



REVOLUTION

voice of the
revolutionary
communist
party, usa

*the newspaper
formerly known as
the Revolutionary Worker*

FILIBUSTER WARS

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The Center —
Can It Hold?
The Pyramid as
Two Ladders
by Bob Avakian,
Chairman of the
Revolutionary
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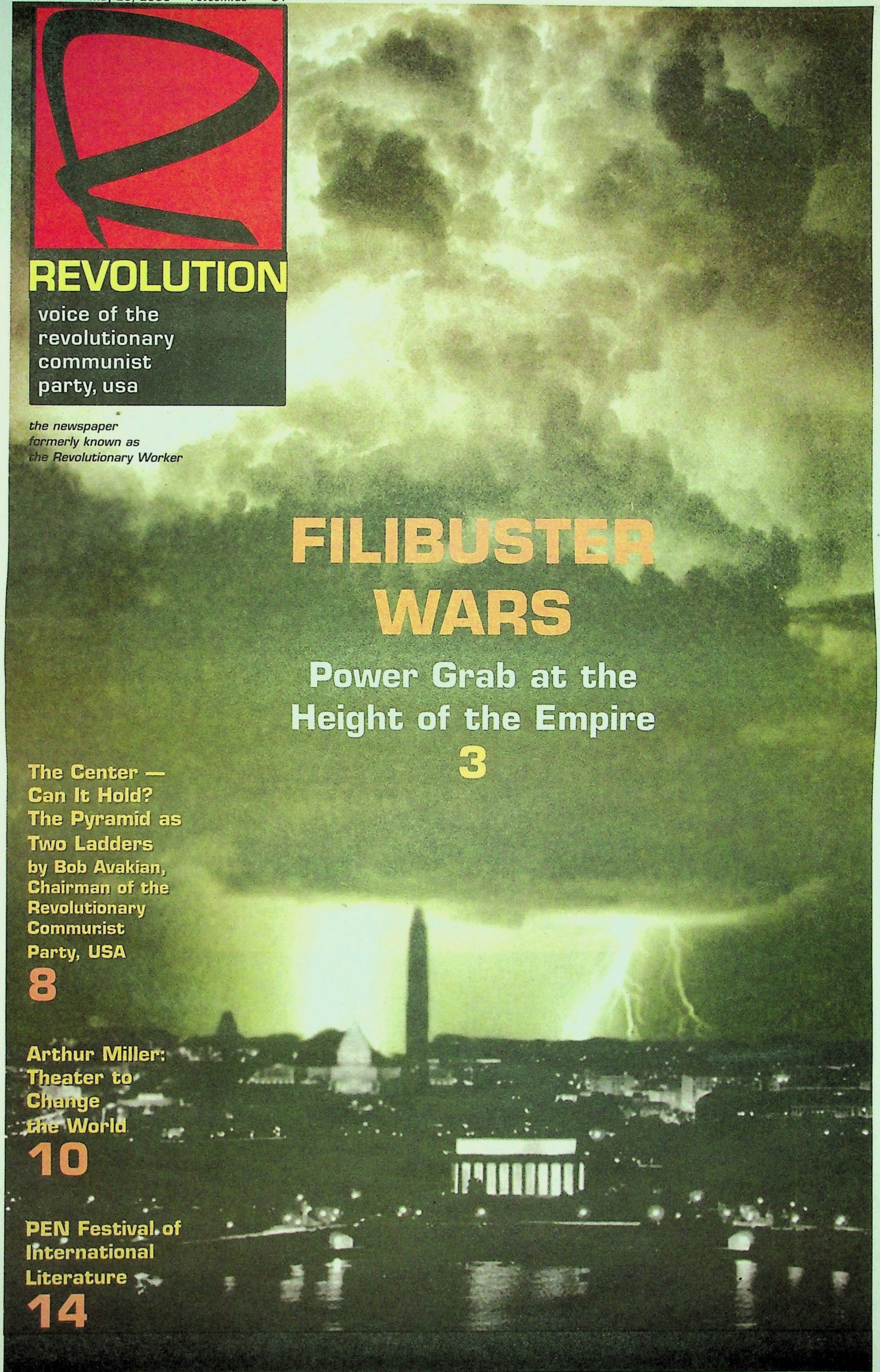
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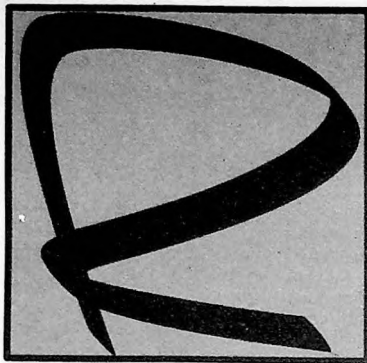
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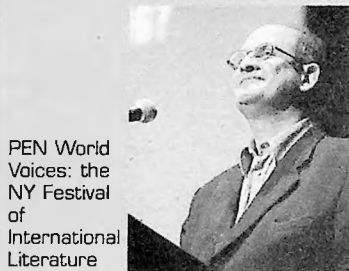


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To our readers:

This is Issue No. 4 of *Revolution/Revolución*, formerly known as the *Revolutionary Worker/Obrero Revolucionario*.

In a future issue, we will lay out more fully the thinking behind the change from *RW* to *Revolution*. But in short, we believe that the new name more fully reflects our revolutionary communist ideology and politics, and the enriched vision of a tribune of the people that has been pioneered by RCP Chairman Bob Avakian.

As part of the new transformation we have embarked on, we are working to create a fresh graphic look that captures the spirit of revolutionary communism in the 21st century.

Our graphic look is still "under construction." In particular, the masthead on the front page is a work in progress. We invite people broadly to be part of the process of finalizing the masthead in the coming weeks.

We would like to hear from artists, designers, design students, and others. Send in your comments on the special masthead that appears in this issue; suggestions for variations or modifications; or different ideas for the *Revolution* masthead.

We are extending the contest we announced in March for new masthead designs.

DESIGN A NEW MASTHEAD FOR REVOLUTION NEWSPAPER

Design elements should include:

- Title: REVOLUTION
- Subhead: Voice of the Revolutionary Communist Party
- Website: revcom.us
- Issue info: volume number, issue number, date, and price

Masthead designs should be printable in three color as well as in black and red.

Entries should include mastheads for both a newspaper and magazine format, in English and Spanish.

The deadline for entries is July 1.

Submit as many entries as you like.

Send entries to:

- email: revolutionredesign@yahoo.com
- by mail: Revolution Redesign, c/o RCP Publications, PO Box 3486, Merchandise Mart, Chicago IL 60654
- Include printout, camera-ready copy, and file on disk in any common graphic format. Indicate program info on disk.
- First prize: A set of five historic full-color revolutionary posters
- Three runners-up: Full-color historic May 1st, 1980 poster

Three Main Points

by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the RCP, USA

What do we in the Revolutionary Communist Party want people to learn from all that is exposed and revealed in this newspaper? Mainly, three things:

- 1 *The whole system we now live under is based on exploitation—here and all over the world. It is completely worthless and no basic change for the better can come about until this system is overthrown.*
- 2 *Many different groups will protest and rebel against things this system does, and these protests and rebellions should be supported and strengthened. Yet it is only those with nothing to lose but their chains who can be the backbone of a struggle to actually overthrow this system and create a new system that will put an end to exploitation and help pave the way to a whole new world.*
- 3 *Such a revolutionary struggle is possible. There is a political Party that can lead such a struggle, a political Party that speaks and acts for those with nothing to lose but their chains: The Revolutionary Communist Party, USA.*

This Party has the vision, the program, the leadership, and the organizational principles to unite those who must be united and enable them to do what must be done. There is a challenge for all those who would like to see such a revolution, those with a burning desire to see a drastic change for the better, all those who dare to dream and to act to bring about a completely new and better world: Support this Party, join this Party, spread its message and its organized strength, and prepare the ground for a revolutionary rising that has a solid basis and a real chance of winning.

Suscribe! See page 15

Our Ideology is Marxism-Leninism-Maoism

Our Vanguard is the Revolutionary Communist Party

Our Leader is Chairman Avakian

revcom.us

You can now use this new address — revcom.us — to reach Revolution Online, the web edition of *Revolution* newspaper.

Help us promote this address and our website everywhere. Link to it online. Put it boldly on leaflets, signs and wherever it can be seen.

In the period ahead, our website will be going through further changes. At the same time, we want everyone to know that our old address (rwr.org) will continue to function—now and on into the future. We will not cause existing links to break. And we intend to keep the full archives of the *Revolutionary Worker* available online. People who have bookmarked our site, its "what's new" page, and specific articles will continue to connect.

To Our Readers: In keeping with our regular publication schedule, *Revolution* will not be published next week. The next issue, #5, will be dated June 12, 2005 and will appear the week of June 6.

FILIBUSTER WARS

Power Grab at the Height of the Empire

The political establishment of the United States is gripped by a raw and escalating struggle over power at the very heights of the empire.

A collision course has been set by the rightwing Republican forces that now dominate the Congress and the White House.

As we go to press, the public showdown is now set for the Senate floor on Tuesday May 24.

The Senate is scheduled to vote on ending their debate over Bush's nomination of Priscilla Owen for a federal judgeship.

If the Republicans don't get the 60 votes they currently need to "end debate," their leadership has announced they will simply *change the Senate rules* and forbid filibusters over judicial nominees, and then move on to confirm Judge Owen.

On the surface, these events may not appear all that earth-shaking. Many people don't see the impact this fight could have on their lives and hopes. Most people have no idea what a filibuster is.

And for this moment at least, this struggle still *appears* to be going through the traditional channels of political business-as-usual. This intense infighting is mainly taking place deep in the bowels of the U.S. power structure—where little packs of U.S. Senators scurry from secret meeting to secret meeting, stopping occasionally to posture and sound-bite in front of TV cameras. To put it crudely: None of this has the *outward* look of a coup d'état. There are no tanks in the street, there have not been arrests or assassinations of opponents.

However, despite these appearances, this country is in the midst of a historic power grab that could have consequences as far-reaching as any coup d'état.

Removing Obstacles By Any Means Necessary

"Now comes the revolution. If you don't implement a conservative agenda now, when do you?"

