

**BOB AVAKIAN
FOR THE LIBERATION
OF BLACK PEOPLE

AND THE
EMANCIPATION
OF ALL HUMANITY**

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One of the things that comes through most powerfully in Bob Avakian's memoir¹ is that a profound hatred for the oppression of Black people has been a defining part of Bob Avakian's life from the time, as a teenager, he learned about the lives of the Black people with whom he developed deep ties of friendship. Never feeling that, because he is white, "it is not his place" to be involved in the struggle against this oppression—but, on the contrary, determined to contribute whatever he could to this struggle—*Bob Avakian (BA), from the time he worked closely with the Black Panther Party in its revolutionary days in the 1960s, has made the liberation of Black people a defining part of his life's commitment and work. As he developed as a revolutionary communist, and emerged as the foremost revolutionary leader and thinker in the world, this commitment has become even deeper and has been strongly*

interwoven with a dedication to the emancipation of all humanity from every form of oppression and exploitation.

As BA has written about his life's work:

Why was I doing the work I was doing? Once again, we're back to *for whom and for what*. I wasn't doing this work for myself. When I was young, in middle school and then even more so in high school, my life got changed in a very major way by coming into contact with people that I hadn't really known that much before, in particular Black people. I started learning about their situation and how that relates to what goes on in this society as a whole. I was drawn to the culture—not just the music and the art overall, but the whole way of going through the world—of the Black people who became my friends, and the world they introduced me to. And I came to the point of recognizing: *these are my people*. Now, I knew they had a different life experience than I did. But these are my people—I don't see a separation—it's not like there are some other people “over there” who are going through all this and somehow that's removed from me. *These are my people*. And then I began to recognize more deeply what people were being put through, the oppression they were constantly subjected to, the horrors of daily life as well as the bigger ways in which the system came down on them. And as I went further through life and began to approach the question of what needs to be done about this, and was introduced to taking up a scientific approach to this, I realized that my people were more than this. I realized that my people were Chicanos and other Latinos and other

oppressed people in the U.S.; they were people in Vietnam and China; they were women...they were the oppressed and exploited of the world...and through some struggle, and having to cast off some wrong thinking, I have learned that they are LGBT people as well.

These are my people, the oppressed and exploited people of the world. They are suffering terribly, and something has to be done about this. So it is necessary to dig in and systematically take up the science that can show the way to put an end to all this, and bring something much better into being. You have to persevere and keep struggling to go forward in this way. And when you run into new problems or setbacks, you have to go more deeply into this, rather than putting it aside and giving up.

So this is why I've been doing the work that I've been doing.²

Bob Avakian grew up in Berkeley, California. Unable, because of a life-threatening illness, to be directly involved in struggles taking place against racial oppression for several years after graduating from high school in 1961, BA nevertheless closely followed and strongly supported the civil rights movement in the early 1960s, and at the same time was influenced by and supportive of the militant stand and role of Malcolm X. This was reflected in an article that BA wrote at the age of 19 in 1962 supporting the struggle of Black people. (This article was submitted to the liberal magazine *Saturday Review*. Although the article was not published, the editor-in-chief of the magazine, Norman Cousins, personally replied—indicating that, although the magazine had chosen not to publish this

article, he recognized that the article spoke, in a strikingly compelling way, to very important questions.)

Having recovered from his illness, in 1964, BA became actively involved in the Free Speech Movement at the University of California in Berkeley, where he was a student. The central issue of this movement was the right of students to carry out activity on the campus in support of the civil rights movement. BA was among the 800 who were arrested during the occupation of the university administration building, which was the high point of the movement and led to winning its demands.

As the civil rights movement increasingly gave way to a more militant Black liberation movement in the second half of the 1960s, BA was strongly influenced by this. He left the university and dedicated his life to working for radical change. As a result of direct contact and discussions with Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the founders of the Black Panther Party, and getting to know Eldridge Cleaver (who also became a leader of the BPP), BA worked closely with the Black Panther Party from its earliest days and at the height of its revolutionary role and influence.

In 1967, BA attended rallies, and spoke at one of the rallies, held by the BPP in North Richmond to protest the killing there of Denzil Dowell, part of the long and continuing chain of murders of Black people by police.

In 1968, when Huey Newton was facing murder charges as a result of a shoot-out with Oakland cops, BA spoke—along with a number of key figures in the Black liberation movement, including Stokely Carmichael, Rap Brown, James Forman, and leaders of the Black Panther Party— at a Free Huey rally held

in the Oakland auditorium on the occasion of Huey Newton's birthday.

