had much more of an oppositional edge. It had a lot of conflicting ideologies within it; it wasn't thoroughly revolutionary, but a sort of basic revolutionary stance was part of some of the early hip-hop, and it certainly had a stance in opposition to the oppression, particularly of Black people, but of other sections of the people as well. That was a significant element within hip-hop, along with some other stuff that wasn't nearly as good. As I've pointed out before, there was a lot of bullshit macho braggadocio and other stuff in there that is not positive, but there was a lot of positive stuff too.

Let's face it, a lot of people liked "Fuck tha Police." But, on the other hand, NWA, even at the same time as they did "Fuck tha Police," they did a lot of stuff with a lot of bullshit in it, that wasn't helpful to the masses of people, to put it mildly.

Still, there was some of that oppositional and rebellious and defiant attitude in early hip-hop that was positive, and then—it's very clear—the powers-that-be stepped in. I mean this both in the more narrow sense of those who control the record and the music industry (there was once a record industry, now it's a music industry which has gone through a lot of changes, but anyway I'm talking about the big corporate honchos, and so on, who control, ultimately, the music scene—not every aspect of it, but especially the commercial part of it) and then, in a larger sense, I'm talking about ruling class figures and operatives in general. They clearly said: "Wait a minute, let's get on top of this and let's weed out the stuff that's more rebellious and defiant and oppositional, so let's not have much more of that 'Fuck tha Police' stuff, let's have shit that gets down on women, gets down on other people among the masses, or just plain talks bullshit, talks commercialization, promotes commodification, promotes religion—let's promote all that kind of stuff, and let's flush out all the other stuff."

So, you've got someone like Ice-T, who goes from "cop killer" to: "oh, let me play a cop in a movie, and let me be a cop on TV." You've got LL unCool J playing an LA pig on the TV now. And how many of these rappers, especially the male ones, have not played pigs, at one time or another?

Well, that's not just them. Shame on them. But it's higher up and more powerful forces in society who are consciously saying: "Let's recast this culture and make it serve something different, let's make it serve our interests. Let's have it reinforce the oppression of the people rather than, at least in some significant element, drawing forward opposition, rebellion, defiance against the oppression of the people."

So there's a real struggle that needs to be waged. Yes, way back in the early days, when I first became aware of hip-hop, and particularly rap, back in the '70s, I was drawn to it—as were, obviously, many, many other people—because it had a fresh spirit, artistically, as well as a rebellious thrust to a significant degree within it. And there's a need to wage a fight—not to give up—to wage a fight to bring that forward more fully and, again, make that part of the radical revolt against this revolting culture, which far too much has taken over a lot of the different realms of hip-hop.

Meeting Real Needs, Breaking Things Down

Brooks: And there's "All Played Out." And you've done, in the last few years, a pretty lengthy talk on the NBA. I know in the Revolution talk DVD (*Revolution: Why It's Necessary, Why It's Possible, What It's All About*) that you sing everything from Ry Cooder to Bob Dylan to the Monotones, that doo-wop group. It is striking, that you draw from different fields of human endeavor, and I wondered if you wanted to talk a little bit about that aspect of your leadership and that aspect of the new synthesis.

BA: [Laughs] Well, for example, with the Revolution talk, when I conceived of that talk and when I worked on it over a period of time, I was trying to find different ways to break down a lot of different concepts and analyses which are somewhat complicated, and which a lot of people are unfamiliar with, 'cause they're not taught this through the institutionalized educational system, which is controlled by the ruling class. So I was trying to think of ways that would both help break a lot of these things down and make it more readily accessible to people from different parts of society, and also try to make it somewhat entertaining and fun. So that's why I worked those things into the Revolution talk—the singing, the reference to things like playing dominoes, and making a certain amount of humor out of the idea that you would try to just put a domino anywhere you want, any time you want, and somebody says, "Man, what the fuck you doin'?" Just to try to give living examples of points I was making, but also to liven this up and make it entertaining and fun for people at the same time.

That's generally the way I try to approach what I'm doing, especially spoken things, or things that I write, things that are meant to go out to people broadly. I try to figure out what is it that needs to be said at a given time: what are things that are coming up in society and the world, or among different sections of the people, that really need to be addressed, because they're obstacles holding people back from fighting for their own emancipation, and, ultimately, for the emancipation of all humanity; or they are more positive things that people are doing or thinking or expressing, but they need to go further and people need to understand the contradictions within them and how to bring forward more fully and develop to a whole other level what's positive, and to cast away or cast aside some things that are still dragging along from the system that we're trying to get rid of.

So I confront and approach things in that kind of way: what are the needs out there that are arising in an overall and ongoing sense, as well as more particularly at a given time? And then: how to address them in such a way that it'll be, as I said, most accessible to the greatest number of people—because a lot of these are, again, unfamiliar and many times complex concepts, and there's no way that you're gonna do any good by watering them down, or by taking the heart or the guts out of them, or by trying to eliminate the complexity of them, if the reality that you're speaking to is very complex, which it often is. So then you have to try to figure out how—without doing that, without watering it down, without oversimplifying it—you can break it down to make it more accessible, and what different forms could you use to do that, while, again, as I said, making it somewhat fun and entertaining for people.

But it's recognizing and doing your best to rise to a need—that frames and is the foundation for how I approach that, and how generally I think it should be approached.

This Is Serious... Humor and Fun Is an Important Part of It

Brooks: And there's also the role of humor. I know in your memoir you have this line about a good pun is worth ten points any time, and the first question in the Q&A of the Revolution talk DVD is responding to whether people will be allowed to smoke weed under socialism, and you talk for a while about that... and then say: "what were we talking about again?" [Laughs] So I wondered if you wanted

to speak to the role of, and actually the importance of, humor and fun in making revolution and transforming society, which I think you were starting to a little bit just now.

BA: Well, look, let's start with this. The basic thing that we're all about is emancipating humanity from thousands of years of tradition's chains, from the darkness that's been imposed on masses of people for millennia now, and from all these different forms of degradation, oppression, domination and exploitation over masses of people by a small handful of oppressors. So we're aiming for the emancipation of the masses of oppressed people in the world and, ultimately, all of humanity from all of that, as well as the wars and all the antagonistic relations that give rise to these wars in the world, which are rooted in these systems of exploitation. So, if that's the goal, that's a very inspiring thing. And, at the same time, you can't conceive of emancipation that doesn't have fun and play in it. What kind of emancipation would it be, if we got to a whole new world and there were no fun and no play? I don't call that emancipating. I'd call it just the opposite. [Brooks laughs]

And, similarly, all along the way, our movement—the movement for revolution aiming for that ultimate goal of a communist world and the emancipation of all of humanity—should have humor, fun and play. Not because it's a duty, but because, if you want to put it that way, it's an organic part, a natural part of what we're aiming for. This should be full of liveliness and humor and, yes, play and fun, even while, at the same time, it's deadly serious. It should have both of those elements. It should be grounded in the fact that this is all very serious—and the whole basic dividing line here is whether the world is gonna remain fundamentally unchanged or whether it's gonna be radically changed. Fundamentally, time and again, it gets back to that. If the world stays fundamentally unchanged, as was pointed out in the polemic against Alain Badiou's political philosophy (which I referred to earlier), then the machinery of capitalism-imperialism continues humming in the background, crushing lives and destroying spirits, and the exploitation goes on unabated. That's intolerable. So the world needs to be radically changed, and it needs to be radically changed in the way that it can be, and a way that's emancipating—and that's through the revolution aiming for communism. But, as part of that—not just part of the end goal, like "someday when we get to communism, we'll all laugh"—no, as part of that all along the way, as an integral part of it, as a living part of it, as an organic part of it in that sense, there should be liveliness. There should be humor. As we talked about earlier, there should be joy, even while we are, once again, recognizing this fundamental question and dividing line that the world needs to be radically changed and not stay as it is, and even as we're deadly serious in that sense.

That's why, going back to what we talked about earlier, I made the comment that I did about this dried up, miserable, feeble oppositional "Left" that's not really aiming for a different world—and why I referred to them as lifeless and lacking joy. If you're really going for the emancipation of all humanity, there is—look, life is full of things that are humorous. Now, different people think different things are funny, depending on their outlook. You know, someone will tell a racist joke, and you say, "Hey, that's fucked up," and they reply, "It's just a joke." No, it's not funny. It's not funny, because we understand the harm that does, and we understand the way in which that helps to reinforce centuries of brutal oppression. The same thing with sexist jokes. The same thing with jokes that degrade gay people. And so on. They're harmful. They reinforce oppression. So different groups of people think different things are funny, or not funny, depending on their outlook and their aspirations—what kind of world, to put it simply, they want to see and they're striving for. But, in any case, certainly those of us who are striving for a world free of exploitation and oppression and antagonistic conflicts among the mass of humanity should be able to—and should naturally, in a certain sense—find lots to laugh about, and lots to give expression to in humor and in other forms of lively culture, even while we're deadly serious.

Brooks: This is a quick tangent on the humor point. I know, in terms of this mixture of humor and

seriousness, somebody who was really good at that was Richard Pryor, whom I know was somebody that you mentioned in your memoir and elsewhere who had kind of a big influence on the way that you give speeches and things like that.

BA: Yeah, I loved Richard Pryor when he was coming forward, when he was at his peak. Unfortunately, he got that terrible disease, MS, which took a real toll on him, and finally he died of a heart attack, it seems. But I really loved his biting humor, the way in which it's directed against important things that needed to be called out—the oppression of Black people in particular, the racism in society. At the same time, we loved you, Richard, but there were things, particularly when it came to women, that he had a lot of problems with, and he had not sorted through and struggled through to get to a better place on. This is something that we also have to be aware of. But, even though that's real, and that's important, and we need to learn from that, it doesn't overshadow or eliminate the great art that he produced. Some of it was very, very funny; and some of it was not so funny but very, very poignant, very moving, and very deep. And, yes, there's a tremendous amount to be learned from him, even with those shortcomings that I've pointed to, which also have to be noted and learned from.

There is a tremendous amount, positively, to learn from Richard Pryor, both in terms of the better content, the positive content that he put forward in a very sharp and biting and, yes, often humorous way, and in terms of the way in which he did it—the form in which he did it, the artistry with which he did it, which was on a very high level. And I have taken a lot of inspiration—first of all, I've enjoyed it a lot, the positive parts; and, second of all, I've taken a lot of inspiration and I think learned some things from it and tried to incorporate some of that into the ways in which I've tried to, once again, get things across in a way that's living for people and breaks things down for people, so they can really grab ahold of it and grapple with it.

Revolution Can Come Through "Many Channels"

Brooks: I think a lot of what we're talking about relates to your point about how making revolution and transforming society is a process that goes through "many different channels" and, as you pointed out, it's not only that people's attention should be focused on things that relate to the immediate political questions, or the way different major contradictions are posing themselves at different times. And I don't know if you had more to say in terms of art—I know you put a lot of emphasis on art and culture and morality, and all the kinds of things that we're talking about not being of secondary importance, or off to the side. I don't know if you had more to say on that.

BA: Well, yes. I mean, things that are, that can be identified as, major political questions in society—things that are directly in the political realm that are major concentrations of social contradictions, as we talked about earlier—those things are obviously very important, and people need to move around them. Things like mass incarceration or the degradation of women, particularly through pornography and the attack on the right of women to abortion and even birth control—and other major concentrations of social contradictions that are more expressed in a directly political way, or that people can be mobilized around in a more directly political way—all that is very important. But there are also other realms of society that are important to people. Art and culture are important to people: they are the way people are nourished—again, I'm not a spiritualist, but if you use that as a metaphor and not literally—they are a way that people are nourished spiritually (or ideologically, to put it another way). And that's very important. People need that. People always have created art and culture. It speaks to a real need of human beings, and they always should and always will create this.

And, as we were talking about a little while ago, there is a need and there has been a direct call for the

development of a radical revolt in the realm of culture and art and, yes, morality against a revolting culture and a revolting morality that's being shoved down people's throats in every corner of society. That is something that's been consciously recognized, and openly called for. But there are also things that come up in the realm of art, or science, or other spheres of society that are, at least in a certain sense, unexpected. That is, their existence may not be unknown, but they become major questions somewhat unexpectedly. Then they do become, at a certain point, major social and political battle grounds. But they didn't start out as that.

You can take things like evolution, for example. That's just something that in the sphere of science—and more specifically, biology—was brought forward as a great leap forward in humanity's understanding of reality, a major part of reality. It is one of the basic foundation stones of all of science at this point. In fact, science without the understanding of the theory of evolution—theory in the scientific sense, a valid understanding of reality—without the understanding of reality that's embodied in the theory of evolution, science as a whole would be virtually impossible. You couldn't really "do science" if the theory of evolution were not allowed to be propagated, understood, and applied. It would disrupt and vitiate all of science, not just biology. But this has become a flash point in society, a major point of contention, because reactionary forces—with the backing of powerful forces within the ruling structures of society which have money and power on a big scale—have launched a massive, many-sided attack on evolution. Some people more spontaneously feel that evolution is calling into question the "established order of things, and the traditions that have been around for thousands of years"—which, yes, they have, and, by the way, they are oppressive traditions that need to be radically ruptured with and cast off—but, then, ruling class figures have identified questions like evolution as key questions around which to promote reactionary ideology that they see as necessary to hold the system together when it's experiencing strains and crises in many different dimensions and spheres of society.

So evolution has become a big point of contention in society as a whole. It was contentious when Darwin first brought forward and systematized the theory of evolution, back in the 19th century; but, in scientific circles, it has for some time now been considered a settled question—something which the overwhelming, overwhelming majority of scientists, especially in the field of biology, have accepted as an established fact for many, many years and decades now, going back a century or more. But in the United States—given the history of the role of religion, and Christian fundamentalism in particular, in reinforcing the status quo and the oppressive order in this country—evolution has become, once again, a major flash point or concentration point of struggle, with implications regarding the larger question of whether to uphold or whether to rebel against, and ultimately to sweep aside, the established oppressive order.

So that's just one example. Many other things can come up. Works of art of relatively minor significance, in and of themselves, can suddenly become flash points or concentration points of opposing viewpoints and struggle: things that, when they were first produced, nobody really thought about that much, and they didn't have that big an impact. You can think of something like the movie *The Big Lebowski*, which when it was first released in the U.S. itself, at least, was something of a commercial dud. But then it did well in Europe, and all of a sudden it's become a big phenomenon and a "cult classic" in the very positive sense. It's become a big point of reference in the culture, among people everywhere. You can turn on the sports channels, or whatever, and you'll hear lines from *The Big Lebowski* being woven into sports reports, and so on. Well, that movie hasn't, at this point at least, become a big bone of contention or a big flash point of opposing worldviews, or something. But it could, at a certain point. It has some positive things that reactionary forces might want to jump on:

"let's suppress that film." That could happen, even though it's not happening right now.

And you could think of many other examples of things that at the time they first came onto the scene weren't a big deal, but for a variety of reasons become real concentration points of opposing forces, opposing worldviews, opposing aspirations. Or, to put it another way: even if they're not directly in the political realm, they become, themselves, major concentrations of social contradictions and often concentrations of political struggle.

This can happen in all kinds of different realms of social life. The sphere of medicine—something as simple as whether women should have the right not only to abortion, but even to birth control, is becoming a major focus of struggle. Some pharmacists, under the influence of reactionary religious fundamentalist ideology, are refusing to fill prescriptions for birth control, for example. That's become a significant point of struggle, and it could become a much more major one.

These are just a few examples. People could think of many more, where different contradictions in society—not just the ones that are more clearly identifiable as directly in the political realm, or even directly and immediately big ideological questions—can become big political questions, big points of social struggle, big ideological questions, confrontations of contrasting worldviews and aspirations.

This is what's being gotten at with the "many channels" point. You can't just conceive of the way that people come forward in opposition to the system, and the way questions get struggled out in society, as narrowly limited to the more recognizable and more directly political realm. This is another expression, in a certain way, of Lenin's point that communism springs from every pore of society. Not literally, not directly and immediately in many cases—as if, for example, disputes that develop over birth control immediately become posed in terms of a struggle for communism, as opposed to capitalism—but the potential for communism continually is brought forward out of the many different ways that the contradictions of this society, in the many different realms of society, find expression, and sometimes become very acute. Again, sometimes this happens in ways that can be anticipated, and sometimes in ways that, at least for most people, are very unexpected and unanticipated.

Could *The Big Lebowski* Become a Major Focus of Political Struggle?

Brooks: Just very briefly, I wondered if you wanted to flesh out *The Big Lebowski* example a little bit. I understand you're not specifically predicting that this would necessarily become a major point of contention, but I do think it's actually a good example of a type of movie that people might not think of as an explicitly political movie. So I don't know if you wanted to just briefly say anything more about it.

BA: Well, *The Big Lebowski* does even have some explicitly political stuff. I mean, the character is based on a real-life character who was active against the Vietnam War, was generally active in the movement of the 1960s, who did get arrested and become part of a group that was on trial for their political activities. But that's not the heart of the movie. That's sort of woven in, but it's mainly a secondary thing and somewhat marginal to the overall thrust of the movie and the overall character of the movie. It is in there, but it's not a political movie, in a direct and explicit way. It's a sort of a mystery story which is really like a backdrop against which a lot of creative artistic painting is done by the makers of the movie—kind of the way you would think of a canvas that a painter was painting on. So, that mystery story is there. And there are some positive political and ideological things in it. But, again, that's not the heart of the movie.

Now, it could be—it isn't the case at this point, but it could become the case—that reactionary forces

decided that this movie was a poisonous thing for the youth of the country—it has profanity, it has some sex in it, and so on and so forth—and they could try to suppress it. And that could become a big battle. Right now, that doesn't seem likely. But it's the kind of thing that, again, could happen unexpectedly. Or, this could happen with something that we're not even thinking of right now, something that doesn't appear to be trying to make any kind of a major political statement, or ideological statement.

I mean, this culture has become so perverse that all kinds of things become made into big deals—somebody becomes a celebrity because somebody sells a sex tape of them on the Internet, or sells it to some cable company, or something. I mean, this is the kind of putrid, revolting culture we have.

But the same kind of thing could happen in a very different way around some relatively minor work of art, or something happening in the sports arena. We talked about Tim Tebow, and this just goes on and on and on. Just recently, after he had a game in which he passed for 316 yards, and averaged 31.6 yards per pass, all of a sudden it's 3:16—oh, could that be a reference to John 3:16? I mean it's just lunatic, the way this shit goes on. **These forces of religious fundamentalism are extremely dangerous, but they are actually lunatics, too.** This thing with Tebow has whole dimensions of lunacy. And, once again, as I've pointed out, if we're gonna talk about 3:16, let's talk about *BASICS* 3:16: let's talk about those the system has cast off, the oppressed rising up and becoming emancipators of humanity—human emancipators of humanity, not some supernatural force, 'cause *BASICS* is not a religious book, it's not religious dogma like the Bible.

Once again, there is the whole question of people rising up in opposition to this revolting culture, including in opposition to religious fundamentalism in particular, but fundamentally in opposition to the whole religious worldview—which is ultimately enslaving to people, which prevents people from really understanding the world and their own role in the world, their place in the larger network of human relations, and how all that can be transformed. Religion, as a world outlook, prevents people from getting a correct—yes, a scientific—understanding of that, and therefore religion is an obstacle to their being able to fully move to emancipate themselves and emancipate humanity.

Now, it's not that some people who are religious at any given time can't and don't play an important role in rebelling against the system, and standing up with others against oppression—many have, many do, and many will, and that should be united with. But, on the level of what's being done around Tim Tebow and the whole promotion of this lunatic religious fundamentalism, this reactionary religious fundamentalism—that has to be directly taken on, and vigorously, sharply taken on. And then, even while we're uniting in the struggle against oppression with people who are religious, there needs to be, at the same time, struggle in a comradely but sharp way. This needs to be done in a lofty way, a principled way; but, at the same time, let's get into the heart of it—contrasting the scientific outlook and methodology of communism with the unscientific and ultimately harmful outlook of religion in general.

So, who knows, this Tim Tebow thing is already being promoted and blown up into a major deal by one side, and there is already a certain level of contention around it, although unfortunately most of the people who are opposing this whole inflation of the Tebow thing are doing it purely from within the realm of a sports evaluation—he's not really that good, why is he being built up into such a big thing when he's not really that good?—and a lot of them are hesitant to take on, or don't themselves want to take on, or are being scared away from taking on the larger and more important dimension of all this, which is the promotion of this reactionary, blind and lunatic religious fundamentalism. The promotion of this is now going on broadly in society, but it's also taking a concentrated expression around Tim

Tebow at this time. And, at some point, in the context of things sharpening up in society as a whole, something like that could become a real concentration point of a whole bunch of social contradictions, and a major point of struggle and contention between opposing forces in society.

Revolution and the Vision of a New World

Brooks: Something really significant that happened in this past year in the realm of art and culture, and putting forward a new art and culture, was this program in Harlem last April—the program on the occasion of the release of *Basics*, where there were all these different artists and all these different types of art—people who were performing and coming together on the occasion of the release of *Basics*. There was a lot of artistic diversity to it, and hundreds of people turned out for it. And I wanted to ask you, both what it was like to read, in *Revolution* newspaper, about this event happening on the occasion of the publication of *Basics*, and also the impact that you think something like this event could have, including now that there's a movie that's being made about it, and money was raised to put out this film about it.

BA: I was very inspired to read about this. It was inspiring that people could be and were brought together around the basic theme of that night—"On the Occasion of the Publication of *Basics*: A Celebration of Revolution and the Vision of a New World." I think that was an application of what we refer to as "solid core with a lot of elasticity."

I also think it's interesting that this very formulation—"solid core with a lot of elasticity"—is something that was suggested to me in a conversation I had with a poet and spoken word artist a number of years ago. We were having a pretty wide-ranging discussion, and I was trying to explain to him how I saw the relation of art and culture in particular to the overall revolutionary process, and how communists should correctly relate to people in the various spheres of art and culture—how to correctly unite with them, how to correctly carry out struggle, how to correctly step back and give them room and air to breathe while at the same time waging some struggle over things where it seemed necessary and important and could have a positive outcome to wage struggle with people. We went back and forth on this, and I was making the point that I thought there had been a tendency at times, in the history of the communist movement and socialist society, to be a little too much constantly leaning over the shoulder of the artists on the part of the political leadership, so to speak. And so I asked him: Could you write your poetry if you had a party leader or a party cadre standing over your shoulder all the time, metaphorically speaking? And he said, "Fuck no!" [Laughs] So then, as we went on, I said: This is the point I'm wrestling with, because it is important that there be struggle in the realm of art and culture about what the character and content of that art and culture should be—without hamstringing, without constricting it, without making people feel they have no air to breathe and no room to create. And so, finally, after we went back and forth over this some more, he said: It sounds to me like what you're talking about is a "solid core with a lot of elasticity." And I said, wow, you really put together in a very tight formulation what I've been wrestling with.

The point is, you do need a solid core, in order to get where we need to go—in order for humanity to be emancipated. In an overall sense, there has to be a solid core which has a deep understanding and grounding in why that is both necessary and possible, and which, correspondingly, is deeply committed to that. And, then, there has to be opening for a broad range of people with different levels of understanding, and with different viewpoints and perspectives, and a lot of air has to be given to the flowering of various kinds of art and culture, with those divergent viewpoints. Handling that contradiction correctly in the sphere of art and culture, or generally in society, and in the transformation

—the revolutionary transformation of society—is a very complex, but extremely essential, thing to do.

To me, this program in Harlem was an application of that principle. People were brought together around the occasion of the publication of *Basics*. The publication of *Basics* and the basic thrust of *Basics* was what tied all that together, even while many people who performed may have just encountered *Basics*, or may not even have seen it until the night of the program itself, because it was just being published then. Or, in any case, many of the performers may not have read much of my works up to that time—or any of them, for that matter—and they were coming from a diversity of viewpoints. But there was a basic core to the evening that was embodied in *Basics* and represented by the publication of *Basics*—a core around which people could broadly unite and could find, so to speak, their own level of unity. You had a very broad flowering there of many different forms of really inspiring art, with many different perspectives. You had people doing tap dancing, you had jazz, you had people doing poetry or spoken word, you had many different forms and kinds of music, and the great piece by David Murray at the end was, from what I've heard, a tremendous jazz piece.

I think this is an example—and it's very inspiring as an example—of the correct application of "solid core with a lot of elasticity." And I think it's also a model—or an embryo, or whatever metaphor you want to use—of the kind of society and world that we're aiming for, and the role of art and culture in that society and that world—where there is a lot of diversity, both in terms of form, but also in terms of the different ways that people are exploring different things, or giving expression to ideas or feelings in different ways, and the different perspectives they bring to it. It was inspiring as a glimpse of the future that we're actually striving for, as well as an important element of that striving, of the struggle, of the movement for revolution to reach that future society and that world of emancipated humanity.

Key Principles and Mainstays in Building the Movement for Revolution

Brooks: Okay, shifting gears, I wanted to ask you about how you see the relationship between the two paragraphs that run in every issue of *Revolution* newspaper on "Some Principles for Building a Movement for Revolution," and then about the two mainstays—which are: developing a culture of appreciation, promotion, and popularization around the leadership, the body of work and the method and approach of Bob Avakian; and wielding *Revolution* newspaper as a key tool in building the movement for revolution. And could you speak to the link between these things.