Richard Viguerie
founding leader of the Christian right,
election eve 2005

In many ways, this is *the moment* that the Religious Right has been waiting and working for over decades. With high level support and funding, they have painstakingly increased their power throughout the Republican Party and at all levels of the state apparatus—including the military. In 2000, their leader George Bush took over the White House. And they now dominate both houses of the Congress.

In other words, key levers of power are there in their hands.

And at the same time, they are tremendously dissatisfied with what they have accomplished with that power so far. They want much, much more. They intend to make changes that are so sweeping and deep that there is no "going back"—so that their vision dominates the U.S. and their domination is permanent.

They want to *drastically* change what people are allowed to say, think and do. They want to force Christian fundamentalism to the center of society—as the standard for law, behavior, and morality. They want school children indoctrinated in their anti-science beliefs about Creationism and miracles, and they want teachers forced to lead their students in Christian prayer. They want biblical standards of punishment and behavior to become the law of the land—with all the horrors this would mean (including the severe punishment of children, the escalation of executions and the ominous demonization of gay people).

To impose their backward vision of family and submissive sex roles, they want to prevent women from controlling their own reproduction—including by criminalizing abortion and even birth control. And, they are in a frenzy to impose a sweeping censorship over anything they consider indecent and subversive—most cultural expressions of overt sexuality, revolutionary politics, anti-religious satire, teenage rebelliousness and much more.

This push for a Christian-fundamentalist police state has brought the issue of federal judges to center stage—because it has long

been clear that to *fully* carry out their chilling vision they will need to make *sweeping* changes in the existing legal standards of the U.S.

Many federal court rulings over decades objectively represent legal obstacles to the Christian-fascist plans for the society and culture.

The federal courts have enforced a separation of church and state. They have stopped organized prayer in schools. And they have put limits on the government's power to censor both sexual and political matters. The Supreme Court has ruled that there is a constitutional "right to privacy"—and on that basis has knocked down state laws that criminalized birth control, abortion and gay sexual acts. Major Court decisions have ruled that advocating communist revolution or burning the U.S. flag should be considered forms of speech that are protected from criminal prosecution.

These are current standards of U.S. law that the Christian right has been determined to overthrow.

A Strategy for a Profound Change

For decades, extreme right-wing political forces tried to make constitutional changes piecemeal. In the Civil Rights days they called for impeaching the Warren Supreme Court that upheld desegregation. Since then, their successors have tried to pass a long series of amendments to reverse significant parts of the Bill of Rights—amendments to allow religious indoctrination in public schools, to ban abortion, to ban flag burning, to ban gay marriage, and so on. Though these efforts revved up their political movement, they never got enacted.

Now, with the heights of power in their hands, a whole different strategy presents itself. Rev. Rick Scarborough, leader of a large network of "Patriot Pastors," recently said: *"It takes two-thirds of Congress, the President's signature, and three-fourths of the states to change the Constitution—or one judge."* (Newsweek, May 16):

In short: Instead of slowly rewriting what the Constitution says, they intend to pack the top court and then announce a change in what the Constitution means.

At the very time when Republicans dominate both the White House and Congress, there will be two, three, or perhaps even four vacancies on the U.S. Supreme Court over the next couple years. Seeing this opportunity, they are moving with a "now or never" intensity. They are determined to use their overall power to step-by-step bulldoze any legal and political obstacles to their recasting of the Supreme Court—and then of many of society's most basic rules.

It needs to be pointed out, again and again, just how extreme this whole plan and vision is.

The current Supreme Court (which the Religious Right hates so much) is, in fact, a very conservative institution that loyally serves this whole oppressive system.

This is the same Supreme Court that helped carry out the virtual coup d'état that put George Bush into power! On a day-to-day basis, this Supreme Court enforces modern capitalism—upholding and arbitrating the rules of capitalist property. This is a court that has allowed the round-up of immigrants without trial, that okayed unprecedented new police surveillance, and allowed the U.S. torture camps at Baghram Airforce base in Afghanistan and Guantánamo.

And yet, after all that, when evangelist Pat Robertson gets on *ABC's This Week* (May 1), he rages that the federal judges and the cultural changes they have allowed over a hundred years are a more serious threat to the U.S. than "bearded terrorists who fly into buildings." It shows the harsh war-like mentality of fascists straining for final victory.

Busting the Filibuster

So what, then, is this showdown in the Senate over?

The vast majority of Bush's new court

nominees have been approved by Congress—often with very little debate or opposition. So far Congress has approved 204 of Bush's court nominees. 34 of them judges for the important Appeals Courts (just below the Supreme Court).

However the Senate Democrats have used the traditional Senate procedure called "filibuster" to stall the nomination of seven of the most extreme court nominations. And this is being treated as *completely intolerable* by the Senate's Republican majority.

Here is how that filibuster procedure works: on the Senate floor, it takes a majority of Senators (i.e., 51 votes) to approve a judge. However, under the Senate's traditional rules, a minority of Senators can insist on *continuing the debate*—thereby delaying any vote. Delaying a vote this way is called a filibuster. Filibusters have historically been a way to prevent a Senate majority from having their way, by stalling and by rallying public opinion. And often it has been used for reactionary purposes—as when Southern Dixiecrat senators filibustered on and on against civil rights bills in the 1960s.

According to the Senate's rules, it takes a "super-majority" to *end* a debate. This means that the Republicans need 60 votes to end the debate over their seven stalled judges.

This is what has frustrated the Republican leadership and the Christian-fascist right. The White House sent up those ugly right-wing judicial nominees to the Senate long ago, and the Senate Republicans have a 51 vote majority to approve them, but they *don't* have the 60 votes needed to *end* the debate.

And so, under the current rules, the Democratic minority in the Senate can stall the appointment of any particular nominee—virtually forever.

You might wonder: only 7 stalled out of 204? *What's the big deal?*

But for the top Republicans, getting their *most extreme* appointees confirmed is *exactly the point!*

The forces represented by George Bush, Bill Frist and Tom DeLay have no intention of getting this far in the game, and then accepting a Supreme Court freshly staffed with old-school "moderate Republicans" that essentially accept the current framework of the status quo! They don't want a future Supreme Court to look essentially like the *current* Supreme Court.

The *whole point* of their strategy now is to pack the next Supreme Court with a *much more* extreme new majority that will actually *reverse* major legal precedents and *overturn* established interpretation of what the U.S. Constitution means.

The Christian fascists are perfectly aware that any Supreme Court nominee that serves *their* purposes would certainly face a filibuster by a sizable chunk of the Senate. And so, they produced the present aggressive power play: They intend to simply abolish the Senate rule that allows filibusters for judicial nominees.

Current Senate rules require 67 votes to *change the rules*. But the Senate Republicans intend to simply bypass that rule too. They have dreamed up the "nuclear option" where Dick Cheney (who, as Vice President, presides over the Senate) will announce that the decision to abolish judicial filibusters can be made with a simple 51 vote majority.

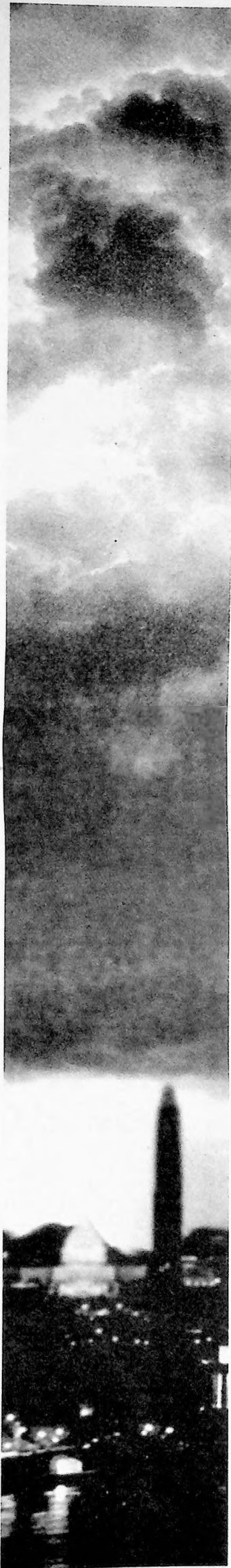
This is a raw gangster move: If the Democratic opposition uses its traditional right to stall Bush's seven most extreme nominees, the Republican majority in the Senate and Cheney have announced they will simply *change the rules* and take away that power.

And you can almost hear them say: "Whaddaya gonna do about it?"

Implications and Outcomes

Harry Reid, leader of the Senate Democrats, offered a humiliating compromise weeks ago—promising to approve four of the stalled seven judges, and

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PEN World Voices: the New York Festival of International Literature

"Literature is a loose cannon. This is a very good thing."

—Salman Rushdie, April 17, at the PEN World Voices festival

In 1989 author Salman Rushdie was condemned to death by Ayatollah Khomeini, then the head of Iran's fundamentalist Islamic Republic. Khomeini accused Rushdie of committing blasphemy against Islam in his acclaimed novel *The Satanic Verses*.

Flash forward to 2005. Rushdie is now the president of the literary organization PEN America Center. And, ironically, an American ayatollah now sits in the White House. A powerful religious fundamentalist movement—of the Christian kind—threatens to turn this country into a theocracy. Rushdie recently said, "It has perhaps never been more important for the world's voices to be heard in America, never more important for the world's ideas and dreams to be known and thought about and discussed, never more important for a global dialogue to be fostered. Yet one has the sense of things shutting down, of barriers being erected, of that dialogue being stifled precisely when we should be doing our best to amplify it. The Cold War is over, but a stranger war has begun."

In these dangerous times of a "stranger war," Rushdie took the courageous step of launching PEN World Voices: the New York Festival of International Literature, a week-long series of readings and discussions showcasing literature and ideas from around the globe. PEN American Center describes itself as "an association of writers working to advance literature, defend free expression, and foster international literary fellowship." It is part of PEN International, which was founded in 1921.

For this festival, 125 writers from 45 countries converged on New York City from April 16-22 to, in Rushdie's words, "highlight the international nature of literature and the way in which it crosses frontiers." The idea of this festival—bringing writers from all over the globe to the U.S., right now—was an ambitious and bold call to gather writers who stand with the people of the world and dream of something better. It was an invitation to discuss some of the important issues that come with being a writer in a world like this.

