



**Getting
Over
The
Hump**

by Bob Avakian

*Chairman of the Revolutionary
Communist Party, USA*

Reprinted from
the *Revolutionary Worker* newspaper

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Ruling the Court Is Not A Straight Line Thing

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There is a very important statement by Mao in his essay "Where Do Correct Ideas Come From": sometimes, he points out, those representing the advanced class can lose out in a particular battle or a particular encounter, not because they are incorrect or have made serious errors but because at the given time the balance of forces is against them. But, he goes on to say, they are bound to win in the long run. We have seen many examples where the proletariat has lost in a battle, or even a major encounter such as the battle between revolution and counter-revolution in China which resulted in the revisionist coup and the restoration of capitalism.

This has been something of a stumbling block in the International Communist Movement. Various forces have had trouble coming to grips with the fact that you can be correct at a given time—as Mao said, you can represent the advanced class and not make any fundamental errors—but you can still lose in a particular round of struggle because at the time the balance of forces is against you, even though you are bound to win in the long run. There has been some disorientation in terms of failing to grasp this. People might say about the struggle in China, "Well how could the 'Four'* be correct if they lost? If you are correct you are supposed to win." But this viewpoint does not recognize that what is involved is an actual *class struggle* which is rooted in

* The "Four" refers to the revolutionary leadership who supported Mao Tsetung in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution— including Chiang Ching [Jiang Qing] and Chang Chun-chiao [Zhang Chunqiao]. They were called the "Gang of Four" by the counter-revolutionaries in China, led by Deng Xiaoping, and they were arrested in the coup d'etat which overthrew revolutionary rule in China after Mao's death and put China back on the capitalist road.

underlying material forces and contradictions and that if we could always win every battle then it would be very easy to get to communism.

The notion that if we don't make any serious mistakes we are always bound to win, or to advance, and the converse of this—if we suffer a defeat or setback it must be because we made serious mistakes—runs up against the whole dialectical materialist orientation represented by Mao's concentrated formulation: "The future is bright, but the road is tortuous." According to some people's logic, Mao should have said "the future is bright and the road is a straight line." This logic fails to grasp that you can be correct and still lose a particular battle or round of struggle. In emphasizing this, my point is not to offer an excuse for being incorrect, for not caring about being correct or just saying "que sera sera," whatever happens will happen.

So we have to be *materialist* and *dialectical* in our approach. We have to correctly assess the objective stage that we are operating on, including the strengths and weaknesses of ourselves and the enemy, at any given time. And with both victories and defeats, advances and setbacks, we have to correctly analyze the objective factors and the subjective factors (including our mistakes) and the interrelation between the objective and subjective factors, including the determination of which of these was principal in the particular circumstances.

But, without falling into determinism and fatalism, it is very important to grasp the essence and the dialectical materialist basis of Mao's statement that, even if they do not make serious errors, the representatives of the advanced class can lose sometimes, although they are bound to win in the long run. It is very interesting and significant that Mao makes this statement in an essay ("Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?") whose subject is the basic materialist theory of knowledge.

Basketball and History

Now in talking with the masses about the "demise of communism," we have to start from the ground floor and go deeply into the actual contradictions facing the proletariat on a world scale—and what it's going to take to put the imperialists on the run. It might be helpful to develop and use popular analogies, drawn from everyday life. For example, drawing from an arena that is dear to me, we could make an analogy to basketball.

If an expansion team, in its first or second year of existence, were somehow thrust into the NBA championship, it probably wouldn't

make it right away, but that doesn't mean it can't win the championship in the long run. And, on a much more profound level, it's also not surprising if the first attempts at socialist revolution are defeated, and this doesn't at all show that this revolution cannot ultimately prevail. Of course, the NBA is fake, anyway, so maybe we should come up with other, better analogies.

For example, if a bunch of young teenagers go down to the playground courts and there's nobody older around right then, these younger kids might be able to rule the courts for a while; but then if the older, bigger, stronger players start coming around, these youngsters might be able to hold out and win a couple of games, but they're bound to lose and have to get off the court before the day is over. Yet if we look at it strategically, these young kids will grow up. They will grow bigger and stronger and they will also learn from their experience. And in the meantime the bigger, stronger players will get older, and actually get weaker and slow down—they won't be able to hold off the younger players forever.

And, by analogy, the rising proletariat, with the first breakthroughs it makes—the first socialist states it creates, encircled by still more powerful imperialism—may be defeated in the short run, but the imperialist system, and all systems of exploitation and oppression, are growing old, while the international proletariat and its revolutionary struggle is on the rise and is learning from its defeats as well as its great achievements, and is bound before too long to gain the upper hand and then drive the exploiters and their system off the court of history, once and for all.

This is the material foundation under our slogan "Fear Nothing, Be Down For The Whole Thing." It is with this kind of approach and methodology that we can understand, apply, and boldly assert Mao's concentrated formulation that "thoroughgoing materialists are fearless."

What Will It Take To Get Rid of This Obsolete System?

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Let's dig into this whole question of the "death (or demise) of communism," "the end of the cold war," "the victory of the West in the Cold War," "the triumph of capitalism over communism," etc. etc., blah, blah, blah. To do this in a thoroughgoing and deep way, it is necessary to "step back" and analyze this question with some historical perspective and historical sweep as well as examining it in terms of how it fits into the major changes taking place in this period in world economics and world politics.

This phenomenon, which the imperialists and reactionaries celebrate as "the demise of communism," is an important part of the political terrain as well as being related to some changes in the U.S. military "force structure" and other changes. In other words, a lot of the "technological revolution" that we are hearing so much about these days—and major technological changes are taking place—was in a certain way and in certain aspects "bottled up." It couldn't find as much expression as now because of the international configuration, or alignment of forces, that had to do with the "Cold War," the inter-imperialist contradiction and the confrontation between the U.S.-led bloc and the Soviet-led bloc.

But with the "end of the Cold War"—with the break-up of the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc—while there hasn't been a restructuring and expansion in the economy in the way there was after World War 2, certain things have been unleashed in terms of the operation of capital internationally. And certain technological changes which were obviously already in motion have been further unleashed. The U.S.

imperialists in particular, and also others in their bloc, have been freed up to do certain things that they couldn't do previously because of the political or geo-strategic requirements of the confrontation with the Soviet bloc. (And, on the other hand, from the Soviet side, there also have been some obviously very dramatic changes, which I am not going to try to get into here.)

Getting Rid of Class Society Worldwide

Now stepping back to get some historical perspective, we have to confront straight-up the contradiction between the fact that in world historic terms the capitalist-imperialist system is obsolete and has long since ceased to play a positive role in human affairs and world history, yet at the same time it will take a whole historical era to get rid of it, to eliminate this system and its material-social basis, worldwide. The reality that it is going to take a whole historical era to abolish class society and its material as well as ideological basis, worldwide, is also a material and historical fact.

We have to look at both aspects of this, we can't just look at the fact that from a world historical standpoint the capitalist-imperialist system is done for, that it's outlived any positive role it can play overall in human affairs and in the development of society. That's one very powerful, strategic reality—that is a material reality, that's not just an idea. But, on the other hand, a secondary but very powerful material reality—the other aspect of the situation historically speaking—is that it is going to require, as we are learning more and more deeply, a very long and very complex and tortuous historical era of struggle to get rid of this system. It will require a process of struggle, very profound struggle, to eliminate this system and its material-social basis worldwide.

And, as an important particularity within that, there is the very stark fact that in the U.S., in one of the main citadels of this system (or in "the belly of the beast," as we like to say) we cannot right now rise up and overthrow this system, as much as we might want to. And, further, we have to deal with the reality that the opportunity to do so depends, primarily—not entirely but primarily—on qualitative changes in the objective situation.

I say primarily but not entirely because we should also recognize that the world situation includes, as a very important factor, changes brought about by revolutionary struggles internationally, and not just

changes in the economy or similar things. So it isn't like the proletariat has a passive position or role in relationship to this.

And one of the points we have stressed before and must grasp firmly is that a period of non-revolutionary situation in one country may be a period of very acute revolutionary crisis and struggle, or one marked by an advancing protracted people's war, in many other parts of the world. So it is never a static or uniform picture—it is only relatively that you are talking about a non-revolutionary situation, if you are keeping in mind the world as a whole. And of course it's also only relative in the sense that there are also always revolutionary factors even in a non-revolutionary situation within particular countries. So it is never absolutely non-revolutionary, even when a revolutionary situation is not fully developed or there hasn't been a qualitative leap to an all-out revolutionary situation.

Still, a qualitative change in the objective situation—within the country itself, in the context of the overall world situation—is the primary thing that has to occur in order to be able to launch an armed struggle which has a real chance of winning in a country like the U.S. We can never have a guarantee of success—and we should never look for one—but we must have a situation where there is a real chance of winning, “in the belly of the beast” as well as in other powerful imperialist citadels. And more generally, even in Third World countries where a protracted people's war is launched, there will have to be changes in the objective situation before they can win nationwide power. There have to be objective and also subjective changes before complete victory can be won—although the advance of the protracted people's war is one of the main ways that such changes will be brought about. Such is the materialist dialectics of the situation.

Now, in a different way in the imperialist countries—and in a concentrated way where you are directly up against U.S. imperialism, in its own “citadel”—being able to seize power does depend primarily on qualitative changes in the objective situation. Yet, here again, we also do have to remember that the objective situation includes, as a very important factor, changes brought about by revolutionary struggles internationally and secondarily, although very importantly, it depends on our all-round revolutionary work in the U.S. To emphasize it once more, we are not in a passive position—we are not determinists in the mechanical sense—we don't think this will all just work out “by itself”

and we can just sit around and try to live a bourgeois lifestyle—or survive however we can, or whatever we might think of doing—until the proper time, and then somehow we can step in and make revolution. And in fact we wouldn't want to anyway. If we weren't consistently working for revolution, we wouldn't recognize the opening or have the willingness and eagerness to seize the opening for revolution when it did occur.