BA: The two paragraphs that embody "Some Principles for Building a Movement for Revolution"¹⁵ speak to the need to identify what we've talked about a number of times already in the course of this interview—the major concentrations of social contradictions—and to mobilize people around that, to build resistance, and, at the same time, to do this in a way that contributes to building the movement for revolution. Again, it's similar to the formulation, "Fight the Power, and Transform the People, For Revolution." This speaks to the need to build resistance, and to raise people's consciousness—and, in terms of how our Party approaches this, to do all this as part of building a movement for revolution.

Now, as to the relationship—or at least important aspects of the relationship—between that and the two mainstays you referred to, it can be approached this way: First, what do we mean in identifying them as mainstays? There is the wielding and the mass distribution of our newspaper, and the utilization of our newspaper as a key tool in unifying people in terms of their understanding of what's going on in society, and the world as a whole, and what needs to be done to transform society, and also enabling them to act together on the basis of that common understanding as, broadly speaking, a unified force. So, when we say, for shorthand, that the newspaper is one of the two mainstays, this means it is important, is crucial, to wield this newspaper in an ongoing way, as a kind of bedrock or foundation of

everything we're doing: to expose this system; to set forth boldly our communist understanding, convictions, and objectives; to enable people to understand scientifically the major events in the world and the major concentrations of social contradictions, and therefore to feel impelled, and compelled, morally and politically, to act in resistance against the many outrages of the system, and to increasingly understand the need to build all that toward revolution; and (this goes back to our previous discussion about "solid core with a lot of elasticity") to bring forward a growing solid core which is increasingly deepening its understanding of, and therefore its commitment to, the struggle for this radical transformation of society and the world through revolution aiming for the final goal of communism. The newspaper, in an ongoing and a fundamental sense, is a basic grounding for all the work that's done by our Party, including what's spoken to in those two paragraphs, "Some Principles for Building a Movement for Revolution."

At the same time, the other mainstay is promotion and popularization of the leadership, the body of work, the method and approach, the new synthesis of communism, that I have brought forward. So that is also a fundamental thing that has to be done, in an ongoing way, through all the work to build the movement for revolution, and all the struggle that's built, which we work to develop as part of that movement for revolution. This promotion and popularization is one of the two main foundation stones, if you will—along with the newspaper as the other mainstay—that undergirds and provides the basis for all of the various kinds of work we do to build the movement for revolution.

And the promotion and popularization of my leadership, my body of work and method and approach—this is now taking a concentrated expression in the "BA Everywhere" campaign and the massive multi-faceted fundraising battle to make that real. It is important to emphasize that this is about making communist revolution a major question in society—it is a matter of spreading the new synthesis of communism into all corners of society. As we've talked about, this is one of the key objectives of this campaign—to raise the level of discourse and wrangling about the big questions of society and the world, and "whither humanity," to put it that way: where can humanity go, where does humanity need to go, what is possible in terms of transforming the world, and how should we go about that? In other words, this "BA Everywhere" campaign is a concentrated means for pushing forward all three objectives—"making BA a household name" is a concentrated means for pursuing the three objectives of this overall Campaign—the other two objectives being: to make this revolution, communist revolution, with the new synthesis of communism, a major question in society, to project that into every corner of society and have that become a point of reference and, yes, a point of debate and struggle, broadly in society; and to bring forward wave after wave of initiators of the new stage of communism, to strengthen and develop, and broaden and deepen that solid core of people, to bring forward new people to become part of that solid core that is aiming for the communist revolution and the emancipation of humanity that is represented by that communist revolution.

So, as we discussed earlier, those are the three objectives of the overall Campaign. But, at the same time, this is not only a means of achieving those objectives, it's also a way of involving large numbers of people in this process. It's a way for many, many people—ultimately, thousands and thousands of people—to get involved on many different levels, coming from many different places and perspectives. A way to build unity and, yes, community among these people, with their many divergences as well as their common unity around the understanding that it's vitally important to project this out in society, to reach into every corner of society with this, and to raise the level of discourse and debate about these big questions—and to do all this even while continuing to have very lively debate and wrangling around the questions: what is the problem, what is the solution and the way forward?

Now, going back to the statement, the two paragraphs embodying "Some Principles for Building a

Movement for Revolution," one of the key things that's emphasized in those Principles, or one key aspect of those Principles, is building up the conscious force of revolutionary communism. And, obviously, the two mainstays have everything to do with building up that conscious force of revolutionary communism—building it up quantitatively and qualitatively, if you will. In other words, bringing in many new people, winning more and more people to become communists, to join the Party on that basis, and to be consciously working to build the movement for revolution from that perspective, while also continually deepening their understanding and their grounding in the scientific outlook and methodology of communism that has to guide the building of this movement for revolution. So that is a key part of what's embodied in those Principles.

And this relates back as well to the statement "On the Strategy for Revolution" that we were talking about earlier. That statement speaks to the fact that we need thousands now who are won to communism and are actively working for communist revolution.

While we're reaching and influencing millions, thousands can be and need to be brought forward, oriented, trained, and organized in a revolutionary communist way and enabled to actively struggle for the objectives of this revolution. And, when the time comes that there is a much deeper and broader crisis in society that reaches objectively revolutionary proportions—when the ruling class really has much greater difficulty ruling in the way they've ruled, and masses of people in the millions and millions, and tens of millions, don't want to and, in an active sense, are increasingly refusing to, live in the old way—then **that core of thousands can, in turn, influence, can bring into the revolutionary movement, on many different levels, and can lead the millions and tens of millions who are refusing to live in the old way, and are actively seeking radical change.**

All that relates to "Some Principles for Building a Movement for Revolution," where it calls for building up the conscious force of revolutionary communism.

And, obviously, the two mainstays—the wielding of the newspaper, and the projection, out into society broadly, of my leadership and of the new synthesis of communism I have brought forward—have a great deal to do with masses of people coming to see the illegitimacy of this system, because people don't see the illegitimacy of the system in a vacuum. As long as people think there's no alternative, then they continue to be weighed down by the notion of the permanent necessity of the existing conditions—even if they hate those conditions, even if they feel deeply oppressed and outraged by those conditions and what they give rise to.

So, there's a dialectical relation, if you will, a back and forth relation, between people seeing that there is a radical alternative that is viable, that is real, that could be achieved—not easily, and only with a great deal of struggle and sacrifice, but there is a real alternative, a radical alternative, that is viable—the more that people see that, at the same time as they see the thoroughly rotten, oppressive, exploitative, and outmoded nature of the current system, and that it needs to be swept into the museum of history, and off the backs of the masses of people in the world, those two things positively reinforce each other.

The more that people don't understand the nature of the present system, the less they believe that there could be and should be a radical alternative to it. On the other hand, the more they see the real nature of this system—and, together with that, the more they understand that there is not a permanent necessity for this existing system and these existing conditions, and they see the possibility and the viability, the real living reality that there could be a radically different society and world if a revolutionary struggle is waged to achieve that—the more they're going to gravitate toward that. And if these two things can work together positively, all that has everything to do with undermining people's belief in the

permanent necessity of existing conditions, enabling them to see the fact that they don't have to live in this way, and under this system, to see that this system is totally illegitimate, and to see the radical alternative which is possible, and which they should actively struggle for.

So, all that, too, is part of the interrelation between the two mainstays and those "Principles for Building a Movement for Revolution."

Particular Outrages, Particular Struggles, and the Overall Movement for Revolution

Brooks: Another thing that I wanted to ask you about is the theme of making everything about the whole thing, so to speak. Obviously, there are a lot of different elements and particularities that go into the overall ensemble of revolutionary work that revolutionaries should be doing; but, then, there's also not losing that link between each individual element of that and the ultimate goal of making revolution and getting to communism. For example, in relation to some of these initiatives that we were talking about earlier in the interview: initiatives of fighting the power, and transforming the people, for revolution—things like the movement to stop mass incarceration, or to end pornography and patriarchy, just to use two examples. In other words, could you speak to the importance of this, and how to go about maintaining that link, keeping your eyes on the prize and not losing sight of what you're ultimately trying to do, even though there are different individual elements of that.

BA: Yes, well, I think there are a number of different aspects to this, or elements of contradiction that have to be understood and handled correctly. Many people will get involved in struggle against different outrages of the system—or, in terms of what you were referring to, mass initiatives against particular concentrated outrages (or, once again, major concentrations of social contradictions), like mass incarceration, or, for short, the degradation of women. Many people will get involved in those struggles because they're moved by the outrage of them, because those things have become intolerable to them, because they feel compelled to struggle against them and to fight to put an end to them. And, obviously, people will also have broader thinking. Everybody comes to any particular thing with their broader perspective in mind. Religious people come to these struggles with their religious views, and they're generally not hesitant about expressing them either [Laughs]. And that's part of the process. There needs to be a broad unity, and there need to be people coming forward who are, at a given time, mainly concerned about one or another, or a few, major concentrations of social contradictions—or, put more simply, major outrages and injustices in society.

So, there's a need to build unity very broadly in these different dimensions of fighting the power, to put it that way.

At the same time, for those who have gotten to the point of understanding, as communists do and should, that all this is rooted in, or has been encompassed within, the very nature and dynamics of the system of capitalism-imperialism, this involves the understanding that, while particular manifestations, or particular forms, of the oppression that this system brings in many different ways may be able to be changed or eliminated, the overall oppressive and exploitative nature of this system cannot be changed, and it must be swept away through revolution. For example, Jim Crow as such—open segregation and discrimination, written into the law or carried out as open policy—has largely been eliminated. So today, although there is a lot of discrimination and segregation that still goes on, it's not any longer a matter of open law and open government policy. Discrimination and segregation is far from having been eliminated in reality, but at least it's not open law and open government policy, the way it was for decades, for generations, even after the Civil War and the ending of literal slavery—although slavery

itself wasn't completely ended either through the Civil War, and it persisted in various forms, including for Black people who were caught up in the legal system and imprisoned. There were still many forms of actual slavery that persisted in the southern United States, and today we see slavery in different parts of this imperialist-dominated world—with one of the most acute forms being the enslavement of women in the sex trade, being forced into prostitution and other forms of similar degradation. So, there are still forms of slavery in the world today, but in some significant aspects things have changed—that is, the particular forms of oppression have changed.

Yet, while particular expressions or particular forms of oppression may be changed or even eliminated, or largely eliminated, there are certain bedrock elements of the oppression of masses of people, and exploitation of masses of people, under this system that cannot be eliminated within the confines and within the dynamics, and the rule, of this system. And, once again, those who have gotten to the point of understanding that are certainly no less outraged about particular manifestations of oppression. If anything, we are even more outraged by these particular injustices that we've been talking about, and other injustices of this system. But, at the same time, we understand that this is all rooted in, and is now part of, the overall nature and dynamics of the whole system that has to be swept aside. And we understand that, even if you can change this or that form of oppression of a particular section of the people, if something is really basic to the system as a whole, then it cannot be eliminated without eliminating that system. For example, the oppression of women, or the oppression of Black people under this system, or the exploitation of the basic working people, the proletariat—all this is fundamental to this system. A lot of the exploitation that this system is rooted in, and depends on, has been spread out and intensified internationally, but it still goes on in some intense ways within the U.S. itself at the same time.

And then there is the whole international dimension—the international exploitation, the international oppression, which, particularly in the Third World, is much more sharp, pronounced, and egregious than it is in a country like the U.S. itself. And there are the wars, and the vicious repression, to enforce and back up all this and maintain these conditions of exploitation and oppression.

Even if you can change a particular form of oppression in a particular area of society, you can't get rid of some of the bedrock forms of exploitation that are built into this system, nor can you get rid of other outrages which are in fact built into this system. When you make the leap to becoming a communist, and understand that communist revolution is what's necessary to sweep away all this, then you can, and you have to, approach any particular question, any particular arena of struggle—whether it's political struggle, or struggle in the realm of culture and ideology, whether it's resisting the system, or it's battling over the question of what kind of outlook and morals do we need in order to be able to uproot oppression, or it's bedrock questions about what is the actual problem, does it lie in "human nature" or in the nature of the system, to put it in a concentrated way—you approach all this from the point of view of understanding that it is both necessary and possible, through tremendous struggle and sacrifice, to sweep away this system and to bring in a whole different system, and to make that be a transition, together with the struggle throughout the world, toward the final elimination of all the different forms in which human beings oppress and exploit other human beings, to get rid of all forms of oppression and exploitation by any one part of society over another, and to get to a whole different world—the world of communism which has to be achieved on a world scale, because, as long as exploitation and oppression exist in any part of the world, then ultimately none of humanity can be free, and exploitation anywhere can also be a base for exploitation and oppression to be reinstated, for the system of exploitation and oppression to once again come back to power, even where it's been initially swept aside. So only by eliminating exploitation and oppression throughout the world, and among

humanity as a whole, can it be done, ultimately and for good, in any part of the world. All of this is bound together in that kind of way.

And once you get that level of understanding—and, yes, it's a process and not a "once and for all" thing—but, once you make the leap to getting that basic understanding and grounding, then it's a question of continually struggling to remain grounded and to get continually more deeply grounded in that understanding, and to apply it in a living way to all the different particular aspects of building the movement for revolution—all the different spheres of struggle, be they cultural, ideological, or political, over major social questions or, as we were talking about earlier, over questions which, at first at least, don't seem to be major social questions but then, perhaps unexpectedly, become that. Now, for communists, like everyone else, there is the pull of what dominates in society. There is the pull of the putrid, revolting culture, ideology, and morals that you have to continually struggle against, not just individually but collectively, together with others. There is the political pull to seeing things in isolation from the overall and larger picture, and into simply being concerned with one particular form or manifestation of the oppressive nature of this system—losing sight of the larger picture into which this particular form fits. That is a constant pull on people. And there is a need—again, not just for individuals on their own, but together, collectively, with growing numbers of people—for struggle to continually loft all of our sights back up to the larger standpoint of seeing the whole picture and proceeding, with regard to any particular aspect of things, any particular part of the struggle, with this whole broad understanding in mind and as the constant guide in what we're doing. This all has to be built as part of preparing the ground for, and getting to the point where, when the objective conditions ripen, we can actually lead millions and millions of people to make this revolution we're talking about, to actually sweep away this system, to defeat and dismantle its repressive institutions, and bring into being new revolutionary institutions that really do serve the interests of the masses of people, and back them up in carrying forward the struggle to continue transforming society, to support others in the world waging the same struggle, and to help people see the need in other parts of the world to wage this struggle more and more consciously toward the common goal of a communist world.

So, that's the way that every particular has to be approached by those of us who have reached the point of having a basic grounding in the understanding of where this all flows from and what, in fact, is necessary in order to sweep it all away and bring something much better into being. Once again, it goes back to that very basic question, that very basic dividing line that I was referring to earlier: Can and should the world stay fundamentally unchanged? Or is this not a horror for the masses of people and humanity? Is it not in fact a disaster for humanity as a whole? Is it not in fact true that the world must and can be radically changed?

It always gets back to that basic question and dividing line. Is the world going to remain fundamentally unchanged, with all the horrors of that—or, as it says in the polemic against Alain Badiou's political philosophy, with the machinery of capitalism-imperialism "humming in the 'background,' crushing lives and destroying spirits," and the exploitation continuing unabated—or, are we going to consciously work and struggle and bring forward more and more people to consciously work and struggle to, in fact, make the revolution that's necessary but also possible, with a great deal of struggle and sacrifice, in order to bring into being a radically different and much better world?

Unity and Contradiction

Brooks: I think part of the challenge in relation to these different initiatives and campaigns that are part of revolutionary work, is the challenge for revolutionary communists of properly and fully

comprehending the breadth of people who can and should be part of these initiatives, coming from a lot of different perspectives, while also boldly putting forward and not watering down, or losing, what you're talking about—boldly putting forward communist convictions and putting forward what this all stems from and the fact that the world could be radically different. And, even just taking the example of what you were saying about the "BA Everywhere" campaign, revolutionary communists have the understanding that "making BA a reference point in society" is essential in order to make revolution and actually get to a whole new society and world; but, then, there are also a lot of people who would be drawn to want to be part of this, coming from a lot of other perspectives, too—people who are drawn to the vision that is contained in your body of work and feel that this needs to get out there for a lot of other reasons as well. That's one example. Or, you could think of other examples in relation to other initiatives, too. I don't know if my question is clear, but it's this point of fully comprehending the breadth of people who would want to be part of these different initiatives and unleashing that, without losing that solid core of what this needs to be about and where it needs to go.

BA: Yeah, one way to get at this is that, as another leading comrade in our Party put it, people are fully capable of holding two thoughts in their head at the same time. That is, in relation to the "BA Everywhere" campaign—and I touched on this earlier, but it's worth coming back to a bit—people, at a given time, can feel that they personally don't know that much about, or maybe don't agree with parts or much of what is actually embodied in the new synthesis of communism and my body of work and method and approach overall, but they can at the same time feel that it would be very important for these ideas to be projected broadly into society and for many, many more people, in all corners of society, to be actively engaging and debating these ideas as part of generating a much greater and much loftier wrangling with the question of, once again, "whither humanity?" What is the situation humanity is confronted with? Why are we confronted with the situation we are today? Is there a possibility of radically changing it? Does it need to be radically changed? If so, how?

Even people who may not agree with or may not know that much about the new synthesis of communism, for example—many, many people, thousands and thousands of people—can get actively involved in and be motivated to be part of helping to project this into all corners of society. They can find their own level, so to speak—as long as the way is provided for them to find their own level—to participate in that, with that kind of contradiction in their own understanding, and in their own approach.

That is one very important aspect of, at one and the same time, dealing with unity and contradiction, which is a lot of what you have to do in building the movement for revolution. There are different levels and different forms in which people can unite to fight oppression—to fight the power, to put it that way—even while they have disagreements about how to wage that fight, let alone about the bigger context and framework into which that fits.

Is the Problem "The Fallen Nature of Man"... or That the System Has Not Yet Fallen?

BA continues: Once again, however much it is systematically or consciously worked out, everybody does bring to the table, so to speak, their own larger worldview and understanding in relation to any particular thing. Some people, because they're very religious, think that it's sinful to incarcerate masses of people. They think it's against the teachings of Jesus, for example, or against the will of Allah, or whatever. People like that, if they're willing to stand up, and are anxious to stand up and fight against mass incarceration, should be united with on that basis. But then there's obviously gonna be a lot of

struggle about how we understand this: Is this a matter of sin? Or is it a matter of the system, and is this being done because, as we talked about earlier, there's a whole section of people that the system has no future for, but the powers-that-be recognize these people as a potentially very volatile force in rising up against the system, so they want to control, contain, confine them—literally confining them in prison in massive numbers?

Those kinds of questions can be and need to be struggled out, even as people are uniting around fighting particular outrages, or particular injustices, and at the same time as those of us who do have a scientific approach and scientific understanding of how this fits into the larger picture of the workings and dynamics of this whole system, are working to win people to become aware of, or more aware of, all the many different outrages and injustices of this system, and of the need to link up the different struggles against the different particular manifestations of the oppressive nature of this system, the different outrages and injustices—to unite people struggling in one realm with people struggling in others and, as we've sometimes put it, to develop people who are fighters on one front against oppression into fighters on many fronts, or on all fronts, against all the different forms and manifestations of the oppressive nature of this system, all the major outrages and injustices—and, then, to continue the struggle to win them to see how this is all rooted in the nature of this system, that it's not "human nature," it's not "the sinful nature of man," or "the fallen nature of man," it's the nature of this system—the criminal, oppressive nature of this system and the fact that this system needs to be "fallen," needs to be knocked down, in fact, and replaced by a much better system.

So, throughout this whole process, there's unity and there's struggle—and then the unity sometimes breaks apart, but, through struggle, waged well, a higher level of unity can be forged with many people. So, it's not a straight line. It's often unity-struggle—some division—and then more unity, and often unity on a higher level with more people. Not in a straight line, but through a process with a lot of twists and turns. And, from our perspective, understanding this and approaching it in a scientific way, all of this has to be built toward the goal of making revolution, all of it has to be done as part of building the movement for revolution.

The more that we do that, the more we approach it in that way, the more there will be the basis to win more people to become part of that. Whereas, the more that we lose sight of that, then, in fact, even the struggle around a particular injustice is gonna be weakened, because it's not gonna have within it that strong element of people seeing it correctly in its larger context, and therefore actually being able to fight in a more determined and more sustained way around it. Many people can fight with determination but, if they don't see the larger picture, they can get discouraged by what I talked about earlier: that it's very difficult even to eliminate certain forms of oppression—and sometimes, even if you do make progress in terms of eliminating or beating back a particular form of oppression, they just come back another way and oppress people in a different form, and they work to undermine even the concessions you've won, even the gains you've made of a partial nature, they work to undermine those and reverse those.

We Have to Break on Through

BA continues: Look at the situation the masses of Black people are in today. Does that mean that the struggle they waged—their heroic struggle beginning in the 1950s and reaching its high point in the late '60s and early '70s—wasn't about anything, didn't accomplish anything, it was a waste of time, it was misplaced and unjustified, unwise sacrifice on the part of those who went to jail, or were driven into exile, or even killed? No, none of that is true. Tremendous things were accomplished, and the most

important thing that was accomplished was raising the sights of not only masses of Black people, but many other people as well, to begin to see, first of all, the importance, as well as the possibility, of standing up against this system and fighting back, of fighting the power; and, even beyond that, seeing in a larger way at least important aspects and features of the oppressive nature of this system and of the need to fight against that whole system. Millions and millions of people came to that position.

But, because, as I spoke to earlier, we didn't "break on through to the other side," to use that phrase—because we didn't get all the way to revolution, and the ruling class of capitalist-imperialists remained, and still remains, in power—they've gone to work to undermine everything that was gained and everything that was learned through that struggle. And they've found new ways of oppressing people. They've had to back up off of open and legal segregation and discrimination, but they've found means like containing people in ghettos: brutally repressing them; murdering them in large numbers—hundreds of murders by the police every year—incarcerating them in massive numbers, so a huge percentage of particularly young Black men and young Latino men, and growing numbers of women, are either literally in prison or in some way under the direction and control of the prison/judicial system—on parole, on probation, and so on and so forth.

So what does that prove? That it was pointless and useless to rise up? No. What it proves is that we have to go all the way, we have to break on through. Or, to go back to what we were talking about earlier, we not only have to be right, we not only have to be righteous, we have to win!

"Diverting" the Struggle—Onto the Path of Revolution

Brooks: Just to go a little bit further on this, 'cause I think this is really important, I think part of what poses itself, in terms of the role of revolutionary communists in relation to these different struggles and in relation to fighting the power, and transforming the people, for revolution, is that the role of revolutionary communists is maintaining a broad unity while diverting these struggles towards revolution, rather than tailing the other understandings and lines that are out there. And I guess, just to zero in for a second on this example of the struggle against mass incarceration, revolutionary communists have the understanding that this phenomenon of mass incarceration is one particularly powerful concentration of what this whole system of capitalism-imperialism does to Black people, and the whole historical oppression of Black people. And then, on the other hand, as you were talking about, there's gonna be people who take up this struggle against mass incarceration coming from a lot of other understandings and viewpoints. I guess part of what I'm getting at is how revolutionary communists build the correct unity—not making the understanding of what this all stems from, and how to get rid of it, the basis of unity, but also not losing that and not tailing the other understandings that are out there in relation to this, just to use one example. So, that's what I'm trying to explore further, this thing of diverting not tailing, and communists leading these struggles—maintaining the proper unity, but not letting different understandings set the terms, or go unchallenged.

BA: First, let's begin with something you referred to in raising this particular question, which is the concept of "diverting." I think it's important to speak briefly to what that means. In other words, people start out struggling against various ways in which they're outraged by what this system does, and they don't all, somehow magically, acquire—or very quickly or spontaneously acquire—a scientific, a communist understanding of what this all stems from, and the interrelation of all the different things we're talking about, and what the ultimate solution is to this, flowing in a real sense from what the actual nature of the problem is. They have a partial understanding, and everybody in society, including people who rise up to resist injustice, are influenced by the dominant ideas that are constantly pumped

at people through all the different ways that we've spoken to—not only directly the political sphere and political operatives and functionaries of the ruling class, but also the realm of the media, the so-called news media, and more broadly the realm of "popular culture"—TV, movies, music, etc. There are some good and positive things in there—but, let's face it, the overwhelming weight of what comes down through that, and influences people, reflects the outlook and the interests of the dominant ruling class of capitalist-imperialists. So, even people who rise up to fight back against this system are still significantly influenced by that.