The last PEN Festival was held in NYC 20 years ago. Convened by Norman Mailer, that Festival brought together authors from around the world during Reagan's presidency at the height of the Cold War. Among the participants were Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish; Nicaraguan author Omar Cabezas, who was a Sandinista; and writers Kurt Vonnegut and Susan Sontag from the U.S.

One of the key events of this year's festival was an evening of readings

titled "The Power of the Pen: Does Writing Change Anything?" Among the writers participating were Margaret Atwood, Nuruddin Farah, Jonathan Franzen, Ha Jin, Ryszard Kapuscinski, Antonio Muñoz Molina, Shan Sa, Wole Soyinka, and Salman Rushdie.

The event dealt in part with the role of the writer in a culture: their ability to tell people's stories, and what that means for eradicating injustice. It also spoke to the need for and significance of writers—fiction and non-fiction—being able to take those stories across borders, especially in today's world. In an interview with the *New York Press*, Rushdie said, "If you look at the success of books like *The Kite Runner* and *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, it's almost as if what people are getting from the news media isn't enough. It doesn't give you the means to fully understand what's going on in the greater world. Iranian writers, Iraqi writers, Afghani writers, are giving readers something they can't get from any other source."

The festival showed that the need for literature right now to connect people to each other and to help people understand the world is immense. Speaking to this question and the role of intellectuals, Rushdie, as part of the "Power of the Pen" panel, said:

"The old idea of the intellectual as the one who speaks truth to power is still an idea worth holding on to. Tyrants fear the truth of books because it's a truth that's in hook to nobody; it's a single artist's unfettered vision of the world. They fear it even more because it's incomplete, because the act of reading completes it, so that the book's truth is slightly different in each reader's different inner world, and these are the true revolutions of literature, these invisible, intimate communions of strangers, these tiny revolutions inside each reader's imagination; and the enemies of the imagination, politburos, ayatollahs, all the different goon squads of gods and power, want to shut these revolutions down, and can't. Not even the author of a book can know exactly what effect his book will have, but good books do have effects, and some of these effects are powerful, and all of them, thank goodness, are impossible to predict in advance."

Other panels in the festival included "Don Quixote at 400: A Tribute," "Africa and the World: The Writer's Role"; "Czeslaw Milosz and the Conscience of Literature"; "Writers and Iraq"; and "Crossing Borders: Universal Themes in Children's Literature."

Audio excerpts from the Festival are available online at PEN American Center's website:
pen.org/vv_media_library.html.



Salman Rushdie



Margaret Atwood and Antonio Muñoz Molina

Making New Maps

by Araby Carlier

I jubilantly attended "PEN World Voices: The New York Festival of International Literature," in New York City, April 16-22. I was on the edge of my seat to hear the voices of Fadhil al-Azzawi, Azar Nafisi, Salman Rushdie, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

At the same time, I felt so honored to be introduced to writers whose names I did not recognize, authors whose home countries I have never read about outside of newspapers. All week, libraries, schools, museums, and bars were packed for discussions, panels, and interviews with dozens of writers from around the world. In this commentary, I drop a lot of names and titles to turn you on to literature and authors you may not have heard of. This is an invitation to investigate.

Three books in high school snapped my eyes open to the rest of the world: *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck, *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. The reality in these novels pushed me beyond my borders. In the past year, I have taken to consulting maps almost daily. I seek out the countries and cities where my books are taking me. Three or four books usually occupy my thoughts all at once. And as I check out the distance between St. Petersburg and Puerto Rico, I wonder if Dostoevsky ever read *The Arabian Nights*, and I know his contemporary Tolstoy did.

Across the country, history departments are dwindling, and history courses are increasingly not a mandatory part of the curriculum at many liberal arts colleges. A student's knowledge of the past is increasingly found in

works of fiction. Where would students be without novels from around the world? V.S. Naipul and Staceyann Chin taught me of the vast South Asian and Chinese Diaspora throughout Africa and the Caribbean. Julia Alvarez guided me through the Dominican Republic. The senselessness of World War I is nightmarishly clear in my mind because of Sebastian Japrisot and Erich Maria Remarque.

In a piece on Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez, Salman Rushdie said that there is "something that literature needs to recognize all the time: Reality is not realistic. This is something we're all beginning to recognize. Have you noticed how weird things are lately?"¹ Technology has brought people closer than ever but, at the same time, the imperial stabs the U.S. has inflicted on the rest of the world have driven us further apart. The view of the planet and its people from within the U.S.—as taught to us—is not realistic.

I told a friend that Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* was so fascinating because I didn't know anything about pre-revolutionary Russia. My friend replied that when he begins a work of fiction and it mentions an event he doesn't know, he usually puts down the novel and grabs a history text. I'm all about the history texts, but putting down the novel I don't recommend.

Grabbing a history book to emphasize a novel is a fantastic idea. Remember though, that while a novel won't necessarily present a linear timeline of events, a work of fiction will infuse history with the vibrant humanity it is often stripped of.

Reporter's Notebook

Starting the Conversation SF Bay Area Celebrates Release of Bob Avakian's Memoir

By our correspondent in the San Francisco Bay Area

Berkeley is where Bob Avakian grew up and became a revolutionary. On May 6, over 250 people attended a book-launching event in Berkeley for Bob Avakian's new memoir, *From Ike to Mao and Beyond: My Journey from Mainstream America to Revolutionary Communist*. The book launching was held at King Middle School, the junior high (then named Garfield) that Avakian had attended.

This wasn't just a book release. It was a revolutionary conversation among diverse groups of people—from college professors to youth in housing projects, from poets and artists to Latino immigrants.

People very broadly are agonizing about the future. Are we living in a "New Rome" whose rulers are waging endless war to dominate the people of the world? Will the future be dictated by a fundamentalist-Christian, all-American version of the Taliban? Is there another alternative—a way out of this madness?

In such times, Bob Avakian's memoir can strike a chord with millions. And in some important ways through the building for the book launching and the event itself. Bob Avakian and his voice and vision have started to become a reference point in and a vital part of the debate in this area about the future.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X opened my eyes to a whole new way of looking at the world when I first read it. Malcolm's uncompromising stand, his principles, and his life experiences challenged me and changed my life—and the lives of millions of others. This is what I think about when I think about the kind of impact that Bob Avakian's memoir can and needs to have today.

A Society-Wide Conversation

The event was organized by the Bay Area Bob Avakian Promo Committee, a group of people in the Bay Area working to bring about greater awareness of Avakian and his works, focusing especially on the promotion of the memoir right now.

Organizers reached out broadly to find the varied ways that this book can connect with different sectors of society and invite them into the process. People welcomed the opportunity to contribute and participate.

A group of honorary co-hosts—who feel in different ways that having a society-wide conversation about Bob Avakian's memoir, and Avakian himself, is important—came together. The co-hosts included Lawrence Ferlinghetti, internationally known poet, publisher, and owner of City Lights Bookstore; actor Peter Coyote; author and activist Julia Butterfly Hill; veteran activist Yuri Kochiyama; Barbara Lubin of the Middle East Children's Alliance; former political prisoner (San Quentin 6) Luis "Bato" Talamantez; hip hop artist and popular Refa One; UC Berkeley African American Studies Professor Ula Y. Taylor; social activist Richard Aoki; SF State Professor of International Relations Dwight Simpson; attorney Bob Bloom; Michael Rossman, an activist and archivist from the Free Speech Movement; the spoken word crew Chico

Speaks Out; veterans of the Black Panther Party, and others.

The honorary hosts took up many different responsibilities for the book launching—helping publicize it, working to plan the content, participating in the readings and in other ways.

"I think that Bob Avakian has taken the whole idea and conception of communism to another level—he's revived the communist project, if you will, going beyond Marx, Lenin and Mao in some really important ways," said Lenny Wolff, who wrote the memoir's preface, in a *San Francisco Chronicle* article about the event. "At the same time, there's a lot of other folks who are not communist but who are also trying to help him get heard because, from their own varied viewpoints, they think this is someone whose story and ideas and critical stance are extremely timely."

Taking the Memoir Out to the People

A sound truck decorated with posters advertising the memoir went through the proletarian neighborhoods of West Berkeley and West Oakland to bring news of the book launching. A revolutionary activist who was out with the sound truck described the scene:

"In West Oakland on a Sunday morning, Black people coming out of churches give their thumbs up to the message they are hearing from the truck about a revolutionary leader who is connecting with the people. Kids in their bikes follow the sound truck around on a kind of festival atmosphere through the neighborhood.

"A middle class woman in West Berkeley comes running out of her house and gets tickets for the celebration. She says, 'I just heard the voice of a Black man on a loudspeaker talking about revolution and I had to come out and see what this was all about! I haven't heard this in years!'"

"In this same neighborhood an older Black man says, 'Sure, I know a little about Bob Avakian. More than you can probably guess. I haven't forgotten those revolutionary times.' He invites us into his house and shows us a whole collection of art and photos from the '60s, the Black Panthers, the Cultural Revolution in China. 'I knew Huey and David Hilliard and I've heard some about Bob Avakian over the years. I definitely want to check this out.' He buys a memoir and invites people to come back."

At Berkeley High teachers have been reading the memoir and introducing it to their students, who in turn helped publicize and videotape the book launching. Joe Veale—spokesperson for the Los Angeles Branch of the RCP, a former Black Panther, and a graduate of Berkeley High—spoke in assemblies to 1000 students about Bob Avakian.

Cracking the Media

A very significant development was the publication in the *San Francisco Chronicle* of an honest, substantial, and insightful article by Rick DeVecchio, reviewing the memoir and announcing the book-launching event. (Available online at sfgate.com).

"Berkeley-bred Avakian's new memoir, *From Ike to Mao*

and *Beyond*, leaves a breathtaking impression," DeVecchio wrote. "Having deepened and purified his convictions over 40 years of personal and political struggle, Avakian sounds a high, sustained cry for complete social transformation almost as if he were the trumpet of Lenin himself."

Of Avakian's approach to Marxism, DeVecchio wrote, "His non-dogmatic communism tolerates contradiction, welcomes dissent and demands the participation of artists and intellectuals in creating a classless society. 'Marxism is not a scripture, it's not a religious dogma,' Avakian writes. 'It's a scientific approach to reality.'"

The *Chronicle* article made many more people aware of the memoir and its significance—and touched off attacks by reactionaries (see sidebar).