BA worked tirelessly to build support, including among white people, for the demand to "Free Huey!" At a "Free Huey" rally at the courthouse in Oakland where Huey Newton's trial was being held, BA was arrested for "desecrating" (burning) the American flag.

During this time, at the invitation of BPP leaders, BA wrote a number of articles for the Black Panther newspaper.

At a rally of thousands, led by the Black Panther Party, on May First, 1969, BA spoke of the need for revolution and called on white people in particular to more actively take part in movements for revolutionary change in the U.S., and to support such movements throughout the world.

By the beginning of the 1970s, millions of people in this country were in favor of some kind of revolutionary change, but they faced profound challenges. How could this revolution be made—or was it even possible to make a revolution here, up against such powerful forces of oppression and repression? Which were the key forces that had to be mobilized to have a real chance to carry out such a revolution? What kind of leadership was needed, and what methods and approaches should that leadership be based on? The difficulties in confronting and seeking the answers to these hard questions, combined with brutal and often murderous repression by the powers-that-be, led many revolutionary organizations, including the Black Panther Party, to split and end up departing from the road that could lead to real revolution.

By this time, partly because of the influence of the Black Panther Party, which had popularized the "Red Book" of

quotations from the Chinese communist leader Mao Zedong, BA had become convinced not only that revolution was necessary, and was possible, but that it had to be led by a vanguard force that based itself on the scientific method and approach of communism, as it had been developed initially by Karl Marx, then further developed by V.I. Lenin, the leader of the Russian Revolution in the early part of the 20th century, and then in turn further developed by Mao, who led the Chinese revolution and the new, socialist society in China, until his death in 1976. BA led in the formation of the Revolutionary Union at the end of the 1960s, with the aim of working toward the establishment of the vanguard party of revolution, based on the science of communism. During the first part of the 1970s, BA was both the practical leader and the leading theoretician of the Revolutionary Union, writing much of the essays and polemics for its theoretical journal *Red Papers*. This included major articles, particularly in *Red Papers* 5 and 6, that involved groundbreaking scientific materialist analysis of the situation of Black people, historically and down to the present—how and why their particular conditions of oppression had changed, from the time of slavery to the present era, and how this objectively put Black people in a potentially powerful position to be a driving force not only for their own liberation but for the communist revolution whose fundamental aim is the abolition of all oppression and exploitation. These articles included powerful polemics, arguing against positions and programs that would *not* lead to, but would actually work against, this liberation and the revolutionary transformation of the world as a whole.

In 1975, with BA's leadership, the Revolutionary Communist Party was founded, with the aim of being the vanguard force for the revolution that was, and continues to be, profoundly

necessary. Over the decades since then, BA has fought to keep that Party on the revolutionary road and to bring forward new revolutionary forces to revitalize and strengthen the vanguard forces for the revolution that is now, all the more urgently, required. While continuing to provide practical guidance to the revolutionary forces, BA, through summing up the experience (positive and negative) of the communist movement, and drawing from a broad range of human experience, has brought forward a new synthesis of communism (also referred to as the *new communism*) which, most decisively, has established communism on an even more consistently scientific basis. As BA's Official Biography explains, the new communism "is a continuation of, but also represents a qualitative leap beyond, and in some important ways a break with, communist theory as it had been previously developed. It provides the basis—the science, the strategy, and the leadership—for an actual revolution and a radically new society on the road to real emancipation."³

A defining part of this new communism is the emphasis it gives to the struggle for the liberation of Black people, and the relation of this to the ending of all oppression. And this has continued to stand out in BA's leadership role and work over the decades, up to the present. At revcom.us there is a special section, *Bob Avakian on The Oppression of Black People & the Revolutionary Struggle to End All Oppression*, which contains clips from films and selections from the writings of BA on this question. The following are just a few examples of important works and leadership by Bob Avakian, over the past few decades, that speak to this decisive question.

The book *Reflections, Sketches & Provocations*, written by Bob Avakian during the 1980s, contains a number of

commentaries, speaking in a number of dimensions to the oppression of Black people and the struggle against this oppression, including support for rebellions following the murder of Black people by police. This book begins with the essay “Hill Street Bullshit, Richard Pryor Routines, and the Real Deal,” which powerfully exposes how terror against Black people, and other oppressed people, is “part of the job” of the police—and is “a reward” for carrying out the role of maintaining the “law and order” that keeps the oppressed in their desperate and miserable conditions. Going deeper, it speaks to how this is rooted in this system of capitalism-imperialism, which has had this oppression built into it from the very beginning.