Objective and Subjective: Talking Straight With the Masses

In all this, it is very important to grasp that the objective and the subjective are a unity of opposites. And while overall the objective is principal, there is continual interpenetration between the two and the transformation of the one into the other—of the objective into the subjective, and of the subjective into the objective. By the “objective” I mean the general conditions set by the world situation overall and the economic-social-political situation within the particular country, and the “subjective” means in particular the subjective factor, the political work and struggle that is carried out by class-conscious revolutionaries led by the Party. So this is a unity of opposites—the objective and the subjective factors—and there is a continual inter-penetration and transformation of one into the other.

The work that we carry out changes the objective situation. It gets transformed into part of the objective situation. And the objective gets transformed into the subjective in terms of how the objective factor impinges upon the Party—its outlook, its line, its policy, and what we have to do in response to the objective situation in order to transform it. This is an important general principle of dialectical materialism, and there is an important application in terms of how we view the relationship between the objective situation and the subjective factor (referring again specifically to our Party and its conscious political work and revolutionary struggle together with the masses).

I stress this because sometimes we can get into a situation where we emphasize the one aspect and not the other. In other words, sometimes we talk to the masses in various forms—we carry out our political work and put forward our line—and we present to them the aspect of reality, the strategic world historical aspect, that this system is obsolete, that it needs to be done away with and can be done away with, that we

could solve all these problems that the system cannot solve—all of which is true and extremely important. In no way do I want to diminish the importance of that. We need to do a lot more of that, not less, so let me be clear on that. But we also have to present the rest of reality, which the masses even spontaneously in certain ways are acutely aware of.

They are acutely aware of the fact that it is not an easy prospect to do what we are talking about doing. To a certain degree they view this difficulty one-sidedly or they misunderstand what the actual character of the difficulty is, because spontaneously they don't have a correct understanding of this. But they have a lot of aspects of correct understanding. They know that this is not something that you can do with a snap of the finger. They know that you are up against "all that"—however that is actually conceived.

That's also material reality: it's not just material reality that the system has its fundamental contradiction, that both within particular countries as well as on a world scale this fundamental contradiction is assuming very acute expression and that it cries out for resolution through proletarian revolution. That is all very true and very powerful—an important part, the strategic aspect of material reality. But it is also part of material reality that it is going to take a whole historical process to get rid of this system, and that in a country like the U.S. it is going to take a lot of work and struggle and a lot of changes in the objective situation before it will be possible to overthrow this system.

We Can't Have a Revolution in the U.S. Right Now But We Can Have a Revolution

And this is something we also have to put out honestly and straightforwardly to the masses—and not only present this to them but involve them in grappling with this question and how we actually go about resolving this contradiction through all the steps and stages that the revolutionary process has to go through. We shouldn't try to hide this from the masses, we should openly, and in a certain way, boldly put this problem before the masses—let them know we are aware of this contradiction, that we don't think this is easy. We don't think we can do this right now, although we do think, we do know, that we *can* do it. We have to recognize and we have to acknowledge to the masses that this is a gigantic and very difficult task—we have to put this straight out to the masses—so that, among other things, they know we aren't crazy!

I was listening to a tape of a forum in a proletarian area of Los Angeles. In the question/answer part of the forum, a guy stood up and said: "You're talking about revolution and all of this kind of stuff, but they got all this and they got all that—man you're crazy." Now our answer to questions like that can't be to act as though we think we can do it right now and that we can do it easily. This kind of simplistic idea was not put forward in this forum. But the way the question came up reflects a certain understanding (as well as a certain lack of understanding) on the part of the masses. And they have a need to know, in a certain sense, that we know this—that we are taking into account the real difficulties involved. The masses need to know that just because we are out propagating the need and the possibility of revolution doesn't mean that we fail to understand how difficult this is, what a complex process it is. On the contrary, we have a very profound understanding of what we are up against and we still know that we can do it. That is what the masses need to understand. That is the synthesis that we need to bring to them.

So the masses need to know this—we have to dig into it more with them, we have to make this part of the understanding of the masses—the dialectical materialist understanding of why it is that on the one hand we can't make revolution right now in this country, but strategically we can make revolution. That it is going to take a whole historical era to arrive to communism, but we can carry out that whole historical struggle and arrive at communism ultimately.

Bite by Bite

So in a certain sense, speaking of the struggle in the U.S. itself—although not in the same sense as where the road is correctly protracted people's war—we also have to have the approach of eating a meal bite by bite. Mao pointed this out about waging protracted war—he said we can't defeat the enemy all at once, we have to defeat him piece by piece, bit by bit—he used the analogy (or the metaphor) of eating a meal bite by bite to illuminate the process of carrying out a protracted struggle—in that case a protracted war—to gradually wear down and then finally finish off the enemy. And, although our road isn't protracted people's war, we also have to have the same kind of approach. We have to recognize that we can't take the whole meal down at once. We have to have a systematic approach and an approach proceeding through

definite steps and definite leaps to arrive at the point where together with the changes in the objective situation the revolutionary forces could launch an armed struggle— an ai/cw (armed insurrection followed by civil war)—that has a real prospect of winning.

The masses need to understand this.

So this is a very important point of orientation—dealing correctly with this contradiction that on the one hand the capitalist system is outmoded and needs to be overthrown and superseded by communism, worldwide, but on the other hand this is going to require an entire historical epoch of struggle to achieve. And more specifically it is not possible now—and it will require qualitative changes in the objective situation before it could be time—to launch the ai/cw to seize power in the U.S. This isn't just a theoretical question of world historic sweep, although it is that, but it also has very direct implications for all of our work, including not only propaganda and agitation, but all of our work overall with the masses.

The Problem of Lowered Sights

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Let's talk more about the "death of communism." This theme is a big part of the current political and ideological terrain, and it has definite negative aspects that we have to deal with—and transform. On the other hand, running counter to the tactical gains that the ruling class and reactionaries have realized from the so-called "death" or "demise" of communism—which they have attempted to magnify through their propaganda barrage and the use of all their technology and media—is that now the *reality* of open and more unbridled capitalism has set in in the former Soviet empire, and masses of people have begun to rebel in various ways against this.

This is very strikingly revealed in places like Poland. Now look, let's face it, I don't give a good god damn about the guy who is head of state of Poland right now. He is just another bourgeois politician—nothing really in the interests of the masses happened with his election. But, let's put it this way: who couldn't get some "artistic pleasure" out of watching that scoundrel Lech Walesa get thrown on his ass out of office. There was something very poetic about that I have to say, even though it involved no fundamental change in the society—and was only a change from one bourgeois representative to another. But the results of that election reflected the dissatisfaction of the masses with the more openly capitalist regimes that have replaced the old phony communist regimes. In the former Soviet Union right now and in countries that were part of its bloc, such as Poland, you have this phenomenon.

In the Presidential elections in Russia, the U.S. did quite a lot to bolster Yeltsin against his main challenger, the head of the so-called Communist Party. And still Yeltsin had trouble winning the election. They tried to make a big deal of how he won decisively, but actually he got 60 percent of the vote, and the representative of the former and refurbished Communist Party got something like 40 percent of the vote—even with all of the resources of the Russian bourgeoisie and the U.S. bourgeoisie behind Yeltsin. This is a reflection of the fact that some of the luster of the more open and unbridled capitalism—insofar as it had any luster in Russia—has come off pretty quickly even for some of the middle strata and certainly for the basic masses. They had been living under capitalism anyway, in the revisionist, phony socialist, state-capitalist form since the time of Khrushchev, but now they have run into the material-social reality of living under an undisguised form of capitalism.

Finding Out About Capitalism

I remember one of the passages I really liked in the statement the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement put out to the masses in these Eastern European countries once the Soviet Empire started unraveling a few years back. (And, to my understanding, various vehicles were found to get this statement out to the masses in Eastern Europe pretty broadly, and it got some favorable response there.) Now one of the parts of that statement that I really liked was where it addressed itself to the masses along these lines: If you think that there is going to be all these wondrous things happening now with the advent of open capitalist rule, you are going to be in for a big shock and it is not going to be a pleasant shock. And it added something to this effect: If you want to know what's in store now, you can go and ask someone living in a housing project in Chicago or one of the equivalent places in London. A few other examples were mentioned, and then came the part I really liked: "Or you can just wait and find out for yourselves!" That was one of my favorite parts of the RIM statement—it had just the right pizzazz and the right substance to go with that pizzazz, the right content.*

*The RIM statement "Cast Away Illusions! Revolution—All the Way!: An Appeal to the People of Eastern Europe from the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement" is available in *World to Win* magazine Issue No. 15, 1990.

And that is exactly what is unfolding now—people are in fact beginning to find out for themselves what this more undisguised and unbridled capitalism is all about and the hell and the horror it really means. And they didn't have to wait very long to find this out. Not that revisionism was any better for the people, but with this undisguised, unbridled capitalism has come not only a lot of chaos and breakdown economically but also direct attacks on the old "social welfare" measures that were extended as concessions to the working class in the Soviet Union. What is going on in Russia now parallels in some significant ways the process in the U.S. whereby the "New Deal" and "war on poverty" social contract and social programs are being gutted and the ruling class is moving to forge a new and different "social contract" to attempt to maintain the stability of its rule.

And as all this has happened in the former Soviet Union (and former Soviet bloc), we have seen some of the luster coming off all this triumphalism of "the victory of capitalism," the "end of history," etc., etc. ad nauseam. Not that the imperialists and reactionaries are going to stop pumping this stuff out there, but some of the luster has come off even for many of the people who were initially more attracted to it.