An enthusiastic review of the book also appeared in the *Laney Tower*, the school newspaper of Laney Community College. "At times I laughed at some of the tangential yet interesting stories Avakian would occasionally delve into, while at other times my eyebrows would be locked in a furrow as I read about the mire of America's capitalistic politics," the *Tower* reviewer wrote. "This book comes with my highest recommendations to aspiring activists or anyone who, like Avakian, holds no respect for unearned and unwarranted authority. It is a wonderful memoir for anyone who enjoys reading diverse perspectives on history. Enjoy."

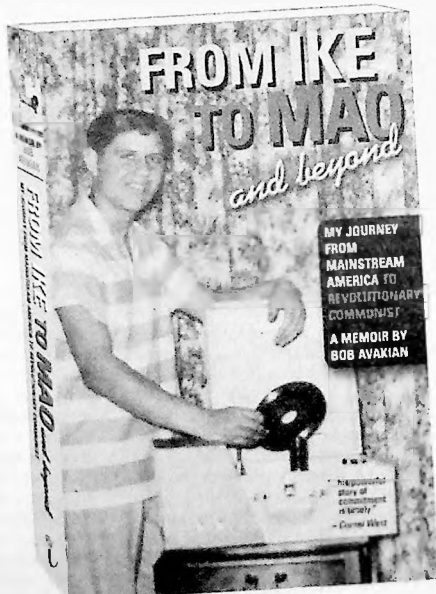
A lengthy excerpt from the book, about how Avakian met and worked with the Black Panthers, ran in *The Bay View* newspaper, the largest Black newspaper in the Bay Area. A review of the memoir appeared in the Berkeley High School *Yellow Jacket*. The Berkeley Historical Society newsletter also ran an excerpt from the book.

The Celebration

The event itself was an ambitious multimedia production. Readings from the book by local actors and cultural figures composed the core of the event. These were augmented by historical and descriptive video footage, including of Avakian speaking at a Black Panther rally in the late 1960s and appearing on the nationally televised late night talk show, "The Tomorrow Show," in the late 1970s with host Tom Snyder. Music by two DJs punctuated the readings and intensified the videos, bringing in another element that helped situate Avakian's life in the changing culture that helped change him—from do-wop to jazz to reggae to hip hop. The hallway outside the auditorium was lined with video, photo, and text installations, and people could write messages to Bob Avakian in a guest book. The whole event brought to life different aspects of the memoir and conveyed a sense of the "journey from mainstream America to revolutionary communist."

In the audience were people very new to politics as well as veteran political activists. People came who knew Avakian from back in school (even elementary school) and who were part of some of the things that shaped him—like the Free Speech Movement, the Black Panther Party, the Tournament of Champions, and friends of the Avakian family.

Bob Avakian has written a memoir containing three unique but interwoven stories. The first tells of a white middle-class kid growing up in '50s America who goes to an integrated high school and has his world turned around; the second of a young man who overcomes a near-fatal disease and jumps with both feet into the heady swirl of Berkeley in the '60s; and the third of a radical activist who matures into a tempered revolutionary communist leader. If you think about the past or if you urgently care about the future...if you want to hear a unique voice of utter realism and deep humanity...and if you dare to have your assumptions challenged and your stereotypes overturned...then you won't want to miss this book.



Now Available:

Get to know "America's Most Radical Revolutionary Communist..."

"Bob Avakian is a long distance runner in the freedom struggle against imperialism, racism and capitalism. His voice and witness are indispensable in our efforts to enhance the wretched of the earth. And his powerful story of commitment is timely."

Cornel West
Class of 1943 University
Professor of Religion,
Princeton University

"A truly interesting account of Bob Avakian's life, a humanizing portrait of someone who is often seen only as a hard-line revolutionary. I can understand why Bob Avakian has drawn so many ardent supporters. He speaks to people's alienation from a warlike and capitalist society, and holds out the possibility for radical change."

Howard Zinn
Author of
*A People's History of
the United States*

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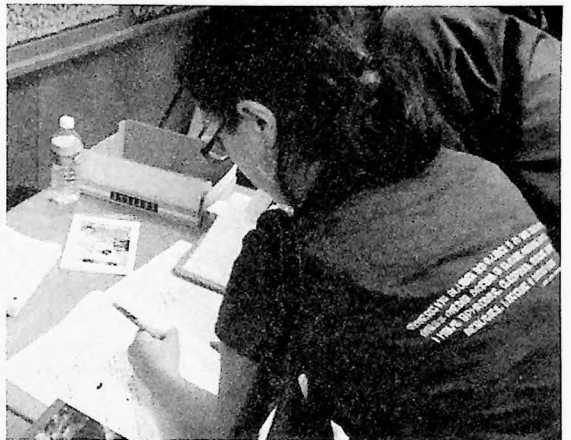
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Kriss Worthington, Berkeley City Council.



Quetzal Ceja, Associate Editor of Insight Press and Joe Veale, Spokesperson, RCP, Los Angeles Branch.



Sending a message to the author.

All Photos: Revolution Photo

Laura, who came with her daughter, told me: "I was curious, especially since I started reading the book, about his whole line of thought and reasoning, his vision of what the world could be and what his vision of the Party going forward is, which is different than I thought it would be. You live in this society and you get all this bullshit [about communism] thrown at you so you begin to believe it. And you don't really know what's true or not true until you have a person who's leading the Party speak for himself. And that's how you can get to the truth or at least closer to the truth. To be truthful I don't really know too much about communism but I certainly don't like what we live in."

A Latino man who came from a small town in southern Mexico and had been with the Zapatistas said that he had discovered Bob Avakian at a Revolution Books store. "Ever since I was a little kid I was told that communism is dead. But I found out about Bob Avakian and I started reading his stuff. And I thought, this guy is really talking the truth and he's fighting against the system. This is the leader that we need. This is what I am looking for. I'm going to be along his way and following his words."

He said he thought that the Zapatista leader Marcos and Avakian were both revolutionaries but that "Marcos and the Zapatistas were fighting just locally, for Mexico, for indigenous people. But for Avakian it is global, for the world in general. We are fighting for everybody, without respect to religion, language, skin color or whatever. He's fighting for everybody, for rights, for freedom and against imperialism. That's what I like about him."

"Welcome to the People's Republic of Berkeley"

The program began with the word "Imagine" projected on the screen, followed by a film clip of Bob Avakian from the *Revolution* DVD, challenging us to imagine a new world.

Kriss Worthington, a Berkeley City Councilperson, took the stage to declare, "Welcome to the People's Republic of Berkeley. It is fitting and proper that...the program began with the words of Bob Avakian, whose vision and message is what has shaped this evening's program."

Before the program I had a chance to talk with Worthington about why he was part of inviting people to the event. "This is Berkeley and there are a lot of people here who believe in revolution, or communism or socialism of one brand or another. Bob Avakian is a powerful voice and an advocate, and it's important to acknowledge his role and his new publication," he said.

Tournament of Champions

I was happy to see that one of my favorite parts of the memoir—an account of the Tournament of Champions high school basketball playoffs in the Bay Area—was among the selected readings. Avakian's love of sports, particularly basketball, and how this opened up a whole different world and was a door for connecting with many different people, is a major theme of the book.

After the event I talked with Michael Lange who read from that section during the program. Lange is an educator and actor who has performed around the country as Malcolm X, bringing Malcolm's speeches to life for thousands of people.

"Here is a man who is talking about his

childhood, who grew up in Berkeley and is a revolutionary and that is a powerful thing," Lange said. "I needed to find out who Bob Avakian is... I've heard his name in different parts of the country when I was doing Malcolm X. It's the most amazing thing."

Performing as Malcolm X around the country has given Lange an acute awareness of the importance of protecting our revolutionary leaders. "I'm at the podium, I'm recreating verbatim three of Malcolm's most important speeches and I'm looking out and seeing the audience and I see what they feel... I'm looking at faces that say, how come we didn't know how to protect him? And it's the same way with Bob. How are we going to protect him? The powers that be want to eliminate that thinking of revolution, the changing of government."

Personal reflections, by a family minister and by a man who worked politically with Avakian as a proletarian youth in Richmond, gave meaningful and intimate glimpses into this very interesting life.

I really liked the statement from the guy from Richmond who had met Bob Avakian back in 1969-1970. This was when Avakian had moved from Berkeley to Richmond to do political organizing among the proletariat, and the statement was written by someone who had been a young man of 19 working with the Brown Berets. "I began to talk to Bob which allowed me to begin to have a broader outlook on things. I remember Bob coming out to my house talking to my dad. He met the family and had supper with us.... Once when he came over my house my mom started yelling at me and my dad. Bob asked, 'What's up?' I told him that we had worked on the car and then we tracked dirt into the house. Bob said, 'Well you know she does have a reason to get mad since she has to clean up after you.... He helped me understand that what we were up against is bigger than just the police, although they are part of it; that it is this capitalist society. If we are going to be able to change things then we have to be able to know what it is that has to be changed. When I went to school I didn't know how to read very well til I started to read things like the Red Book and we would talk about things, and then I started to like to read.'

Chico Speaks Out – a nationally known poetry slam team from California's Central Valley—performed several pieces as part of this celebration of the memoir's launching.

Forging a New Road

A highlight of the program was a conversation between Quetzal Ceja, associate editor of Insight Press (the publisher of Bob Avakian's memoir), and Joe Veale. They talked about how one of the unique things about the memoir is that it reveals a "from-the-inside" picture of what it is like to forge and lead a communist party. Veale brought out the confusion that he and other people felt at the end of the 1960s and how Avakian identified and tackled the key political and ideological questions of the day. They also talked about the role that Avakian played following the death of Mao and the capitalist coup in China. And they discussed the urgency of defending Bob Avakian today.

Travis Morales, long-time follower of Bob Avakian who was asked by the Party to speak on what is special and unique about Avakian, presented a concentrated picture of what is meant by "and Beyond" in the memoir's title. He said that what he finds most inspiring about Bob Avakian is his "fierce determination, combined with a very non-dogmatic method, all guided by a vision for humanity, to get beyond the mad-

Chronicle Attacked for Favorable Review

Rick DelVecchio's review of Bob Avakian's memoir in the *San Francisco Chronicle* had a big impact in the Bay Area, letting tens of thousands know about the book and about the significance and drama of Bob Avakian's life. But there were some who were very upset that such a review had appeared in a mainstream newspaper.