Plus, they run up against the difficulties, the realities and difficulties, of waging such a struggle. You get to a certain point—like what happened to the "Occupy" movement. For a certain period, the ruling forces—the mayors in the cities and the governors, and even the higher levels of ruling class functionaries—said: "Well, we'll just see where this goes, maybe they'll just get tired and go home. We can put up with a little bit of protest, if it stays on a certain level, not just in terms of its activity, but in terms of its outlook; and if it doesn't pose any kind of fundamental challenge to us, we can let it go on for a while." And then, after a while, they said: "This is not a good thing that's happening here, in terms of our interests. Not only are more and more people gravitating to it and supporting it in various ways, not only is it striking a chord broadly with people, and getting a lot of sympathy and support, but it's also starting to raise the kinds of questions we don't really want people thinking and debating about. And it's also providing, with its physical presence—in parks here and there, and other sites—with its physical presence it's actually providing a place where people can come together and where what people are into in that context is not the daily shit we want them to be into, but they're talking about and thinking about and debating about big questions about 'what is wrong with this society?'... 'why are we in the position we're in?'... 'what is going on in the world, and how does that relate to what's going on here?'... 'is there an alternative—is another world possible?' All this—we don't like it" (I'm speaking now in the voice of the conscious functionaries of the ruling class), "we don't like it when people get together and have a space where that's what they're talking about and debating, where there's a visible presence there that others can gravitate to, and where, even if it's just in limited ways, this is starting to pose an alternative to the way we know that society has to function and operate in order for our interests to be served."

It's not that people were defecating in the park, or all this other stuff that they pretended was the problem—they didn't like the political and ideological character of what was embodied there, and they said, okay, that's enough. And so, they came down with repression. They brutalized people. They physically drove them out of the parks with illegitimate force and violence, violating what are supposed to be people's rights under the Constitution: even though that's a Constitution that reflects, fundamentally, the system and the interests of the capitalist-imperialists; here again is a contradiction between their outer shell and pretense of democracy and the actual dictatorship that is exercised on behalf of and to reinforce the capitalist-imperialist system and the rule of the capitalist-imperialist class.

So, now, people haven't been defeated, but they've been dispersed in significant ways. And there's a question of whether people are gonna come back and massively mobilize against this repression. And we've issued a statement calling on people broadly to unite, calling on people to unite with us and with many others to actually mobilize massive political resistance—manifestations and demonstrations of political resistance against this repression, calling it out for what it is and making a powerful statement that it's intolerable and cannot stand and will not be tolerated.

But, what happens when you get this kind of repression is that people come up against this, and they spontaneously come up with different ways of dealing with it, and there's a real pull on people, for

understandable reasons, to try to find some way to finesse the contradiction: Maybe we can find some politicians to vote for, who will be more favorable to what we're doing. Or maybe we should disperse and go into various neighborhoods and kind of build up our bases, and then maybe we can come back later. And some of this latter approach is part of what should be done. But, if that becomes a substitute for actually mobilizing massively and bringing even much broader numbers of people to be mobilized to stand up against this repression, then you're gonna be set back, and it's gonna be that much more difficult to come forward again.

Some people kind of resort to—or retreat, frankly, into saying: "Well, they may be able to repress us, but you can't repress an idea whose time has come." Actually, that's wrong. Unfortunately, we've seen this in history. There used to be a thing, "You can kill a revolutionary, but you can't kill the revolution." Well, ultimately and fundamentally, you can't kill the revolution, because revolution springs forth because of the basic contradictions and the oppressive nature of this system, and the way those contradictions of this system get expressed. But you can set revolution back for a long time, including by killing off revolutionaries. We've seen that in the world. We've experienced that bitter pill. And a real struggle has to be waged not to allow the movement of resistance, and the movement of revolution that needs to be built, to be killed off, or even to be set back in a sustained way. That has to be a major point of struggle.

Combatting "The Spontaneous Striving to Come Under the Wing of the Bourgeoisie"

BA continues: So, here comes the point of "diverting." Lenin made the point that there is what he called "the spontaneous striving" of masses, and of mass movements, "to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie" (the ruling class). Now, what did he mean by that? He meant that people rise up but, with their spontaneous understanding, with the partial understanding they have—which is natural when they're just beginning to wage struggle—they don't see the full picture and they don't understand how all this is rooted in the system, and they don't see that the solution to the problem is to make revolution to abolish this system and replace it with something radically different and better. So, when they then come up against the repressive nature of the system, it becomes difficult to see the possibility of breaking through that, of fighting back against that, of advancing in the face of that, of bringing forward even more massive resistance in the face of this kind of repression. It's not that they can't see it at all, but people are driven towards seeking alternatives which are contained within, not only the confines of this system in an overall sense, but the limited terms that the system is willing to allow at a given time.

And then, you begin consciously working to recast what you're doing—or those who are seeking to recast what you're doing into terms that are acceptable to the powers-that-be get more strength—because there's kind of a dual thing going on that's, once again, the carrot and the stick. On the one hand, they're viciously repressing you; and, on the other hand, along come people who say, "Well, we just need to elect better politicians. We gotta get more Democrats and better Democrats in office." This has a pull, even though we've seen what the Democrats are, that they're just representatives of the same system, even if they have some differences, at times some significant differences, with other representatives of the same system who are generally grouped in the Republican imperialist party, instead of the Democratic imperialist party. So, people tend spontaneously to get drawn back into the terms—and under the wing—of a section, at least, of the ruling class (of the bourgeoisie, as Lenin put it).

And it's the responsibility and role of communists, who understand where all this comes from, what it's all rooted in, and what the nature and role of those different sections of the ruling class are—and what the nature is of the ruling class and its political functionaries, institutions, and processes overall—to struggle against that: to enable people to see that, not only must we not get drawn onto the terms and under the wing of the ruling class, but we have to develop this movement more broadly and more deeply. And we have to win more and more people in a movement like this to become part of a larger movement, a more fundamental movement—of people who are increasingly gaining an understanding of, once again, what the problem is and, related to that, what the solution is. Who understand how the system is the source of all this. That it is in the very nature of the police to be a repressive force on behalf of the established order and on behalf of the system, which that established order enforces. That the police may have salaries that they have a hard time living on, and pensions that aren't so great, but they are part of the repressive apparatus of the capitalist-imperialist state; they are under the direction of people who are high-level functionaries of the capitalist-imperialist state; and they will act accordingly, because that's their role in this society.

The only way they can not act accordingly is by bolting away from that. And, when you reach proportions of struggle that are getting to the verge of a revolutionary struggle, sometimes sections of the army, and even some among the police, break away from the institutions they're part of and either pull back and no longer actively take part in the conflict at all, or even go over to the side of the people. But, that's much more likely to happen among people who are—particularly when there was a volunteer... I mean a drafted army rather than a volunteer army, you had a massive phenomenon of soldiers coming over to the people's struggle, particularly in relation to the Vietnam War, but also in relation to other questions that were being battled out in the movement of the 1960s, for short. But it's less likely that the police are gonna do that, because people who become police are generally fairly ideologically committed to a certain view, including a despicable view toward the masses of people. They have the view, spontaneously going in—and they get reinforced in the view—that the masses of the people, especially the masses of brutally oppressed people in the inner cities, are a bunch of "savages" and "animals." This is the outlook with which they're indoctrinated, and that outlook is constantly reinforced in their role as police. So, regardless of the attitude of individuals, in any case, as a social phenomenon—as an institution, as a force in society—the police are going to act in their "proper role," which is to be an instrument of repression, as a key part of the state enforcing the capitalist-imperialist system.

Well, once again, when you run up against that, either you deepen your understanding of that and you understand that this is all rooted in the very nature and dynamics of this system, and we have to build a movement to sweep away the whole system—or, you get diverted in another way: instead of being diverted more and more toward a revolutionary direction, you get diverted more and more under the wing of the bourgeoisie, into being subordinated to, and finding yourself more and more confined within, the terms that are imposed and dictated by the ruling class and its operatives.

Broad and Diverse Mass Movements, and the Movement for Revolution

BA continues: That's an important thing about the need to divert the struggle. This doesn't mean, in relation to "Occupy," for example, that we think "Occupy" should itself become a communist movement—and this relates to your other point. It is correct and necessary for these mass movements to have a broad range of people involved, with many and diverse perspectives and outlooks, united in a common thrust against the injustices that they can be won to oppose—what they initially united around, and the broader unity and deeper unity that can be developed. At any given time, if we were to limit the

people in any mass movement simply to those who agree with the need for communist revolution, we would not only be undermining those mass movements, but we would be, more fundamentally, undermining the building of the movement for revolution.

There is a need for many different forms of mass struggle and mass movement in which there is a broad unity, with a broad diversity of views and range of perspectives, within which communists work both to build those struggles but, also, to win more and more people to the understanding of the need for revolution and the building of a movement for revolution, and to link particular struggles up with other struggles—once again, to develop fighters on one front into fighters on all fronts against this oppressive system. And, through all that, as well as the mainstays we talked about—wielding the newspaper; projecting broadly the new synthesis of communism and my body of work and leadership—building the movement for revolution, and diverting more and more people, so that, rather than coming under the wing of the bourgeoisie, they become more and more deeply grounded in an understanding of the nature of the problem and of the solution—of the need for revolution, for short.

It's not a question of "every mass movement should have communism as its basis of unity." Such movements, at this time particularly, would not be mass movements—they'd be movements of small numbers of people, and the people who are already won to that would just be talking and working with themselves [Laughs]. That's never going to get to where we need to go. So, there's a need for broad unity and many diverse viewpoints, and many diverse forms of struggle; and there's a need for communists, who do have the understanding of the need for communist revolution, to work to have all this be building toward the goal of revolution; to struggle and work together with people—but also, yes, to struggle ideologically with them to win more and more people to see that revolution is what's needed and to be consciously working and struggling for this revolution.

Dealing With the Very Real Divisions Among the People

BA continues: Another dimension of all this, which communists have to approach with a scientific understanding and method, is that there are very real divisions among the people. There are different forms of mass movements around different particular questions, but there is also—underlying all this, so to speak—not only the fundamental and antagonistic division between the ruling class and the masses of people in society, but among the masses of people, among the people broadly speaking, there are very real divisions that are rooted in the nature and dynamics of this system.

There is, for example, the fundamental divide around the oppression of half of humanity, the oppression of women. There is the division—this is a very profound division in a society like this, and it helps to perpetuate this system—the division around what we call "the mental/manual contradiction," between those people who primarily engage in working with ideas and in intellectual pursuits, and have the corresponding levels of education and training, and people who have been denied those levels of education and training and have been conditioned and "tracked" to work with their hands and their backs, if they can find work at all. That's a very profound contradiction, and it finds expression in everything—including in how, and to what degree and in what ways, people are able to be involved in different mass movements and mass struggles.

All these, and other, major divisions, are things that the communists have to be consciously aware of and take into account in building the movement for revolution, in order to correctly build unity and in order to correctly lead all this toward the goal of revolution, which is necessary in order to uproot and eliminate these contradictions—which are, in a basic sense, contradictions among the people—as well as in order to abolish the basic exploitative and oppressive nature of the system as a whole, and the way

it rules over, and subjects to all kinds of horrors, the masses of people, not just in this country but in the world as a whole.

A very sharp manifestation today of what is basically a contradiction among the people, is that between immigrants—millions of immigrants, many of whom are driven to this country in conditions where they can't be legal—and the masses of people in the inner cities, particularly Black people in the inner cities. You have a situation right now where, spontaneously and to a large degree, many Black people, who have been driven out of employment, who have incredibly high rates of unemployment—particularly among the youth but not only among them, among older people as well—feel resentment toward immigrants who are getting jobs. They feel like—spontaneously, they can be pulled toward the line that's put out there that "those are supposed to be 'our' jobs; here we are with all this unemployment, and they bring in these immigrants." So, there's resentment that way, instead of the understanding that it's the very nature and dynamics of this system which has cast them out of these jobs and which is determined to maintain them in the situation they're in, because it does have no future for them and finds it more profitable, economically, as well as in its interests politically (speaking of the ruling class), to bring in immigrants and to be able to exploit them in conditions where they don't even have a legal status; and, at the same time, to build up conflicts between them and the masses of Black people.

And a lot of the immigrants are subjected to the propaganda that the reason Black people aren't working—they're all standing around on the corner, or they're all dealing drugs, or whatever bullshit—is because they're lazy and they don't wanna work. These immigrants have generally been denied any understanding of the whole history of Black people and the tremendous amount of exploitation of their labor that went into building up the wealth and power of this country in the first place, from the days of slavery down all the way to the present time and in recent generations.

One of the things that seems to be a "price of admission," to become accepted in the dominant society, is that you have to turn against Black people. That's the history of this country. There was a book, *How the Irish Became White*, by Noel Ignatiev, and one of the main points of this book was how the Irish people who emigrated from Ireland to the U.S. found themselves in conditions of poverty and discrimination, and there was a battle among the leaders in the Irish community, so to speak, about whether they were going to seek to be integrated into the white society, and therefore turn their backs on Black people and become racist toward Black people—or whether, particularly as a people who faced bitter oppression back in Ireland, they should unite with oppressed Black people in the U.S. And, unfortunately, to a significant degree, to a large degree, the former line, the bad approach, won out.

And that is a kind of price the ruling class imposes on immigrants. You wanna become part of America? You have to hate Black people, turn against them, become part of treating them as a pariah group—as less than human. This is conscious on the part of the ruling class in an overall sense.[16](#)

So, you have this attitude being promoted among immigrants who have been denied an understanding of the whole history of Black people in this country. In fact, when our Party has gone out and worked among immigrants—united with them to fight back against the ways in which they're oppressed, marginalized, discriminated against and exploited, but also brought to them an understanding of the history of this country, the nature of this system, and in particular the role of Black people within that—a lot of them say, "My god—I didn't know any of that, I had no idea about any of that." Which, again, is a condemnation of the system itself. And then, you have, on the other hand, the Black people who are saying, "these immigrants are taking our jobs."

Well, how are you gonna overcome that, without a scientific understanding of how all this relates to the

nature and workings and dynamics of this system, and where the fundamental interests of these different sections of the people actually lie, and the unity that actually resides in the common fundamental interests they have, as opposed to their more narrow and momentary interests?

Communists have to be working on all these different things and, in the final analysis, only if you're coming from a scientific grounding, and specifically the scientific method of communism, are you going to be able to "work your way through" these various contradictions and actually build a movement that can really get to the root of all this and uproot it all.

The Two Mainstays and All-Around Work for Revolution

Brooks: The two mainstays that we were talking about—the promotion of Bob Avakian's body of work, method and approach, and the role of *Revolution* newspaper—could play a major role in the diverting that we're talking about. I wondered if you wanted to speak a little bit to the role of the two mainstays in terms of diverting people's understanding towards a revolutionary direction and towards a correct understanding of the problem and solution in its own right, including in relation to these contradictions you were just discussing?

BA: Well, I think we've touched on this a fair amount earlier, but to come back to it a little more. The newspaper, on an ongoing basis, does a lot of what I was just talking about: giving people an understanding of the actual nature, role, functioning and dynamics of this system, how different events in society and the world are actually expressions of the nature and contradictions of this system, and how they relate to the fundamental nature of this system, and the need to sweep it away through communist revolution. So the newspaper obviously has a crucial role, as I have been speaking to. Through the newspaper, as well as in other ways, addressing these contradictions among the people, and enabling different sections of the people to get not just an understanding of the actual character of the contradictions between them and other sections of society, but to see the larger picture into which all this fits and the larger source, or the fundamental source, of all this—this is crucial. The newspaper is an ongoing, crucial, and critical instrument for being able to win more and more people to that understanding—to introduce people to those ideas, to that understanding, and to win them increasingly to it.

And so, in its own right, is the method and approach, and the new synthesis of communism, that is concentrated in my body of work. That speaks to many of the different manifestations of this system and many of the contradictions that become concentrated at given times in the society, as well as many of the problems and contradictions that have to be confronted and dealt with in building the movement for revolution; and it presents a picture of what all this is rooted in and where it all needs to go. One of the fundamental things that people don't understand is how all this is, in fact, rooted in the basic nature and dynamics of this system; and, once understanding that, therefore understanding why and how this system cannot be reformed—that you cannot change the fundamental nature and dynamics of this system, that you have to get rid of this system in order to get rid of those dynamics and the consequences of those dynamics.

"Poor Mr. Wakefield"—a Lesson from Marx's *Capital* About the Basic Nature of This System

BA continues: In this connection, something comes to mind that I read a long time ago in *Capital* by Marx. I haven't actually gone back and read this particular example in quite a while, but I was thinking

about what Marx wrote about—I believe the guy's name was Wakefield. Marx talked about "poor Mr. Wakefield." Now, this Wakefield (if I'm remembering his name correctly—but we'll just call him Wakefield, because it will serve the example in any case), this Mr. Wakefield was a member of the British aristocracy in the 19th century, and specifically at the time when England was colonizing Australia—while driving under the native peoples there and subjecting them to oppression, it was also importing a lot of people from the lower classes, including convicts and so on, from England, to make them be the proletariat for the capitalists who were colonizing Australia.

And this Mr. Wakefield, learning about this and being a man of wealth and means, decided that he would take advantage of the opportunities opening up with the colonizing of Australia and the driving to the margins, to a significant degree, of the native peoples there. So he went and spent some of his means to buy machinery that he would need for factories. He got all this machinery and chartered a ship to take the machinery to Australia. He took many of the servants in his household—because he was a rich nobleman, and he had a butler and other servants—he put them on the boat, with the idea that they would become the workers in the factories he'd set up with this machinery. He bought land in Australia. He got factories on the land in Australia. He installed the machinery in the factories in Australia. He brought his servants from his manor in England over to Australia.

And what happened? All the servants ran away into the Outback in Australia. And, to paraphrase, Marx's comment on this was: Poor Mr. Wakefield, he brought everything with him to Australia that he needed, along with the land he bought—he brought the machinery, he brought all the other means he needed to set himself up as a capitalist, he even brought the people. The one thing he couldn't bring was the necessary social production relations.

Now, what was Marx getting at there? He was getting at the fact that, in this beginning stage, when they were colonizing Australia, you could bring people who, in the social conditions of England, had no real options except to be your servants—you could bring them into Australia and try to chain them down in your factory to be exploited proletarians—but they saw lots of "open space" they could run off to and try to make a way for themselves. So they all ran off.

And this, by the way, is similar to what happened in the early stages of the colonization of America. When slavery was first instituted, they tried—the slave owners, people who became slave owners—not only brought over Africans, but they tried to enslave many of the native peoples. And they had very limited success with this, because many of the native peoples had another way of life and they also were familiar with the territory and with the environment, the natural environment. A lot of them refused to work and ran off. And this gave even further impetus to importing more and more Africans who really had no option. They were in a strange land, brought over an ocean from their own homelands, and they had much more limited—some of them did manage to run off, for example, to Florida and link up with the Seminoles who had been driven into a part of Florida—but most of them had no real options.

So, what's the point of all this? It is that, after a certain point, both in Australia and in the Americas, the system became deeply enough entrenched and established that its basic dynamics took over. And people could no longer just run away. Slaves tried to run away, but there was a whole superstructure of laws, police forces, and even organized militias of white people who would track down runaway slaves. And, if the slaves were able to run away, they had a hard time getting to the North, and they had a hard time surviving. So even many slaves who hated slavery—which the masses of slaves obviously did—were hesitant to run away, because it was not clear what they could run away to, and how they could live. The point being, once the system became firmly entrenched and in effect, and once its dynamics

were determining the character of how society functioned, and a superstructure had grown up around it to, legally and through force, maintain this system—to use force and violence and the rule of law to maintain this system—then people could not run off the way Mr. Wakefield's servants did when they got to Australia, while there was still lots of "open territory" to run off to, or the way many Native Americans did at the beginning of what became the United States of America.

Once this system is in effect, then, for the masses of people, they have to find their place within that system. Even if they are not literally chained down and sold to individual owners the way slaves were, they still are enslaved and enchained by the dominant economic and social relations and by the dynamics of the capitalist process of accumulation and exploitation—accumulation through exploitation. So, for the masses of people, once this system takes hold and is entrenched, and its dynamics are setting the terms, they cannot escape the terms and the confines of this system—other than through overthrowing this system. Marx made this point in another work of his, the *Grundrisse*: Once a system is firmly in place and entrenched, then individuals may be able to change their social position—they may acquire education and become part of the middle class, for example, or in some other way escape from being impoverished, into a more middle class position—but, Marx emphasized, in a very important point, while individuals may be able to do that, the masses of people cannot escape the conditions of their existence, en masse, as the masses of people, except through abolishing those conditions—except, in other words, through revolution.

This is a very fundamental point, which people are led away from understanding. It's not just that they don't understand it on their own—which they don't, spontaneously, because it requires the acquisition of a scientific approach and method—but also, they are consciously led away from this: by the educational system, by the propaganda machinery of the system, the so-called news media and other elements of propaganda of the capitalist class, they're led away from understanding this. So they see, for example, that there is opportunity for some individuals to change their position, and therefore they're open to the propaganda, or are influenced spontaneously by the propaganda, that everybody can do that. But everybody can't. Everybody can't be a billionaire, or even a millionaire—because, then, who would create the wealth for the millionaires and billionaires? If there is nobody to exploit to create that wealth, you can't have millionaires and billionaires. But the idea is constantly pumped at people: "You can be whatever you wanna be—all you have to have is ambition and drive and determination." Well, that's bullshit. And this is Marx's point—that individuals may change their social position, even perhaps quite a few individuals, but the masses of people, whose oppression and exploitation is fundamental to this system, cannot change their position, as masses of people, except through sweeping away the conditions, sweeping away the system. And this today is true, not only country by country, but it's true on an international scale, because the capitalist system has reached the stage of imperialism where it is a worldwide system of globalized exploitation—and, in the Third World in particular, intense exploitation—which impoverishes masses of people and chains them within the confines of the dominating dynamics of the capitalist accumulation process and of the capitalist relations—economic, social, and political.

This is a fundamental understanding that people are denied and led away from. And it takes a conscious effort to come to a scientific communist understanding of this—and then to take that understanding to growing numbers of people, in order for people to see this and to see why this system cannot be reformed—that electing this or that politician, or this or that political party, all representing the same system, is not gonna change anything. And the fact is, those politicians have no choice but to represent that system. If they try to go outside of that system, first of all, the people with wealth and power will undermine them; but more fundamentally, they will run up against the very functioning of that system,

and the things they're trying to do to make any kind—if they tried to make any kind of basic change in the character of the society and in the position of masses of people who are exploited and oppressed, they would run up against the realities of the system, and they wouldn't be able to do it. The system could not (to put it that way) accommodate that, because it would run contrary to its fundamental nature and its fundamental necessities.

All this is what communists need to be bringing to people, in a living way. And I do often think back to "poor Mr. Wakefield." Now, he was an exploiter—but even he, as an exploiter, couldn't get away from the fact that, fundamentally, the nature of the production relations, as well as the social relations, determines the character of the society; and at the time he was trying to become a capitalist, Australia was a society in transition, from one which was characterized by the way of life of the original peoples there—the native peoples there, if you will—to one that was becoming a capitalist society. And his misfortune, as an individual, was that he came too early, before the capitalist system was completely entrenched.

The misfortune of the masses of people is that, once this system is entrenched and its dynamics are what's determining the character of things—and the confines and limits of what's possible, within that system—then the masses of people are chained within those conditions. And, to refer once again to Marx's statement in the *Grundrisse*, they cannot escape from those conditions en masse—in this country or that, and ultimately in the world as a whole—without overthrowing, uprooting and completely abolishing that system and replacing it with an emancipating system.

Capital Is Not a "Thing"—Capital Is a Social Relation

BA continues: And the other thing, to round this out, that Marx was getting at with his "poor Mr. Wakefield" example is: what is the essence of capitalism, of capital and capitalism? The essence of it is not machinery or money or land—all those things can be turned into capital—but the essence of capital is a social relation, and, more specifically, a social relation of exploitation. For example, many of the Native American tribes and groups didn't treat land as capital. They didn't have a concept and didn't practice private ownership—or ownership even by the whole group—of the land. They viewed the land as a resource of the people that couldn't be owned by anyone. And, in fact, private ownership of the land, or different parts of the land, by different individuals was in conflict with their way of life. If they had private ownership by different individuals of parts of land, individuals would have been in conflict with each other, and their way of life—where their way of life was based on ranging over a broad territory and gathering and hunting, and so on—would have been undermined by that. So land itself is not capital; land can be turned into capital, if capitalist economic relations, capitalist relations of production, have taken hold in society.

So, what Marx was also stressing here—besides the fact (which he also spoke to in the *Grundrisse*) that the masses of people, once this system has taken hold, can only escape the conditions by overthrowing the conditions, to put it that way—is that capital is not any particular thing, such as machinery, land, raw materials, or money. It can be all those things—all those things can be turned into capital—but it is fundamentally and essentially a social relation and, more specifically, a social relation of exploitation, in which a small group of people is in a position to, first of all, employ or not employ other people, according to how this small group, these capitalists, see their interests; and, where they do employ them, to utilize the labor of those other people to enrich themselves, to accumulate more capital, which they can then invest in many different ways—in land, in machinery and raw materials, and so on, or speculating on the stock market, especially in the present age.