In the 1990s, BA raised the idea that there should be a day, every year, when people mobilized to protest police brutality, mass incarceration and repression by the government. This proposal was taken up and a broad coalition, including family members of people killed by police, was formed to initiate, in 1996, the National Day of Protest to Stop Police Brutality, Repression, and the Criminalization of a Generation. At its height, over the next decade, this National Day of Protest, held every October 22nd, rallied thousands of people in dozens of cities across the country. And activities by people who have been part of this coalition have continued since then.

During the past two decades, BA has given a number of filmed speeches, and written articles, essays and books, in which the liberation of Black people and its crucial relation to the communist revolution, aiming for the emancipation of all humanity, has been a major question.

BA’s 2003 speech *Revolution: Why It’s Necessary, Why It’s Possible, What It’s All About*, begins with a searing exposure

and condemnation of lynching, and speaks to the horrific reality of slavery and the oppression of Black people down to today, including the continual murder of Black people by police.³

In 2006, BA gave a series of 7 Talks, in which once again the oppression of Black people, and the struggle for their liberation, is a major theme. One of these 7 Talks, *Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy*, begins by speaking to the experience of Black people in this country; and the question of slavery and the overall oppression of Black people is, of course, a major part of this talk. It is in *Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy* that the following is clearly stated:

There would be no United States as we now know it today without slavery. That is a simple and basic truth.

(This is also the very first statement in *BASICS, from the talks and writings of Bob Avakian*, the handbook for revolution.)³

At the beginning of *BA Speaks: Revolution—Nothing Less!*, in 2012, this point is stated emphatically:

Let's start with just one great crime of this system: police murder—after murder—after murder—of Black people and Latinos, especially youth.³

This is part of the powerful exposure in this speech of the role that continuing murders by police play in enforcing this monstrous system of exploitation and oppression, the system of capitalism-imperialism.

At the beginning of his October 2017 speech *The Trump/Pence Regime Must Go! In the Name of Humanity, We REFUSE To Accept a Fascist America, A Better World IS*

Possible, BA speaks powerfully to the horrors of slavery in this country—including the rape by slavemasters of huge numbers of enslaved women. This speech shows how the murderous oppression of Black people, continuing down to today, is one of the main roots of the fascism that has come to power in this country with the Trump/Pence regime; and, in this speech, BA repeatedly returns to the critical importance of the fight against this oppression.³

BA's 2018 speech *Why We Need An Actual Revolution And How We Can Really Make Revolution* begins this way:

In 2012 in *Revolution—Nothing Less!* I talked about the outrageous murder of Ramarley Graham earlier that same year—shot down in his own house in the Bronx by the New York City police. He was only 18 years old. Do I have to tell you what “race” he was?! His mother kept saying: “This has to STOP!” And his father repeated over and over: “WHY did they kill my son?! WHY did they kill my son?!” New York cops then loudly rallied around their fellow pig who murdered Ramarley in cold blood, viciously taunting Ramarley’s family and loved ones, demonstrating yet one more time the ugly truth that, **in the way this country has been built, and for the powers-that-be in this country, the humanity of Black people has never counted for anything**—they have never been valued as human beings, but only as things to be exploited, oppressed, and repressed. Six years later, and with cold-blooded murders by police continuing in an unbroken chain, I will say again what I said then: **How many more times** does this have to happen? How many more times do the tears and the cries of anguish and anger

have to pour forth from the wounded hearts of people?! How many more times, when another of these outrageous murders is perpetrated by the police, do we have to hear those words that pour gasoline on the already burning wounds: “justifiable homicide, justified use of force” by police?! **How many more?!³**

In that 2018 speech, BA not only powerfully exposes once again the horrific oppression that this system of capitalism-imperialism inflicts on Black people, and on other oppressed people in this country and throughout the world, and the grave danger this system poses to the very future of humanity; he also lays out in this speech (and in a more recent article *A Real Revolution—A Real Chance To Win, Further Developing the Strategy for Revolution³*) the strategic approach that could make it possible for this system to be finally overthrown through a revolution in which millions and millions of people are led to fight to put an end to this system and bring a radically different and much better system into being.