"SF Chronicle Digs Communism" was the title on an item on the Little Green Footballs web log—as if the *Chronicle* had suddenly turned pro-communist because it published a favorable review of a book by a communist revolutionary. This blog, known as LGF, is not some fringe operation (though it certainly is rabidly reactionary—it calls Rachel Corrie, the internationalist peace activist who was crushed by an Israeli army bulldozer while protesting the destruction of a Palestinian home, "Rachel Pancake"). Run by California web designer Charles Johnson, LGF was voted "Best International Blog" in a poll by the *Washington Post* in November 2004. And it was one of main forces that behind the right-wing offensive that led to the ouster of CBS News anchor Dan Rather after a controversy over a new story about Bush's National Guard record during the Vietnam War.

Similar attack pieces appeared in the website of the *Cal Patriot*, which publishes a right-wing newspaper at UC Berkeley, and the (so-called) *American Thinker*. These Internet postings aimed to mobilize their right-wing base in a email and letter campaign against the *Chronicle* and DelVecchio—and to threaten others in the media. Such threats are part of these times—when the President's spokesman tells those in the media to "watch what you say" and when journalists and academics are coming under serious fire for not blindly towing the ever-more-radically-conservative line.

Marc Cooper, a writer for the social-democratic weekly *The Nation*, has joined these right-wing publications in their attack. On his blog, Cooper posted a name-calling, low-level, substance-less attack on Del Vecchio (calling him a "dope") and on Bob Avakian (calling him a "head-case," a "cult-leader," and a "whackjob"). Cooper's online article ends with this suggestion: "Fire the guy at the *Chronicle* and hire this civilian." (Cooper was referring to someone who wrote a review attacking Avakian's memoir on amazon.com.) Discussion on this topic on Cooper's blog site was directed at anyone who has publicly recommended that others read Avakian's memoir, including Cornell West and Howard Zinn, who had written blurbs that appear on the book jacket.

Writing in her online blog, Sunsara Taylor responded to Cooper: "Why should people who write the kind of low-level ad-hominem attacks Cooper did here have any credibility among progressive people? Cooper himself can't answer the substance in what Avakian has to say and he doesn't want anyone else to even look into it.

"Cooper assails Rick DelVecchio for his 'yawning ignorance of the subject about which he so blithely writes.' The trouble with this argument is that DelVecchio clearly did read *From Ike to Mao and Beyond* and demonstrates an accurate, sweeping and even poetic grasp of its contents, while Cooper demonstrates nothing but predeful and glaring ignorance of the book's contents....

"Cooper's snide, proof-texting, uncritical approach not only prevents people from learning anything new about the world, it also conforms to the 'unthinkingness' of the times being demanded by those with the power. He is aligning himself with aggressive measures to cleanse the discourse in America of everything oppositional and revolutionary."

In a widely distributed e-mail, several of the honorary hosts of the Berkeley book launching wrote: "These attacks require a sharp rebuke. We cannot let mobilization of their minions bombarding the *Chronicle* with emails and letters attacking the review and the reporter who wrote it [to go on] without a strong, effective response."

ness surrounding us and to get to a whole different world, to communism."

"Avakian's re-envisioning of socialism," Morales said, "demands doing better than anything the world has seen in unleashing the creativity of the people, celebrating diversity, and not just tolerating but welcoming dissent and the interrogation by others."

At the end of the program a young woman actor read from the final chapter of the book where Avakian writes about what sustains him as a revolutionary. As I left the program his words and her reading resonated in my head, tying together many of the strands of the evening:

"If you have had a chance to see the world as it actually is, there are profoundly different roads you can take with your life. You can just get into the dog-eat-dog, and most likely get swallowed up by that while trying to get ahead in it. You can put your snout into the trough and try to scarf up as much as you can, while scrambling desperately to get more than others. Or you can try

to do something that would change the whole direction of society and the whole way the world is. When you put those things along side each other which one has any meaning, which one really contributes anything worthwhile? Your life is going to be about something – or it's going to be about nothing. And there is nothing greater your life can be about than contributing whatever you can to the revolutionary transformation of society and the world, to put an end to all systems and relations of oppression and exploitation and all the unnecessary suffering and destruction that goes along with them. I have learned that more deeply through all the twists and turns and even the great setbacks, as well as the great achievements of the communist revolution so far, in what are really still its early stages historically.

(Thanks to the many people who assisted in writing this article.)

THE CENTER CAN IT HOLD?

THE PYRAMID AS TWO LADDERS

by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA

Let's look again at this pyramid of power that I have spoken to before. In that piece on "The Pyramid of Power and the Struggle to Turn This Whole Thing Upside Down," I made the point that:

"At the top of this pyramid are the people that rule this society.... Here's the pyramid and here are the

The polarization in the ruling class of the U.S. now is between centrist mainstream imperialist thought and program, on the one end, and, on the other end, fascist thought and program — all ultimately serving the same imperialist system... And all this is increasingly moving to the right.

Republicans over here (on the right) with their shit going down to the right-wing social base of religious maniacs and fundamentalist fools.... On the other hand here are the Democrats at the top of this pyramid (on the so-called "left"). Who are the people that they try to appeal to—not that the Democrats represent their interests, but who are the people that the Democrats try to appeal to at the base, on the other side of the pyramid, so to speak? All the people who stand for progressive kinds of things, all the people who are oppressed in this society. For the Democrats, a big part of their role is to keep all those people confined within the bourgeois, the mainstream electoral process...and to get them back into it when they have drifted away from—or broke out of—that framework.¹

Well, we can also conceive of this as a pyramid made up of two ladders that are leaning against each other at the

are gradations. Yes, there are forces in between, and there are forces, especially among the broader population, that don't fit into that configuration at all fundamentally, and others that we have to rupture out of it. But if you think of this pyramid analysis, this is basically what's at the top of the pyramid, what's represented on either side of the apex of this pyramid, to put it that way—that's what it is: mainstream imperialist thought and program, on the one side, and fascist thought and program on the other side, all rooted in and ultimately serving the same imperialist system.

And all this is increasingly moving to the right. That's why you had such a (to use their phrase) "disconnect" in this election between the Democratic Party leadership and the "mass base" of people who voted for the Democrats. Even at the Democratic Party convention in 2004, there was this huge gap and difference between the sentiments of the people there, who are Democratic Party lower level functionaries by and large—between their sentiments about key issues like Iraq, which were overwhelmingly to get out of Iraq for basically good reasons—and what was being articulated from the stage and by the candidate Kerry himself. And that great difference ran right to the election. This was a little bit like the phenomenon I spoke to, in terms of the 2002 mid-term election, where people poured out into the streets, largely as a result of the fact that they were desperate to have some way to oppose the Iraq war and the Democrats refused to give it to them. Well, this time around, in the 2004 Presidential election, the Democrats refused to give it to them again, but many people still went and very consciously voted—this was not an apathetic populace in this election,

It's not at all guaranteed that if the center, in its present form, doesn't hold things will come out positively — it could all come out extremely negatively. In fact, right now that's the greater likelihood — and that's what got many people paralyzed with fear, frankly. And we have to do something about that too, through our work — ideological and political, and yes, ultimately organizational work on the basis of ideological and political line.

in that was something we definitely must unite with and do unite with, even though we have to divert it and lead it somewhere else.

So there was this very stark "disconnect" between these people and the Democrats they voted for. However, one of the things that does happen—and you could see this also through the electoral process—is something I observed in one of those short comments I made just before the election, which was printed in the *RW*², where I said that if you try to make the Democrats be what they are not and never will be, you will end up being more like what the Democrats actually are. And you could see that dynamic at work in the 2004 election too. Some people started adopting Kerry's terms for criticizing Bush, even though they don't agree with those terms. If you step back, do you agree that the point is that Bush is an inefficient commander-in-chief in Iraq? Is that your critique of what's happening? For millions and millions of people the answer is clearly: No. But you still find people getting drawn into those terms.

So, on the one hand, this polarization is obviously not what we need. On the other hand, there is potential in it, in terms of the fundamental question of whether the center can hold—and what will happen if it doesn't hold. It's not at all guaranteed that if it doesn't hold there will be a positive outcome, from the point of view of everything we're about and are striving for, and seeking to lead masses of people to achieve. It's not at all guaranteed that if the center, in its present form, doesn't hold things will come out positively—it could all

cannot hold." We've seen this in the Clinton impeachment crisis, in the 2000 election, and in a different form through the recent election and things bound up with it. The way in which the ruling class has been able to hold this society together and rule it, and been able to have its larger interests prevail over lesser partisan disputes, is already fraying to a significant degree. There are underlying material reasons for this, some of which is spoken to in *Preaching From a Pulpit of Bones*⁷ [as well as in the "Right-Wing Conspiracy" piece⁸]. There are significant changes in the economy—both the U.S. and world economy—particularly as this has been unleashed by the fall of the Soviet empire, there is the heightening globalization. There are the accompanying and corresponding changes inside the U.S., particularly in terms of both the necessity and opportunity to do away with the New Deal⁹ consensus and the Great Society programs⁹.

One of the things that is said in *Notes on Political Economy* is that when a legitimacy crisis occurs, when the "glue" that holds society together begins to come undone, and there is an attempt to forge a new ruling consensus, then it is acutely posed whether that attempt to forge a new ruling consensus (a new "social glue," so to speak) is going to hold and work. That's a very relevant point now and a very relevant thing to dig into more deeply in terms of all this.

So we do have these very acute contradictions in society and within the ruling class, which are not entirely under the control of anyone. We are not dealing with "a committee of the ruling class"—all sitting there turning political faucets off and on. There are people seeking to do that, political operatives like the Carl Roves, or whatever, but that is not the fundamental dynamic that is going on. There are different forces in the fray, within the ruling class and more broadly in society, and this is putting a tremendous pressure on the coherence of the center as it has

We are not dealing with "a committee of the ruling class" — all sitting there turning political faucets off and on... There are different forces in the fray, within the ruling class and more broadly in society, and this is putting a tremendous pressure on the coherence of the center as it has existed and as they're now seeking to reforge it through a lot of struggle.

existed and as they're now seeking to reforge it through a lot of struggle. There is not one uniform group seeking to do this, but through struggle there's an attempt to reforge a center and a ruling consensus, in the context of this period of major transition with the potential for great upheaval.