A Lowering of Sights

Still, in the short run, one of the things that has happened as a result of the collapse of the Soviet empire—which is presented as the demise and failure of communism because of its own inherent weaknesses and defects—is that this has had a real effect, materially and also ideologically. It has had an effect specifically in lowering people's sights, politically and ideologically. This is true even for some more advanced people. This has been the case among various strata, finding different expressions among different strata and social groups. We have to take this into account—this is part of the political terrain and in an overall sense part of the objective conditions that we have to deal with.

This is related to the fact that the initial rejection of revisionism, as these former Soviet bloc countries became unraveled, did not take the form or expression of the immediate demand for *genuine* socialism but a gravitation toward bourgeois democracy and undisguised and unbridled capitalism. This is especially so among intellectuals and other more privileged strata, but it also had effect among more basic masses.

We have seen this phenomenon at work—this lowering of sights

and this gravitation, at least initially, towards more of a belief that capitalism was the way to go. So, now, when people see the “death of communism,” but then on the other hand they also see some of the luster coming off of “the triumph of capitalism” and they feel the effects of what’s happening with the economy in the former Soviet bloc—the immediate spontaneous reaction is not to say “We want revolution to overthrow this system and bring back socialism, *real* socialism.” People go in many different directions spontaneously—including, as a significant social phenomenon, a number of people moving toward the right. Or they simply become more passive, more paralyzed politically and ideologically. They lower their sights in terms of what they think is possible and therefore desirable. And this applies not just in the former Soviet Union and the countries of its bloc, but more broadly throughout the world. People have been propagandized with this whole notion, this unscientific summation of what’s happened in the Soviet Union, and that it represents the “death or failure of communism.”

And many people have lowered their sights as a result of all this—lowered their vision as to what is possible, and what is desirable—because there is a unity of opposites between how people view possible and desirable. What is considered to be impossible also tends to get transformed into being regarded as not desirable in certain ways. If you get your sights lowered, even things you might abstractly or in another context think are good ideas become *not* good ideas because you see them as not possible, and to put your energy into that is not worthwhile and is in fact bad. This is the negative dialectic that can set in. Of course, this is far from the universal reaction. Not everyone responds this way, and even for those who do—or certainly for many of them—this reaction is not permanent.

It is perhaps ironic that precisely in the countries of the former Soviet bloc, after only a few years of more open unbridled and undisguised capitalism, masses of people are revolted by and revolting against this in various ways. Yet and still, this phenomenon of the lowering of sights, politically and ideologically, is an important aspect of the current “social terrain” that we have to reckon with in our work.

This affects how we have to work and what work we have to do to raise people’s sights, raise them to a qualitatively different vision. Here, obviously, we cannot rely on spontaneity. What is required is giving people a correct understanding of this so-called “death of communism.”

We have to get into the reality of the *defeat*, not failure, of the first attempts at creating and developing socialist society, in the Soviet Union (where capitalism was actually restored several decades ago) and then in China (where it was restored two decades ago). And we have to get into the *real* and profound historical lessons that must be drawn from this, not the lies and distortions that the imperialists and reactionaries are so noisily and incessantly trumpeting. It requires giving people an historical perspective on this from a correct, in other words a proletarian class, viewpoint.

Against the ‘Everything Is for Sale’ Morality

A related point here, which I think is potentially very important, is that we certainly have something going for us on the positive side. And we have to figure out how to maximize this. Because with all this sort of unbridled and unrestrained commodification that’s going on, including in the culture and other aspects of the superstructure, people are becoming *sickened* by it, even where they don’t have a scientific understanding of it.

Everything is openly and crudely a commodity these days, even in a qualitatively greater way than before. Everything has a commercial tag associated with it very directly, brazenly. Put simply, everything and everybody appears to be for sale. This is the going “ethos” or spirit of the times—it is being aggressively put forward by the ruling class. And, on the other hand, the effects of this are far from positive for the great majority of people—even when they get swept up in it, the effects of it are far from positive for the great majority of people. It has many negative consequences for different strata of people in different ways.

I think that, for various people, particularly though not only in the middle strata, one of the attractions of “traditional morality” and the Christian Right is that they appear to be putting forward some values and morals in contrast to this crass “materialism,” that is, consumerism and commercialism (everything and everybody for sale). Recently, I was reading an article about the appeal of this right-wing ideology and the people being interviewed were talking about how they want something more than just consumerism and all that.

Of course, particularly in the middle strata, while they say they want something more than all this consumerism, they’re not so inclined

toward *giving up* the consumerism. That's the beauty of this fascist ideology and all this "traditional morality" from the point of view of the bourgeoisie—it does not really call on people to give up all this consumerism and dog-eat-dog. And that makes it a lot easier for this ideology to get over with people—spontaneity goes a lot more with it. This is one of the appeals of these people, these Christian Fascists—they appear to be putting forward, and they assert that they're putting forth, transcendental basic values in contrast to a lot of the madness that's been unleashed by what's going on in the material base of society and by associated things in the superstructure that are being promoted by the bourgeoisie to a significant degree. (Even the criminal activity that the masses get caught up in is, to a large degree, encouraged by the ruling class in various ways *and* used as a rationalization for imposing even harsher police state rule, particularly over the masses in the ghettos and barrios.)

But in opposition to this fascist ideology and bourgeois ideology generally, *our* ideology and our motivation really stands out: not being self-centered; not being selfish and looking out for yourself (for "number one") above everything else; not being motivated by or getting into petty rivalries and back-stabbing; having a definite integrity consistent with our strategic objectives, in other words, integrity in the sense that we mean what we say, and we say what we mean, that we're not for sale, that we can't be bought. This is not to say that no individual will ever be broken or sell out, but collectively speaking we cannot be tortured or bludgeoned away from our stand, speaking of the Party collectively. All this is very powerful and inspiring to masses of people as they learn about it and see it in practice. It stands out against all this unbridled "everything for sale-ism" and all the rotten corruption associated with this.

As people run into the concrete results and manifestations of what's going on in the economy and what the ruling class is promoting through the superstructure, the contrasting fact that we're not for sale, that we're operating out of some more overriding principle which is objectively in conformity with the interests of the masses and with where society needs to go—this is a potentially very powerful "pole of attraction" for people.

It's not just that we have some good ideas and we're principled people, although that's true, but what we're fighting for is objectively the only possible resolution of the underlying contradictions of society

that's actually in the interests of the masses of people and ultimately of humanity as a whole. This has a potentially very powerful "attractive pull," exactly in a situation where people are thirsty for something that makes sense out of everything going on and all the craziness that is being unleashed.

A Dramatic Contrast

We shouldn't think that this is going to solve all of our problems by any means, but we also shouldn't underestimate this as a positive factor that's going for us. In other words, to put it simply, what we're about stands out in very sharp contrast to the bankrupt ideology and dog-eat-dog mentality and underlying dog-eat-dog and exploitative reality promoted by and promoting the ruling class—what they're grounded in and what they promote.

Today those bourgeois values are assuming the most putrid forms, and the most putrid forms are very consciously being promoted by the ruling class in order to degrade and demoralize the masses of people. This is having an effect.

Sometimes I get to see tapes of some of these tabloid shows in the U.S. And it's very clear when you watch them that, besides all the general bullshit, there is a conscious design and policy to promote this putrid stuff in order to disorient and demoralize a lot of people and to get them to see things in terms of the "flaws in human nature" and how messed up everybody is—and also to get them to gravitate more toward traditional morality and the traditional social relations that this morality serves. This whole way of thinking is directly opposed to people gaining the consciousness that the problems in society, and in people, have their source, fundamentally, in the underlying production and social relations and in the ruling ideology that serves those relations of exploitation and oppression.

So what we're all about stands out in very sharp relief. One of the main objectives of the Morality essays* is to speak to that contradiction: on one hand to lay bare the ugly reality and essence of "traditional morality" and the underlying relations that it's upholding, and on the other hand to put forward our ideology and our morality as a beacon

*"Preaching from a Pulpit of Bones: The Reality Beneath William Bennett's 'Virtues,' Or We Need Morality, But Not *Traditional Morality*" and "Putting an End to 'Sin' Or We Need Morality, But Not *Traditional Morality* (Part 2)." Excerpts from these essays—including a series on "What Is Communist Morality"—appeared in the RW from January 28, 1996 through May 12, 1996.

to inspire people towards something higher which is based on a material reality that's strategically more powerful than what capitalism has going for it. Our communist morality and our ideology overall does represent the actual necessary resolution of these underlying contradictions, in the interests of the broad masses of people not just in the U.S., but worldwide.

At the same time, it is important for us both to think more deeply about *and* to speak openly to the masses about all this—including the world-historical problems of the proletarian revolution. We should put it out openly to the masses and involve them in grappling with these contradictions, on the basis of what we call our “strategic double-c”: our strategic *contempt* for the enemy, and our strategic *confidence* in the masses and in our cause.

We should do this especially as we grapple more and get more understanding of these questions, but it's a dialectical process. We don't want to go off into a corner and refine all our understanding and only *then* speak to the masses. That would result in another case of the more we do that the *stupider* we'll get. It's a back-and-forth process of refining our understanding while speaking to the masses about the world historical problems that have been encountered by the international proletariat to this point in the struggle to move from the bourgeois epoch to the epoch of world communism, in other words, to carry forward the world proletarian revolution. We have to be speaking to the masses about these questions, rather than ducking them. Strategically we should welcome these questions. We should welcome the fact that these contradictions are sharply posing themselves.

The fact that there have been temporary setbacks in the world proletarian revolution is a real problem for us. Obviously, we're still feeling the effects of the loss of China in many different ways, but that's part of the objective reality that we have to confront and transform through revolutionary struggle. Yes, it poses problems for us, but we shouldn't be ducking them. We should be welcoming questions and challenges about this, and we should be speaking to the masses about them and giving the masses our understanding and learning from the questions that they pose, to help deepen our understanding as well as theirs.