In the *Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America*, authored by BA, a sweeping vision and concrete blueprint for that radically different and much better system is set forth. And the principles and means for finally putting an end, at long last, to the oppression of Black people is a major part of that Constitution.³

This year (2020), BA has written as many as 30 articles in which this decisive question—the oppression, and the struggle for the liberation, of Black people—is a recurring subject.³

In the speeches and writings of BA overall, there is not only powerful, penetrating exposure and uncompromising condemnation of brutal and murderous oppression but, even

more importantly, there is scientific analysis of how all this is rooted in this system of capitalism-imperialism and of the need, the possibility, and the means for making revolution to overthrow this system and finally put an end to all the outrageous and unnecessary suffering that the masses of humanity are continually subjected to under this system.

It is a very precious thing for the oppressed of the earth when they have a leader whose life is dedicated to their emancipation, and who has the determination, and the scientific method, developed over decades, to point the way, and continue to carve out the path, to achieving that emancipation. BA is such a leader. As emphasized in the article *Bob Avakian: A Radically Different Leader—A Whole New Framework For Human Emancipation*:

As a revolutionary leader, BA also embodies this rare combination: someone who has been able to develop scientific theory on a world-class level, while at the same time having a deep understanding of and visceral connection with the most oppressed, and a highly developed ability to “break down” complex theory and make it broadly accessible.³

One of the things that most distinguishes BA’s role as a revolutionary leader is his willingness—indeed, his insistence—on telling people the truth, even when they may not want to hear it. This comes through in the way BA exposes and refutes unscientific ways of thinking—all kinds of “conspiracy” theories and superstitious ideas—that lead people, including the most bitterly oppressed people, away from understanding the world as it actually is, and keep them from seeing not just the need, but the possibility, of radically changing the world, in a way

that will lead to ending oppression. A big problem that BA has taken on, straight-up, is the role of religion as a mental chain on the masses of Black people, and other oppressed people, and the need to break this chain in order to most powerfully wage the struggle to finally be free of all oppression. BA has repeatedly emphasized that, in order to end oppression, “you have to want revolution badly enough to be scientific about it.”

Science means judging whether something is true, or not, by whether there is *evidence* that it actually *corresponds to reality*—and not believing something because it makes you *feel good* to believe it, or not *refusing* to believe something because it makes you *uncomfortable*. In the article *Conspiracy Theories, Fascist “Certitude,” Liberal Paralysis, Or A Scientific Approach To Changing The World*, BA has spoken directly to this problem:

many of the basic masses, who are bitterly oppressed under this system, also are suspicious of and even are inclined to reject science and scientifically-grounded analysis. But this also leaves you vulnerable to all kinds of unfounded “conspiracy theories” and other wrong and harmful ideas, including the notion that nothing people do will make a difference because “it’s all in god’s hands.”³

In the 2014 Dialogue with Cornel West (*REVOLUTION AND RELIGION: The Fight for Emancipation and the Role of Religion*), which took place during the upsurge of protest and rebellion in response to the murder of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, while speaking to the importance of uniting people broadly in the struggle against oppression, including people who hold religious views, BA also emphasized that the revolution that is needed to finally put an end to

oppression must be *led* with a *scientific*, not a religious, outlook and method.³

From the start of the article *Bob Avakian On Emancipation From Mental Slavery And All Oppression*, written this year (2020), BA does not hold back in speaking to these critical questions:

In 1863, mid-way in the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln finally issued the *Emancipation Proclamation* and, as a result of the Civil War, Black people were formally freed from literal, physical slavery. But today the question is: ***When, and how, will Black people finally be free from all forms of slavery and oppression?*** And this poses straight-up this big question:

When will Black people finally emancipate themselves from the mental slavery of religion?!....

Once more, the question is sharply posed: **How can Black people be finally and fully emancipated from centuries of oppression, and how does this relate to ending all oppression, of all people, everywhere?**

The answer is that the possibility of this is real, but it can happen only on the basis of *a scientific approach to changing the world and the scientifically-grounded understanding that this oppression is rooted in and caused by the system of capitalism-imperialism*—the same system that is viciously exploiting and murderously oppressing people not just in this country but all over the world and is plundering the natural environment—and that *this system must and can be*

*overthrown through an actual revolution and replaced by a radically different and far better system: socialism, whose final goal is a communist world, without any oppression or exploitation of anyone, anywhere.*³

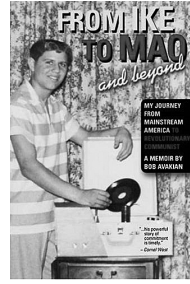
From his early years, forging close personal ties with Black people and increasingly learning about their lived experience, to his development as this rare leader who has brought forth the most advanced scientific revolutionary theory with the new communism—a defining part of the life and work of Bob Avakian has been the liberation of Black people from centuries of oppression, and the understanding of how this relates to, and is a crucial driving force in, the communist revolution to finally abolish every form of oppression and exploitation, everywhere.