In "GO&GS" (*Great Objectives and Grand Strategy*)¹⁰ I quoted Edward Luttwak's book *Turbo Capitalism*, speaking not so much to the religious fundamentalist aspect of what the ruling class is doing now but to the general punitive aspect of the U.S. culture at this time. And Luttwak actually says something rather striking. He says that the American form is less virulent, but there's a similarity with what occurred in Nazi Germany, where there is a non-economic expression of revenge for ultimately economic factors. This relates to the phenomenon Luttwak is referring to with the metaphor of turbo capitalism—the fast pace of life, the insecurity that is brought with it. Yes, many people have been making a lot of money, particularly in the '90s, but they don't have the job security, they don't have the life security they feel they had before. I have also quoted this other book, on suburbanization, *Fortress America*, where the authors talk about people retreating into suburban enclaves—trying to pull the drawbridge up around themselves [BA laughs]. There is actual instability and uncertainty and chaos and volatility, and there is also manufactured fear, which is something Michael Moore brought out in his movie *Bowling for Columbine*. There is both real and manufactured fear and bases for fear. But Luttwak's point about the non-economic expression of revenge for fundamentally or ultimately economic developments is a very significant part of the whole picture that we have to understand—and move to transform.

¹ This article originally appeared in *Revolutionary Worker* #1231 (March 7, 2004) and is available online at revcom.us.

² These comments, under the heading "Food for Thought While Agonizing Over Bush and Everything He Stands For," appeared in *Revolutionary Worker* #1254 (Oct. 10, 2004) and is available online at revcom.us.

³ The "Third International" refers to the Communist International (or Comintern), which was founded by Lenin shortly after the victory of the Russian Revolution. But especially during the time when it was led by Stalin, from the mid-1920s until it was dissolved at the time of World War 2, the Comintern was increasingly marked by a mechanical approach to analyzing the world situation, which essentially saw capitalism as caught in a continuing crisis that was always worsening or about to worsen. For more on this, see the book *America in Decline* by Raymond Lotta (Banner Press, 1984) and the RCP's *Notes on Political Economy: Our Analysis of the 1980s. Issues of Methodology, and the Current Situation* (RCP Publications, 2000).

⁴ The full title of the document is "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002."

⁵ The full title of the book is *The Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet*, by James Mann.

⁶ A reference to this is in a previous excerpt, "The Coming Civil War and Repolarization for Revolution in the Present Era," which appeared in *RW* #1274, April 10, 2005. In that excerpt Bob Avakian says: "In speaking to 'a coming civil war' I am 'drawing inspiration' from Newt Gingrich (the prominent Republican politician who was formerly the Speaker of the House of Representatives), who has made the observation that what's happening now in the electoral arena and the broader things that it reflects in U.S. society is analogous to what was going on in the U.S. in the 1840s and the 1850s, and that this isn't something that will—I'm paraphrasing, but this is the essence—this isn't something that will go away. It will only be decided when one side or the other wins out."

⁷ *Preaching from a Pulpit of Bones: We Need Morality But Not Traditional Morality*, Banner Press, 1999.

⁸ "The Truth About Right-Wing Conspiracy... And Why Clinton and the Democrats Are No Answer" was reprinted in *RW* #1255 (Oct. 17, 2004) and is available online at revcom.us.

⁹ President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal program was enacted in the 1930s to save U.S. capitalism in the depths of the depression by carrying out a series of reforms. Among them was the enactment of Social Security, unemployment insurance, and laws legalizing trade unions and creating the modern system of collective bargaining. The New Deal formed the basis for a modern "social compact" or "consensus" where working people were led to accept the framework of capitalism in exchange for a promise of a social net that softened the extremes of the system.

¹⁰ President Lyndon Baines Johnson's Great Society programs were enacted in the midst of the upheavals of the 1960s. It was a series of domestic reform initiatives including civil rights legislation, creation of Medicaid/Medicare, government health insurance and general talk of a "war on poverty."

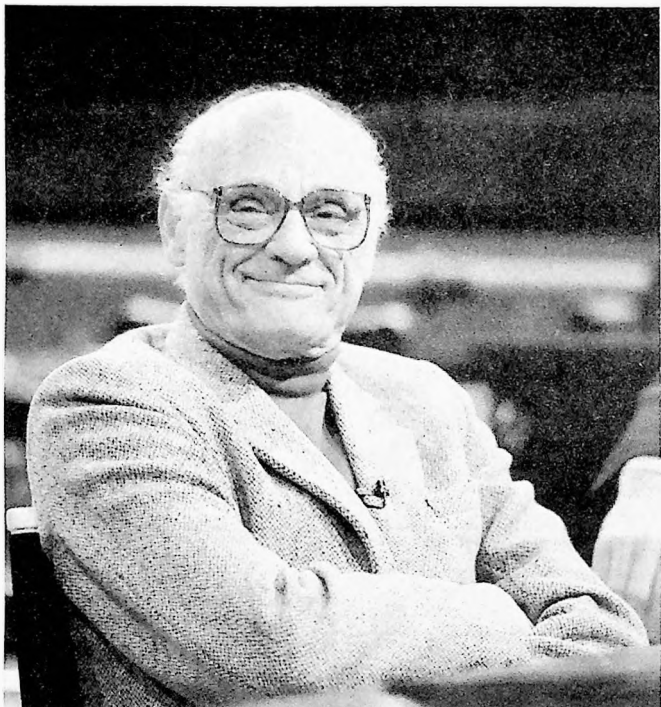
¹¹ Excerpts from *Great Objectives & Grand Strategy* appeared in the *RW* from November 2001 to March 2002 and are online at revcom.us.

When a legitimacy crisis occurs, when the "glue" that holds society together begins to come undone, and there is an attempt to forge a new ruling consensus, then it is acutely posed whether that attempt to forge a new ruling consensus (a new "social glue," so to speak) is going to hold and work.

top; and the centrifugal forces at the bottom, pulling away from the center, can cause it to collapse. In that kind of context and in that kind of way, you can see how the question arises very acutely: the center—can it hold?

The polarization in the ruling class of the U.S. now is between centrist mainstream imperialist thought and program, on the one end, and, on the other end, fascist thought and program—all ultimately serving the same imperialist system. Yes, there

including among the basic masses. Yes, some people didn't vote, but this was a very politically charged and, on a certain level, politically aware populace on both sides of the polarization as it took shape around the election. And many people poured into voting, including a huge number of people who voted for Kerry who were saying, "yes, Kerry is no good," but wanting desperately to get Bush out—and not for bad reasons overwhelmingly. The way that took expression is not what we want or need, but what was finding expression



Arthur Miller, 1990.

Arthur Miller:

Much of Miller's drama unfolds tragically around this basic dilemma: we are a race of creatures capable of boundless love and courage and invention, trapped in a brittle, obsolete society in which we can touch each other but not be present.

by C.J.

"Shipping clerk, salesman, business of one kind or another. It's a measly manner of existence... To devote your whole life to keeping stock, or making phone calls, or selling or buying. To suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two-week vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off. And always to have to get ahead of the next fella..."

—Biff Loman,

Death of a Salesman

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is the story of Willy Loman, a decent man driven to despair and suicide when his life is declared over by the cold workings of American capitalism. He kills himself in his car so his son can collect his life insurance. Miller describes Willy Loman as someone who "gave his life, or sold it, in order to justify the waste of it."

When you think about it, it's one of those remarkable ironies of history that this play—which so poignantly reveals the toxic heart of the "American dream"—won a Pulitzer Prize and has been one of the most frequently read plays in U.S. high school and college English classes over the past six decades. It is testament to the tricky way an artwork which powerfully lays bare a society's deceptions can make its way deep into that very body politic, sowing doubts, debate, and seeds of change.

Equally remarkable, Miller wrote *Death of a Salesman* in 1949, just as Henry Luce, publisher of *Time* magazine, was declaring the "American Century," and Americans were being directed to enjoy the "good-times" in this reputed best of all possible worlds. The play hit with such force in the Broadway theater that often at the final curtain there was silence—audience members, especially men, "bent forward covering their faces, and others openly weeping."

The world lost a great one when Arthur Miller died in February 2005 at the age of 89.

"I could not imagine a theater worth my time that did not want to change the world, any more than a creative scientist could wish to prove the validity of everything that is already known."

Arthur Miller wrote that, and he made it real, seeking new

ways to explore the new in play after play.

In 1947, mere months after World War 2 ended, Miller's *All My Sons* arrived on Broadway—a play that reveals the way the logic of capitalist relations in America drives a small-time industrialist to knowingly send faulty airplane parts to the military during the war, causing the deaths of several pilots and ripping apart his own family.

A few years after *Salesman*'s huge success in 1949, and just as the McCarthy inquisition was settling around the necks of thousands of communists and liberals, Miller brought to Broadway *The Crucible* (1953)—a harrowing tale set during the Salem, Massachusetts witch trials of 1692. His central characters struggle for truth and love as a cruel theocratic government manipulates a terrified population into turning on their fellow citizens with wild-eyed accusations. All dissent from the madness is regarded as further proof of the devil.

Miller's *A View from the Bridge* was produced in 1955 (revised as a two-act play in 1956). This devastating play was set in Brooklyn's Red Hook waterfront where the "promise" of America for peasants arriving from post-war Italy turned out to be a back-breaking job in an isolated urban backwater where the old feudal traditions thrived alongside the cold requirements of capitalist calculations—and the government kept order by turning family members into snitches.

Arthur Miller would write for the next five decades, into the 21st century. He was the author of more than 20 plays, as well as screenplays, short stories, books of reportage, a richly conceived autobiography *Timebends*, and numerous groundbreaking essays on the role of theater in society and the creative process. His plays have been performed and revived more often than any other American playwright, in countries across the globe.

Miller's political themes command attention because he fearlessly confronts the emptiness and heartlessness of the late-imperialist era. But I think he is beloved for his ability to convey, with great depth and tenderness, the peculiar ways in which social contradictions of our era become concentrated in the interior lives of individuals and embedded in the choices

they make.