The Problems Of Uneven Development And “Leftovers”

Revolutionary Worker #936, December 14, 1997

One important dimension of the world-historical problems encountered by the international proletariat and the world proletarian revolution can be summarized in terms of two major, and interrelated, contradictions. In various ways we have spoken to these problems before, but it is very important to continually return to them and deepen our understanding of them, as well as our all-around understanding of this whole process and its contradictory motion and struggle.

The first of these two major contradictions is the uneven development of the world proletarian revolution and the fact that, up until this point, proletarian revolutions have triumphed in one (or a few) countries at a time—so that they have emerged and, for some time, are very likely to emerge and exist in a world still dominated by imperialism. They will exist in a context—a “grand strategic context,” if you will—of imperialist “encirclement.” So that's one expression of the world historic problem of carrying forward the world proletarian revolution and advancing to communism.

Leftovers from the Old Society

The other world-historical problem involves the contradictions within socialist society that are “left over” from capitalism (and previous class society) and that characterize socialist society as a transition to communism—that mark and shape this whole transition. One concentrated expression of this could be characterized this way: For a certain historical period, even after the seizure of power and the initial socialization

of ownership, at least to a certain level, the functions of leadership and administration, and more generally the tasks that are associated with intellectual work, are still going to be the main province of a minority of society. This was true, for example, in the Soviet Union and China where the basic socialist ownership that was achieved, after a short period, involved mixed forms of socialist ownership, collective ownership by groups of peasants and others, as well as state ownership, with remaining commodity relations, even within the state sector of the economy.

This is very important to understand from a dialectical materialist standpoint: with the dictatorship of the proletariat, even after basic socialist ownership is achieved, these intellectual, administrative, and leadership tasks still are—and, more fundamentally, they *cannot help but be*—the main province of a minority of society. This will be true for a fairly long period. And in the beginning stages of socialism, it will be a relatively small minority of society that specializes in these tasks. There will be no way to avoid the fact, that for a certain period of time, there will only be a minority in society that will be able to be given the training and education to be able to take on these intellectual, administrative and leadership tasks. The basis will not yet have been created for people throughout society to share, more or less equally, in this intellectual labor as well as in manual labor. This is a reflection of the underlying contradictions that mark socialist society and the transition, moving from capitalism as it exists when it's overthrown—with all the destruction involved in the warfare to overthrow the old order and consolidate the new system—towards the elimination of class distinctions and the achievement of the “4 Alls,” with the advance to communism, worldwide.

In other words, try as we may and wish as we will, we're not going to be able to create a situation where we're going to be able to immediately, or in a very short period, make a qualitative transformation, in a world historic sense, in terms of the mental/manual contradiction—let's put it that way. And this has all kinds of ramifications, not only in administration but more specifically in the very pillar of state power—the army.

You can have a real people's army; you can have a correct line in command; you can have a correct relationship between the army and the masses; you can have all that and the fact will remain that you are going

to have contradictions. You are going to have a division of labor that could be transformed into a relation of alienation and subordination characteristic of a bourgeois army—between the commanders and the rank and file, to cite one important aspect of the problem. To be a commander of an army requires, besides practical training and experience, a certain level of acquired intellectual skill, military knowledge, training, etc., and that's another expression, a very concentrated expression, of the mental-manual contradiction. Everybody in the army cannot immediately or in a short period of time be a commander. Nor, for a considerable period of time, will it be possible to create a situation where everyone can, in rotation, serve as a commander and a rank-and-file fighter in the armed forces.

The majority of people in the army—even in the people's army under socialism—cannot be a commander, beyond a very basic level; we're not going to be able to quickly get to that point, even where proletarian state power has existed for a number of years, or even decades. This is bound up with a very important point that is brought out in the polemic against K. Venu (“Democracy: Now More Than Ever, We Can and Must Do Better Than That”): The historical experience of the socialist revolution has shown that, contrary to what was believed by Marx and Engels, and even what was believed by Lenin until after the the October Revolution, it will not be possible, for some time, to abolish the standing army under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

At the time Lenin wrote “The State and Revolution” (just before the October Revolution of 1917), he talked about how very quickly you could abolish the standing army and replace it with mass militias. But in fact, historical experience has shown this can't be done in any kind of immediate period, or for a long time.

And here we see the influence, and the interpenetration between, these two basic contradictions I'm speaking to: the fact that for a definite, rather protracted period, you can't abolish the standing army in socialist society has to do both with the contradiction of imperialist encirclement of socialist states and with the other contradiction involving the “survivals” of previous class society within socialism, the long-term persistence of these “survivals,” such as the mental/manual contradiction. These “survivals” have persisted and will persist much longer than was anticipated by Marx and Engels and even by Lenin, at the time he wrote “The State and Revolution,” before the October

Revolution, but even to a certain degree afterward. The difficulty of uprooting these differences (between mental and manual labor as well as other major social distinctions) in the economic base as well as uprooting their expression in the superstructure involves a whole complex process, which is concentrated in the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and between the socialist road and the capitalist road, and which cannot be carried through in any short period of time.

Line and Leadership

So, in a sense, as Lenin said about the petit bourgeoisie, we're going to have to live with and transform this situation—marked by the remnants of previous class society in the economic base and the superstructure—over a long period of time. We can't try to change it overnight, or else we'll go right back to capitalism—the forces of capitalism will be more fully unleashed and strengthened to stage a comeback that much more quickly. This will be a long-term historical problem. And one of the ways to get at the essence of this is to examine the fact that we can't abolish the standing army in any short period of time, and more specifically the reasons *why* we can't do that.

This question is often put—in particular by people of various socialist persuasions, and even to a certain degree by some communists, the argument is often framed—in terms of whether the masses are armed, whether the guns are in the hands of the masses. And what was pointed out in that polemic against K. Venu is that the question of whether the guns are really in the hands of the masses is not so simple as whether the masses literally have arms. It involves much more profound contradictions, because the guns can be in the hands of the masses, in a literal sense, but if the *line that's leading* the army is a line that serves the bourgeoisie, then the guns are *not* fundamentally in the hands of the masses, even though literally and physically they are.

Whether the guns are really in the hands of the masses has everything to do with the question of leadership—whether the leadership represents the proletariat or the bourgeoisie—and that in turn gets concentrated in terms of line, whether the line is a line that serves the interests of the proletariat in carrying forward the revolutionary transformation of society and the advance to communism worldwide, or whether it serves the bourgeoisie, in fact, in restoring capitalism.

Again, my point here is not simply that we need to be grasping this more deeply and dealing with a theoretical understanding of this. We do need to be doing this, but we need to do that in dialectical relation with speaking about this with the masses and drawing forth their ideas and questions about this. We have to be not only grappling with this but mastering it well enough to really go back-and-forth with the masses about it in an ongoing practice-theory-practice dialectic. We have to point it out to the masses and hear what they have to say, including their “yeah, but,” when we point to the need and possibility for proletarian revolution, in the U.S. and worldwide—“Yeah that's a good idea, but you can't really do it”; or “Yeah, that sounds righteous but what about the ways things are gonna come down on us if we try to move in that way”; and so on and so forth.

We have to deal with all these “yeah, but,” including the “yeah, but” about whether this is possible, both in the sense of being able to militarily defeat the other side, and in the sense of being able to uproot the underlying conditions that give rise to classes and to the world outlook that corresponds to bourgeois society and class society generally. We have to be able to continually deepen this in an ongoing back-and-forth process between the vanguard and the masses and between practice and theory.

I'm raising these world historic problems as food for thought—as something for the Party and other revolutionary-minded people to grapple with. But I also want to situate this in terms of the tasks that are more immediately before us, not only in the realm of propaganda and agitation but also in our ongoing revolutionary work, among the basic masses and among other strata.

Breaking Down the Division Between Mental and Manual: Stalin and Mao

Revolutionary Worker #937, December 21, 1997

I want to tell a joke that I heard when I was first getting involved in the movement—I don't want to even say how many years ago that was—but it was the time of the Vietnam war and the early big demonstrations against that war. In Berkeley we had this committee, the Vietnam Day Committee, which was organizing against the Vietnam war. We had this office in Berkeley, and one day this guy, who was kind of a social-democrat, came in while we were all sitting around talking about different tactical things, like organizing demonstrations and meetings, and about bigger political questions. And in the course of this discussion, he came up with this joke.

At the time I was a "radical," but I wasn't yet a communist, and the way I interpreted what he was saying with his joke was more or less that the changes that were achieved in the Soviet Union really didn't amount to all that much—really not that much had changed, even before Khrushchev came to power. But as I learned more, and not only became a communist but accumulated more experience and a deeper understanding about the basis for capitalist restoration in socialist society and the struggle against that—about the whole way in which the road is in fact tortuous although the future is bright—I have come to understand and treat this joke more in terms of its being a lesson about the class struggle continuing under socialism and the need to continue the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

It is a story about two soldiers in the Soviet Union in the dead of winter in the 1930s. They had the job of guarding some important

offices of the Soviet government. And they would march back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And then whenever the clock struck the hour—this was in the dead of winter and in the still of night—they would stand at rigid attention next to each other until the clock finished ringing out the hour.

Now these are two very different soldiers. One of them is Ivan and the other is Igor. Ivan is very enthusiastic about the revolution, about socialism—he comes from a family of poor muzhiks, poor peasants from old Russia. His family was suffering terribly under the old system, and he threw himself fully, "body and soul," into the revolution, and he still has driving enthusiasm for the socialist transformation. But Igor comes from a *rich* family, an aristocratic family, part of the former nobility who, just at the last moment, when the civil war was starting up after the October insurrection, saw the winds changing and jumped on the revolutionary side and became part of the Red Army. And Igor has become an officer in the Red Army.

So these are their backgrounds, and they are walking back and forth, back and forth, and the clock strikes midnight. And they are standing rigidly at attention next to each other, in the dead of winter and the still of night. But while he knows he is supposed to be standing quietly at attention, Ivan just can't contain his enthusiasm:

"Igor! Igor!, isn't it vunderful?"