BA himself has expressed this in the following poetically powerful statement:

There is the potential for something of unprecedented beauty to arise out of unspeakable ugliness: Black people playing a crucial role in putting an end, at long last, to this system which has, for so long, not just exploited but dehumanized, terrorized and tormented them in a thousand ways—putting an end to this in the only way it can be done—by fighting to emancipate humanity, to put an end to the long night in which human society has been divided into masters and slaves, and the masses of humanity have been lashed, beaten, raped, slaughtered, shackled and shrouded in ignorance and misery.

NOTES

1. *From Ike to Mao and Beyond, My Journey from Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist*, A Memoir by Bob Avakian, Insight Press, 2005.



2. Bob Avakian, *THE NEW COMMUNISM: The science, the strategy, the leadership for an actual revolution, and a radically new society on the road to real emancipation*, Insight Press, first printing, 2016, pp. 321-22. In addition to *THE NEW COMMUNISM*, in other recent works by BA—in particular *Breakthroughs: The Historic Breakthrough by Marx, and the Further Breakthrough with the New Communism, A Basic Summary, and Hope For Humanity On A Scientific Basis, Breaking with Individualism, Parasitism and American Chauvinism*—the oppression and the struggle for the liberation of Black people, and its relation to the emancipation of humanity as a whole, is a prominent subject. These works are available at revcom.us.

3. All of these works are available at revcom.us. (Information about how to acquire the print and e-book editions of *Basics* can be found at revcom.us. Audio of the 7 Talks is available in BA’s Collected Works at revcom.us; and *Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy* has been published in a print edition, the text of which can also be found in BA’s Collected Works at revcom.us.)

The film of the Dialogue between Cornel West and Bob Avakian, *REVOLUTION AND RELIGION: The Fight for Emancipation and the Role of Religion*, is also available in BA’s Collected Works at revcom.us.

The article Conspiracy Theories, Fascist “Certitude,” Liberal Paralysis, Or A Scientific Approach To Changing The World (longer and shorter versions) is available at revcom.us as well.

The importance of Bob Avakian as a revolutionary leader, who has further developed communism as a consistently *scientific* method and approach, is a central theme in *SCIENCE AND REVOLUTION: On the Importance of Science and the Application of Science to*

Society, the New Synthesis of Communism and the Leadership of Bob Avakian, An Interview with Ardea Skybreak. Ardea Skybreak is a scientist with professional training in ecology and evolutionary biology, who is also the author of the important book *THE SCIENCE OF EVOLUTION AND THE MYTH OF CREATIONISM, Knowing What's Real And Why It Matters*. Each of these books by Ardea Skybreak is published by Insight Press, and the Interview with Ardea Skybreak (*SCIENCE AND REVOLUTION*) is also available at revcom.us.

The following articles, written by Bob Avakian this year (2020), which speak to the oppression of Black people and the struggle to end this oppression, are available as well at revcom.us:

Donald Trump—**Genocidal Racist** (Parts 1-10)

Racial Oppression *Can* Be Ended—But *Not Under This System*

Police And Prisons: Reformist Illusions And The Revolutionary Solution

Anything But The Truth—Bob Avakian Exposes Lies, Distortions, Distractions and Evasions About the Murderous Oppression of Black People

Lynching, Murder By Police—Damn This Whole System! We Don't Have To Live This Way!

Bob Avakian On Emancipation From Mental Slavery And All Oppression

Colin Kaepernick, LeBron James And The Whole Truth

Donald Trump Isn't "Tough," He's A Bloated Bag Of Fascist Feces

Bloated Bag Of Fascist Feces Trump Isn't "Tough"—Part 2: Who Really Has Heart?

Trump And Pigs: A Racist Love Affair

Fucker Carlson, Fascist "Fox News" And The Broadcast Of White Supremacy

Bob Avakian on Black Trump Supporters: What If Jews Had Supported Hitler?!