Why They Can Question You, But You Can't Question Them

BA continues: But, think about it. To clearly get at how capital is a social relation, in its essence—and, in its essence, a relationship of exploitation—think about the process: When you go to an interview for a job, if you're lucky enough to get an interview for a job, well, they can ask you—the person sitting there, who is a representative of the owner of capital, is a salaried employee but he's representing the ownership, the people who control the capital of the corporation, or whatever it is, the company that you're trying to get hired by—that person is in a position of power and authority over you. Not because of his particular role, fundamentally, but because he is a representative of the people who own capital. So that person gets to ask you all kinds of questions, including personal questions: "Tell me about yourself. Tell me about your work history. Have you ever been arrested? Will you pee in a bottle?" They get to ask you all kinds of questions like that—and you can't say to them: "Why don't you go fuck yourself! What business is that of yours?" Or you will never get a job.

Turn it around: Why is it that you, as a person applying for the job, can't say to the person who is interviewing you: "Wait a minute, bring the owner of the company down here. I wanna interview him. I wanna ask him about his personal life. Does he cheat on his wife? What does he do in his personal life? Has he ever been arrested? Does he exploit people? Does he have investments in other countries? What is he planning to do with this corporation next year?" How come you can't ask those kinds of questions of the owner of the company?

Well, the answer is obvious: Because they own the company, and you don't. They have the capital—which, in fact, they have accumulated from previously exploiting other people who are in your position. And if you are "lucky" enough to get that job, then you will be in a position to be ordered about by the people who run that business on behalf of the major owners of capital. And, once again, you'll have a process similar to the process when you interviewed for the job. You don't get to go up to the foreman, or the head of the section of the office that you work for, and start giving them orders. They come around to your desk, or your post in the factory, if you work in a factory, and give you orders: "Get off that machine, go over to that machine." You don't get to tell them: "You're laid off." They get to tell you: "You are laid off." You don't get to tell them: "I don't like the way you're running this company—you're fired." They get to tell you: "We don't like the way you're working—you are fired."

Now, all of that is an expression of a relationship that, if you think about it for a tenth of a second, is obviously unequal. It pretends, or it has the outer appearance, of being equal, because you do work and they give you a wage. But, in fact, they are accumulating a lot more wealth into their own hands—the owners of the company or the corporation—through the work that you do than they are paying you out in a wage. And they have you in a situation, which is illustrated by the examples I've given, where they have a position of dominance over you. So they are exploiting and oppressing you—it is a relationship of exploitation and oppression, a highly unequal exploitative relationship.

And this is the essence of capital. It is a social relation of domination and of exploitation. And if someone, some backward person, were to say, "Of course they can do all that, because they're the ones who invested in the company"—well, that's exactly the point. And the point, furthermore, is: where did they get the money to invest in the company? Well, at some point, they accumulated capital by exploiting other people just like you. They may have started out with money that they saved from working themselves; but, at a certain point, in order to really develop as capitalists, they invested that money—not just in machinery and not just in factory buildings and raw materials, but also in the control of wage labor and, with that control, the utilization of that wage labor, the wage labor of many

other people like you—and, if they're a big corporation, doing this all over the world, in many parts of the world it's at starvation level wages—to accumulate more wealth as capital and to continue the process in competition and conflict with other individuals—and, more importantly, other groups of capitalists—who are doing the same thing in competition and in rivalry with them.

These are the dynamics of the capitalist system. This is what Marx was emphasizing, or one of the main things he was emphasizing, with his "poor Mr. Wakefield" example—that capital is fundamentally and essentially not a thing, but a social relation, and more particularly a social relation of exploitation, domination, and oppression.

The Base and the Superstructure—A Crucial Understanding

Brooks: I think this example of "poor Mr. Wakefield" relates to what you talk about in Part 1 of *Birds Cannot Give Birth to Crocodiles, But Humanity Can Soar Beyond the Horizon*, in terms of the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure, and the implications of that.

BA: Yes, that's right. It is another way of coming at the same point: The economic base, that is, the fundamental economic relations of production, and the social relations that go along with that, set the basic terms for what the superstructure—that is, what the political system, what the culture, what the morals, values and generally the ideology—will be that will dominate in society. The political institutions—and in particular the institutions of political and forcible suppression, such as the military, the police, the courts, the prisons, and so on—will be, will have to be, in fact, set up and function in such a way as to reinforce and to maintain the underlying economic system, with its fundamental relations of production and its dynamics of accumulation, and to crush any kind of serious opposition, especially any kind of conscious resistance and rebellion that threatens the very nature and functioning of that system. And this is why, no matter whom you vote for, or what party you vote for, you can't change the basic workings of the system, because the underlying economic system is setting the terms and establishing the limits and confines of what can be done.

Let's go back to even more basic things. Underlying all this is the fact, or the question: what is a society at its root, what is the foundation of a society? Fundamentally, society is an organized way in which the material requirements of life are produced and distributed throughout society, and with other parts of the world; and this is done through very definite relations of production that people enter into, which more or less correspond to the character of the forces of production which are at hand—in other words, the machinery in general, the technology, the land, the raw materials, and the people with their abilities, skills, and knowledge—and the way in which all this can be utilized in order to have the most rational functioning of the economic system, in correspondence with what the productive forces are.

And changes in productive forces can bring about changes, even significant changes, in the production relations. This goes back to the example that I mentioned earlier, which a number of people have invoked, because it does graphically illustrate something very basic: When Native American tribes were living without the horse, they had one way of life. Some of them actually occupied a position on the margins and were, in fact, dominated by other tribes. And then, some of these same tribes that were dominated by others got the horse, as the Spanish introduced the horse into North America, and that changed their whole way of life and often changed their position relative to these other native groups—sometimes they, in turn, became dominant over those other native groups, because they became skilled with the use of the horse. That's an example of how changes in productive forces, in this case the horse, can bring about a major change in the way society is organized, in people's mode of life, in the way they live, in the way they satisfy their basic material requirements and, correspondingly, the way their

social system and even their political system and relations are organized, in accordance with that fundamental way of living.

One of the important points that Marx makes is that, in order to carry out production—in order to meet and satisfy the fundamental requirements of life—people have to enter into definite relations of production, but those relations of production are independent of the will of individuals, even individuals who dominate in those relations and in the society. In other words, capitalist relations are independent, fundamentally, of the will of individual capitalists. They can make changes in the character of particular investments or particular ways corporations are run—or whether they close down this factory in this country and move things to another place, and so on. But they can't change the fundamental nature of the relations of production and the dynamics of accumulation that go along with those relations of production.

That is why Marx said capitalists are fundamentally capital personified. In other words, they themselves have to operate in accordance with the dynamics of capitalist production relations and the capitalist accumulation process. And you are not gonna be able to change this, so long as those fundamental dynamics are in place because, most fundamentally, people have to eat, to put it simply—people's basic material requirements of life have to be met on some level, or else society can't function. Even if it functions with great inequality, it can still function in a certain way, if the way in which the dynamics of accumulation are operating is more or less in line with the productive forces at hand.

But if the way in which wealth is accumulated, and the way in which the economy overall is functioning (if the way in which people enter into relations of production), is out of step with—and is, in an essential sense, in conflict with—the character of how the productive forces have developed, that is a whole other matter. And productive forces are constantly developing. People are constantly making innovations and changes in technology which lead to changes in the way that production is organized. We can go back to the example of the Native Americans and the horse. Once the horse was introduced, if people tried to live in the old way, they would just be swept aside by those people who decided to make use of the horse. And, in fact, that's what happened to a significant degree.

Coming forward to modern society, the fact is—and this is the fundamental contradiction of capitalism—that the productive forces are such that the production and distribution of goods and services that's carried out can only be organized, not by a bunch of scattered individuals each working in their own little workshop with the raw materials they themselves have bought, but by mass production carried out under the domination of a small handful, with their salaried employees organizing and enforcing this system of production, but masses of people working cooperatively to produce millions of cars... refrigerators... televisions... computers and iPads. And who mines the ingredients, the basic raw materials, that go into all the things I just mentioned? That's also done by large numbers of people. And, in this era, all this is an international process.

This is the only way that production can be carried out now. But this stands in antagonistic conflict with the fact that, while on the one hand masses of people are working in large groups cooperatively—not on their own individually-owned means of production (machinery, raw materials, and so on), but on large-scale means of production owned by other people—yet precisely that relatively small number, that capitalist class of other people, accumulates to itself what is produced through the cooperative effort of thousands and thousands of people in many cases—accumulates that as private capital, and then sells it as private capital and realizes profit, if it's successful in its sales, and then reinvests it as capital on a bigger scale, in conflict with others doing the same. This stands in sharp conflict, in fundamental antagonism, to the socialized way, the cooperative way, in which all this is produced.

And this, including the conflict among the competing capitalists, leads to all the things that people are all too familiar with, including the breakdowns of the economy, with massive unemployment, massive foreclosures, because you get—especially at this stage of capitalism which is so highly parasitic, one of the large-scale forms of capitalist investment is speculation—speculation on whether something will be profitable or, in fact, whether it will be unprofitable. And some speculative investors will choose to take people's loans and turn them into investment—taking people's debt in effect and turning it into investment—speculating in the financial markets with the debt people have in their mortgages for their homes, for example. This is highly parasitic, and it underscores the fact that this system is what stands in the way of having a radically different society and world, unlike the one we now have, where there is tremendous wealth produced that could, if it were in the necessary form, lead to providing a decent life for every human being on the planet—and yet we have hundreds of millions of people living in slums throughout the Third World, literally among garbage and human waste; we have a billion people at, or nearly at, the verge of starvation, with many other people living on a meager income from day to day—absolutely outrageous conditions that are totally unnecessary and which stem only from the nature and functioning and dynamics of this capitalist system of exploitation, and accumulation based on exploitation, and the conflict between rival capitalists.

It's Not Just "Greed"—It's the Very Nature of the System

BA continues: Is this just a matter of greed, "organized greed," as some people say? No. Why don't the capitalists give a greater break to the people who work for them? Why don't they pay a decent wage, for example, to people to whom they're paying starvation wages in the Third World? Why do they, all of a sudden, close down an operation in this country and leave thousands of people without a livelihood, and move it somewhere else? Not just because they're greedy, but because they're in competition with other capitalists who are also striving to accumulate more capital, because all of them need to accumulate more and more capital in order not to be driven under by others; they cannot afford to lose out in market share and have their profit undermined; and they will go out of business if they don't, in fact, exploit people on a massive scale and, yes, throw them out of work when it's less profitable than exploiting other people.

So it's not a matter of greed, even organized greed. It's a matter of the fundamental dynamics of the capitalist system, the process of capitalist accumulation through exploitation and through competing groups and blocks of capitalists exploiting different sections of the people, different proletarians within a country and on an international scale. These are the actual dynamics that are at work. Yes, the capitalist class unites on a certain level in the superstructure, politically, in order to enforce the conditions that keep the capitalist system, in which they all are totally bound up, and in which they're all thoroughly invested—to keep that system going—even while they have rivalries with each other, not just directly economic rivalries, but political differences, strategic differences, about how to perpetuate and maintain and strengthen the system of which they're all a part.

So, yes, they have those differences, but they do find a relative unity in order to maintain and enforce the system. And, in fact, when that unity among the capitalist ruling class and its political representatives begins to break down in an even greater way than it is doing now—when they find it more and more difficult to find common ground with each other, and they're more and more at each others' throats—that is one of the signs of, or one of the ingredients or elements that goes into, a revolutionary situation, one of the signs of things developing in the direction toward a real revolutionary crisis. That is not all of it, but one of the key elements of it.

Crisis of Legitimacy and the Possibility of Real Revolution

Brooks: What you're getting at goes back to this question of legitimacy that you were talking about earlier. And, like you were just saying, one of the elements of a revolutionary situation is huge numbers of people feeling that the present order has no legitimacy and that the people ruling, the ruling class, has no right to rule. And, I guess part of what I wanted to get into is—I think it's those two paragraphs on "Some Principles for Building a Movement for Revolution" that referred to the legitimacy of the present order being questioned in an acute and active sense—and so I guess a little bit more on what it means for legitimacy to be questioned in an acute and active sense; and then also how the work that revolutionaries are and should be doing today can be part of getting to that point—the work that the revolutionaries are doing to expose the illegitimacy of things.

BA: Well, this goes back to a point that's also made in *Birds Cannot Give Birth to Crocodiles, But Humanity Can Soar Beyond the Horizon*: While the underlying economic system, as I was just speaking to, sets the terms and the fundamental dynamics within which society, including the political system and the culture and all that, have to find their place and have to operate, a revolution is actually not made in the sphere of the underlying economic system. It is made politically. It is made, in a concentrated sense, through the struggle over political power, in which—at the point at which—a revolutionary situation develops and a revolutionary people is brought into being in the millions and millions, there is actually a struggle to determine which group of people in society will hold power. Will it be the exploiting capitalist class, or will it be the exploited proletarians and those aligned with them, who will hold power in society? Will the ruling and dominating, and oppressive and repressive, institutions of the capitalist system be broken, will their hold over people be broken, will that be defeated and dismantled, and new revolutionary institutions, representing the interests of the proletariat and the broad masses of people, in an overall sense, be instituted in their place; or will the attempt at making revolution be drowned in blood and brutally suppressed, and the capitalist dictatorship maintained?

At the point where things become really acute, come to the point of an acute crisis, if the revolutionaries, the communists, have been carrying out their work correctly to prepare for that time, then that becomes the question, the matter that becomes directly joined, and acutely joined in all-out struggle. And that's why I mentioned "On the Possibility of Revolution," which speaks, in basic strategic terms and broad outlines, to the matter of how to approach waging that struggle for power when the objective conditions have come into being and the masses of people have been brought to a revolutionary position in the millions and millions.

So, that's how a revolution gets made. In other words, to put it in basic terms, you have to break the hold of the ruling class—which is manifested in the superstructure, in their rule in society, which is concentrated in their control of a state which enforces the fundamental nature and relations of the system. Again, the courts, bureaucracies, prisons, police, and army constitute the core of the state that maintains the underlying economic system and its ongoing dynamics and accumulation through exploitation.

It is the breaking of the hold of that state, and its replacement by a revolutionary state, that is necessary in order then to be able to transform the whole economic system into one that is a socialist system—based on the principles of developing through stages: more and more common ownership of the means of production (the machinery, land, raw materials, technology, and so on) by the masses of people—and, ultimately, communism, where all of the means of production of society become the common property of the people of the world.

So, this is the fundamental question that gets posed when you get to a revolutionary crisis. This is where we are historically in terms, not of how human society was somehow bound to develop, but how it actually has developed and what it has actually made possible in terms of a radical transformation of society in which we can, in fact, eliminate all the glaring outrages that are bound up with the capitalist system, including the fundamental situation that I referred to just a little while ago, where there is tremendous wealth produced through exploitative relations, and it is accumulated in a greatly disproportionate way by a relatively small handful, while millions and literally billions of people are either not surviving at all—dying of preventable disease, malnutrition, and so on—or are on the edge, barely able to survive, literally in the billions, when that's totally unnecessary at this stage, at the point to which human society, not was bound to evolve, but has actually evolved. Doing away with that situation is fundamental to what the communist revolution is all about.

No Wonder They Slander Communism

BA continues: If you step back and think about it, no wonder they slander communism so much. If you presided over a system that has such glaring, howling contradictions and disparities in terms of how people lived, a system which denied a decent life to the majority of humanity, and weighed them down with tremendous oppression and superstition and ignorance, while a relative handful in a few countries lived a life of unbelievable luxury—but, more than just luxury, they continued to accumulate capital while they fought with each other over who would beat out the other through this exploitation and accumulation of capital—if you stood back and looked at that... Imagine if you said to somebody: go to a drawing board and draw up the way you think the world should be. And imagine if somebody went to the drawing board and painted a picture of the way the world is now, and they said: this is the way the world should be. I mean, there would be tremendous howls coming from all quarters of humanity, saying: What the fuck—that's the way you think the world should be, with these tremendous disparities and people, little children, dying of cholera and malnutrition and other things that could be prevented easily, while a small number battle each other to accumulate more and more wealth from the suffering of this mass of humanity—that's what you think?!

Anybody who would actually draw that up on a board should actually be—and would probably be—rightly accused of criminal insanity. And yet, here's a class of people, the capitalist-imperialist class, that presides exactly over a world that way, and argues it's the best of all possible worlds. The only reason that people don't—masses of people don't, right at this time—say, "this is criminal insanity" is because they've been propagandized and conditioned to believe that, in fact, this is the only possible way, and that the radical alternative to it that does exist, namely communism, has somehow been a horror and a disaster. And it's not hard to see why the ruling class of capitalist-imperialists would employ a lot of people to propagate that idea everywhere they could. If you presided over such a criminally insane system, you would undoubtedly do the same.

What Pulls People Away From Recognizing This Reality?

BA continues: So, in terms of legitimacy and illegitimacy, bringing all this to light has a tremendous amount to do with people's coming to see this system as totally illegitimate—and that maintaining this system, through the massive force and violence that's repeatedly used to maintain it, is also completely illegitimate and a massive outrage.

And the reason, again, that masses of people in a country like this don't already see this is—frankly, there are material reasons for it, and there are ideological reasons for it. The material reason is that

because of the lopsided nature of the world—because of the intense and super-intense exploitation of people, literally billions of people throughout the Third World in particular, in nations oppressed by imperialism, and the tremendous accumulation of wealth that results from the exploitation of people, even in the imperialist countries themselves but much more viciously and intensely in the Third World countries—because of all that, and the accumulation of wealth in that way, there is a basis to "parcel out a few of the droppings of that wealth" to not insignificant sections of people in the imperialist countries themselves. In other words, what's referred to broadly as the "middle class" in the U.S. has been able to have a relatively comfortable position for a fairly long period of time, even with some ups and downs within that, and the fact that this comfortable position is being in some significant ways undermined is one of the main reasons why a lot of people are beginning to question and even to rebel in certain ways.

But that's the material reason why people haven't already called into question, in massive numbers—particularly people in the middle class have not already called into question the legitimacy of this system in a massive way. But there's also what I referred to earlier—the whole ideological dimension of this massive, orchestrated campaign of slander and vilification against communism, which represents the real radical alternative to this system. So, for the combination of those reasons, people have not as yet come, in their millions and millions and millions, to regard this system as fundamentally illegitimate.

Now, there was a period, again going back to the '60s, when that was a mass phenomenon. Even Henry Kissinger, in his memoir from that period, talked about how the radicals—a small number of radicals, as he put it—gained initiative, while people like him, who were representatives of the ruling class (even though he wouldn't put it that way), were put on the defensive. There was a widespread feeling that this system, the people who ruled over it, and the violence they used to maintain this system, was illegitimate.

We weren't able to bring all the necessary elements together—in particular a vanguard party with sufficient roots and links among broad enough ranks of people—to be able to carry that all the way through to a revolution. But that's what needs to happen. And now there is again more questioning of the legitimacy of the system.

"At Least You Can Vote"... But Always on the Terms of This System

BA continues: And there's one other element that needs to be spoken to. I've spoken about the material basis on which some of the spoils of imperialism, to put it that way, are shared—not equally, of course—shared very unequally, but shared in some significant dimension, with sections of the middle class or middle strata in the U.S., and countries like the U.S. And there's the ideological dimension of the whole assault on communism and the whole propagation of the idea that this is the best of all possible systems—it may have its problems, but nothing else is as good. You know, once again, Winston Churchill: democracy—by which he meant capitalism-imperialism—is the worst system you can conceive of, except for any other. Well, that idea is also propagated, including among the intelligentsia, and by many in the intelligentsia at this point, parroting that idea in effect. But the political dimension, in terms of legitimacy, has to do with the whole process of the outer appearance of democracy and, more particularly, elections.

The way it's set up, and the way it functions, is that you may have grievances, you may be disaffected, you may be angry about certain things that happen, but every so often—every four years for president, every two years for the House of Representatives, every six years for this or that Senator—you get to

vote. And, if you don't like a particular politician, or you don't like the way things are going in general, you can vote to get rid of that politician, or vote to get rid of this political party, and vote in another politician, or another political party—which, what do you know, represents the same system. But this is one of the main pillars on which they have worked to rest their legitimacy: however much you may have grievances, at least you can vote to replace the particular people who are functioning politically to maintain this system—you can replace them with other people to do the same thing.

Of course, they don't say it's to maintain an exploitative system—they say it's to exercise "the will of the people." But the fact is, it's just not a matter, as many people spontaneously are thinking and expressing these days especially, that the corporations and wealthy people, bankers and Wall Street and speculative investors, have too much influence over the political process and "they're corrupting and perverting our democracy." It is that, once again, there is a ruling class which—to go back to what Marx said—is, in a very real sense, the personification of the fundamental nature of this system. It is the underlying dynamics of this system—of which that ruling class is, in a real sense, the personification—that set the terms for how the politics will function. That's why the "politicians"—and, especially if you have ideas of justice and trying to end at least some forms of oppression, the Democratic Party, which pretends at times, or in some ways, to be for that—constantly "sell you out." Because the Democratic Party, first of all, doesn't want to—but, in even more fundamental terms, could not, even if it did want to—operate in a way that goes against the basic nature and dynamics of this system, which incorporates and embodies all these various forms of oppression and exploitation, not just in the U.S. but in every part of the world.

A Danger Sign for the Ruling Class

BA continues: So one of the big danger signs for the ruling class is when masses of people, not just a few people but masses of people, begin to say: Elections don't matter—it doesn't matter whom you vote for, which party you put in—it doesn't make any real difference. These politicians, and this political system, doesn't work for us.

Now, that in itself doesn't constitute revolutionary consciousness—there's a lot more that goes into it, which we've been speaking about. But it does pose a warning sign for the ruling class. It's very important, for the ruling class, that people believe that their grievances can be addressed, and that the normal functioning of society and the orderliness of things can be maintained, by voting in the electoral system the way the ruling class has set it up. And when masses of people begin to break away from that and say, "that does not represent us, that represents those ruling over us," then that is a key step in the direction of the whole legitimacy of this system being undermined.

So, going after this is very important—exposing what is the real nature of this democracy, that it is bourgeois democracy, not some classless democracy that provides for the will of everybody, but a bourgeois democracy, a capitalist democracy that represents the interests of the ruling and dictating capitalist class, and that the electoral process is a means by which that rule, that dictatorship, is continued and maintained. And, more than that, this electoral process is a way of involving masses—including masses who are becoming disaffected and alienated from the way things are—back into a political process which is entirely on the terms of the ruling class, through its control of the political system as a whole.

Through its control of the state, but also through its control of the media and the means of molding public opinion, the ruling class determines what are, and what are not, legitimate questions to be discussed in elections, for example. You can see this through the role of the media—I've used this

example before. Back in 2000, or rather 2004, I believe it was, they had this whole electoral circus of the Democrats, like they've been having recently with the Republicans, and people like Dennis Kucinich and Al Sharpton in those days (who was more oppositional than he is now, even though he was always plugged into the system) were raising a lot of things about the wars going on and other things in this society, and the media said: these people are getting a hearing, they're very popular, but they're not serious candidates. Well, [Laughs], who said so—how come they're not serious candidates? What the media were saying, in effect, was that the ruling class has determined that what they are raising (people like Sharpton and Kucinich) is not what the election is gonna be about, and that people like this are not gonna be able to be entrusted to be in positions of authority, because they're not gonna be acting in the way—even with their modest opposition to the way things are, that's not what we want to be the focus of discussion in the context of elections, not what we want people to be debating. So, lo and behold, those people did not become the candidates.

The point being, that's just one small example of how, through the use of the media and all the institutions it controls, this ruling class—including through conflicts among itself and the way it resolves those conflicts on one level or another—controls and determines who's going to run, what the terms are gonna be, what the questions are gonna be, what the debates are gonna be about, and what they are not gonna be about, and who is not gonna be running. And then they tell you, after they've determined all that: "okay, now you can choose between the one and the other." This is not only a sham, but it's a way of involving people—including people who are disaffected—it's a way of involving them in the political process entirely on the terms of the ruling class.

And it's like a magnet pulling on people. People become disaffected. There's massive disaffection with Obama and the Democrats now, people feel betrayed by that: they look at the way he's continued torture, continued wars, institutionalizing his right to go and assassinate people, including American citizens, anywhere in the world, or imprison them. He's institutionalized, even beyond what Bush did, the right of the president to imprison people for life without a trial or any of the rights that are supposed to be given to people. And many, many people—broad numbers of people who were all excited about Obama, or who voted for him, in any case—are very disaffected. But then, if you don't see any alternative to this present system—then they've got you. Because then they come around and say, as people are already saying now: "Yes, we're very disappointed in Obama, but you want those crazy, lunatic, dangerous Republicans in? What choice do we have? We have to vote for Obama. Yes, he didn't do any good in his first term—even though we said he would, because he was dependent on us to get in there, so since he was dependent on us to get in there, he'd have to do good things when he got in there—well, that didn't work, but now he'll get in there again, now it'll be a second term, and he can't have a third term, so he won't have to worry about getting re-elected, so he'll do the right thing..." Bullshit!

It never happens that way. But, particularly people in the middle class who want to stay within their comfort zone, resist coming to grips with the reality that it never will happen that way. Because, once again, this superstructure of politics, ideology, culture, the media, and so on, not only is set up to, but has to, function in a way to reinforce the existing system with its dynamics and its necessities, and the interests of the ruling class as, in a real sense, the personification of those fundamental relations and dynamics of this system.