Everywhere in Miller's plays one encounters unbearably lonely people, more or less dying to connect—a condition which in Miller's view is not some universal and timeless human conundrum, but has a material basis in modern capitalist society. And if it's bound up with our historical moment, this implies possibilities for human beings to consciously transform themselves and the world: "We want to give of ourselves, and yet all we train for is to take, as though nothing less will keep the world at a safe distance... A time will come when they will look back at us astonished that we saw something holy in the competition for the means of existence." (Miller, on the one-year anniversary of *Death of a Salesman*)

In exploring this bleak terrain, his plays are searching out "the right way of living in the world," even while the characters do not always make the right decisions. He presents people and situations in their changing contradictoriness: "...To take up a sad story and discover the hope that may lie buried in it, requires a most complete grasp of the characters involved. For nothing is so destructive of reality in literature as thinly motivated optimism. It is my view—or my prejudice—that when a man is seen whole and round and so characterized, when he is allowed his life on the stage over

and beyond the mould and purpose of the story, hope will show its face in his, just as it does, even so dimly, in life." (Miller, *The Nature of Tragedy*, 1950, *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*)

Until the age of 12 Arthur Miller lived as a rich kid, the son of Augusta and Isidore Miller. Isidore was a Jewish immigrant who shipped out from Europe alone at the age of seven to join his parents in New York, and rose to own one of the largest coat manufacturing businesses in the country, while never learning to read or write in any language. The family home was a rambling apartment overlooking the north end of New York City's Central Park (then a wealthy Jewish area of Harlem), and Isidore was chauffeured downtown to his factory by limousine.

With the stockmarket crash of 1929 that ushered in the Great Depression, the coat business tanked, and the Millers had to move to a small shabby house in the flatlands of Brooklyn next door to the poor relations. Arthur later wrote of his father: "Along with a desire to help, I was filling with pity for him... As the waiting began for the past to return and the unreality of the present wound itself around us all like some dusty vine that had taken root in the living room carpet and could not be kept down for more than a day before

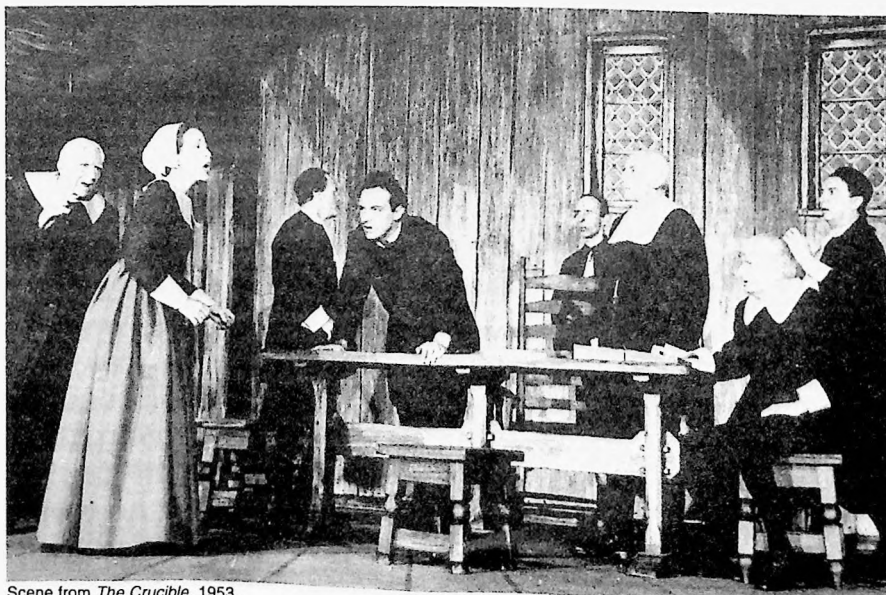
it grew again... It was my father who was our link to the outside world, and his news was bad every night." (Miller, *Timebends*)

Augusta Miller, a woman accustomed to paying a Columbia University student \$2 an afternoon just to come talk to her about novels, cursed her rough new life but soldiered on nonetheless, earning food money playing illegal bridge games all over Midwood and Flatbush.

Arthur made it through okay, spending his teens living cheek-by-jowl with an endless stream of enterprising neighbors and relatives. Hymie and Stella and Manny—closely observing how they tried to make sense of their harsh lives.

Some of them would later be reincarnated in his plays. They were also among the people for whom he wrote his plays. "...My style as a playwright had been influenced by Stella no less than by my mother, that somewhere down deep where the sources are was a rule never if possible to let an uncultivated, vulgarly candid, worldly, loving bleached-blonde woman walk out of one of my plays disappointed..."

Miller came of age in the 1930s when, as he said, "one lived as though in a permanent emergency... which would end with either the triumph or defeat of fascism.... A point arrived—perhaps around 1936—when for the first time unpolitical people began thinking of common action as a way out of their impossible

Scene from *The Crucible*, 1953.

Theater to Change the World

conditions."

Miller describes the afternoon he was introduced to Marxism while watching a ball game in front of Dozick's drug store. He was 16 and an older boy, a college student he barely knew, showed up. "[He] stood beside me explaining that although it might not be evident to the naked eye, there were really two classes of people in society, the workers and the employers. And that all over the world, including Brooklyn, of course, a revolution that would transform every country was inexorably building up steam... I remember giving up my turn to get into the game and saying to him, 'Everything is upside down!'—meaning that in my family workers had always been a nuisance; necessary though they might be, they were always getting in the way of businessmen trying to make and sell things..."

Transforming the world would prove to be far more complex than the communists of that time projected, and nothing in life was ever so linear and predetermined as their epistemology would have it. But in important ways, "the spin [his] soul was given by this anonymous college student" stayed with Miller, as the burgeoning left movement gained influence throughout American society. He never became a communist, but he permanently crossed over to stand with the oppressed.

After high school, Arthur was one of the lucky ones to get a job in an auto parts warehouse. He saved the money for college (and later wrote a play about the experience, *A Memory of Two Mondays*). No one in his world except his mother and brother

had ever had any use for books, but during that year at the warehouse he started to read. "He is probably the only man who ever read through *War and Peace* entirely on the subway, standing up," his friend the director Harold Clurman wrote.

Miller enrolled in the University of Michigan in 1934 and four years later had won all of the school's play writing awards and was headed back to New York City. He worked for the Federal Theater Project, wrote for radio, took some factory work, refused write-for-hire Hollywood jobs, and was supported by his first wife, all the while writing plays. In 1944, his first play on Broadway flopped after four days, and he turned to writing a novel, *Focus*, a searing tale of how anti-semitism and fascism could take root in America. The book sold well, and established him as a writer. More plays soon came tumbling out.

You meet Willy Loman on the last day of his life. It is 1949. *Death of a Salesman* opens as he drops his sample cases in the kitchen, "thankfully letting his burden down," the stage directions read. Willy is past 60, stooped and exhausted, haunted by the fact that nothing about his life remains in his control—not his job (he will be fired later that day), not his sons (Biff has returned home again without a job or moral center), not even his car, which he nearly drove off the road on his way back from New England.

He believed in the dream, and still does, but he is being thrown out like a used pair of shoes.

Only his wife Linda knows

how close he is to ending it all, and she is in a desperate struggle to save his life, and to give it meaning. Her pronouncement to her sons is one of the most famous speeches in American theater: "*Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest man that ever lived. But he's a human being and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to go to his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person...*"

All his life, Willy has had to lie, obfuscate, and peddle hype—to the world and to himself—in the required drill to "succeed." Now as it all flies apart, moments from his past intrude and come brashly to life onstage.

To deliver the complexity of what was going on in Willy's head, Miller departed from the realism of *All My Sons*: time is exploded, linear cause and effect rearranged, the sets minimized—a table and chairs become the kitchen, a window frame hangs in air...

These formal innovations were new for Miller and uncommon for Broadway.

Miller wrote: "There is no limit to the expansion of the audience's imagination so long as the play's internal logic is kept inviolate. It is not true that conventionalism is demanded. They will move with you anywhere; they will believe right into the moon so long as you believe who tell them this tale. We are at the beginning of many explosions of form. They are waiting for wonders." ("The Salesman Has a Birthday," 1950, *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*)

This was an artist with a deep-going relationship with his audience, and serious respect for their ability to make sense of well-constructed theater.

He later said about the experiments in form found in *Death of a Salesman*: "I was very moved by German expressionism¹ when I was in school; yet there too something was perverse in it to me. It was the end of man, there are no people in it any more; that was especially true of the real German stuff: it's the bitter end of the world where man is a voice of his class

Continued on page 12

"Attention Must Be Paid": In Memory of Arthur Miller

Estelle Parsons stepped to the podium, her voice instantly taut with a suppressed fury:

"Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest man that ever lived. But he's a human being and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to go to his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person..."

"Attention must be paid." Words I memorized in high school almost four decades ago, words that still deliver the betrayal of hard work in pursuit of an illusion, an American dream that spits out even its most ardent believers. Words that dig deep at the sons, daughters, and partners of all who chase this dream, only to be ground up, inflicting that potent mixture of rage and love that is the family.

I am sitting in The Majestic, one of Broadway's grandest theaters, it's a full house in the middle of a workday, in tribute to Arthur Miller who died the month before. At once, I am awed by the power of his art and life, and, at the same time, I am wrestling with why it is that I might be the youngest person there, aside from Miller's own children. This is not good.

Speaker after speaker brought forward examples of Arthur Miller's integrity, his courage in living a life of principle—standing up to the inquisition of the McCarthy hearings, publicly opposing the Vietnam and Iraq wars, and most of all, his creation of a rich body of work that exposed the dark side of America.

From the vise grip that squeezed the life out of a traveling salesman, to the challenge of standing up to the vicious terror of a majority whipped up by a lunatic fear and revenge in *The Crucible*, Miller brings you right into the harsh and complex reality of life, the killing contradictions. He makes you recognize and wrestle with the choices his characters make and, in so doing, reveals the potential to understand and, perhaps, to do better. Arthur Miller made wise and ethical choices in his life, his example makes us feel we can, and must, do so too.

The Majestic was filled not just in memory and celebration of Miller's life and work, but with an urgent tension for today. There was a palpable sense that these are times, with the mad peril of Christian fascists looming, that will require many to stand up for principle, no matter the cost. The Reverend William Sloan Coffin, pastor emeritus of Riverside Church, brought some humor to bear, telling the audience what he said to Miller, who could hear, but not speak, a few days before he died: "I know you think you are on your way to nowhere, but I've got better information than you do. They've got a special seat up *there* for you. As God's favorite atheist, your sole assignment is to keep the Christians honest. What you do with the Jews, you have to figure out on your own time."