Bob Avakian On: A Beautiful Uprising: Right And Wrong, Methods And Principles

On Statues, Monuments, And Celebrating—Or Ending—
Oppression

*Fascists Today And The Confederacy: A Direct Line, A Direct
Connection Between All The Oppression*

Patriarchy And Male Supremacy, Or Revolution And Ending All
Oppression

Sounding Like Southern Segregationists: It's Not Just Trump—
It's Democrats Too

Bob Avakian Brings Out the Truth: Barack Obama Says Police
Murdering Black People Should Not Be Normal—Unless *He's*
President

Bob Avakian On Ugly Words & Phrases

Bob Avakian On Tulsa Racist Mobs

A Real Revolution—A Real Chance To Win: Further Developing
the Strategy for Revolution

“The More I Engaged BA, The More I Could Not Wait to Get Out of Prison”

**by Joe Veale, revcom,
former member of Black Panther Party**

January 18, 2021

I'll start like this. I “knew” BA even before I met him. We grew up in the same city, in Berkeley, California. The Black Panther Party had started in Oakland which was right next to Berkeley. I knew a lot of the rank and file Panthers, once they got going. They were telling me what they were doing—they had developed this organization and they were trying to make revolution to overthrow the system and to put an end to the oppression of Black people. They were straight up about the fact that racism went with the capitalist system, working to overthrow the system and not working within the system. And they made it clear to me that they was trying to build the revolution not only among Black people, they was trying to build support for it among whites, you know, support for this among whites as well as other different races and nationalities. And in that context, BA's name always came up. It was “Bob Avakian.”

I hadn't met him yet, I wasn't a Panther yet, but I knew about him. That's what they were saying—this is the main person who supported them when they first began. Then when I started to go to Panther rallies, that's what I would see on the stage with these Black revolutionaries, Black militants—BA would be right up there speaking with them about Black liberation and revolution, and supporting the Panthers.

Joining the Panthers

Then when I joined the Panthers—it was in Richmond, California, that's the branch I went in. BA and the Revolutionary Union, which he led, were also there as well. I didn't know this at the time, but they were in Richmond doing their political work. They were answering the call from the Panthers and others to take revolutionary politics out to poor whites. He talks about it in his Memoir (excerpts from the Memoir available at revcom.us).

Richmond was a proletarian city of different races and nationalities. So out in Richmond, I would see him come by the office to talk with the Panther leadership. At times I'd have assignments at the National Office in Berkeley and I'd see him come through there talking to some of the national leaders and everything.

I remember on one occasion it was at this community college, Contra Costa College. BA talks about doing work there and the Panthers did work there also. This is when I first ran into BA face to face. And one of the things that really struck me, because up to this point, I had never met anyone who was white that was so passionate about Free Huey! Huey Newton and Bobby Seale were the two founders of the Black Panther Party. Huey was facing a murder charge for a shootout with Oakland police and they were trying to put him in the gas chamber. BA had Free Huey buttons

all over his clothing—it was really striking to me. He also had Mao Tsetung buttons all over him.

You know, the Panthers were into popularizing Mao's Red Book, but BA was just as passionate, if not more so, about Mao and revolution. I hadn't met anybody—anybody white, to be frank—who was so passionate about Black liberation and communist revolution.

Then I found out that me and BA, we had some of the same friends. He talks about one of these friends—Billy Carr, who was also a friend of mine. Billy was a very good athlete, and a really nice person—he was a little older than me. Billy ended up being in “the life”—I had gotten into it too and I kinda idolized Billy.

But he was a friend of BA's that he knew really well. BA was struggling with Billy trying to get him to do something else with his life. He wasn't blaming Billy for being in the situation that he was in, he was blaming the system and trying to get Billy to see that. He really understood and he had a lot of real affection for people like Billy generally. When I realized that and I learned that BA had genuine friends like that, that they had potential to do something great with their life, this had a big impression on me—I just have to be straight up about it.

Studying Revolution in Prison, Going Up Against Identity Politics

In the early '70s when I was sent to federal prison, these revolutionary prisoners (seven prisoners known as Leavenworth Brothers) struggled with me to read BA's writings. Because I was really angry like [another person in this discussion] was talking about. I was cocky and angry, and nobody could tell me shit. I had a certain attitude towards other prisoners: “y'all trying to win

a longevity contest but you need to be out here trying to make revolution." Anyway, some people were struggling with me: "if you're really serious you got to read BA." The first thing they had me read was *Red Papers* issues #5 and #6, both issues were about the Black National Question or Black liberation. I knew BA had wrote these.