So, that's how important it is to be breaking people out of this confined narrow process and of continually being drawn like a magnet back into accepting the terms that are presented to them: "If you vote for that one, he'll shoot you in the head; if you vote for this one, he'll just give you a mild poison which will slowly kill you over years. Wouldn't you rather have that?" And right now there's so much

poverty of imagination—and poverty of dreaming, in the right sense—that many people can't see beyond those two alternatives, even though they know there's an "evil" in what's presented as a "lesser evil."

And, once again, we're back to the fact that there's a very close connection between people seeing that there is not a permanent necessity to existing conditions and seeing that the existing conditions are not just outrageous, in and of themselves, but are rooted in a system, and that we don't have to have this system. The more that goes forward in a positive way, the more that will contribute to people being able to break out of these impoverished terms that are imposed from the ruling class, the more they will be able to dream and imagine, and then begin to concretely take up the fight for, a whole different way the world could be, and therefore cast aside the idea that the only choice they have is one which reinforces the existing system and all the horrors that go along with it.

So this is a big part of what needs to happen—that people need to understand what this system is all about—and, yes, here again is the importance of setting the record straight, the thisiscommunism.org website, and engaging in lively debate, and polemics and struggle, over what has actually been the history of the communist movement and of the socialist societies it has brought into being. Why do we say—and is it, in fact, scientifically grounded—that overwhelmingly these were very positive experiences, with unprecedented liberating breakthroughs, while, at the same time, there were some very real, and in some cases serious or even grievous, mistakes and errors in policies that were made and adopted? That we can and must go further and do even better with the new synthesis of communism—but it's a new synthesis, leaping forward from the previous experience, and not repudiating it. That, in fact, repudiating that experience and denouncing it is, first of all, wrong and unscientific; and, second of all, leads us right back into the only alternative there is, which is the killing confines of this system, and all the horrors it does bring for humanity.

The Importance of Proceeding From Material Reality

Brooks: Okay, one of the things that's a constant thread throughout both the content and the method of your work, in this interview and in your body of work more broadly, is the emphasis on the importance of being scientific and approaching communism as a science, including in relation to some of what we've just been talking about: what are the key links and the key things that revolutionaries need to be doing in a given time? And so, I wondered if you wanted to speak a little bit more to what does it mean to apply communism as a science and a scientific method in an ongoing way, on a day-to-day basis.

BA: Well, again, as we discussed somewhat earlier, we shouldn't mystify science, and make it into some kind of quasi-religious thing itself—which would go against the whole substance and spirit and method of science.

One of the key and fundamental things about having a scientific approach and method is that you proceed from reality, and not from how you would like reality to be. This has to do with the basic divide, in terms of philosophy and schools of philosophy, between materialism and idealism. In other words, between the understanding, which is the materialist approach and orientation, that reality is objective, that it's not determined by the ideas, the thinking, the wishes, the inclinations, the aspirations of particular people, or people as a whole, but it exists objectively, independently of people and their wills and desires and inclinations and thoughts, and so on. As I've said previously, people and their ideas are part of objective reality, but they do not determine objective reality.

And the idealist approach—when we speak of idealism, this is not, as it's commonly used, to mean having a sense of values and principles and acting in a lofty way in relation to those values and

principles, or in proceeding from them. But philosophically idealism flows more from the word "idea," and is the notion that reality is shaped fundamentally by, or flows fundamentally from, ideas: either the ideas of people, or the idea in the mind of some supernatural being, or beings (a god, or gods, or whatever). You hear this expressed in a lot of different ways. I referred to some of this earlier: "Well, this may not be true for you, but it's true for me." In other words, somehow reality doesn't exist objectively for both you and me, but is determined—at least my reality is determined—by my thoughts, desires, aspirations, inclinations and so on, whereas yours can be determined by your ideas, thoughts, inclinations and aspirations—"so long as they don't get in the way of mine," is often the unstated but very real accompaniment to that. But that's not how—reality is not determined by those things. It exists independently of people's thought processes and inclinations and aspirations, and so on. Again, those things are all part of reality, but they are not determinant of reality—they don't determine what reality is, and how it is moving and changing, which in fact it always is.

So, science proceeds from a materialist standpoint—it proceeds from the real world, to put it simply. It investigates the real world and seeks to determine how the real world actually is, and why it is the way it is. It also understands that there is change in reality, that reality is not static; therefore science seeks to discover how reality is changing and what are the dynamics, or the driving forces, of that change.

That's sort of fundamental, that's foundational to being scientific: you proceed from reality and from probing and investigating, in various ways—through experiments, through research, through learning from knowledge that other people have accumulated, or experience they've had, or experiments they've carried out, and so on—different ways that other people, or yourself, probe reality and in the process, yes, change reality, but learn about it in the course of doing so. And then there's the question, if you want to put it that way: what do you do with the "raw materials" that you accumulate—the raw materials of knowledge that you accumulate, that you gather together, so to speak, from probing and investigating and, yes, changing reality? Do you seek then to apply rational thinking to identify the patterns and the underlying dynamics or driving forces within different parts of reality and different processes? Or do you seek to impose on reality—either from the very beginning or after a certain amount of investigation—do you seek to impose on reality pre-conceived notions or objectives or ambitions that you have, in the service of which you try to bend reality in order to have it conform to what you went into it thinking you wanted to have happen? That's a fundamental dividing line.

Another one is: do you, after a certain point, say, "well, this is what we learned from reality but there's a whole other realm"—the realm of the supernatural or the spiritual in some sort of idealist or metaphysical sense—metaphysical in the sense that it transcends reality, that it's above and beyond the reality that exists in the material world. Do you invoke that—even though it's impossible to probe and to learn about that whole other realm, do you invoke that realm, which by definition remains, at least in its essence, a mystery—do you invoke that and superimpose that on reality? Which is, of course, what religion does—and various forms of spirituality which are idealist and not materialist.

So, these are fundamental dividing line questions in terms of your approach to things—your approach to learning about and understanding the world—learning about reality and transforming reality, acting in accordance with the way reality can actually be changed, based on an understanding of what is reality, what are the ways it is changing, and what are the driving forces or underlying dynamics of that change, and how particular phenomena, particular parts of reality or particular processes, relate to other parts of reality and to reality in a larger and more encompassing sense. All that is part of the scientific method. This is applied in the natural sciences. In the natural sciences, if you say, "Well, there's another planet out there, in another solar system, on which there is human life," and people ask, "Really? Where's the evidence for that?" and you answer, "I don't need any evidence, because God told me"—

you would be banished from the scientific world [Laughs]. Okay? Or else you'd be told, "Come back when you're serious." Right? Because that's not proceeding in accordance with a materialist scientific outlook and method.

In other words, you will be called upon by others in the field of science—particularly the specific field, in that case, say, astronomy or astrophysics, but also by others more broadly in the scientific field—you'll be called upon to provide the evidence for this and how you arrived at this. What was the process? Was it a rational process of drawing conclusions from the facts that you accumulated, and identifying correctly the patterns and the dynamics involved? Or did you make a "leap of faith," in effect, and just depart from any kind of rational process proceeding from reality? You would be called upon in that case: "Okay, what's your evidence for the existence of this planet, and/or the existence of human beings on this planet?" And if you can't provide the evidence, then you'll be told you're being unscientific and your conclusions are not valid. Even if somehow they happened to be true, they can't be accepted, because you haven't established them in a way that can be verified—can be looked into, and verified or disproved—by other human beings applying the scientific method, looking into what you've done—not only the results that you have reported, but also the means you used to get to those results—to see if they're valid or not, according to the scientific method, as I've tried to briefly sketch it.

So, that's on science in general. And then there is the science of human society and its historical development. The reason that we say—and that I have emphasized many times—that communism is the most consistent, systematic, and comprehensive scientific method is that communism as a method, as a world outlook and method—it's not that people don't make mistakes in understanding it or applying it, but the principles of it and the methods of it are consistently materialist. And they're consistently dialectical—that is, they understand that not only do things change, but that things are driven forward by change, and that change itself is bound up with the contradiction that resides within things, as well as the contradiction between different things.

Communism and the communist outlook and method synthesizes those two things: the materialism, as I've spoken to it—proceeding from the actual world, understanding that it exists independently of the mind and the ideas of people, or of gods, which are non-existent in fact—and the dialectics of understanding that not only do things change, but what are the bases and dynamics of change. So, if it's applied in that kind of way, with that kind of synthesis, then it is consistently and systematically and comprehensively scientific.

There Is No "Perfect Knowledge," But Human Beings Can and Do Acquire Real Knowledge About Many Things

BA continues: Now, that doesn't mean that communism brings "perfect knowledge." That notion itself is opposed to the scientific, materialist and dialectical understanding. There is no such thing as perfect knowledge. In other words, you can never know about all of reality, and you never can have "perfect" knowledge about what exists in the world, and the universe, what has existed in the past, what will exist in the future. There is no whole and complete, "perfect" knowledge. Knowledge is constantly developing. It is limited, both by the limited capacities of human beings and whatever the technology is that they've developed at a given time, and it's also limited because reality infinitely exists and because it's constantly changing.

So you will never have "perfect" or complete knowledge of things. But that doesn't mean that you can't know anything. And it's important to understand the distinction there. Many people fall into, lapse into,

wrong thinking about this. Because your knowledge of things is incomplete, and in that sense only relative—because it's only part of the broader knowledge about particular things, and those particular things are only part of the broader, infinitely existing and changing reality—that doesn't mean your knowledge is not real. It doesn't mean you don't really know things.

Let's go back to the example of Darwin and evolution. Much has been learned since the time Darwin first systematized the theory of evolution, things that shed new light on certain aspects of the process and dynamics of evolution, both generally and also among human beings. But the essentials—the fundamental elements of evolution which Darwin systematized—remain true and are continually being further verified. So the knowledge of evolution is relative, in the sense that it's incomplete and more can be and has to be constantly learned; but it's still basically true, even while it has an element of relativity within it.

All this is part of the communist method. Some people think: communism, or the communist method, just applies to politics, or maybe to ideology. But, no, it applies to everything. It applies to all of reality, including human society and its historical development, its social relations and social struggle and, yes, classes and class struggle in class society.

Now, Mao brought forward a very important statement in relation to this—which I've grasped the importance of and have worked to further apply and develop. He made the point that Marxism embraces, but does not replace, all the various spheres of human activity and knowledge, such as physics, or art and culture, and so on and so forth. What that means is that the basic scientific approach and methodology of communism, the basic principles and methods, can and should be applied to all these different spheres. But, on the other hand, it doesn't replace them, because they each have their particularities. Each of these areas of human endeavor, or each particular aspect of reality, has its own dynamics, its own particularities, which have to be probed into, in their own right, and learned about in their own particularity. The point is, you apply this general outlook and methodology, this scientific approach and method of communism, to all these different areas, but it does in fact have to be applied to these different areas.

And something I've also emphasized—taking this and working to further develop it and apply it in an all-around sense—is that it's important to understand (and this has not been clearly understood in the history of the communist movement; or sometimes, even if it's been theoretically understood, it has been undermined in practice, so to speak) that just because communism, if it's correctly grasped and applied, is the most consistent, systematic, and comprehensive scientific outlook and method, doesn't mean that only communists can discover truth—or, more specifically, it doesn't mean that people who not only don't apply this method, but who may oppose it, cannot therefore discover important truths about particular, and even important, aspects of reality. Things are more complex than that.

Two things are important to understand in relation to this. One, as I was emphasizing before, just because you take up the communist outlook and method, and even if you apply it well—and even given that it is in fact the most consistently, systematically, and comprehensively scientific outlook and method—it is not a magic means of arriving at truth about everything. In other words, once again it's back to the point that there is no "perfect knowledge," there is no complete and final knowledge, for the reasons that I spoke to earlier, including the fact that reality is constantly changing and human beings are limited. So, to say it's the most consistent, systematic, and comprehensive scientific method means precisely that—but it doesn't mean that, even if you apply it well, you will, in any particular instance, come to the correct conclusion. You may err in how you apply it, even though you're trying—and even if, in an overall sense, you're applying it well, there may be problems with how you apply it to a

particular aspect of reality. Once again, there are the limitations of human beings. And reality is constantly changing, and there's always a need to continue learning. So knowledge has an element, as I said, of relativity—it's incomplete—even when the absolutely most correct method that's been developed is actually applied.

And, at the same time, there's the second point: people who don't apply this method can learn important things about reality by investigating reality and drawing conclusions from it, even though, ultimately, what they would do with that knowledge will be shaped—and, if you want to put it that way, corrupted—by the methodology they employ, which is not consistently scientific.

That's kind of the contradictory—the dialectics, you might say, or the contradictory nature, of the approach to learning about and changing the world. And it's important to understand that communism, as a theory and method, is not a dogma and must not—cannot be applied correctly as a dogma, and should not be applied as a dogma or a dead doctrine. But, precisely as a living scientific outlook and method, it seeks to learn from a broad range of things, including the explorations, investigations, probing and, yes, the conclusions that others draw—among them people who not only don't support or apply, but may even oppose, may even bitterly oppose, the communist method. If you're actually applying the most systematic, consistent, and comprehensive scientific method, you should be actively seeking to learn, and in fact learning, from all that—including what other people learn who are not communists and don't apply that method.

All this has to do with the relationship between understanding and changing the world: understanding, first of all, that the world is constantly changing; understanding the ways in which it can be changed, based on the actual nature of different parts of reality and the dynamics of change that are involved in those different parts of reality, and how particular parts of reality relate to a larger reality as well as to other parts of reality.

Dogma Is the Province of "Lazy Bones"—You Have to Work, and Keep on Learning

Brooks: Just going a little further into that: How does one consciously apply dialectical materialism to these particular developments or particular spheres of society, as part of understanding and transforming the world?

BA: Well, you have to work [Laughs]. I mean, Mao said dogma is the province of lazy bones—dogma and dogmatism. You have to study theory. You have to learn from those who've come before, beginning with Marx, who have developed the scientific outlook and method of communism. You have to study other people, coming from other perspectives, to learn what you can learn from the way they approach problems, the methods they use. You have to engage in the active process of changing reality, either directly or through learning from the experience of others who are engaged in changing reality. You have to constantly interrogate your own conclusions about things: what you hold to be true at a given time, even important elements of it. You have to be—not constantly, but repeatedly—going back to them, in light of what has newly emerged in reality, what's been learned by yourself and others. You have to be open to the criticism of others, including those who oppose you, even bitterly oppose you.

The point is—we spoke to this earlier—that it is not only fine or okay, it is a necessary part of the process, for there to be criticism and struggle between people with different and conflicting viewpoints. And a communist, above all, should learn from the criticism that others raise. The point is, it should be on a level—the struggle needs to be carried out, the fight needs to be waged, to loft this onto the level

—where people actually can learn from it, and not have it descend to the level where it drags things down into the gutter and where people can't actually learn anything positive from it. Well, I suppose you can learn something from how people drag things down into the gutter, but mainly we need to fight for that not to happen. You can learn from anything, even negative things, but we need to minimize negative things and we need to fight to get people to raise their sights and their standards.

But, with all that, it's important—it's not only "okay," it's not only fine in a sort of negative sense, it's an important part of the process—to learn from the criticism and disagreements that others have with what you say, because there may be important elements in which they're right. Or, even if they're not right, in engaging what they have to say, by way of disagreement and criticism—especially if it's on the level of substance and is actually seriously engaging what you say—you can deepen your own understanding. Even if the criticism is, in its main lines, or even entirely, incorrect, you can still learn.

So, this is also part of the scientific process, and it exists in the various fields of science. to varying degrees and with various levels of subjectivity also involved [Laughs]. But in the main, and in essence, this is a part of the scientific process.

You have to study. You have to continually reground yourself in the basic principles and methods. And you have to continually apply those principles and methods, as you continue to learn more about them, in order to be involved in the process of changing the world. You have to learn from the process of applying these principles and methods to change the world. And you have to keep on reading and learning—not just reading, but investigating and learning in many different forms: listening to music, reading literature, yes, but also learning from many different forms of culture, including popular culture, and exploring different spheres of human activity and thought—philosophy, science, and so on. It's not that you should lock yourself in a room and do this all the time; but, even for people who are extremely actively involved in changing the world, there's still the need to carve out the time, individually and collectively, to learn from and to wrangle about different ideas, and different theories that are put forth.

All this is part of developing, and continuing to develop, your ability to grasp and apply the scientific method—an ability which, once again, is always gonna be "imperfect." Or, to put it another, better way, it's always gonna be in the process of development. And either you're gonna continue to develop forward with it, or you're gonna go backward if you don't continue to engage in the various dimensions that I've touched on.

The Important Role of Theory

Brooks: That brings up another thing which I think a lot of your work is getting at: that this understanding—grasping and applying the scientific method in general and the science of communism in particular—it's not just an academic thing, but it actually has real implications in terms of being able to understand and transform the world, on the one hand. But then there's something which you were just getting into also, which is that inevitably people are going to make mistakes in doing that, and there's kind of a dialectic there, which I don't know if you wanted to elaborate on.

BA: Yes, well, first of all, I wanna emphasize that there's a difference between something being treated as "academic" or "scholastic" in the sense that it's just being played around with, without even an attempt to relate it to actual reality—there's a difference between that, on the one hand, and theory in its own right, so to speak. And, in fact, there is a great importance to people exploring questions of theory, of philosophy, science, and so on, in their own right—that is, going deeply into them and studying them. That is a very important part of the process that needs to go on overall. And if that's neglected, or

if that's downgraded, or if it's regarded as somehow illegitimate activity, that's going to seriously undermine understanding the world and being able to change it, in accordance with the way it can change and in accordance with the interests of, ultimately, humanity as a whole.

So, theory in its own right is very important. But, in an overall and ultimate sense, if it's merely treated in its own right—if it never is related to actually changing the world—then, first of all, the theory will dry up, and will find itself more and more departing from a correct understanding of reality; and, second of all, and most fundamentally, to get back to this point once again, the world will remain fundamentally unchanged, when the world really is a horror for the great mass of humanity at this point, and unnecessarily so. That's the crying crime—unnecessarily so.

So, there's both the problem of theory which is, ultimately, and in an overall sense, divorced from the practice of changing the world and becomes—turns into its opposite, becomes dogma or becomes something which more and more goes away from a correct understanding of reality. And, fundamentally, if it's not applied to changing the world, then the world remains as it is, and it's really intolerable for the world to remain as it is. So, that's one point.

Mistakes, and Daring

BA continues: Now, on the question of mistakes. Yes, as I spoke to earlier, there is no human endeavor, or at least no serious human endeavor, and especially none that goes up against powerful convention and tradition and entrenched authority—which the process of revolution, and revolutionary theory to guide that process, in fact has to do, by definition—no such endeavor can be undertaken without the prospect and the reality of making mistakes. Hopefully, you can minimize your mistakes, but it's not possible to avoid making mistakes.

Now, here you run into another contradiction. Do mistakes matter? Yes, they matter. If you do things wrong, if you get something wrong, if you go out into the world and act in a way that's proceeding from wrong assumptions or wrong theoretical principles, then you're gonna do damage, to one degree or another. And that matters. So, on the one hand, you can't just have a cavalier attitude. Especially if you understand how radically the world needs to be changed and how urgently it needs to be changed, you can't have a cavalier, "it's all good" attitude: "everybody makes mistakes, so yeah, I made mistakes and there were bad consequences, but, you know, that's just the way it is—'it's all part of the experience,'" to quote Chevy Chase in the *Christmas Vacation* movie. No, that won't do.

On the other hand, you can't—first of all, you can't be paralyzed by the fear of making mistakes, because then you will be afraid to take initiative, and you also won't contribute to changing the world in the way you need to. And, the important thing—the synthesis on this—is to have daring to make the best estimation you can of reality, and to go out into the world on that basis and seek to change the world, but to be open always to learning. And when, whether sooner or later, you do recognize that you've made a mistake, then not only to learn from that yourself and draw the conclusions in an all-around and deep way, but also to let other people know—in that sense, help to educate other people about the mistake that you've made, because other people who are trying to change the world can learn from your mistakes, and there is no good reason, and it's to no good purpose, for everybody to keep repeating the same mistakes because we don't learn, first of all from reality, but also from other people who are involved in trying to change the world and who make mistakes. And if people correctly identify and sum up their mistakes, and speak to the reasons and causes for those mistakes, we can all learn and be that much further ahead in the process.

So, that's an important orientation in terms of mistakes. You can't be cavalier about mistakes, but you

also can't be paralyzed by the fear of making mistakes, and you can't become timid because you've recognized that you've made mistakes. Especially if you're seeking to make revolution and to provide communist leadership, you have a responsibility to learn from reality as deeply as you can, including your own mistakes—and, once again, to educate other people about those mistakes—and to continue deepening your ability to not just avoid mistakes in the abstract, but to grasp more deeply and apply more correctly, in a more systematic way, the scientific outlook and method of communism, in order to contribute everything you can to the process of changing the world in the way it can be and needs to be changed.

I think that's an important attitude toward mistakes. You have to have daring to go out and change the world, especially up against all the forces of the old order that you're up against. But you can't be—you shouldn't be reckless, nor should you be stubborn in refusing to recognize your mistakes when the basis is there to recognize them, or, on the other hand, paralyzed by the recognition that you have made mistakes.

Science, Not Subjectivity—Objective Interests, Not Prevailing Prejudices

BA continues: Now, look, here's an important point—and it's also one of the difficulties. When you're doing what we're setting out to do—and when you're seeking to not only be part of, but actually to provide leadership to, the process of the communist revolution, with everything it involves, all the complexity and difficulty and everything it's up against, all the entrenched and extremely repressive and destructive power it's up against, all the convention that you have to break with and all the popular prejudices and misconceptions that you have to deal with—if you're really seeking to do what needs to be done, and if you're really dedicated to doing that, you cannot adopt things just because they're popular at a given time, or abandon things just because they're unpopular. In other words, the positions that our Party takes, for example, are not based on what people at any given time think is true—once more, what people think is part of reality, but it doesn't determine objective reality. Our positions are not based on what people, even a majority of people, think at a given time, or what the popular prejudices are, or what the misconceptions are, or the inclinations of different sections of people. This is based on, and needs to be based on, once again, a scientific assessment, flowing from a scientific method and approach to determining what is actually objective reality, what are the actual contradictions and the motion and change that's going on with that reality, and what is the basis and possibility for change, including radical change through revolution.

That's how we have to proceed. And then we have to do our best to struggle to win people to that. Yes, we listen to people. We have to understand objective reality in as full and all-around way as we can—including the objective reality of what people think and what their prejudices are—but, if our best determination is that what's held to be true by the majority of people is unscientific and not correct, we can't pander to that, we can't say, "well, because most people think it, and we'll be unpopular, therefore we'll just bow to that and accept it." No. That would be a great disservice to the masses of oppressed people and ultimately the cause of emancipating all of humanity. So, that makes it very difficult, because there is constantly the pull and the pressure to conform to what most people think.

And there's a misconception also, even among communists sometimes, that somehow truth resides in what masses of people—what the majority of people, or this group or that group—happens to think is true, at a given time. There is a pull, and even sometimes a theoretical misconception (perhaps imperfectly—I mean incompletely—formed, but nevertheless a misconception) that that's how you determine truth, and that's how you proceed. Like, we have some ideas about how the world should be,

and we go out and the masses tell us they don't like our ideas, so then we go back and change our ideas. No. That's subjective, it's not scientific, and it won't actually get us where we need to go.

Once again, the opinions, and even the prejudices and misconceptions, of the masses are part of objective reality that we need to learn about, in order to be able to transform it in the way it needs to be transformed. But they do not determine objective reality, and they don't determine the truth about anything. What the majority of people may happen to believe at a given time—again, I give the example of religion and the existence of gods—what the majority of people in the world, or in a society or in a part of society, happen to believe at a given time is part of objective reality, but it does not determine objective reality. And that's an important principle also.

So when it comes to different questions, we don't proceed by: well, okay, for example, here's the oppression of women, what do the majority of women think is the status of women in society today?—that should determine what we believe about it and how we should act. No. Unfortunately, right now a lot of women are caught up in the idea that commodifying themselves sexually is "empowerment." No. It's degradation. But that doesn't—it isn't their fault—it's not that they... this idea has been inculcated in them by the workings of the system and by conscious propaganda.

And you could go down the line with a lot of other things.

Once again, it's not that you should ignore what people think, nor certainly that you should have contempt for people because they have wrong ideas or are acting in ways that are actually harmful. But the point of all this, and the synthesis of it, is that you have to proceed in a consistently, systematically, and comprehensively scientific way, determine as best you can what's true, and recognize that you will make mistakes, but try to minimize your mistakes, try to learn how to recognize your mistakes more quickly, and try to dig deeply into the roots and causes of your mistakes, correct them as soon as you do identify and recognize them, and educate others about your mistakes.

I think this is an important part of the whole communist approach and method that we have to fight to be consistently—to be grasped, first of all, and to be consistently applied in opposition to other, subjective and unscientific, methods.