"Vat's so vunderful?"

"Vhy to live in People's Socialist Rhooshia."

"Vhat's so vonderful about that?"

"VELLL! Here ve are. You are the son of a rich rich aristocratic family; I'm the son of poor poor muzhaks; and yet we are equal!—equal in all ways in People's Socialist Rhooshia! You're in the people's army, I'm in the people's army; you're a luuftenant, I'm a luuftenant. Isn't it vuuunderful to live in People's Socialist Rhooshia?"

"Yeaahh, vunderful," answers Igor with evident disgust.

Then they start marching apart again. They go back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, until at one o'clock the clock rings. There they are once again standing rigidly at attention, next to each other. Ivan knows he is supposed to stand rigidly and quietly at attention, but he can't help himself, his enthusiasm comes bubbling up again:

"Igor! Igor!, isn't it vunderful?"

"Noww vat's so vunderful?"

"Vhy to live in People's Socialist Rhooshia."

"Vhaat's so vunderful about that now?"

"VELLL! Here we are. I'm the son of poor poor peasant, You're the son of a rrrich rrrich noble family; and yet we are equal!—equal in all ways in People's Socialist Rhooshia! You're in the people's army, I'm in the people's army; you're a luuftenant, I'm a luuftenant. Isn't it vuuunderful to live in People's Socialist Rhooshia?"

"Yeaahh, vunderful—now shat up!!"

So two o'clock comes, three o'clock, four o'clock, and every time Ivan just bubbles over with the same enthusiasm and Igor is just getting more and more disgusted. Finally it's five o'clock, and it's cold. They are supposed to stand at rigid attention, but they can't hold it anymore—they've got to take a piss. So they are standing there pissing, and even under these circumstances Ivan can't contain his enthusiasm! He starts up again:

"Igor! Igor! Isn't it vunderful!!"

"Now vhat can be so vunderful??"

"Vhy, to live in People's Socialist Rhooshia."

"Vhat can be so vunderful about that now??"

"Velll, here we are, you're the son of rich rich noble, I'm the son of poor poor peasant, yet we're equal!—equal in all ways in People's Socialist Rhooshia! You're in the people's army; I'm in the people's army; you're a luuftenant, I'm a luuftenant. But only one thing I do not understand Igor . . ."

"Yaahh, vhat's that!"

"Velll, when I piss in the snow, it is like the roaring of thunder in a storm, or wheels rolling over the cobblestone, or cannons firing! But when *you* piss, it is like soft velvet, or violins playing by candlelight . . . tell me Igor, vhy is that?"

And Igor pulls himself up—raises himself up to his full aristocratic height and says, "Vhyyy! I'll tell you vhy *peasant*! Because I am PISS-ING ON YOUR COAT!!"

Now, there is a certain problem, or limitation with this joke: it could encourage a kind of mechanical materialist, economist approach—as though the *class origins* of people were the decisive thing in terms of the danger of capitalist restoration under socialism. (This is a part of the question, but not the heart of it.) But this joke can be interpreted in a way to help illuminate important aspects of the world-historic problems

and contradictions involved in carrying forward the revolution and in making the transition to communism; and, after all, it is a good joke.

Class Origin and Class Position: Stalin's Approach

Earlier I talked about how one of the problems for the world proletarian revolution was the "leftovers" from the old society and how, for a long period in socialist society the tasks of leadership and administration and intellectual work generally are the main province, and *cannot help* but be the main province, of a minority of society. Here I want to come at this world-historic problem from another angle—to examine it in another major dimension—in terms of the history of how Stalin and Mao dealt with this problem.

In the history of socialist countries and the International Communist Movement, Stalin's approach to the differences and inequalities left over from capitalist society, and in particular the mental/manual contradiction, was somewhat mechanical. This shouldn't surprise us, given that we've analyzed, drawing from Mao, certain metaphysical, mechanical tendencies in Stalin. But that can't be looked at in isolation from the fact that when Stalin first started dealing with these contradictions there wasn't any prior historical experience for Stalin to learn from in this regard—for almost the entire time that Stalin was the leader of the Soviet Union, it was not only the first but the only socialist country facing unprecedented challenges.

For a combination of these reasons, Stalin's approach to handling this mental/manual contradiction was to change the *class origin* of the people who were doing intellectual work, in other words, to train intellectuals from among the workers and peasants. Stalin made a number of speeches (to Party Congresses and so on) in which the way he presented this question was essentially to say: we are increasingly training intellectual and administrative workers from the ranks of the workers and peasants, so the situation (with regard to the mental/manual contradiction) is qualitatively changed; now, increasingly, in place of intellectuals trained in the old society, according to the old outlook, we have people in the new society among the ranks of the laboring masses who are being trained to carry out the intellectual and administrative tasks.

Well, unfortunately, it's not that simple. It's not that there's no importance to what Stalin was emphasizing. But one of the things we have learned is that there have been plenty of examples in the

revolutionary movement generally, including in the communist movement, where people from among the basic masses have adopted the bourgeois world outlook and acted against the interests of the proletariat. There have been negative, but also positive, examples where people desert their class, betray the interests of the class in which they started out.

There's that old story involving an alleged conversation between Bevin and Vyshinsky. Vyshinsky was a leading person in the Soviet Union during the period of Stalin's leadership, who like Igor in the joke about the two soldiers, was from an aristocratic background. But, unlike Igor, Vyshinsky had come over to the side of the proletariat. Bevin, on the other hand, was a leader of the thoroughly reformist, pro-imperialist British Labor Party, but he came out of the working class—he had the proper bonafides, as far as class origins, but he had become just another bourgeois politician. The story goes that at one point they're having an argument and Bevin says to Vyshinsky "Look, you can say all this stuff about the proletariat, and this and that, but you're from an aristocratic background, and I'm from a working class background. You're telling me I'm serving capitalism and our Labor Party is not revolutionary and doesn't represent the proletariat, but I'm from a working class background, while you're from an aristocratic background." And Vyshinsky smiled and said to Bevin: "It looks like we both betrayed our class."

There's an important point bound up with this story: the problem of class origin is not the essence of the matter—there's something to it, but it's not the essence—and what Stalin ran up against objectively was that you can change the *class origin* of the people doing intellectual work, but you cannot in the short-run change their *class position*. Doing intellectual work puts them in a different class position than the masses of laboring people. Even if people are brought forward from among the workers and peasants (the basic "popular strata," or however you want to put it), their *social position changes* when they become people who are predominantly doing intellectual work. And this is going to have an effect on their outlook. You can't just wish this contradiction away, nor can you get rid of it simply by making reference in your policy to class origins. It's not that there's nothing to class origin, but it's a secondary aspect of the situation—it doesn't and can't deal with the essence of it. So, Stalin's approach didn't solve the problem, as we know only too well.

Cultural Revolution: Mao's Way

On the other hand, learning from this experience, as well as generally applying a more dialectical materialist approach and methodology, Mao, in particular through the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, adopted a much better approach. This found expression in all the policies of the Cultural Revolution that involved people carrying out both mental and manual labor. These policies involved having the people who were primarily doing intellectual work increasingly also take part in manual work together with the masses of working people; having the masses take on intellectual and administrative tasks; leading the masses to take up every sphere, including philosophy and science; open-door science, combining the masses with professional science workers; similar policies in educational policy, and so on—everything that we know is associated with the great upheavals and the great transformations brought about through the Cultural Revolution. This represented a great qualitative leap beyond what Stalin did and beyond any previous experience and advances in the socialist revolution.

Mao was drawing on and summing up the experience of the Soviet Union under Stalin, its negative as well as its positive lessons, and in particular how it dealt, and didn't deal, with these contradictions. Not only was Mao's a better approach, to put it simply, but it also led to qualitatively greater advances. And, along with that, it indicated for the whole international proletariat the basic means and methods for dealing with this mental/manual contradiction and related major contradictions in society, like the worker/peasant and city/countryside contradictions.

So, everything which found mass expression and which was able to be crystallized into and implemented as line and policy through the Cultural Revolution (and which thereby achieved what Lenin called "the dignity of immediate actuality as well as universality")—or, to put it simply, everything that was proved in practice in the Cultural Revolution—was a great advance in terms of these transformations, in terms of moving forward in the direction of overcoming these differences and contradictions. All this was a great advance beyond what had been done in the Soviet Union in the first attempt at dealing with these contradictions.

Beyond that, as Mao said, this Cultural Revolution indicated a basic means and method—and I underline the word *basic* means and

method—for dealing with these contradictions. Basic, because this means and method will have to be further developed through the whole world-historical process of advancing through all the twists and turns—the great leaps but also the reversals and setbacks, and then further great leaps—to the overcoming of these contradictions and the achievement of the “4 Alls,”* on a world scale. As Mao repeatedly stressed, these contradictions are not going to be resolved with one Cultural Revolution; it’s going to take many Cultural Revolutions, and it’s going to take the advance and the ultimate victory of the world proletarian revolution.

Lessons from Mao’s Last Great Battle

And as we have continued to grapple with this, we’ve come to see more clearly and deeply how that’s true—that it’s going to take many cultural revolutions in socialist society; and even more fundamentally, it’s going to take the triumph of the whole world revolution. So any particular policy—or even one truly great historical event, like the Cultural Revolution, which definitely was of world-historic significance—cannot resolve these contradictions. That’s why Mao emphasized during his last great battle, focused particularly against Deng Xiaoping, that even with the establishment of proletarian state power and the basic but still far from complete transformation or socialization of ownership, the struggle to uproot the basis for capitalist restoration was far from over and was in fact still in its beginning stages. While the seizure and consolidation of proletarian state power and the initial, basic socialization of ownership were really profound qualitative changes that did, in one sense, make all the difference, did represent a great leap from the old society—a leap which opened up all kind of possibilities for further transformation—on the other hand, in broader perspective, not all that much had changed. Far greater and more profound transformations remained to be made, over a whole historical period.