I had already read, studied, and listened to Malcolm X, all of his speeches/recordings over and over. I had read Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. I had read all this stuff from the Panthers and the Panthers' leaders about this contradiction—the oppression of Black people—and what's the solution to it. But when I read *Red Papers* 5 and 6, I recognized that I had never seen this kind of approach, this kind of systematic and scientific approach that BA took to understanding and analyzing it: from the time of slavery, to sharecropping and Jim Crow, to moving into the urban cities, into the proletariat still facing discrimination, segregation, and police terror—the implications of all that for revolution. Black people was now potentially in a more powerful position to contribute to communist revolution to emancipate humanity. I had never read anything like that.

But at that time some people were saying (at least some people that I knew—it was one of the things that was in the movement at that time): "don't read anything from somebody white that's trying to tell you about the struggle of Black people or any other oppressed people because its social chauvinism." It means they are trying to take over "your" struggle. They are trying to "own" it. No! If it is true and scientific it is getting to the root of the problem so that this oppression can be uprooted and overthrown.

You hear a lot of this today in identity politics lingo—it's white privilege, white racism, therefore white people are automatically disqualified and they have no business in here trying to tell

you about what is real or not real. That is bullshit! It's a way of avoiding the central point which is whether what anybody says is true or not, does it correspond to reality or not? You can determine that by taking the evidence-based scientific approach.

It's bullshit on another level. I knew BA, and I knew where his heart was.

And then when I got to reading his writings—I got to know his method of thinking, his thinking process, how he went about engaging reality. When I received that pamphlet while I was in prison, *Revolutionary Work in a Non-Revolutionary Situation*, I thought it was a masterful grasp of the dialectical materialist method—understanding how a thing of one quality can be transformed into a whole different kind of quality. How a non-revolutionary situation can be transformed into a revolutionary situation.

I was in prison and we had our Marxist study group. We were comparing all these people that were saying they were communists and communist leaders. You had different ones—October League, League of Revolutionary Struggle, Communist Workers Party, Black Workers Congress—all these different organizations. You had 'em all, they were all around. We were looking at all of them, what they were saying in relationship to what BA and the RU were saying, as well as comparing it to how Mao, Lenin, and Marx took up the scientific method, how they engaged reality, and who here came the closest to that. Even at that time BA stood out.

The method that he was applying, even though he has developed it and made different ruptures since that time—but you could see, if you was looking for it, that there was some real systematic and a scientific way of getting to the roots of things. He did not put

forward or say something just 'cause it was something to make people feel good, he just told people the truth whether they liked it or not. It was something I really appreciated. He applied this to everything including the oppression of Black people and how it had changed over the years.

Getting Out of Prison and into the Movement

The more I engaged BA, I could not wait to get out of prison. Before that, I didn't give a fuck whether I got out or not. Before that I was saying: if I only live five more minutes it's going to be on my terms, whether I'm in here or whether I'm out there—fuck it! But once I started getting into... I wanted to get out. I wanted to get with the leadership of BA. I wanted to meet him, I wanted to get with the Revolutionary Communist Party because I thought: hey, we have the leader and the leadership to really make revolution that we was trying to do in the '60s.

When I came out of prison in the late '70s, what immediately happened was the Bob Avakian and Mao Tsetung Defendants court case. He was part of a demonstration in DC that was viciously attacked for defending Mao and revolution in China and was calling out the capitalist coup after Mao's death. BA himself was facing hundreds of years in prison. Because I knew that we had something special here in terms of a leader, I volunteered immediately to go to DC to be one of the volunteers. I said: we can't allow BA to be snatched away from us. I'll go anywhere, do anything politically, to prevent that from happening. And 200 of us volunteers went to DC. We went there to politically "turn DC upside down"—again, this is in BA's Memoir. We were passionate about that, even as we were just beginning to grasp what we have in the leadership of BA.

I was brand new. I had just got out of prison, my parole had just ended the day before and the very next day I was on the plane to DC as a volunteer. So, I'm there, and I think it was a speech BA had just given to the volunteers. I'm standing in the back talking to somebody, he comes up to me. He starts talking to me about some of things we were all studying at that time about the Collapse of the Second Communist International. We studied why during Lenin's time, Lenin was the only one who led the masses to go for revolution. They had other parties that were bigger and had even greater influence but were capitulating and leading the people in different countries to take up guns to defend the fucking imperialist fatherland and shit like that, during World War 1.

BA just walked up to me and started talking to me about that and some of the lessons that we should draw from that. I was just kinda... I have to say I was kinda taken aback because he came up and was talking to me. But BA was so genuine, he had no airs, he was just so genuine. I was just talking to him... even though he's this really advanced world-class leader, when you're talking to him it's like you're talking to your best friend, it's like talking to a friend—that's just how he comes off to me, which again, just really struck me. This always has struck me about him.