Making Mistakes—But Not Making the One Big Mistake

BA continues: And, since we're talking about mistakes, there is one other thing—a story I heard, which I think about often. In fact, I spoke to this about 20 years ago now in "The End of a Stage—The Beginning of a New Stage" (referring to the end of the first stage of the communist revolution, which we talked about earlier, and the beginning of—and the need to launch, in fact—a new stage of the communist revolution). This story, the way it was recounted to me, was that W.E.B. Du Bois—who was an active figure for decades in the fight against the oppression of Black people in particular, and a progressive figure overall—toward the end of his life visited China and had a meeting and a discussion with Mao. And in the course of it, Du Bois said: "Looking back over my life, all I've done is make one mistake after another." And Mao, the way it was recounted to me, spit out the word contemptuously—spit out the word "mistakes"—and said: "Mistakes! In the process of our revolution, we've made every mistake you could think of. But the one mistake we did not make was to give up."

That speaks to a very important point of orientation. You are going to make mistakes and, once again (without repeating everything I've said), one's attitude towards one's mistakes—how you approach them, how you learn from them, and how you help others learn from them—is extremely important. You are going to make mistakes. But the one mistake you cannot make is to give up and capitulate to

this horrific oppressive system of capitalism-imperialism and all the very real horrors it does bring for the masses of people, on a daily basis and in an ongoing way, in a way that's totally unnecessary.

I think about that often, including those times when you go out to change the world and people oppose what you're doing, or they even attack you for what you're doing—sometimes in highly unprincipled or even vicious ways—attack you for fighting for communism and for revolution, or distort what you're doing and slander it. I think about this, and it occurs to me that sometimes people pretend to hate us for the mistakes that we've made—when, in reality, what at least some of these people hate us for is the one mistake we haven't made, going back to Mao. That is, they hate us for refusing to give up on making revolution.

Democracy—Yes, We Can Do Better Than That

Brooks: I wanted to, on this point of objective reality—what people think is part of objective reality, but objective reality is not determined by what people think—ask you about some of the conventional wisdom and pervasive ways of thinking out there in the ideological terrain that keep people—stand in the way of people being able to understand the world in order to transform it. Or, as you put it in "All Played Out," "keep people in chains suffering unbearable pain." We've talked about some of those things already in this interview, not the least of which is all this anti-communist slander, and we've talked about elections and things like that. One of these pervasive ways of thinking, in the conventional wisdom, that I wanted to ask you about is on the question of democracy, 'cause I know that, about 25 years ago now, you had this book *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?* And yet, a lot of the dominant thinking out there is continually—even among progressive people, is continuously returning to putting everything in terms of democracy, or "perfecting democracy," or things like that. So I wondered if you wanted to talk some about that.

BA: No. [BA and Brooks laugh.] Never mind—that was just a joke. Well, the point of *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?*, without going into all of it, was that democracy, in short, is bound up with human society in various phases—in forms in which it's divided into exploiters and exploited. And that the democracy we're familiar with, for example in the U.S., is specifically a democracy which, once again, is a bourgeois democracy—is a democracy on the terms of, and exercised in the interests of, the ruling bourgeoisie, or capitalist-imperialist class. In fact, this democracy is a part of the exercise of the reality of dictatorship, that is, rule enforced by institutionalized violence over the masses of exploited and oppressed people and over the society as a whole. This democracy is bourgeois democracy, and is an outer expression of and a camouflage over the inner essence of bourgeois dictatorship, to put it that way.

But, more broadly than that, looking with more historical sweep, the point is that **democracy is an expression of the fact that human society has not yet reached the stage where it has gotten beyond division into exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed.** It is a mechanism through which institutions are supposed to guarantee rights to people in conditions where people are divided into slave masters and slaves, or exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed. It is an institutionalized mechanism which reflects those divisions and which is supposed to guarantee rights to people, on the terms of and in the conditions where those oppressive and exploitative divisions exist and in fact characterize society and its fundamental functioning and dynamics.

And when we get beyond the division of society into classes, into exploiters and exploited, the concept of democracy will no longer have meaning in the sense of the protection of the rights of a minority—or an institutionalized means through which the rights of the people are supposed to be protected—

because there will no longer be sections of society ruling over and oppressing the greater part of society. And so there will not be a need for institutions and institutionalized means for protecting the rights of parts of a society against other parts which would exploit and oppress them, or deny them rights, and so on, and so forth.

Democracy literally means "rule by the people." But when—think of it this way: everything in a certain sense exists in terms of its opposite. There's no high without low; there's no up without down; there's no big without small; and so on. These concepts exist only in terms of their opposites. So, rule by the people—that is, democracy—what meaning does it have, when you have moved beyond the division of people into exploiters and exploited, when there is only the common association of people? Yes, there will be contradiction and struggle, but there will not be social relations and institutionalized forms through which one part of society will be dominating, ruling over and exploiting and oppressing other parts of society. So what meaning, then, is there to "the rule of the people" when there is just the people, with their common association, without the need for and without the existence, in fact, of instruments of suppression of one part of society by another?

It will just be the way society is, when you get to communism. There will be many contradictions: between particular parts of society and society as a whole, between particular parts of the world and the world as a whole, between the inclinations of some parts of the people, some parts of society, and the inclinations of others, or the particular interests and concerns of different parts of society, or of people in different situations and different parts of the world. But the point is that, both in terms of the material relations of people—the abolition of relations of exploitation and oppression—and in terms of the thinking of the people, there will have been a transformation to where "naturally" ("naturally" in the sense of what will be the general, and increasing, consciousness about what is in the general interests) people will work to resolve those contradictions, even where they involve disagreement and struggle, in a non-antagonistic way (that is, without hostility and violence), because there will be no material interests pulling people, in any qualitative sense, to become antagonistic with others, and they will have an understanding that, if they do that, it will undermine the association of people in general, including their own role within that.

When you get to that, "democracy" doesn't have meaning. What has meaning is the conscious—the increasingly conscious and voluntary association of people, without relations of exploitation and oppression, without antagonism among different parts of society, and without, therefore, the need or the existence of instruments and institutions to enforce the rights of some, and the prerogatives of some, and the interests of some, over those of others.

This is the essence of why I titled that book *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?* The point is to get beyond where democracy has meaning, in the sense in which I've spoken about that—to get beyond all relations in which people are divided into exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed, and there needs to be any kind of institution to enforce that while, at the same time, pretending to protect the rights of the oppressed against the encroachment of the oppressors, and so on.

So, that's the basic point. And once you proceed from that understanding—that there is a much better way, and a possible way, for human beings to relate to each other, not just in one corner of the world but in the relations, ultimately, among humanity as a whole, in all parts of the world, and it's a much better way, also, for humanity to interact with the rest of reality and, in particular, the rest of nature and the environment—once you've raised your sights to understanding not only that this would be much better, but that it's actually possible, even though it requires a wrenching struggle, full of sacrifice, to get from here to there, then the question arises: Why would you want to lower your sights to something

less than that? And why, in particular, would you want to think that the best you could do would be to try to "improve" or somehow "perfect" a system which is grounded in relations of exploitation and oppression, and whose democracy is an expression of those relations of exploitation and oppression, as it is under the present capitalist-imperialist system—a democracy which, in fact, serves the exercise of dictatorship by the exploiting and oppressing capitalist-imperialist ruling class over those it exploits and oppresses and dominates in society?

Why would you wanna reduce yourself down to that, once you've gained a glimmer even, or basic grasp, of the possibility of a whole new world? Why would you wanna lower yourself back down to simply trying to nibble around the edges of a horrific system of exploitation and oppression and a democracy which is—and which, in fact, can only be under this system—an expression of that horrific system?

Now, when you make revolution and get to socialist society, and you have the dictatorship of the proletariat as a transition to a communist world, then, yes, there is democracy in a whole new and fuller way for the masses of people. It's a democracy which now serves the interests of the new ruling class—that is, the formerly exploited proletariat—and of the masses of people in the society as a whole. It is a democracy which serves, and whose purpose is to serve, the continuing struggle to fully uproot relations of exploitation and oppression and, together with the people struggling throughout the world, arrive at the point where institutions to enforce and to back up the struggle to eliminate those things are no longer necessary, because those things, those various expressions of exploitation and oppression, have been uprooted and eliminated.

So, again, once you see things from that standpoint, then why would you wanna rest content with merely pecking around the edges of a system which is grounded in exploitation and oppression, and whose democracy is an expression of and part of enforcing that exploitation and oppression, not just in your own country, your own particular society, but in the world as a whole, and in many ways much more horrifically in other parts of the world?

Brooks: Well, it seems like this goes back to the importance of polemics that we were talking about earlier, because just as we were talking about how communism is slandered as a horror, democracy is consistently held up by the people who rule in this country as the best possible way that things could be. Both of those ideas have tremendous sway, even among progressive people and people who are raising their heads up and resisting or wondering if things could be different. So it seems like this is—this question of democracy is another area where the importance of polemicizing and actually fighting for the understanding that you're talking about comes in.

BA: Yeah, I agree very much. I mean, this goes back to my point earlier about the drawing board. If somebody actually went up to a drawing board and were told, "okay, give us your conception of the best way society could be," and they drew up the way society and the world is today, they would be rightfully accused of being criminally insane, at best. And if you were a ruling class that in fact presides over this system (and, actually, I think, in large part believes that this is the only possible or the best possible way), of course you would wanna slander—as much as you felt you could and needed to, you'd wanna slander any attempt to bring into being a radical alternative and, especially, the real radical alternative to this, the communist revolution and the advance to communism.

So, yes, this is gonna be coming from the ruling class. But also, because it is the ruling class, and its ideas are the ruling and dominant ideas in society, and they do have influence that sort of seeps and permeates, or floods down through all the different layers of society, these ideas do hold sway among all different sections of the people to varying degrees—including, as you were referring to, people who

are rising up to resist some of the outrages and injustices of the system.

And there does need to be an ongoing struggle, including polemics—waged from a high level and in a principled way, but sharply—over these questions, particularly the question of what is this democracy, what is the essence of it, how does it fit into the overall economic, social and political system, what does it actually serve, and what is really needed in order to change the world in a radical way. Sharp polemics over what is needed to change it fundamentally—in a way that would rid society and humanity of all the horrors that are embedded in the current system—some of which, at least, some of the people who are still trying to “perfect democracy” do recognize, and do even struggle against.

Radically Changing the World, and Changing Yourself in That Context

Brooks: Another one of these common ways of thinking, pervasive ways of thinking, is the sentiment that gets expressed, in one form or another, that the revolution has to start within—change has to start within, I have to change myself, or people have to change themselves individually, before they can really change the world.

BA: Well, first of all, that takes too long. [BA and Brooks laugh.] There are something like seven billion people in the world, and if they each have to change themselves first, there are too many horrors that will go on, in the meantime. But, more fundamentally than that, as we've referred to before: Yes, people changing—transforming the people, transforming their outlook, their values, their morals—is an important part of building the movement for revolution, and then succeeding with that revolution, bringing a new society, and ultimately a whole new world, into being. Yes, that is an important part of it. But the question is: how is that gonna come about? First of all, you have to know—and this, once again, gets back to the question of proceeding from science, or not—you have to know what are the changes that are necessary: what are the changes that are necessary in yourself, what are the changes that are necessary among people more broadly, what are the changes that are necessary in this society and in the world? If you don't correctly identify that, then even if you were to set out to change yourself, you wouldn't get very far—or you'd go in the wrong direction trying to change yourself.

So that's part of the picture. But it's also an important part of the picture that people do not and cannot change themselves in that kind of way, in a vacuum, turning inward into themselves. And we've seen the opposite, the positive side of this, with some of the resistance that we've been talking about, for example the prisoners' hunger strike, where a lot of prisoners united that people said could never unite, and they rose up and gave expression to values and morals that people said they could never give expression to—these prisoners are declared "the lowest of the low, the worst of the worst," and here they were sacrificing for a larger good than themselves. And you see that in the "Occupy" movement and in other forms of protest, rebellion, resistance. People begin to change themselves as they begin to fight back against the system and raise their heads and think about bigger things. **It is only in the context of struggling to change the world that people can even fully recognize the need to transform themselves; further, they can only wrestle fully with the question of how they should transform themselves as part of, and together with, the larger process of changing the world.**

And then, once again, there's the question of the science—the method and approach of communism, and the goal of communism, has to be brought into the picture, so that people can actually understand what is the problem here. Is it that everybody's just thinking about themselves in some abstract sense—everybody's selfish, out of some sort of innate and unchangeable, or at least personal, failing and bad quality of their own? Or, is there a system and a set of economic, social and political relations, and institutions, and a whole set of ideas and values corresponding to those relations, that's being promoted

out here in the world, which results in people acting the way they act?

I mean, why do people—let's look at things—why do people, here in a society like the U.S., think they need iPods and iPhones? If you watch a movie from 30 years ago, nobody's talking about needing an iPhone and an iPod—because they didn't exist. The point is that people's views, people's inclinations, even people's wishes and desires, are fundamentally socially determined. They are not just personally determined in a vacuum or in isolation from other people. What you think you need, what you strive for, is determined by what prevails in society and the relations in society and how those relations cast you in relation to other people. You wanna get an apartment in a big city like Paris, or New York, or whatever—well, you have to get there before everybody else and beat out everybody else. Why? Because that's the way the economic system works—and, yes, selfish ideas do grow up in relation to that. First of all, they're promoted, but they also arise out of the need for competition, the fact that people are compelled to compete with each other.

You see this over and over again, in every sphere of society: the way people think, the way they act, even the way they feel—yes, it has a personal element to it, people aren't machines, clearly, but it is fundamentally and essentially shaped by the larger society and the relations and dynamics, and the influences, culturally and ideologically, of that society. If you don't set out to change all that, then you're gonna be constantly dragged back to the terms that prevail in the society; and even changes you make in yourself can only be partial and limited, and may not even last very long, because of the overwhelming force of all this other stuff working against it, even if the changes you're seeking to make in yourself are good ones and things that should be developed and encouraged.

Brooks: Where do you think that pull comes from of, well, I just wanna—to make change you have to start with yourself?

BA: I think it comes from at least two main places. One, once again the influence of the dominating ideology that tells people, that emphasizes—especially in capitalist society, in general individuals are thrown into conflict and competition with each other and they are encouraged to treat themselves, and even their bodies, especially in the case of women, as commodities, You're constantly selling yourself. Look at this culture: develop your "brand"—all this kind of shit—people are treated as things, in essence. They are treated as commodities—you should even treat yourself as a commodity, you should "own" your own oppression, you should "own" your own degradation, you should commodify it. You are constantly being pushed to sell yourself. And, in American society, the level of that and the level of individualism that's promoted—everybody out for themselves. Even philosophically: the notion that truth resides in you (that whole thing about "what's true for me"). "You know what's best for you, and nobody else can tell you." "Think about yourself first, before you think about anybody else; how can you help anybody else, if you don't help yourself?" All these ideas don't come out of the void—they come out of what's constantly pumped at people through the society, through the means and instruments of molding public opinion and people's outlook and values. And all that is reinforcing the way the system works, and the way it causes people to have to think about themselves and to be in conflict with other people. So I think all that is one element of it.

The other element—and this applies more particularly when people think about changing the whole world, or changing the system, or changing major things about society—pretty soon you run up against the fact that it's awfully goddamn hard. You have to go up against a tremendous amount. Not only are you up against the power of the entrenched ruling forces, but you're also up against all the stuff that exists among all the other people just like yourself, as well as within yourself—all the divisions among the people, all the backward thinking, all the ways in which people feel a constant pull to put

themselves ahead of others. You start realizing, "man, we gotta go up against all that, so maybe I better retreat into the margins and grow a little garden, or maybe I'd better just talk about changing myself, 'cause that doesn't seem so hard." And it's understandable, but it's wrong, because it doesn't lead to anything positive. You get driven back—if you don't have a deeply grounded scientific understanding, there's a very strong pull to be driven back to dealing in a limited sphere that you feel maybe you can manage, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, maybe you don't have to go directly up against everything you're starting to recognize you have to go up against in order to make real and significant societal change.

I think both those things pull on people and drag them away from a correct understanding. And, again, that's why there needs to be struggle to raise people's sights to really understanding, scientifically, what is going on: why is society the way it is, why are people, including yourself, the way you are and think and act the way you do, and how could that radically change? Yes, to do that you have to go up against a tremendous amount, but there are—this system, once again, is riven with contradictions and conflicts, even among the ruling forces themselves, and there is a fundamental contradiction of this whole capitalist system which screams out for resolution through revolution. And you can be part of that process. There isn't any—there's no guarantee about it, there's no inevitability to it, but it is a real possibility, and it is something, above everything else, that's worth fighting for and giving your life for, and dedicating your life to.

The Backbone and Driving Force for Revolution

Brooks: Another big one, as you know, is that, well, yes, the U.S. does some bad things around the world and, yes (I'm obviously characterizing—the defenders of this system say) yes, it's horrible how the U.S. is torturing people or carrying out all these wars—or, yeah, I guess maybe it's true that slavery played a major role in the history of the U.S.—but people still not being able to break with the basic idea that the U.S. is the "good guys" in the world.

BA: Well, I think that goes back to many of the things we've discussed: the fact that, particularly among the middle class, there are certain privileges, materially, and even politically, that you get from being in the citadel of imperialism, so to speak. You're getting some of the spoils. What I mean by politically, and not just economically, is this: If you're in the middle class and you don't cause a lot of trouble for the ruling class, and you don't step out of line, it's not very likely that in your daily life the police are gonna kick down your door and shoot you, or drag your kids out in the street and humiliate them, or take you away in the middle of the night and drag you off to prison.

Now, if you do anything to step out of line, or if you get mistaken for somebody who's come into disfavor with the powers-that-be, then, yes, that not only can, but likely will, happen to you, in one form or another. But there is this sort of cushion, or pillow, that people have to a certain degree, especially in the middle class. And, especially as people like that think about what would be involved in radically changing society, what do they see? Chaos... upheaval... violence... destruction. Now, even if they agree with you, "look, most of that is—the fault for that lies at the feet of the people who rule this society and it's built into the nature of this system, and the people who'll be doing the massive violence and destruction are gonna be the people defending and seeking to enforce this system and to suppress those who are rising up against it"—even when many people agree with you, they say, "yeah, but, you know, my life is not that bad, it's not that uncomfortable, when I weigh it against all that."

And this is the reason why, frankly, people in the middle class, while they can play a positive role in many ways, they're not gonna be the bedrock and driving force of the revolution. It's people who (as it

says in the statement "On the Strategy for Revolution") are catching hell in many ways every day under this system, and for whom some of those things about middle class reality don't really apply—the idea that you have even a basic right to hang on a street corner with five of your friends doesn't even apply, if you're a youth in the ghetto, or in the barrio, or whatever. The idea that you have rights that the police are bound to respect—that doesn't apply for the youth and for people generally in those conditions. It is among those people that you're gonna find the backbone and driving force for the revolution. Now, there are a lot of things that weigh on them, including those things I just mentioned, that make it hard for them to raise their heads, along with the daily scramble and scuffle just to survive and to have the basic means of life. All those things weigh—push them down and make it harder for them to rise up—but, when they are able to break through that, when they're led to break through that, that is where the main driving force of revolution is going to come from.

The "Two Maximizings," and the Role of Youth

BA continues: At the same time, you are never going to bring that forward fully, nor are you going to carry it all the way to revolution, if you aren't continually working among, yes, even the more privileged strata in the middle class—people who don't catch hell every day in the hardest ways under this system, but who are facing increasing hardship in many ways, including economically, and who are, in fact, outraged by many of the injustices and crimes that this system commits.

And so, there needs to be what we call the "two maximizings": the maximizing of rebellion and resistance and the development of a revolutionary consciousness and a revolutionary trend and organization among those bedrock basic masses, to put it that way; but also the same thing among sections of the middle class. And there needs to be the mutually reinforcing influence of those two things—maximizing this among the one section and among the other, and the mutual influence of that—in order to bring forward the overall process of revolution, and even in order to fully bring forward the force from among the basic bedrock masses who can and must be the driving force of this revolution—who have, frankly, less to lose and who are subjected to conditions which make them much more willing to break free of, or to rise up against, the oppressive conditions and the daily grind of the ongoing functioning of the system.

You will never fully develop even that in isolation, or just unto itself, because people in that situation will say, and have said: "Look, we can't do this all by ourselves. If everybody's against us, if there are not others out there who are at least moving in a positive direction, in terms of protesting and rebelling and beginning to fight the power, we will be isolated and crushed." There's truth to that. And that's why people in the inner cities, for example, have taken heart at things like "Occupy," or other forms of resistance, because it gives them more sense that society could change, that there are people they could ally with, even while those people don't share the hard-edge conditions that they are put through every day, and don't therefore have the same burning desire to see something different (even if that desire is often suppressed or deflected into other forms, including harmful forms sometimes).

So, I think all this is part of the picture that we, the people who are consciously and scientifically approaching the process of building a movement for revolution, have to take into account and have to wage struggle around. And, particularly speaking about the youth—this is true of youth in general, including among the most downpressed masses, but also in the middle class and among the intelligentsia—there is a particular role of youth, who feel less "invested" (if you want to use an awful term, less "invested") in the status quo, in life and society the way it is, and who do feel more ability to shake free of that and to rise up. And you see that in every significant social movement or social

uprising. The youth, for the reasons I've just touched on, often tend to be, and generally tend to be, in the forefront of that, because they are less "invested" and less weighed down. And that's also an important element that has to be taken into account and maximized in building the movement for revolution.

Breaking From the Illusion That There Is Something Good About This System

Brooks: I wanna connect what you were just saying with this question, again, of people not being able to let go of the idea of the U.S. being the "good guys" in the world, "warts and all." Because, talking about the '60s, even though, as we've been talking about, ultimately there was not a revolution, there was, including among huge numbers of youth, a whole different ethos and culture and understanding in terms of what the actual role of the U.S. was. I'm not trying to oversimplify it and make it a thing like everybody had that. But there was a whole different ethos and understanding and culture in terms of the U.S. and its role around the world; and it seems that, to state the obvious, in order for there to be—we were talking earlier about legitimacy—in order to get to the point where the rulers of this country have lost legitimacy in the eyes of millions of people, that has to be broken through.

BA: Yes, I think in the '60s, there was a very broad recognition—not only among the basic bedrock masses who were rising up, but also broadly among the youth of the middle class—that, indeed, the U.S. imperialists were the "bad guys" in the world (to use their own crude comic book terms). That they were, in fact, what they are: mass murderers, people who carry out mass slaughter and destruction, as in Vietnam, in order to try to maintain and enforce the interests of the system that they represent, in order to keep that system going and to enforce it on people in all parts of the world. There was a very broad recognition of that, along with a recognition that, look, you claim—you people who run things; you, the power structure; you, the establishment; however it was conceived of and spoken of in those times—you claim to be the champions of freedom and democracy, and look what's come to light about how you've been treating Black people in this country for all these years, decades, generations, and even centuries. Look what we've been learning as people have risen up to struggle—look what's been brought to light, look what's forced itself into the light of day about all that. This very powerfully and significantly undermined the sense of legitimacy of the ruling class among broad numbers of youth, in particular, but many others as well.

So, yes, that is a necessary thing. I mean, it isn't like somehow U.S. imperialism has changed its nature or gotten nicer or better since that time. It has committed countless crimes since that time; and, as long as it is in power and as long as it exists, it will continue to commit countless horrific crimes, because that flows from the very nature and necessity of the system. Again, not because the people who run it are greedy; not because the system is "organized greed"; or not because, as individuals, they're "evil," in some religious sense, or some other sense. It's because of the necessity of the system that they are the representatives of—and, in a real sense, as Marx put it, the personification of (the embodiment of) the fundamental relations of this system. Yes, they have choices. Yes, they have decisions they make—whether they should invade this country or not, whether they should bomb that one or not, whether they should back this dictator or not—or however they conceive of it. They make decisions but, fundamentally, those decisions of theirs are confined within a certain range, which is set by the fundamental nature and dynamics of this system, once again. And that is why they act the way they do.

This is what has to be brought to light. This is not the best of all possible systems—this is what is, in fact, inflicting the horrors on the mass of humanity that are totally unnecessary. Not only are they outrageous, which they are, but they're totally unnecessary, and they continue to happen only because

of the enforced perpetuation of this system and the fact that we haven't broken through, swept this system aside, and brought into being a whole new, radically different system and world.

That needs to be driven home repeatedly to people: the reality of what this system actually does, and the lies that it spreads to cover its crimes, need to be ripped apart and their raggedy ass exposed for everyone to see. And this is a big part of people coming to see—not in some manipulative sense, but in a scientific way—it's not a matter of manipulating people, it's a matter of enabling people to really come to an understanding of the essence of what it is we're dealing with here, what is the real nature and role of this system, not because of the "evil nature" of the people who rule it, but because of the very internal nature of the system itself and its actual dynamics and necessities. This is what people have to come to see—they have to see the crimes that are being committed, but they also have to see why these crimes are committed, what they flow from, and that there could be a radically different way that things could be, that there is no permanent necessity to existing conditions.

Religion, and Revolution: Uniting in the Struggle Against Oppression, Struggling Against a False and Enslaving Worldview

Brooks: Well, obviously, if we were gonna sit here and talk about all these different pervasive ways of thinking under this system that keep people locked into the way things are, we'd be here all day, and then some. But there is one more that I wanted to ask you about for now, which is the question of religion and, obviously, this is—it's kind of like this phenomenon: in this society, you're not allowed to say anything bad about Israel, you're not allowed to say anything bad about democracy, you're not allowed to say anything bad about religion. Religion is pervasive—you were talking earlier about Tim Tebow—I mean, religion in all different kinds of ways and all different spheres is just out of control, for lack of a better way to put it [Laughs], in terms of its influence. And so I wondered if you wanted to speak some to that.