During this period of his last great battle, Mao issued a series of statements which were basically variations on this theme, hammering at this: There are still significant differences in wage scales; there is still

* The “Four Alls” are a concentration of communist aims. They are drawn from a summary by Marx of what the communist revolution aims for and leads to: the abolition of all class distinctions (or “class distinctions generally”); the abolition of all the relations of production on which these class distinctions rest; the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production; and the revolutionizing of all the ideas that result from these social relations.

the contradiction between mental and manual labor, along with the worker/peasant and city/countryside contradictions; the contradictions involving the oppression of women are far from overcome; and so on. In this sense, he said, not that much has changed. He kept emphasizing that this is going to be true, in a fundamental sense, for a long time—that, while it is crucial to restrict these differences to the greatest degree possible at every stage, such things can only be restricted, and not completely eliminated, under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Of course, when Mao said this he was giving emphasis to the need to restrict these differences as much as possible at any given point, and to continue through the revolutionary struggle and the transformation of society to develop the basis to further restrict them, in order to continue the advance toward communism.

When the revisionists came to power, for a certain period of time they tried to use these quotes from Mao against Mao’s whole point, his whole line. They twisted the emphasis and meaning inside-out. They put their emphasis on the word “only”, as if to say: “Why worry—Mao himself recognized that these things can only be restricted, so why worry about them? Let’s not be concerned with them. We can’t do away with them, we can only restrict them, and since we can only restrict them, why don’t we in fact give *full play* to them?! Why don’t we actually expand rather than restrict these differences, so that—by relying on those who have more privilege and advantage, and by *increasing* that privilege and advantage as an incentive to them—we can develop the national economy and then, someday in the future, we can move to restrict and eliminate these differences.” That’s the program that they put into effect, which has given rise to a polarization in which a small portion of society has prospered but *for the masses of people* the consequences have been disastrous.

So, upon seizing power through a military coup, these revisionists found it necessary and useful, for a certain period, to appropriate and pervert Mao’s words and use them in the service of the very thing Mao was warning against—capitalist restoration. The revisionists put emphasis on the word “only,” to say why worry about these differences, whereas Mao’s whole thrust and intent was the opposite: these differences can only be restricted, so we got a lot of worries—and a lot of class struggle to wage—because these differences provide a material basis for revisionists to come to power and restore capitalism. He kept hammering at this theme. And during the campaign to criticize Lin

Biao and Confucius, and more generally during the period of his last great battle, Mao referred to Lin Biao and Confucius in an Aesopian way, as a symbol for Deng Xiaoping, Chou En-lai, and all the other capitalists-roaders grouped around them. Using Lin Biao as a symbol of these capitalist-roaders, Mao said if people like Lin Biao come to power it would be quite easy for them to rig up the capitalist system, because of all these basic contradictions. And, unfortunately, we found out that Mao knew exactly what he was talking about, because people like Lin Biao—that is, Deng Xiaoping, Hua Guofeng and all—did come to power and they were able, relatively quickly and easily, to restore capitalism and to reintegrate China into the structure and network of accumulation of imperialism and the whole imperialist framework, with all the disastrous consequences for the masses of people, not only in China but throughout the world.

A Radical Revolution, A Radical Rupture

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Previously in the history of revolutions—I'm not talking about the proletarian revolution alone, but previous revolutions throughout history, including the bourgeois revolution—the more it was the case that these revolutions were thoroughgoing revolutions in relation to the era in which they occurred, the more it was also the case that they were carried out with the masses as the main material force, the main fighting force. And they were often even generally carried out in the name of the masses—especially the bourgeois revolution was generally carried out *in the name* of the masses or “the people.” (For example, the French Revolution was a very thoroughgoing, bourgeois revolution, which is why it scared the hell out of a lot of the bourgeoisie even at that time.)

But the fact is that a minority of society in all previous revolutions has always monopolized leadership of these revolutions and monopolized administration and rule in the societies that have been produced or have resulted from these revolutions. This minority of society has reaped the fruits of these revolutions and subjected the masses once again to exploitation and oppression, differing perhaps in *form*, or in certain forms, from the previous system.

In this regard, we often speak of how this is precisely where the proletarian revolution represents a radical rupture with all previous societies and all previous revolutions. This is correct, and it's a very important point to emphasize—that the previous revolutions were in essence about replacing one exploiting class and one system of exploitation with another, whereas the proletarian revolution is about

putting an end to all forms of exploitation and all oppressive social divisions and all social antagonisms, eliminating the contradictions between rulers and ruled, as well as the related contradictions of mental/manual labor and so on.

This is a very important point to assert, to aggressively and boldly assert—to emphasize. But even more important is that we have the world historic task of actually making this a reality. We have to actually *achieve* such a rupture—or the two radical ruptures that Marx and Engels spoke of in the “Communist Manifesto.” And to do this it is necessary to fully confront this contradiction—the fact that we cannot in the short run do away with the situation where the tasks of leadership, administration, and intellectual work generally will be the province—and cannot help but be the province—of a minority of society, as well as the interrelated contradiction of the uneven development of the world proletarian revolution and with that the emergence of socialist states not all at one time but in one or a few places and in general conditions of imperialist encirclement.

Communists and Communist Intellectuals

And an important point to bring out here is that we should not have a one-sidedly negative attitude toward intellectuals. This applies all the more with regard to *communist* intellectuals: to people who have come from among the intellectual strata and have come to communism, first of all, through an intellectual process, but who then make the great qualitative leap, or radical rupture, to taking up the stand, viewpoint, and method of the proletariat *and* to applying this in practice; or, on the other hand, people from among the basic masses, including prisoners and others, who come to communism perhaps through their own kind of intellectual development; or people from among the basic masses who come to communism not through an intellectual process but more out of their direct life experience—their particular individual experience but more essentially their social experience—but then develop their intellectual capacities as communist intellectuals. Clearly, we should not have any kind of a negative or one-sided attitude with regard to communist intellectuals, wherever they came from and however they have developed into communist intellectuals.

Why, and *how*, such communist intellectuals develop and adopt the orientation of “serving the people” and fighting for the revolutionary

interests of the masses—why “they would want to do that,” as the masses sometimes put it, including advanced masses—this is a very important point to bring out to the masses because this is bound up with our whole stand, viewpoint, and methodology. It is bound up with a dialectical materialist understanding of what the tasks of the revolution are and what its underlying material basis is. This underlying material basis is the fact that the fundamental contradictions of the bourgeois mode of production, and how it expresses itself internationally as well as in particular societies, especially in the era of imperialism, will continually call forth the objective need for proletarian revolution and the advance to communism. This need will assert itself repeatedly until this proletarian revolution is in fact carried out. These fundamental contradictions of capitalism/imperialism will continually thrust people into struggle against the system and throw them up against the fact that objectively the fundamental things they are struggling around can only be finally and ultimately and completely resolved through the proletarian revolution.

To become a communist is to make a qualitative leap to grasp these things in a basic way and also to understand that it is the proletarian class which has an objective interest and need to carry out this revolution and therefore is able, through the leadership of its vanguard party, to be at the forefront of the masses of people in fighting ever more consciously, ever more determinedly, for this goal. To be a communist is to come to understand this, and that’s why as communists we go out to “do all that.” That’s why we talk about serving the people and making revolution, because we have not only a hatred for the injustices and a feeling that this whole system is completely intolerable, but also the understanding that it’s completely unnecessary and that there is the material basis and the social basis for overcoming it and moving beyond it.

This is why we go out and do the things we do, and this is what we have to let the masses know. We don’t want it to be a mystery to them why we are doing what we are doing. We want them to understand this ever more deeply, even as we deepen our own understanding of all this.

Lenin in *What Is To Be Done?* makes the very basic point: communist consciousness can be and has to be brought to the masses “from outside,” that is, outside of the relations between workers and their employers, and more generally outside the sphere of the masses’ daily

experience and struggle and “outside” the spontaneous consciousness they develop. So in this light we can understand the *indispensable role*, the absolutely essential role of people who develop, from one starting place or another, into communist intellectuals and who take up communist theory. The crux is that, upon taking up this theory, they have to find the ways to take this to the masses, to “bring it home,” and enable the masses to take up and act upon this understanding and transform it into the powerful material force that it in fact can and must become in order to realize this theory in actual life. So, in doing this, intellectuals are involved in a very sharp contradiction: they come to a theoretical understanding of all this, but then taking it to the masses is a very real contradiction, or is made up of many different contradictions, which can sometimes be expressed very acutely. It is not so direct that you just go to the masses and say “Here I am, I’m bringing your ideology home to you”, and they say, “Oh, I’ve been wondering where it was!”

There is all kind of very sharp contradictions involved in this. A lot of things the masses are caught up in and the “spontaneous” consciousness they have actually runs counter in some important ways to their objective fundamental interests. And there is a very real objective difference between people who are the conscious vanguard elements and the rest of the class, and that contradiction can be turned into an antagonism. Especially if you do actually lead a revolution and come to be the leading group within the new society, that becomes a very acute and concentrated expression of the fundamental underlying contradictions that mark socialist society as a transition from the old world to the new, from the bourgeois epoch to the epoch of world communism. In short, this contradiction between the leaders and the led—between the conscious, organized vanguard and the rest of the proletariat and the people—can be the basis for the vanguard party to be transformed into its opposite and to become an instrument for restoring bourgeois dictatorship and capitalist rule and the capitalist mode of production.

We have to speak openly to the masses about this, too. We have to engage in a dialectical process of learning and leading in our relations with the masses, on this question as on all questions. We have to be bold about putting this forward and also we have to be good at learning from what the masses raise as well as what social practice more broadly teaches us, or potentially teaches us—the lessons that can be drawn from this—by applying our stand, viewpoint and method.