Back to what I was saying about his friend Billy, even the thing with the Panthers, when I listen to BA talk about it, he understands it better than I do. I was in the Panthers, I went through it, but he understands it. When I went to prison that's why I was so angry because of what had happened to the Panthers. But BA had a rational and a scientific understanding about why they split apart, and departed from the road of revolution. Again, not blaming them, appreciating the very brutal and murderous repression they faced—but more so, recognizing

how they didn't make the leap to become scientific about revolution.

Nobody in the '60s came up with a real strategy that can lead millions and millions to defeat and overthrow this system, what to replace it with, what kind of leadership do we need, what kind of methods and approach does that leadership needs to be based upon.

So it's the same thing like what I was saying about Billy or with those youth in Chicago when we showed them the video clips of *BA Through the Years*. BA resonates when people hear him, especially the basic masses, as well as others. When they hear him it resonates so profoundly because he understands their situation, what they are going through, and what is the way out—better than you do.

You may be going through and suffering in this way, but it is like going to a doctor, a good doctor. You're the one suffering but they understand what the solution is to put an end to that suffering better than you do and better than you can. Because he has done the work. People need to engage this work and become followers of BA.

“There has never been a leader like this”

But these are some of the things that have really always struck me about BA. It always struck me on a real personal level. Anytime I was ever able to talk to him, and then read and study his works, it's so striking that there has never been a leader like this. I think it's really rare. Especially when I was in prison, and other times, I would just hope that we could get a leader that could really lead the masses to get out of this shit and really navigate through all the twists and turns. Because in any revolution there are always

difficulties, there's always unanticipated things that pop up, but you got to have a method and approach that allows you to be able to work through that and not be thrown by that. And that's what I see with BA.

When I was in my prison cell, I used to think that either I was going to do something crazy when I got out or I was just going to go to China and live because Mao was still alive at that time. But I hated this system, I hated what it was doing to the masses, not just here but all around the world. But I didn't think we could get that leadership on that level of a Mao, a Lenin, or a Marx. Then I started realizing that we had it, we have it. And now, it's developed more beyond what it ever had been in the history of the communist revolution, because BA has made this science much more thoroughly and consistently scientific, to be in synch with reality and how it is changing, and how it CAN be changed to emancipate humanity.

I would read some of things from the first wave of the world revolution—Marx making the first great breakthrough in our understanding in the struggle for human emancipation—but there were definite limits and weaknesses in the first stage of communism. Sometimes I would read those things and get to a place where I'd say, "oh yeah, now we can relax because there's a kingdom of peace and forever harmony"—that's a vision would come to my mind. But I don't ever get that from BA.

Through this revolution humanity can surpass being divided into antagonistic groups—but there's always going to be matter in motion, there's always going to be struggle, even if it's not always antagonistic, that's just reality. That's what's so fucking refreshing. Because when I was in prison people would talk... some of these people, they was eloquent, they'd been studying Marxism—but it was really dogmatic. And I'd listen to them talk

and my jaw would just drop because they'd be talking about how the working out of history is pre-determined, that feudalism would be negated by capitalism, and capitalism is going to be negated by socialism—and it was all a kind of worked out in a one/two-step harmony. Real dogmatic and shit like that. Some of that was in that first phase of communism, and BA has gotten rid of all of that with his new synthesis of communism. You don't find none of that religiosity, religious mantra and shit like that in it and stuff. To me, that's why I think we can do this—with him, and with his leadership, because of that.



Bob Avakian: A Radically Different Leader— A Whole New Framework for Human Emancipation

Bob Avakian (BA) is the most important political thinker and leader in the world today.

Bob Avakian is completely different than the endless stream of bourgeois politicians who are put forward as “leaders,” whose goal is to maintain one variation or another of this system of capitalism-imperialism that is founded on and perpetuates itself through cruel and literally life-stealing exploitation, murderous oppression, and massive destruction, in all parts of the world. BA is a revolutionary who bases himself on the scientific understanding that this system must finally be overthrown through an organized struggle involving millions of people, and replaced with a system that is oriented to and capable of meeting the most fundamental needs of humanity and enabling humanity to become fit caretakers of the earth.

Bob Avakian is the architect of a whole new framework of human emancipation, the new synthesis of communism, which is popularly referred to as the “new communism.”

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