BA: Well, I've spoken to what the role of religion is, as a world outlook, and how it obscures reality and leads people away from understanding reality in its actual terms and dynamics, and therefore how it holds people back from really struggling to change reality. All that is very important to understand, and it's very important to wage struggle to bring that to light and to enable people to increasingly recognize that, and to take up a scientific outlook and method in opposition to it.

Another part of the picture, though, is that at the time we make revolution, most of the people, including most of the people who will be involved—people involved on the side of revolution—will, to one degree or another, still hold religious beliefs of one kind or another. That's the nature of the contradictions we're gonna be dealing with. And you cannot—it's very important to wage struggle with people in the realm of their thinking, the realm of ideology, to put it that way, but you cannot force people to give up thinking, beliefs. You have to both unite with them in the positive aspects with which people can be united, at any given time, and struggle with them ideologically to win them to understand what is wrong with things like religion and, therefore, to cast it off, on the basis of recognizing that it is, in fact, a shackle, a chain on people—on their thinking and, therefore, on their acting and on their ability to really be free to sweep away relations of exploitation and oppression, not just for themselves but, ultimately, for humanity as a whole. To really become, as we say, emancipators of humanity. So, you have to handle that unity/struggle process correctly also.

Once again, this goes back to what I was speaking to earlier in terms of epistemology, or theory of knowledge, and how do we determine the truth. Is it determined by what most people think, or is it determined by scientific investigation and assessment of reality, according to a scientific outlook and

method? We have to base ourselves on the latter. And that tells us that there is no god, there is no objective rational basis for believing in god, and that we have to struggle with people over that and not bow down to it because most people in the world, including in any particular country—or at least certainly in the U.S.—overwhelmingly most people believe that there is a god, or believe in some form of religion.

So we have to handle those relations, those contradictions, correctly. But, here's a poisonous example. The old Communist Party [CPUSA], even before it became thoroughly rotten and revisionist and gave up altogether any real orientation of working for a revolution, had a terrible line in this regard; and when they would run into oppressed masses, Black people or others, who were deeply into religion but who wanted to fight against oppression, they would not simply unite with them to fight against oppression—which they definitely should have done, and which should be done in general—but they would recruit them into the Communist Party on the basis: you can have Marx in one hand and the Bible in the other. No, you can't. You can have them, but you can't be in a vanguard party working for communist revolution and do that. You have to make the leap to see that—to put it in those terms—Marx is correct and the Bible is not; one is positive and one is negative, is leading you away from where you need to go, leading you to a false understanding of reality and keeping you from acting on a true understanding, a scientific understanding, of reality in a basic sense, in order to bring about the changes that are needed in society and the world.

So, we can't repeat that kind of experience. We can't say: "Oh, the poor, pitiful masses—they need their religion to console them in their oppressed conditions." Yes, their conditions are horrific. They endure both totally outrageous—and, once again, totally unnecessary—suffering, as a result of the functioning and nature of this system. But the point is: how are they going to—how is that gonna be changed? How are the masses gonna be a vital part of emancipating themselves and others from all this, and ridding humanity of all this? They are not gonna do it if we bow down to—if we have a condescending attitude toward them that they're not capable of doing without this consolation of religion, that they're not capable—and this is really a contemptuous attitude toward the masses—that they're not capable, somehow, of taking up a scientific worldview and method. "Oh, yeah, maybe a few of us, the really wise people in the world, can take up a scientific outlook and method, but those oppressed masses, they're too beaten down, they're too degraded, they're too much in need of consolation to be able to take up a scientific outlook and method. We shouldn't expect or demand that of them, we should just let them come along, shackled by a wrong understanding of reality and by the religious notion that somehow the problem in the world is owing to the evil nature of humanity, including themselves, rather than understanding that the problem is owing to the very nature and workings and dynamics of the system which rules over and oppresses them." That's disgustingly contemptuous of the masses of people, to have that kind of attitude.

Once again, we should unite with people who wanna fight oppression but who are still clinging to, or not willing to even question, let alone give up, religious beliefs at any given time; but we should also continue to find good ways to struggle with them, in order that they can become emancipated in their thinking and, therefore, more fully fight to end the conditions that enslave not only them, but broad masses, billions of people, in the world—and, ultimately, to emancipate humanity as a whole.

And then, of course, besides the way in which, as a worldview and approach to reality, religion embodies a distortion of reality—all religious viewpoints—there is the reactionary content, socially and politically, of the dominant religions in the world, including Christianity and Islam, and the ways in which, if you read through the scriptures of these religions, they uphold the most horrific forms of oppression, some of which I referred to earlier in talking about Tim Tebow: the oppression of women,

even the murder of women who are not virgins, enslavement, exploitation, wars of plunder, the slaughter of people who have a religion different than your own, ignorance and superstition, and on and on and on. All these things are embodied in and are basic to—they're not just incidental, they are basic to—the doctrine and dogma of all of these dominant religions. And the same is true of Hinduism or other religious forms that are more based in Asia, and so on. So, there is the question of the worldview and the basic approach to reality which misleads people, but there's also the reactionary content of these dominant religions, which has a very harmful effect in terms of reinforcing oppressive relations and exploitative relations that are dominant in the world now.

And, of course, I can't here—rather than elaborating on this at length here, I will just refer people to *Away With All Gods!* or, earlier than that, *Preaching From a Pulpit of Bones*—books I have written which get into some of the specific content of this and examine the actual harm that it does, as well as putting forward the program and the outlook of communism, as the radical alternative to not just religion but to this society, and relations that these religions serve to reinforce.[17](#)

Personal Experiences and Broader Experience—Becoming a Communist and Persevering to Break Through With Revolution

Brooks: I wanna go back to where we started this interview, in a way—but from a different angle—from a personal angle. You know, there is this whole experience that we talked about, and have been talking about, of the 1960s—this whole upheaval involving millions of people—and revolution was in the air. But then a revolution wasn't made, and eventually that upsurge receded. And the majority of people who came through that period were either killed or jailed, or gave up or sold out, or in one way or another lowered their sights. And not only did you not do that, but you went deeper, and you dedicated your whole life to making revolution and emancipating humanity from all of the horrors and all of the suffering it faces. And one thing that stands out is: you did not have to do that, but you did do it. It's what you've been about since the late 1960s, and what you're still about today. And yet, to be blunt, what I've just said, and all the work that you've been doing, it's not at this point understood or appreciated on nearly the level it should be in society, and even for a significant amount of time within the Party itself.[18](#) And so I wondered if you wanted to speak some to how you have persevered through all this, and how you deal with the weight of that and keep going forward and keep fighting to break on through to the other side.

BA: Well, I think it's important to point out that some people—and, in a concentrated way, those who are part of our Party—have, along with myself, continued on the road of revolution and continued grappling with the challenges of actually making revolution and transforming the world. And I think, for myself and for others who have done that—but speaking more directly for myself, or about myself—it's fundamentally been a question of continually going back to what we've been repeatedly returning to here, that is, the scientific outlook and method of communism, in order to understand both the possibilities for revolution, and to get a deeper grounding in that, but also to understand the reversals that have occurred—like the loss of China to the restoration of capitalism shortly after the death of Mao in 1976, or what happened in the Soviet Union that was similar to that with the restoration of capitalism there in the 1950s—and the different ways in which people have gone off track, or lost sight of the goal of revolution, and settled for something far less than that. All that is a matter, most essentially, of going back to, continually getting more deeply grounded in, and working to apply, that understanding and approach, and keep the process going—keep moving forward the process of theory/practice/theory in terms of understanding all these different parts of reality, including the losses and setbacks that have been suffered and what lessons have to be drawn from that of various kinds. I think that's been the most

essential thing.

The Powerful Influence of Black People Rising Up

BA continues: You know, everybody has their own particularities in terms of their personal lives and personal experiences. Looking back on it, I think that, in terms of the '60s, the experiences of that time were in many crucial ways formative for me, as well as for millions of other people. I think I had many things in common with people in that period, and some particular things that might have been different than some other people. The thing I had in common with many others is that I did come out of a middle class circumstance, a middle class family. But I happened to also be in Berkeley, which is a different kind of place [Laughs] than a lot of other parts of this society. It is a place that both, on the one hand, has significant—and, when I was growing up, this was very real and had a real effect—significant numbers of Black people who lived in Berkeley and, of course, many in Oakland right next door, as well as in Richmond and in San Francisco at that time, and many other parts of the Bay Area. It also was a place where there was a lot—there was a university, and a lot was going on with the intelligentsia and intellectual ferment, which "reached down." Even when I was in high school, there was a lot of intellectual and cultural ferment. It was a particular time when that was going on in society as a whole, but it did take particular forms and expressions in the Bay Area and Berkeley in particular.

So, I think there's both the general experiences I shared with my generation, if you will—including people from the middle class, but people more broadly, too—of what was going on in society, the whole upheaval of the civil rights and then the Black liberation struggle, and the development of the women's movement, and other key movements among other oppressed sections of people who were discriminated against. All that was the broader context, as well as what was happening in the world as a whole: the whole massive upsurge of anti-colonial struggle in the Third World, taking a very advanced and concentrated form in the resistance of the Vietnamese people to the attempts of the U.S. to impose its reactionary rule over them and to dominate them, as part of its overall imperialism—the dynamics of its imperialist system. All these kinds of things—and the Cultural Revolution in China, very importantly—all these kinds of things were what the whole generation was influenced by, in varying ways and to varying degrees.

And there were particular experiences—as I said, the particular mix of Berkeley and the Bay Area. And then there were very personal experiences, which I spoke to in my memoir. Being stricken with a very serious disease at a very young age, 18 years old, and having to go through that for three years—that has a profound effect on someone, particularly on a youth. And I think it caused me to be more reflective in some ways. In ways I was more or less consciously aware of, it had an impact on how I saw people and things. There are a lot of different elements that go into how different particular people experience things—within, and as they are influenced by, the broader social and even international context of what was going on at that time, as "my generation," the generation I was part of, came to adulthood, if you will.

So, there was that general atmosphere, and there were the particular elements that went into the mix with regard to myself personally. But I think the way I experienced this at a certain point was that (as I spoke to in the memoir, *From Ike to Mao and Beyond*) I went to a high school where there were a lot of Black people: because of sports and because of other things, like music, I came in contact on a regular basis with a number of Black people, and became friends with some, and as a result of that experience I was opened to a whole dimension of reality and life and society that I knew about only indirectly and maybe more theoretically, but was then introduced to in a more direct way—not that I personally

experienced this myself, but in a more direct way through my friends, and through people that I became very close to. This was something that impelled me to have a lot of questions about what's going on in this society and this world—this is the way it's treating a whole section of people here and has treated them for all this time. I began to want to learn more about that, I began to read about it. And then, as a result of the upsurge of Black people that was occurring at that time, people that I'd known, as well as people I newly encountered, became part of—either in a very direct and immediate way, being actively involved, or in a more supportive way—became part of these mass struggles and organizations that were developing. And this, of course, had an influence on me as well.

And then I had the particular experience of working at *Ramparts* magazine, where I met Eldridge Cleaver, and we had a lot of discussion [Laughs]. He struggled with me, and I struggled with him about a lot of things—that had a big influence on me, as well as having interaction with other leaders of the Black Panther Party (or people who became leaders of the Black Panther Party) like Huey Newton and Bobby Seale.

Seeing Through the Camouflage, Feeling Compelled to Act

BA continues: At a certain point, through the mix of all that and the influence of all that, and other factors as well, I got to a certain point where—you know, we were talking about where you begin to see this—for me, in a more personal way, this system lost legitimacy. I came to see it as it really is, to see through the camouflage. And I felt compelled to act against this and to act to change this—whether it was in relation to Vietnam or the treatment of Black people or, increasingly, the oppression of women, and so on and so forth. I felt that it was necessary—having come to understand this, I felt compelled to act on it. And I was hardly unique or alone in that—that was the general characteristic of a lot of that generation, of millions of people in that generation. But, at a certain point, the way it expressed itself with me personally was: I became determined that I was gonna do whatever I could do, whatever I felt needed to be done that I could do, to be part of radically changing all this.

And then I got introduced to communist theory and began studying that and weighing it against reality. At first, I resisted and rejected some of it, and then the more that I accumulated experience in terms of being part of the movements and struggles of the times, as well as the more that I reflected on what I was learning and what more broadly was going on in society and the world, I went back to some of that communist theory and struggled with other people who had already taken it up, or for some time had been communists. I got won to the basic position that communism, as a program, and as an outlook and method, was what was needed in order to rid the world of the things that I was increasingly learning about and deeply felt needed to be changed and eliminated.

The Need for a New, Really Revolutionary Communist Vanguard

BA continues: And once I took that step, then, as I said, for me it was a matter of whatever needs to be done—I have to do my best, I have to try to do it, in order for this to happen. It needs to happen, so I have to do what I can to make it happen. And, at a certain point, it became clear to me that there wasn't a single organization—while I had tremendous respect and learned a great deal from people in the Black Panther Party and from what the Black Panther Party overall was doing, I came to feel that their ideology didn't measure up fully; that, while there were important elements of it that spoke to what was needed, it didn't measure up fully to what was necessary to really understand, and therefore be able to transform, reality, in order to actually rid the world of things that it needed to be rid of, and bring into being things that increasingly seemed possible to me, a whole different way that the world could be.

So, I felt at a certain point that there needed to be a new organization brought into being, which could serve as a core to unite with other people, through a process of development and struggle, to form a new party that could actually act as a vanguard. And once I became convinced of that, then I pursued that as actively as I could and struggled for it and argued with people.

And, once again, at a certain point it became clear to me that if this was gonna happen, and if the whole process was gonna be pushed forward toward revolution, I needed to assume more responsibility and take more leadership. And so I did. Because I looked around and I felt like: well, this is needed, and other people aren't doing what needs to be done, so I have to do this as best I can. I began to study more, and I began to struggle more to understand more deeply the things that I'd begun to understand, and I engaged in the process of struggle with others about what is really needed and what really is the way forward here.

And that started a process where—to me it's always been a matter that I haven't seen the world get better. I haven't seen the imperialist system reform itself. I haven't seen the oppression of the masses of people be eliminated or even alleviated. I've seen horror after horror after horror, and I've become more and more deeply convinced that this is grounded in this system, and that it's no longer necessary—that we could have a whole different world which would be emancipating for humanity in a real, qualitative sense. And so, I have seen no—to put it that way, I have seen no reason not to persevere with this, because the need for it continues to press itself upon humanity and, if you want to put it that way, to press itself upon my consciousness, upon my understanding.

So, when there was a need to form a new party, then I played the role that I felt was necessary to play in order to struggle to achieve that party on the best possible basis. There were a lot of weaknesses and errors in the understanding and line of the Party when it was founded in 1975, the Revolutionary Communist Party, but fundamentally it was grounded in the right things. Fundamentally, it was a revolutionary party which was seeking—basing itself on and seeking to apply the science of communism to make revolution and to support and contribute to revolution throughout the world.

Quickly Coming to a Crossroads

BA continues: So, once having been formed—that party having been formed—then there was a question of how do we go out in the world and actually change the world, and what's needed in terms of leadership to push that process forward. And very quickly, actually, especially with the revisionist coup and the restoration of capitalism in China shortly after the death of Mao, we came to a real crossroads within the Party and within the communist movement in the world more broadly, about how we understand... in other words, now I use the phrase, there was "a revisionist coup and capitalist restoration," because it's been decades since we'd thoroughly wrangled with and come to an understanding of that. But, at the time, immediately when it happened, there was a question of what is this—what is happening here? People that I identified, and that many others identified, as leading revolutionaries within the Chinese Communist Party were suddenly arrested by other forces within the Chinese Communist Party and denounced as counter-revolutionaries and betrayers of what Mao was about, and so on.

So, it was all very confusing, and there were many people who wanted to go along with this—wanted to go along because they actually were tending themselves to make their peace with and accommodate to the system of imperialism, which was represented by what was happening in China, and wanted to go along with it out of pragmatic considerations: "Well, look, these are the people who have come out on top; if we oppose them, then we're gonna isolate ourselves." And even really rank pragmatism like:

"We have to be able to tell people that socialism is possible, so if we can't point to China as a place where socialism actually exists, it's gonna be much harder to convince people that socialism is possible."

This goes back, once again, to: Is reality determined by what you would like it to be, or is it objective to you, and you have to proceed from what reality is and then figure out what to do, on that basis? This was a major, many-sided struggle that we had, and it did result in the loss of a significant part of our Party—less than a majority but a significant part of the Party went with the revisionists within our own Party who were supporting the revisionists in China. And, at that point, the whole communist movement internationally was thrown into crisis, and many people either took the wrong side, like those people who capitulated within our own Party, or else they just became totally confused and demoralized and retreated from revolution and communism altogether.

Meeting a Great Need, Rising to the Responsibilities

BA continues: So, once again, it was a question of, okay, there are needs that have to be met. There's a need to sum up this experience: What happened in China, and why? How does this relate to what happened in the Soviet Union? What are the underlying causes of this? How do we understand this in terms of what's going on in the world now? And what are the implications of this in terms of how we go about pursuing the struggle for communism in the world and applying the communist outlook and method? So, there was a need there. And I felt the responsibility to rise to the need—to dig into this deeply; and then to pursue, after that, looking more deeply into the history of socialist society in the Soviet Union and then China, including the experience of the Cultural Revolution in China, but also the experience of the communist movement more broadly and historically, beginning all the way back with Marx.

So I did a lot of reading and studying. I found myself in a position where I both was able to be and had to be—was able to study, but also was forced to be separated from a lot of the ongoing struggle at the time.¹⁹ So this, on the other hand, did provide the opportunity for me to do a lot of digging into the historical experience, a lot of studying, while I continued to pay attention to and provide the leadership that I could to the ongoing revolutionary movement. And, once again, it was a matter of: there's a need and, if you see the need and it's not being fulfilled, you have to rise to that the best you can and fulfill that need, to take that responsibility. That's what it means to act as leadership of a revolutionary process, a leader of a revolutionary party, to take the responsibility—which is what it is—to do that. And over the decades since that time, this was what was necessary—I did my best to rise to what was necessary in order to draw the lessons that needed to be drawn, to more deeply ground myself in the communist outlook and method that would enable the lessons to be drawn correctly, and to struggle to make those lessons accessible to growing numbers of people.

That is what's been the driving force in what I've been doing—feeling for some time, going way back for decades now, that there were needs and that they needed to be met, and that once you became convinced of the need and the possibility of this communist revolution and you saw the world was continuing on as it was, and it was causing tremendous suffering, you had to rise to those responsibilities. So that's what I've sought to do, and it's resulted in bringing forward a new synthesis of communism. But I didn't set out to bring forward a new synthesis of communism [Laughs]. I just set out to meet the needs that I could recognize were there, if the movement for communism was not gonna be set back even more than it was with the loss in China, with the reversal there—and the need to forge, if we could, the basis and the foundation to go forward again.

As I said, I didn't set out to develop a new synthesis of communism, I set out to meet the needs, and it has resulted in a new synthesis—which is not some kind of final and complete thing, it's something that continually needs to be worked on and struggled over, by myself and others, and enriched and deepened and, together with the process of applying it, to actually go out and win people to communism—build up the basis for, yes, bringing forward a new wave of the communist revolution and having that happen in the world as a whole.

So, that's kind of a long way about of trying to explain how certain things happened, and why I persevered, and how I've tried to apply myself to what I recognized as—not just myself individually, but as part of a party that collectively determined to be—the needs that needed to be addressed and which I, as part of a broader collectivity, should particularly turn myself to and apply myself to addressing. As I said, I found myself, because of the repression of the U.S. ruling class, in a situation where I was deprived of the ability to be more directly involved in things; but, on the other hand, I had the opportunity to delve and dig into things—particularly in terms of summing up historical experience, and wrestling and wrangling in the realm of theory. And, as part of a broader collectivity, I've taken up that responsibility. So, this is how it evolved, so to speak—and the "why" and the ways in which I've tried to rise to that challenge.

Questions of Leadership—What Is Communist Leadership?

Brooks: I think there's also the question of, you wake up every day and you're aware of, and you see, the tremendous horrors and tremendous suffering in all different kinds of ways that humanity is subjected to every single day, and you wake up knowing that things don't have to be this way, and that you've actually brought forward a solution to all this, this new synthesis of communism that you're talking about. And, on the one hand, there are people taking this up and stepping forward and engaging this, in all strata, and there's people from different perspectives, who, coming from where they're coming from, are engaging this and helping to promote BA's body of work and vision and get that out there more in society—we talked about things like that April 11 program in Harlem, on the occasion of the release of *Basics*. But there's still this huge gap between what this new synthesis of communism that you've brought forward objectively represents and the number of people who are taking this up and engaging it, on the one hand, and then there's also a situation where you've had to deal with tremendous sacrifices because you haven't given up, and then, as you mentioned earlier, also having to deal with attacks and bullshit like that. And I guess, with all that as kind of a context, there's kinda two aspects of that: one is the tremendous need and potential to transform that gap that I'm talking about, from the standpoint of making revolution and getting to communism, and this point that we've been talking about, that it's not enough to be right, you actually have to win; and then there's how you've personally dealt with that gap.

BA: Well, there are a lot of different dimensions to that. I mean, first of all, let me say that I have, besides applying myself as systematically as I can to summing up the historical experience and learning from many different realms of human experience and endeavor, besides just the communist movement and revolution—which, as I said, resulted in the new synthesis of communism—but, besides that, I have paid attention, as carefully as I can, to all the various different trends in society and the world in many different spheres: culturally—obviously, the political sphere, but also culture, science, philosophy, other spheres—and I have tried to draw as much as I could from those spheres. And I've also—I have not relinquished my role or responsibility as a leader of a party, I have continued to work in the context of the overall collectivity of our Party to provide leadership to the development of the revolutionary movement through the work of the Party and the collectivity of the Party. So that's one

key dimension where, even under the conditions of difficulty and hardship which you referred to, I've continued to fight to play that role, and have played that role.

Now, as far as this glaring contradiction—I wanna speak to that contradiction you raised about the gap between what is represented by the new synthesis of communism and this whole body of work and method and approach, on the one hand, and, to put it that way, how it's being received in the world and how much people are taking it up and moving on the basis of it; but before I get to that, I think the point I just made speaks very much to an important point about what is leadership and, in particular, communist leadership. I've spoken to this a number of times, but I just wanna briefly point to the fact that many people have a misconception, especially people who haven't yet confronted what really needs to happen in the world—the fact that we really need a revolution, and what's really involved, and all the complexity and challenges of that revolution. People who maybe are involved in a particular struggle, they tend to see leadership—and there are also popular conceptions, or misconceptions, which are spread, and which sort of merge with a lot of the pragmatic tendencies that are so common in American society, to think that leadership means, or is defined in terms of, political activism: that you're actively engaged in this or that particular struggle, and you're on the ground providing tactical guidance or being actively a leading force, right on the spot, in terms of this or that particular movement. Now, obviously, there's an important role for people who are communists to be doing that, as part of the overall division of labor of a party—and a party needs a division of labor, with many people doing many different things, in order to be able to be an effective force in leading the process of revolution through all the "many different channels," as we talked about, which such a revolutionary process must and will proceed through. But when you get to the question of leading a party as a whole, and a revolutionary process as a whole—or even for those who are directly on the spot, and directly engaged in this or that particular resistance or rebellion or whatever, even in that situation and for those people—the heart and essence of communist leadership is not providing tactical advice in a particular circumstance or particular struggle, even though that may be something that people need to do, and it can be an important element of what they do. But the heart of it is actually implementing "Fight the Power, and Transform the People, for Revolution"—is actually bringing forward all of the things we've talked about in terms of enabling people to get a real understanding, scientifically grounded, of the larger picture that any particular thing fits into. What is the overall foundation and framework in which all these things are occurring? What is, to put it simply again, the problem and solution: what do all these outrages stem from; what are they all rooted and grounded in; what do we need to do to uproot and eliminate all this, and how do we actually build the movement to do that? All that is the essence of communist leadership, whatever level of a party, or whatever part you play in the division of labor of a party, as part of a revolutionary communist vanguard.

But, in a concentrated way, if you have the responsibility to lead the party overall and the revolutionary process overall, then leadership gets concentrated on a very high level there, in terms of line, in terms of learning from broad experience—including different struggles of the people but also, again, many different fields of human experience and endeavor—internationally and historically, in all different kinds of fields; continually studying and deepening your grounding in the outlook and method of the communist science, and applying that to lead a party and to lead a growing movement of people to actually build up the basis for, and then to make, revolution; and to grapple with, and lead people to forge solutions to, all the many complex problems and challenges that lie in the path of actually, yes, winning—actually breaking through and making revolution and bringing a new society into being, as a foundation to carry forward, on a higher level, the struggle to finally reach a whole new world.