Realizing Our Historic Mission in Practice

But most fundamentally we have to actually realize our historic mission in practice. We have to bring about the actual radical ruptures through a whole world-historic process. We have to transform and make a leap beyond the situation where the masses make revolution and then a small group which monopolized leadership of that revolution then has a monopoly on the economy and on political power, and dominates intellectual life and all the things characteristic of a society divided into classes, into exploiters and exploited. This is something that spontaneously the masses have a certain sense of; but this is distilled and distorted through the prism of bourgeois ideology to a large degree—and “spontaneously” includes a very heavy dose of bourgeois propaganda and inculcation. They have a certain sense that this is how revolutions have gone: the masses fight and then a group which seizes leadership—or even in a good sense exercises leadership—of the revolution, usurps power for itself, in the interests of itself as a clique of exploiters and oppressors; the masses of people fight and then a handful of people, even if it is a handful who genuinely exercise leadership, take it over and use it for their own benefit.

This calls to mind that old song by “The Who”—their song about revolution. It is a very cynical song, of course. One of its objectives, besides generally spreading reactionary, cynical and pessimistic views about revolution was to justify their own non-involvement and non-support for revolutionary struggle.

Now, if you step back for a second and divide it into two, one of the very interesting things is here you had a group that was a major group in the cultural scene who felt they had to do a song justifying why they weren’t going to support revolution. So this tells you something about the times then, the late ‘60s and early ‘70s.

So “The Who” had this song about revolution, which had this line (or refrain): “Here comes the new boss; same as the old boss”—in other words, nothing has really changed, here we are back again in the situation where a self-serving clique is lording it over us and telling everybody what to do. And then they had the punch line, the “kicker” that summed everything up: “We won’t be fooled again.” How much they were really worried about being fooled is one thing, but it did speak to a more general problem and a more general sentiment than among the masses, even among some involved in the revolutionary struggle.

Obviously, there's a certain amount of cynicism about revolution and changing society that comes from the more privileged strata. At that point "The Who" were not exactly among the struggling masses, and this song was sort of a "class-conscious" statement of privileged strata. But also among the basic masses there's a certain kind of cynicism—or, to put it another way, a blunt, if somewhat distorted, recognition of this contradiction—that the masses make revolution but then the leadership and power and authority goes to a handful and things go back into the same old thing.

However much this may be distorted through the prism of "spontaneous" bourgeois ideology, there is a real contradiction here that people are recognizing. It's not one we can deny and it's not one that we should want to deny. It's part of objective reality that we have to confront together with the masses—and we have to transform it together with them. It is not a contradiction that we're going to be able to deal with easily, but we have to be open and honest with the masses about that too. We can't pretend that this is a contradiction that's going to be resolved quickly or easily. Nor, on the other hand, should we act like because it can't be resolved quickly and easily therefore it can't be resolved at all. It can be, but it's going to be a very tortuous process of struggle, like everything else that has to do with our historic goals.

Now, these basic contradictions have to a significant extent been confronted, in the realm of theory, by our party—for example, in "Conquer the World" some years back, and elsewhere, as well as by others in the international communist movement, in the RIM and even some forces who are still at this point outside the RIM. But these are extremely important questions that have to be continually returned to and grappled with ever more deeply, involving the masses in this as well as grappling with it within the ranks of the conscious revolutionaries.

At the same time, it's important to emphasize that despite the profound nature of these contradictions and the related difficulties and reversals, twists and turns, of the world proletarian revolution so far, there is NO basis for pessimism and defeatism, at least not for OUR class and OUR cause. This is a very important point to grasp. It's not hype. This is an expression of the very sharply contradictory but principally and strategically favorable material reality that I have spoken to. It is the principal and strategic aspect of the world situation and the process that it's going through now.

Strategic Double-C

Revolutionary Worker #939, January 11, 1998

I have spoken to a number of important problems confronting the world proletarian revolution—and these contradictions are important material facts. They are a material reality that must be transformed. But the even more powerful material reality is that the *capitalist-imperialist system* is a colossal failure and is definitely a *disaster* for the great, great majority of humanity. This is something we should continually put back in the face of the bourgeoisie as well as putting out boldly to the masses.

We should never let the bourgeoisie get away with talking in triumphal terms about what a great thing their system is. We should continually bring out what a disaster it is for the great majority of humanity, how it is completely outmoded and needs to be overthrown as soon as that can actually be done, and how we must go on and eliminate this system from the face of the earth once and for all.

The imperialists can talk about the great achievements of their technology and all that they're doing. And this can have a certain ring of truth. All they have to do in order to be convincing is to blot out 90 percent and more of the people of the world. But once you begin to look at the consequences for the great majority of people of the world—it's a crime and a disaster and a colossal bankruptcy, materially and ideologically. It has long since outlived any positive role in terms of the development of society and the emancipation of the people. And we should never let them get away with saying anything to the contrary.

But they want to continue to blot out the reality the masses of people face. It's like Ralph Ellison wrote that book *The Invisible Man*, speaking about the experience of Black people in America. And we can apply it in a larger sense. It's like the invisible masses — ninety-plus percent of the people of the world the ruling class tries to render invisible, to the extent they can. And on a daily basis they do this to a very real extent.

We, in opposition to that, have to enable these masses to become more and more visible, and in a more and more class-conscious way.

The basic point I'm stressing is that these imperialists and their ideologues and apologists—all of them, liberal as well as conservative—really do represent the past, and we should never let them get away with portraying themselves in any other way. Obviously, on some objective level, they're going to get away with it, till we overthrow them and then go on with the revolution. But in our work we should never let them get away with this—we should never concede an inch to them on this point. They are committing monstrous crimes and their system is a colossal disaster. And we should continue to hammer at this point: Not only do these colossal disasters exist, but their system is responsible for this—we can show this concretely and we will. We got the case, beyond a reasonable doubt! We can show it, and we should, in our all-around work and in a concentrated way in our work of creating public opinion and being creative and being relentless in our propaganda and agitation. We have to continually come back to, bring to light, the material reality that they are continually trying to blot out, along with the people who experience this reality in the most grotesque and extreme ways, that is—the great majority of humanity.

The imperialist system is a colossal failure and disaster in terms of its effects on the masses of people. It is a monstrous crime in terms of what it subjects the great majority of humanity to. And we should not let them get away with this, even in the realm of public opinion.

Strategic Double-C

At the same time, and along with this, we must never lose sight of the great achievements of our class so far. This is the other side of our strategic double c: strategic contempt for them, strategic confidence in our class and our cause.

This strategic double-c has a profound material-historical basis. It's true we've encountered setbacks and reversals—these have been very

real and in certain ways they have been body blows to us, in the short run, tactically. It isn't easy to have to deal with the material reality and the political-ideological fall-out from the loss of China as a socialist country coming on top of the loss of the Soviet Union. But because this is reality—reality that we have to confront and transform—we should not therefore lose sight of the great achievements of our class so far, and really in a very short period historically speaking.

Especially with historical perspective, seeing this in terms of the relatively short period of the world proletarian revolution so far, we shouldn't lose sight of the many world historic transformations that have been carried out and the great transformative potential of the world proletarian revolution that is illuminated by these achievements.

Let's put it this way: What our class has accomplished so far, even though it has been reversed, is a radically different and much better world than what the bourgeoisie is imposing on the mass of humanity—and it is radically different and far better than even the *ideals* proclaimed by the bourgeoisie. We should never forget this, and we should never fail to boldly bring this forward to the masses of people and enable them to learn and be inspired from this.

Even though, in the short run, these gains have been reversed, still, along with these achievements and the reality of them, so long as they existed, we have also acquired a tremendous store of knowledge about the means and methods for carrying this revolution forward and towards final victory. Through all the twists and turns, with all the reversals and setbacks, we have tremendous achievements both in terms of what we actually did bring into being and also what we have learned. We must and will continue to learn more through the continuing revolutionary struggle, both before and after the seizure of power in particular countries. But, at the same time, we should not lose sight of our achievements and lessons so far or the great prospects ahead, the potential even within the present situation.

In a general sense we could express this point by going back to Mao Tsetung's famous formulation which I have spoken to several times: the "future is bright, the road is tortuous." This reflects material reality, in all its contradictoriness. This captures material reality in a very profound way. This is a truth that we should understand more and more deeply and popularize among the masses. There is a very powerful historical and present-day material basis for our strategic double-c. We

must continually come back to this fundamental point of orientation and boldly put this forward and project this double-c in everything we do.

Drawing from the experience of the world revolution so far, on one level we could say everything is not going to work out and has not been working out exactly as Marx and Engels foresaw, and undoubtedly everything is not going to work out as we or anyone else can foresee now. But, on another level—on the grand strategic level—we can and must maintain our confidence that everything will work out just as Marxism-Leninism-Maoism foresees. In other words, the capitalist-imperialist system—and all the relations, institutions, and ideas corresponding to it and corresponding generally to exploitation, oppression and class division and social antagonism—all this will in fact be overthrown, transformed and revolutionized, worldwide. So in that sense we can say that, while everything on one level is not going to work out exactly as anybody in the international communist movement has foreseen or can foresee—including in the original conception of Marx and Engels—on another, more profound and grand strategic level, everything *will* work out as we foresee it. We have to be able to deal with that unity of opposites, not only in our own understanding, but in terms of how we present things to the masses.

Two Humps In The World Revolution: Putting The Enemy On The Run

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The problem of “getting over the hump” in the world revolution can be expressed in two aspects: First, “getting over the hump” in terms of breaking through and carrying out the seizure of power nationwide in a particular country, whether the road is protracted people’s war or armed insurrection followed by civil war. And second, “getting over the hump” in terms of the strategic alignment—and “encirclement”—in the world—that is, making the leap to where the socialist states and the international proletariat have the upper hand strategically in the world, getting to the point where *we* have *them* on the run, where *they* are encircled.

In other words, how do we get to the stage where we can start going for the whole thing—in particular countries and on a world scale?