So the essence of leadership, especially when you have responsibility for leading a party and a process

as a whole, is concentrated in terms of the development of line: the development and application of the scientific outlook and method of communism; the strategy and program that flows from the application of that; the development of particular policies and specific programmatic demands, and so on, that are critical in terms of key junctures that the revolutionary movement—not only particular mass struggles, but the revolutionary movement as a whole—is encountering, in order to break through and make further advances. And grappling with that—not just individually, but in whatever ways one can collectively, as part of the broader collectivity of the Party—is the essence of what leadership, particularly leadership of the party as a whole and the revolutionary process as a whole, involves.

And it involves learning from many different people in many different spheres, including masses of people at the base of society who are catching hell every day under this system. If you can't learn from them directly—or to the degree that you're limited in doing so—you seek to learn indirectly, from reports of people in the Party who are working directly with masses, winning them to revolution and uniting with them in the struggle to build a revolutionary movement. And, in many other ways, you seek to learn from broad trends in society—mass movements, and so on and so forth. All as part of the raw material, if you will, that you systematize and synthesize to develop the line and policy and program that's necessary to break through the obstacles and advance the overall revolutionary movement, with the Party at its core.

I think that's an important point to stress, in terms of what is actually the role of communists overall as part of a communist party and division of labor, and particularly those who have responsibility at the highest levels for leading the party as a whole and the revolutionary process of which the party is the core.

A Crying Need for Radical Change, and the New Synthesis of Communism

BA continues: Now, to get to this question about the disparity between what's represented by the new synthesis of communism and everything bound up with that, on the one hand, and what people understand and appreciate about it, at a given time: this is another one of those vexing—yes, in many ways, frustrating—contradictions. It's part of the broader contradiction, which is extremely frustrating and vexing [Laughs], that there is a crying need for radical change in the world, for a communist revolution as the means for that radical change and the content of that radical change—and there is very advanced theory and line, and the continuing application of the science of communism to further develop and apply the theory and line, to lead that process and enable it to go where it needs to go—and yet far too few people have yet taken this up.

And this is owing to all the things we've been talking about through the course of this: the setbacks the communist movement has suffered over the past number of decades, and the continuing effects of that; the ongoing ideological onslaught against communism; the influences of the fact that this is a powerful imperialist country which exploits people all over the world and, yes, passes out certain spoils to sections of the people—which has massive means of not only accumulating and passing out spoils, but also a massive means of deception as well as massive means of destruction. All these things are part of the picture of why, still at this point, far too few people have gravitated to and taken up, or seriously engaged, communism, communist revolution and, in particular, the new synthesis of communism.

And so, yes [Laughs], all that's very, very frustrating. And to be attacked viciously for daring to put this forward—and for daring to say, there is a way out of all this madness and horror, and here's the way—yes, it's infuriating. Look, I'm a person; nobody likes to be vilified and slandered. But, most fundamentally, it's infuriating because it is what is needed in the world. You know, I feel that we—that

not just I, individually, but we collectively in the Party—are in a position like someone in the field of medicine who's discovered a means for dealing with a disease—not just a few individuals affected by a disease, but a massive epidemic which is causing horrific suffering; and it's like in the days when religious superstition weighed even more heavily and was less challenged in the world—when people would make a scientific breakthrough and they'd be accused of being witches, or accused of engaging in devil worship and dark magic, and so on [Laughs]. It's very much analogous to that.

I mean, what is represented by communism—and specifically the new synthesis of communism—is actually scientifically analogous to that. It is the way forward. It is not some magic solution. It's a scientific approach to forging the way forward. It has answered—or spoken in a significant way to—some real problems. At the same time, it has posed new questions, identified new contradictions that have to be confronted, which weren't seen as clearly before. And it's an ongoing process of discovering, confronting and transforming different aspects of reality that have to be transformed, in order to achieve the emancipation of humanity. That's what it is. That's why we put it forward. And that's why we struggle to let people know about it and to win them to engage it seriously—and, yes, to take it up—because that's exactly what it embodies and represents. It is analogous to a way to deal with a very serious epidemic. There is an epidemic in which the mass of humanity is suffering terribly, as constituted under this capitalist-imperialist system, and there is a way forward—not a magic wand to wave to solve all problems, but a means for forging a way forward on a higher level than before, as a result of this new synthesis that's been brought forward.

So, yes, it's very frustrating and infuriating, not only that still far too few people have engaged it seriously, but that it is being viciously attacked—and, yes, I am being viciously attacked for daring to bring it forward and to say: Look, this is the way we have to move forward, this is the way we can move forward, this is the way we can forge the emancipation of humanity. If you don't agree, then let's get into the substance of it and talk about why it's not that, or why humanity should not be emancipated, or why this will not lead to the emancipation of humanity but just to more horrors for humanity. Let's get into the substance of it, because I'm firmly convinced that it does represent what we say it represents. And, yes, it needs to be further developed—many more people need to take it up and be part of the process of further developing it, not only individually, but collectively, as part of the Party that's leading this process and that needs to lead this process. Let's struggle over all these questions that the new synthesis, and that communism in general, speaks to. But let's loft it up to the level where we're really proceeding from what matters for humanity, and not narrow and petty personal interests and the seeking of revenge on people who dare to say that there's a way forward out of all this.

So, again, it's frustrating to have this be vilified and distorted, and to be vilified and slandered for daring to bring it forward. But the main thing is: it needs to be taken up, it needs to be seriously engaged. We need to fight through and struggle like hell to get people up to the level of seriously engaging this, in the context of everything going on in society and the world, and to really wrestle with: is this the way forward or not, and what can we do, if it is, to apply it and to continue to develop it and to strengthen the ranks of the Party and those who are consciously working to bring forward more masses of people to make this a living reality and to actually fight on through and make it real and win, and get to a whole different place from which to continue the fight for a whole new world?

Focus on the Substance, and the Stakes for Humanity

BA continues: That's what motivates me, and that's what is infuriating about people raising unprincipled opposition and attacks: not principled opposition and criticism, but unprincipled and petty

and low and mean and gutter opposition—that's what's infuriating. You know, some people attack it: "How dare you say this?" Well, fuck that! If it's not correct, then show that it's not correct. I dare to say it, because it needs to be said. You know, some people wanna say: "Well, just because you're saying that it's good, I don't even have to engage it—because who are you to say that you know the way forward?" Well, that's the wrong question, and it's coming at it the wrong way. If anybody, I don't care who they are, claims to know the way forward out of this, and they have some substance behind it, if there's some content to that and a body of work there, then you should seriously engage it, 'cause that matters tremendously—whether what they're pointing to and what they've brought forward really does represent the way forward, or whether it doesn't.

So the question is not—and we have to get away from the question—"how dare you?" or "who are you to bring this forward?" We need to talk about what it is that's been brought forward, and does it represent what is being said about it by those who are defending and upholding and propagating and fighting for it, or does it not? That is the question that people need to be focusing on, and we need to get away from all these other things that are diversions and that don't proceed, frankly, from what are the conditions, what is the situation, of the mass of humanity today, and what can be done about this.

Is there no alternative to this? Do people just have to suffer this horrible long night? Or can there finally be a breakthrough, out of all this? If you're really proceeding from that, and somebody, or a party, says, "we've brought forward a new advance in terms of fighting for that," then you should take that up seriously and engage it on the terms of whether or not it really does represent that. If it doesn't, you should criticize it—or where it doesn't, you should criticize that—in a principled and lofty way, focusing on the real concerns about humanity. If it does, you should unite with it and take it up yourself, fight for it, and become part of making it a living reality.

For Revolution to Break Through, for Humanity to Be Emancipated, Communist Leadership Is Necessary, and Indispensable

Brooks: I think this brings things back to both the tremendous need but also the tremendous potential for this new synthesis and leadership to get out there throughout society and be taken up. And I think it brings us back to this point about the need for people to fight for this, including younger generations and newer generations coming forward who have an understanding of what's represented by the leadership and the new synthesis of BA—to go out to fight for it, to fight for it to be engaged, to fight for the standards that you're talking about, and to fight for protecting and defending the leadership of BA. I think that's where it comes back to.

BA: Yes, because, look, it goes back also to the thing we were talking about, that I brought up in relation to the "Occupy" movement, or things in the past, where people say: "You can't kill an idea whose time has come" or "You can kill a revolutionary but you can't kill the revolution." Well, those ideas are wrong. They may be comforting in the short term, but they're wrong. Because, actually, ideas can be suppressed, at least for long periods of time. And movements based on ideas can be suppressed. And individual leaders—which are, at this stage of history, extremely important in order to realize ideas in the real world, in order for ideas to become a living reality and be fought for and achieved by masses of people—leaders, including individual leaders, or especially those who do concentrate and have brought forward an advanced understanding and method, do count for a tremendous amount. And, if revolutionaries—especially revolutionaries who play that kind of role and represent that kind of high level leadership—if those leaders are killed or suppressed, it has a tremendously destructive and demoralizing effect in setting back the revolutionary movement in very profound ways.

We've experienced this throughout history. I mean, you know, there wasn't a coup in China until Mao died. He died of natural causes, but when he died all the forces of counter-revolution who'd been gathering themselves, and who were, to a significant degree, being held back by, yes, the revolutionary authority of Mao—not just as an individual, but the influence of what he represented, the ideas that he represented and the actual application of those ideas by masses of people—that was actually holding back the counter-revolution, but then the counter-revolution succeeded.

Now, we wanna get to the point where things don't depend so much on a few individual leaders. Yes, definitely. But it requires a whole historical epoch to get to that, because in order for that to happen you have to get beyond the stage where we're at—where there are profound contradictions in society and the world that enslave the masses of people in their great majority, in one form or another, and that prevent them from being able to play the kind of role they could play when, in a whole different kind of world, they have broken off and cast aside the fetters that do chain them down.

We need to get to that whole different kind of world. But we can't get to it by wishing we were there, or pretending we are there, or pretending that people who have an advanced role to play, an advanced understanding and an advanced method in terms of leading people to take that up and fight for it, and to themselves become people who can contribute to further developing it—if we pretend that individuals who play that role are not as important as they are, or if we attack them for daring to play that role, then, yes, we are helping to kill off the revolution for at least a significant period of time. And that does matter profoundly. So, yes, we should defend them, and we should form—as you know, as one of the resolutions of our Party on the questions of leadership and individual leaders, which was passed by our Central Committee more than 15 years ago,²⁰ says: we should form a solid wall around the leaders of our Party and, in particular, around Bob Avakian as the individual who is the "leader of leaders" of our Party. Yes, we need to do that, and broad masses of people—growing waves of people—need to become part of building that wall in opposition to the repression of the ruling class.

But, in addition to that, and at the same time as that is being done, people need to take up what has been brought forward by the leadership of the Party collectively and, in a concentrated way, through my leadership and body of work, and fight for it out in the world, and bring forward people around it—win them to it, and mobilize them to fight for it and to win others to it, to build up the basis to where, once again, thousands are won to this and organized around it. And when the full revolutionary crisis ripens, and millions and tens of millions are demanding a radical way forward and a radical way out of this, those thousands can be the core of leadership to bring those millions and tens of millions into the revolutionary movement and have a real fighting chance of winning.

That's the importance of all this. It has to do with whether the masses are gonna be chained in these conditions of unspeakable misery, and unnecessary misery, or whether there's actually gonna be a fighting chance to break out of this and get humanity to a whole different place. That's what this is all about, and that's what the role of individuals should be about: contributing whatever they can to that—not just as individuals, but as part of a collective process, as part of a broader revolutionary movement and, as they get to the point of being fully won to this, making the leap to becoming part of the Party that has to be at the core and play the leading role collectively in this whole revolutionary process.

This Is the Challenge

Brooks: Obviously, a big component, in relation to everything that you're saying, is creating—changing the situation where right now not nearly enough people even know about BA, what he's brought forward and what he represents.

BA: Well, again, the whole purpose and objective of this campaign of "BA Everywhere"—and raising the funds to really make this a reality in many different dimensions, in all different parts of society—is, or relates to, one of the key objectives of the overall Campaign—that is, to "make BA a household name," to make this body of work and the new synthesis of communism a point of reference and of debate and struggle and engagement in society broadly. And, beyond that, to make revolution—the communist revolution, which this new synthesis is an expression of and a means toward—to make that communist revolution a point of reference and debate, of engagement and struggle in society broadly. And to bring forward wave after wave of new people to become part of this process and to be, as we've put it, initiators of the new stage of communist revolution that's urgently needed.

This is why we have the "chutzpah" to do what we do—this is why we dare to do what we do—because it needs to be done. And this campaign is not a means for anything other than addressing a critical contradiction: that this revolution we're talking about is urgently needed, but far too few people even know about the necessity and the possibility of it, or even what it represents. So, in the context of everything going on in society as a whole, and all the different manifestations of "Fight the Power, and Transform the People, for Revolution," it's critical that, in an ongoing way—as a kind of foundation underneath all this, along with, and in certain ways as a key expression of, the two mainstays we've talked about—this campaign, in this overall context, be a concentrated way of reaching out with the substance and the means of the communist revolution and the new synthesis embodying the further advance—the potential for the further advance—of that revolution. To really reach out broadly into society, and to transform the political terrain, to where the terms, politically, are being changed in a significant way; to where people are looking for the first time, or looking anew, at the question of communism and seriously engaging whether another world is possible and whether, in fact, what is represented by communism is, as we say it is, the actual alternative, a real and viable alternative that can and should be fought for, with an actual prospect—not a guarantee, but an actual prospect—of winning, and an actual orientation of striving to win and being determined to win, in order to actually bring another world into being that would really be emancipating for the masses of oppressed people in the world who are suffering horribly under this system, and ultimately for humanity as a whole to be able to enter a whole new era, free of what has weighed it down for centuries and millennia now: relations of exploitation and oppression, and all the ignorance and superstition and misunderstanding of reality that's gone along with that and has reinforced that.

So, yes, this is the challenge: for many, many more people to take this up, to unite with those who are already enthusiastically with this and taking it up, and to make it much more powerful—project it much more powerfully out in society. Once again harking back to what we talked about earlier: the people who are firmly committed to this need to be the driving force in this, but we also need to unite much more broadly with thousands and thousands of people, in various ways and on various levels, who can understand that, while they may have certain questions or disagreements, this is very important to be out there, being projected in society and being actively taken up, debated and engaged with as an important part of lofting people's sights to much more emancipating things, as part of the broader overall ferment that's needed in society as a whole, and as part of the debate about the fundamental question: is there a way forward, and what is the way forward to another world, to the emancipation of humanity?

A Final Question

Brooks: This interview has been a really incredible experience and a tremendous amount of fun as well. And, just before we end, I wanted to ask: was there anything else on your mind or burning

questions that you wanted to speak to?

BA: Well, I've often pondered the question and wondered: Why has nobody ever made a movie out of Bob Dylan's song "Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts"? [BA and Brooks laugh.]

ENDNOTES

1. Troy Davis was a 42-year-old Black man who was convicted of killing a white police officer, and was executed by the State of Georgia on September 21, 2011 after 22 years on death row. Though there was no physical evidence against Davis, the police quickly went after him as their target. The police put together a series of witnesses who testified against Davis. A jury took just two hours to convict Davis in 1991 and seven hours to agree to sentence him to death. Over the next 11 years, the original case against Davis fell apart. By 2002, seven out of the original nine witnesses against him had recanted their testimony, with six saying that the police had coerced them to lie about the events that led to the officer's killing. The case of Troy Davis went through many levels of state and federal appeals courts, but they all refused to examine powerful evidence of his innocence.

Troy Davis fought to prove his innocence to his last breath. One million people signed a petition demanding a stop to his execution, and there were worldwide protests involving many thousands of people, and some prominent public figures joined this demand. But the growing protests, in the U.S. and around the world, from all kinds of people, did not stop the execution. The U.S. Supreme Court, after the execution was delayed for several hours, could have stopped the execution to allow time to review the evidence of innocence, but instead it gave the green light for the legal lynching. In the days after Troy Davis' execution, in the spirit of his final call to "continue to fight this fight," many youth and others took to the streets in cities around the U.S. [[back](#)]

2. Bob Avakian, *From Ike to Mao and Beyond: My Journey from Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist: A Memoir* by Bob Avakian (Insight Press, Chicago, 2005) [[back](#)]

3. **Endnote by BA:** For a thorough, lively and accessible exposition of the theory of evolution, exposure and refutation of "creationist" attacks on the theory and scientifically-established fact of evolution, discussion of decisive questions of outlook and method, and how all this relates to the struggle for the emancipation of the oppressed, and ultimately humanity as a whole, see Ardea Skybreak, *The Science of Evolution and the Myth of Creationism—Knowing What's Real and Why It Matters* (Insight Press, Chicago, 2006). [[back](#)]

4. Raymond Lotta, Nayi Duniya and K.J.A., "Alain Badiou's 'Politics of Emancipation': A Communism Locked within the Confines of the Bourgeois World," *Demarcations: A Journal of Communist Theory and Polemic*, Issue Number 1, Summer-Fall 2009, demarcations-journal.org. The next (second) issue of *Demarcations* is scheduled to be published in Summer, 2012. [[back](#)]

5. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (The New Press, New York, 2010) [[back](#)]

6. *Revolution and Communism: A Foundation and Strategic Orientation*, a *Revolution* pamphlet (reprints from *Revolution* newspaper), May 1, 2008. "On the Possibility of Revolution" originally appeared in *Revolution* #102, September 23, 2007, and is available at revcom.us. [[back](#)]

7. Bob Avakian, *Birds Cannot Give Birth to Crocodiles, But Humanity Can Soar Beyond the Horizon*. From a talk by Bob Avakian. *Revolution*, November 2010-October 2011. Available at revcom.us. [[back](#)]

8. The larger Campaign referred to, with its three objectives, as summarized by Bob Avakian here in this interview, was launched by the Revolutionary Communist Party in the summer of 2009, with the Message and Call "[The Revolution We Need... The Leadership We Have](#)." See *Revolution* #170, July 19,

2009. Also available at revcom.us. [[back](#)]

9. This article by Raymond Lotta, "[Vilifying Communism and Accommodating Imperialism: The Sham and the Shame of Slavoj Žižek's 'Honest Pessimism.'](#)" *Revolution* #256, January 15, 2012, is also available at revcom.us. [[back](#)]

10. Madhusree Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War, the British Empire and the Ravaging of India During World War II* (Basic Books, New York, 2010); and Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning, The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (Owl Books, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2006) [[back](#)]

11. [Communism: The Beginning of a New Stage—A Manifesto from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA](#), RCP Publications, September 2008. Also available at revcom.us. [[back](#)]

12. See "[Tips for Tim Tebow](#)," by Bob Avakian, *Revolution* #258, February 5, 2012. Also available at revcom.us. [[back](#)]

13. **Endnote by BA:** To explain the extent, and the reasons for, the rather overt discrimination against the Oakland Raiders, directed from the highest levels of the National Football League, is beyond the scope of what can be gotten into here, but this discrimination is a fact. And yes—"full disclosure," as the expression goes—I'm an Oakland Raiders fan, insofar as I'm a professional football fan. Nonetheless, it is true, the Raiders are the designated team to be dumped on by the rest of the owners and the hierarchy in the NFL. They are, for example, the most penalized team in all of professional football—and not because they commit more penalties, but because more penalties are called on them. [[back](#)]

14. "The NBA: Marketing the Minstrel Show and Serving the Big Gangsters" is one of [7 Talks](#) given by Bob Avakian in 2006. Audio of these talks is available at [bobavakian.net](#). [[back](#)]

15. **Some Principles for Building a Movement for Revolution**
by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA

At every point, we must be searching out the key concentrations of social contradictions and the methods and forms which can strengthen the political consciousness of the masses, as well as their fighting capacity and organization in carrying out political resistance against the crimes of this system; which can increasingly bring the necessity, and the possibility, of a radically different world to life for growing numbers of people; and which can strengthen the understanding and determination of the advanced, revolutionary-minded masses in particular to take up our strategic objectives not merely as far-off and essentially abstract goals (or ideals) but as things to be actively striven for and built toward.

The objective and orientation must be to carry out work which, together with the development of the objective situation, can transform the political terrain, so that the legitimacy of the established order, and the right and ability of the ruling class to rule, is called into question, in an acute and active sense, throughout society; so that resistance to this system becomes increasingly broad, deep and determined; so that the "pole" and the organized vanguard force of revolutionary communism is greatly strengthened; and so that, at the decisive time, this advanced force is able to lead the struggle of millions, and tens of millions, to make revolution. [[back](#)]

16. **Endnote by BA:** It is important to keep in mind that the situation with regard to immigrants from Mexico (and other parts of Latin America) today is very different from that of Irish and other immigrants from Europe in earlier periods. This has to do with the relation, historically and down to today, between the U.S., as a capitalist-imperialist country—and in fact an imperialist superpower—and Mexico as an oppressed nation which has, for nearly two centuries, been under the overall

domination of the U.S. Under these circumstances, the prospect of "assimilating" immigrants from Mexico (and other parts of Latin America) into the dominant—white European—nation within the U.S. is much more problematical. It is not at all clear that the ruling class of the U.S., or its leading representatives, consider it in the interests of their system to seek to do this; and it is not clear that, in any case, they could succeed in doing this, without ripping apart the oppressive and exploitative "fabric" which holds their system together. This is further complicated by the demographic trends and shifts which are presently propelling things in a direction where it could be the case, within the space of a few decades, that white Europeans would actually constitute a minority of the U.S. population. It is important to understand that, overall, this is very likely not to lessen but to heighten the assertion of white supremacy (and the racist ideology that reflects and reinforces it), given that this white supremacy has been, from the beginning of this country, and remains today, a crucial "adhesive force" holding together the capitalist-imperialist system of the USA. And a cornerstone of this white supremacy, throughout the history of this country, has been the oppression of Black people and the way in which they have been portrayed and treated as a pariah group. This sheds further light on why the ruling powers in this country would want to maintain a situation where large numbers of immigrants, and in particular immigrants from Mexico and other parts of Latin America, are bitterly exploited, discriminated against, and driven into the shadows, and at the same time have been denied an understanding of the true history and role of Black people in this country. [[back](#)]

17. Bob Avakian, *Away With All Gods! Unchaining the Mind and Radically Changing the World* (Insight Press, Chicago, 2008) and *Preaching From a Pulpit of Bones, We Need Morality But Not Traditional Morality* (Banner Press, NY, 1999, now available from Insight Press) [[back](#)]

18. Here what is being referred to is the growing influence of revisionism—communism in words, reformism and accommodation to capitalism-imperialism in fact—within the Revolutionary Communist Party over a number of decades, in opposition to what remained the leading line of the Party, as embodied in its official documents and the works of Bob Avakian. As a result of the increasing influence of the revisionist line within the RCP, and the intensifying opposition between this revisionist line and the revolutionary communist line, Bob Avakian issued, in the first part of the last decade, a call for a Cultural Revolution within the RCP in the midst of a Long March—"emphasizing through this metaphor that the radical transformation and revolutionary revitalization of the Party, which was the purpose and aim of this Cultural Revolution, must be carried out in the context of, and fundamentally to serve, the transformation of the larger objective world—the carrying out of work by the Party which would actually be guided by communist principles and objectives and would build a revolutionary, and not a reformist, movement." And: "In its principal aspect and essentially, the outcome of this Cultural Revolution within our Party has been a real revitalization of the revolutionary and communist outlook, objectives, spirit, and culture of the Party—a Party facing squarely, and confronting scientifically, the complexities, the difficulties and the dangers, as well as the inspiration, of doing all it can to work for revolution in this country, and to contribute the most it can to this same cause throughout the world, all aiming for the goal of communism. And struggle continues, on a new basis, within the Party to further strengthen, and deepen, its revolutionary character and foundations, in the context of vigorously and creatively carrying out revolutionary work, based on what is in fact the revolutionary-communist line of this Party." (from *Communism: The Beginning of a New Stage—A Manifesto from the Revolutionary Communist Party*, VI, "A Cultural Revolution Within the RCP," which goes more extensively into the reasons why there was a need for—and discusses the course, as well as the stakes, of—this Cultural Revolution within the RCP). [[back](#)]

19. Here Bob Avakian is referring to the fact that, owing to repression in various forms directed against

him, he was forced into exile in France in the early 1980s. This, and its larger context, is discussed in *From Ike to Mao and Beyond*—see in particular chapter 23, "Stop the Railroad!"; chapter 24, "Under Attack"; chapter 25, "Exile"; chapter 26, "In Exile...and Leading Through Line"; and chapter 27, "Perseverance, and Inspiration." [[back](#)]

20. This refers to the *1995 Leadership Resolutions on Leaders and Leadership*. This consists of: Part I, "The Party Exists for No Other Reason than to Serve the Masses, to Make Revolution"; and Part II (which is the part more specifically referred to by Bob Avakian here), "Some Points on the Question of Revolutionary Leadership and Individual Leaders." This two-part resolution was passed by the Central Committee of the RCP, and was published on October 1, 1995, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the founding of the RCP, in issue #825 of the *Revolutionary Worker* (now *Revolution*). This is also available at revcom.us. [[back](#)]

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For Revolution to Break Through, for Humanity to Be Emancipated, Communist Leadership Is Necessary, and Indispensable

This Is the Challenge

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