Thank You from Mao Tsetung

Speaking about this problem of getting over the hump, Mao once made a very interesting comment—one of his classically provocative comments—to make an important point. He said, “We have to thank the Japanese for invading [China].” What did he mean? He didn’t really mean that they should send a letter to the Japanese imperialists and say “Thanks.” There were horrendous things done to the masses of Chinese people by the Japanese imperialists, and Mao was not ignoring all that. But he was making a profound and strategic point: when the Japanese invaded, and in turn through fighting this invasion, the Communist Party and the People’s Liberation Army were able to gain initiative and influence broadly in society.

I recall reading or hearing about a conversation in that period of the Anti-Japanese War in China—a conversation between one of the generals of Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) army and General Stillwell, an American who was assigned to be the liaison between the American army and the armies of China, particularly the army of Chiang Kai-shek. And Stillwell was kind of pulling out his hair and getting very frustrated and expressing concern over the fact that there was not enough oil and salt in the areas that were controlled and held by the KMT. And the KMT general answered Stillwell: "No problem—you have to understand we'll be conceding more and more territory to the Japanese, so we won't need as much oil and salt!" This is what I call a kind of "losers logic" or a "defeatist dialectic." It's not that you never tactically concede territory, but this KMT general was expressing a strategic notion of just giving up more and more territory, essentially sitting out the fight and in fact letting the communists resist the Japanese occupying army, and then planning for the KMT to step in and steal the fruits of victory.

This was the KMT's strategic orientation. It reflected the fact that increasingly the communist forces were the main ones who were actually fighting the Japanese occupiers in China. And, at the end of World War 2, through a combination of a favorable international situation and their accomplishments in the anti-Japanese war, it became possible for the Communist Party to be in a position to move to actually get over the hump and seize nationwide power—through determined struggle over the next few years. And this is what Mao meant when he said, "We should thank the Japanese for invading," because by invading they actually created the conditions which the Communist Party was able to transform into a great deal of freedom. Through this war, the revolutionary forces, led by the Party, were able to advance to the point where they then had the basis to go all out to seize nationwide power through the war to defeat Chiang Kai-shek and the imperialists behind him.

Seizing Nationwide Power Is Not An Easy Thing

But we have to take note of the fact that this kind of thing has so far not been that common an experience for the international proletariat and the international communist movement as a whole. What I am

saying is that in Third World countries, even where a protracted people's war gets "on the map" and makes some important initial gains, the more you advance, the more the other side digs in and hits back, determined to prevent you from getting the upper hand and then going on to seize power nationwide.

So, in this context, as we have seen for example in Peru, it's not surprising that bad lines come up in connection with these contradictions, particularly at crucial junctures and in the face of severe counter-attacks from the enemy, or even when attacks from the enemy are combined with a situation where great advances can be made through struggle if necessity is transformed into freedom. And it's difficult to handle the contradiction correctly—finding the ways to continue to advance, and to make leaps, toward the nationwide seizure of power, without over-reaching beyond what is possible at a given point, and at the same time not settling in to just "being on the map" and being a force without straining at the limits to make breakthroughs toward the goal of seizing power nationwide. This again is a very acute contradiction that continually poses itself. It is one expression of the difficulty of "getting over the hump."

Now, to talk about difficulties is not to say it can't be done, but it is to emphasize that it can only be done by recognizing and transforming the necessity which poses itself. It's to emphasize the need to actually dig concretely into how the situation is posed and struggle this through in the particular circumstances of the revolutionary struggle.

In the imperialist countries, we may find ourselves wanting to do things we can't yet do—things we can't do short of going over to the all-out struggle for the seizure of power. Still, no matter how much we may be impatient to do them, we have to wait; but more than that, we have to work and struggle in the appropriate ways to advance things toward our strategic objectives. But there is the danger with all of this—that because we can't yet "get over the hump" and actually fight all-out for the seizure of power, we will stagnate, or worse degenerate. This is the contradiction that poses itself in a different way—in terms of the road to power in an imperialist country such as the U.S.—than it does in a Third World country where the road to power is protracted people's war, with military struggle the main form of struggle from the beginning to the seizure of countrywide power.

Making Advances or Getting Thrown Back

The other “hump,” in the world arena, is the fact that socialist countries have so far emerged and for a certain historical period are very likely to emerge one or a few at a time. So, in grand strategic terms socialist countries and, more broadly, the international proletariat and the international communist movement will be faced with a situation where it is necessary to change the world alignment of forces or face the prospect of socialist countries going under after a certain point.

This doesn't mean there is some sort of mechanical mathematical or arithmetic equation where if you don't get more and more of the world in a given period of time, then the socialist country, or countries, that exist at the time (if there are any socialist countries right then) will inevitably go under. But there is a contradiction when a socialist country is in a situation of being encircled; and that also interacts with the internal contradictions within the socialist society. And, at a certain point, if further advances aren't made in the proletarian revolution worldwide, these things will turn to their opposites and the conditions will become more favorable for capitalist restoration within the socialist country.

This doesn't mean capitalist restoration automatically kicks in after a certain point, or that it will *automatically* occur at all. But it means that things will begin to turn into their opposites and the conditions for capitalist restoration will become more favorable. So, in that dialectical materialist sense, it's one way or the other: make further advances and breakthroughs in the world revolution or be thrown back, temporarily.

Historically, as we know, we've not yet gotten to the point where on the world scale we can tip the balance in our favor. We want to put these muthafuckers on the run, but we haven't gotten to that point yet. We want them squirming and trying to figure out how *they* are going to deal with the problem of being encircled by the international proletariat. But we will have to go through stages to get there. We're still in the phase before that, where fewer international factors are on our side and in our favor. We need to discuss these problems with people, with the masses, very bluntly. This does not mean that our historic mission—the world proletarian revolution, the advance to communism, worldwide—is impossible; that is not at all the case. But it does mean that real difficulties, real contradictions, have to be dealt with, in carrying out this historic mission.

Revolution or Dire Distress

Some people now, including bourgeois analysts, are full of dire predictions—foreseeing a big mix and mess, a melange of revolution and crime all over the world—in places from Brazil to Africa. And the truth is that, if and where the proletarian revolution does not advance, there will be truly dire things happening—particularly from the point of view of the masses of people. Here, again, what stands out very sharply is the tremendous importance—as a material force and as a beacon—of the people's war in Peru, as well as the people's war that has just been launched in Nepal and in general people's wars led by an MLM vanguard. This holds out the *other road for the masses of people*, the road away from disaster and toward liberation, for the great majority of humanity. This is not an abstract intellectual thing—it is very real.

So in a world-historic way we should say to people: “Look, don't be taken in because those imperialists, who are temporarily bigger and stronger than we are, jumped on us a few times and managed to bring down what we had created—that is, the socialist countries. Imperialism is not creating better conditions for children in the Third World. They are dying by the thousands every day under imperialist rule and the system of imperialist accumulation. This system is not making a better world for the vast majority of humanity. Just the opposite. It is making the nightmare it has already created even worse, and this will continue until we break through with our revolution and then, finally, “get over the hump” and finish off imperialism and all systems and relations of exploitation and oppression.

This is not a matter of blind faith. This world is a bloody mess, and revolution will require a lot more bloody mess. And we shouldn't try to hide this from people. But there is great, well-founded hope for revolutionary change. In other words there is an historical and material basis for the advance to communism, worldwide—and it is definitely worth it. More than that it is the most liberating thing in the history of humanity.

The profound point that is made clear by historical materialism, by all of MLM, is that, regardless of setbacks and reversals in the world proletarian revolution; and regardless of the particular changes, even very significant changes, that are made in bourgeois society and in the world under imperialist domination—regardless of developments in communication and more generally in technology; regardless of certain

dramatically new features in the economy in particular countries and globally; regardless of changes in the superstructure corresponding to these technological and economic changes—regardless of all that: the basic nature and the fundamental contradiction of this system will remain the same and the need for revolution led by the proletariat and the revolutionary transformation of society in accordance with the outlook and interests of the proletariat will continually assert and re-assert itself.

The need for this revolution will find expression not only as a general historical and political trend but also very sharply in the anguish and the outrage of the great majority of the world's people in resistance, which will cry aloud the objective need for proletarian revolution and the advance to communism, worldwide and will dramatically illustrate the potential for this world-historic leap. This will continuously reassert itself, until finally it is transformed into a material reality, until we catapult over these humps and continue, on a new plane, toward the goal of communism. The role of the conscious vanguard forces, within particular countries and on a world level, is precisely to grasp this underlying material reality and motion, to recognize and seize on the diverse ways it continually and repeatedly reasserts itself and to develop this into the most powerful material force of masses of people fighting ever more consciously and determinedly for the final goal.

A series on the so-called "demise of communism" and the advance to communism worldwide—the struggle of the proletarian revolution in particular countries and on a world scale to "get over the hump" and defeat the imperialist system.

"If a bunch of young teenagers go down to the playground courts and there's nobody older around right then, these younger kids might be able to rule the courts for a while; but then if the older, bigger, stronger players start coming around, these youngsters might be able to hold out and win a couple of games, but they're bound to lose and have to get off the court before the day is over. Yet if we look at it strategically, these young kids will grow up. They will grow bigger and stronger and they will also learn from their experience. And in the meantime the bigger, stronger players will get older, and actually get weaker and slow down—they won't be able to hold off the younger players forever.

"And, by analogy, the rising proletariat, with the first breakthroughs it makes—the first socialist states it creates, encircled by still more powerful imperialism—may be defeated in the short run. But the imperialist system, and all systems of exploitation and oppression, are growing old, while the international proletariat and its revolutionary struggle is on the rise and is learning from its defeats as well as its great achievements, and is bound before too long to gain the upper hand and then drive the exploiters and their system off the court of history, once and for all."

Cover: China, 1935—Battle for the Luding Bridge during the Long March