We laugh at the image, yet acutely feel the need for more Arthur Millers. There is a relationship between a society where the culture is so debased, where the majority of youth and people are kept from arts such as theater, and a society where a cowboy-inspired theocratic movement that scorns science, the truth, and all imagination—save that of the rapture—is on the ascendancy.

The playwright Edward Albee gave an impassioned tribute: "Some writers matter and some do not. Some of our most clever writers don't matter. They teach us nothing and they do not render ourselves coherent. Arthur Miller was a writer who mattered. A lot."

Attention must be paid.



AP Photo

Arthur Miller before HUAC, June 1956.

¹A movement in art and literature which began in the early 1900s in reaction to naturalism which was concerned primarily with the realistic representation of existence; expressionism had as its object the expression, or portrayal, of the inner feelings, experiences, and reactions of the artist or writer.

Arthur Miller: Theater to Change the World

Continued from page 11

function, and that's it. Brecht² has a lot of that in him, but he's too much of a poet to be enslaved by it. And yet at the same time I learned a great deal from it. I used elements of it that were fused into *Death of a Salesman*."

Willy's older brother, Uncle Ben, a man who has recently died, makes regular ghostly appearances to counsel Willy on the puniness of his life's path—never failing to remind him of his own choice to grab adventure in Alaska ("When I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. And by God I was rich.") These jarring visitations, along with scenes from Willy's past, co-exist in a play that retains the basic

²Bertolt Brecht was a communist playwright from Germany who himself broke new ground in the theater, in a different direction from Miller.

structure of a realistic setting. The effect of this is to connect the audience with how social relations are poisoned in a world that has logic and order but is fundamentally inhumane and anarchic.

Willy is driven by forces much larger than he can understand, but he is not simply "a voice of his class function"—he is not a reified representative of the tossed-out lower middle class. Ironically perhaps, Miller needed the level of abstraction offered by the expressionist approach to fully convey the confused and complex Willy as a person "whole and round."

Miller's choice of Willy as his protagonist has been a source of much argumentation over the past half-century. He did not fit the mold of knight in shining armor, up-by-the-bootstraps Horatio Alger, or even the conflicted moral visionary. Neither did he have a place in a reductive version of the class struggle that has the evil

bourgeoisie and the noble proletariat squaring off (or trading positions), rosy outcome predetermined.

Instead, in this play Miller found something to learn about this society—what it was and what human beings could be capable of—in examining the tragic saga of a person in the middle, caught up in the dream that is actually an alienating nightmare for the vast majority. In coming to care about what happens to this pointedly unheroic individual, your heart opens up to the millions of individuals whose life force gets snuffed out by a system that would turn people into idea-less clerks of commerce (or beasts of burden) before they have a chance to soar, just as it sucked up the fresh air and invaded Willy's backyard with the "bricks and windows" of the cold new apartment buildings filled with people who could not connect.

Miller's plays are rich with an understanding of social class, but his body of work does not explore the potential of the proletarian class of our era to act as agent for the emancipation of humanity. By the '50s he had rejected as futile and wrongheaded the expressed mission of the communists of his day and the various socialist experiments then underway.

Taking all this history apart, and Miller's intersection with it, goes far beyond the scope of this article. But one can say that while Miller correctly scorned the gross determinism which marked much of the communist movement, he, like many other left artists in the post-war period, negated it with a bourgeois democratic and not a revolutionary vision.

He found a powerful voice in looking at the crossroads facing the individual who apprehends the terrible truth of a situation and struggles to act honorably, to do right by humanity.

In the last scene of *The Crucible*, after several townspeople have been hanged as witches, the central character John Proctor makes a lying confession of having seen the devil—to save his life and to

return to his wife whom he has come to love profoundly through this whole ordeal. But when the town inquisitors try to make him sign an affidavit "to post on the church door for the good instruction of the village," he refuses. They demand "Why?!" and he cries out: "Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang!"

The artistry of *The Crucible*, along with its scorching indictment of absolutist autocracy, has made it Miller's most-produced play. Proctor goes to his death but up to his final moment, you do not know what he will do, what you would do, and even at certain points, what he *should* do. Miller understood that if theater is to open new pathways it must engage uncertainty as part of its poetry. To be truthful, you better try to astonish. Miller's plays did this well, and with purpose: "I still believe that when a play questions, even threatens, our social arrangement, that is when it really shakes us profoundly and dangerously, and that is when you've got to be great: good isn't enough." ("Arthur Miller: An Interview," by Olga Carlisle and Rose Styron)

When I saw *The Crucible* in revival on Broadway following 9/11, the proclamation by hanging Judge Danforth ("You must understand, sir, a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between...") drew audible gasps from the first row to the balcony. But in the few years since, I imagine Miller himself was shocked by how gruesomely exact his 17th century story was coming to resemble the ugly fundamentalist pageant unfolding in 21st century America.

Rarely have life and art collided more potently than with the staging of *The Crucible*. By the time of its Broadway opening, the McCarthy witch hunt was in full swing—a phenomenon which Miller attributed largely to the frantic reaction of rightwing

forces inside the U.S. government to the "loss of China", i.e., the 1949 victory of the Chinese communists, who in Miller's view, "were basically a miserably exploited peasantry that at long last had risen up and thrown their exploiters into the sea. I thought it was a great idea." (Miller from "*The Crucible* in History," 1999, *Echoes Down the Corridor*)

The "red scare" was part of a massive effort by forces within the U.S. bourgeoisie to swiftly secure supremacy against the Soviet Union in the post-war world. They dropped the atomic bomb on Japan to terrorize the planet; they painted the Soviets (their allies the year before) as the totalitarian scourge of humanity; and meanwhile the U.S. authorities occupying Germany removed all mention of the Hitler decade from the schoolbooks.

In the U.S., hundreds of artists and other individuals were dragged before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and accused of being spies, their careers and lives ruined.

Miller was among the suspects. Shortly after *The Crucible* went up, and four years before he was subpoenaed by HUAC, the renewal of his outdated passport was denied and at the last minute he was prevented from traveling to the Belgian premiere of the play. "A rather farcical situation soon developed... Since the play was the first and practically the only artistic evidence Europe had of resistance to what was considered a fascistic McCarthyism, the applause at the final curtain was intense and insistent, and since the newspapers had announced I had accepted the invitation to be present, there were calls for the author. These went on and on until the American ambassador felt compelled to stand and take a bow. A species of insanity was spreading everywhere. Here was the ambassador, an officer of the State Department, acknowledging the applause for someone deemed by that department too dangerous to be present..." ("*The Crucible* in

The Theater and New Ideas

In researching this article, I came across several extraordinary essays by Arthur Miller. While undoubtedly familiar to people in theater and academia, these pieces figured hardly at all in the discourse on his life in recent obituaries. Here is an excerpt from one of his intriguing explorations on how new theories come to light, and the particular role of theater in this process—not all of which I concur with, but I offer it to the reader as rich food for thought.

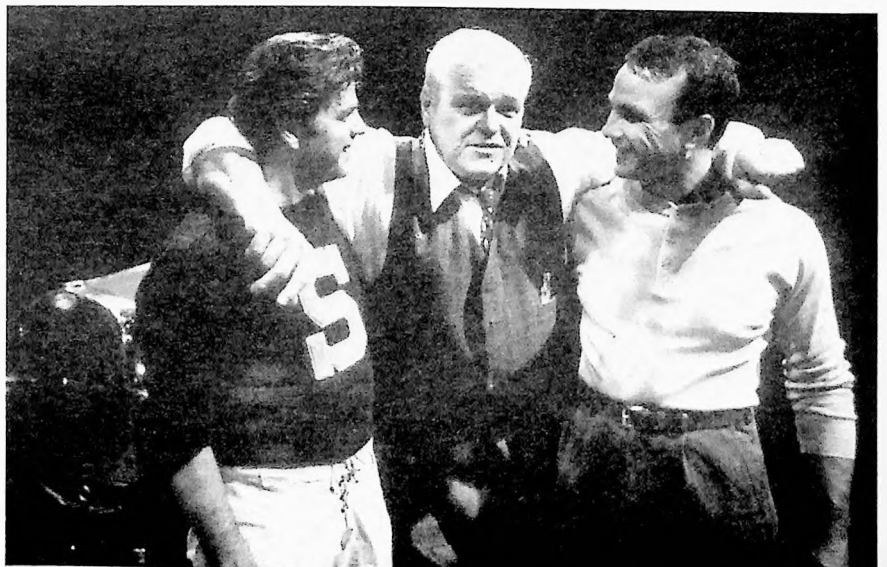
"A genuine invention in the realm of ideas must first emerge as an abstruse and even partial concept. Be it Christianity, Darwinism, Marxism, or any other that can with reason be called original it has always been the product of proofs which, before they go to form a complete and new concept, require years and often generations of testing, research, and polemic. At first blush a new idea appears to be very close to insanity because to be new it must reverse important basic beliefs and assumptions which, in turn, have been institutionalized and administered by one or another kind of priesthood with a vested interest in the old idea. Nor would the old idea be an idea at all, strictly speaking, if some goodly section of the population did not believe in it. If only because no dramatic structure can bear the brunt of the incredulity with which any really new idea is greeted, the play form would collapse under the burdens of having to deliver up the mountain of proof required for a new idea to be believed...

"The dramatic form is a dynamic thing. It is not possible to dally in it for reflection. The polemical method, as well as the scientific exposition, the parable, or the ethical teaching, all depend upon a process which, in effect, says, 'What you believe is wrong for these reasons: what the truth is is as follows.' Tremendous energy must go into destroying the validity of the ancient proposition, and destroying it from an absolutely opposite viewpoint. An idea, if it is really new, is a genuine humiliation for the majority of the people; it is an affront not only to their sensibilities but to their deepest convictions. It offends against the things they worship, whether God or science or money.

"The conflict between a new idea and the very notion of drama is remorseless and not resolvable because, among other things, plays are always performed before people sitting en masse and not alone. To a very large degree, much greater than is generally realized, we react with a surrounding crowd rather than against it; our individual criteria of truth are set to one side and we are no longer at the mercy of a performance alone, but of the surrounding reaction to it...

"If plays have not broached new ideas, they have enunciated not-yet-popular ideas which are already in the air, ideas for which there has already been a preparation by non-dramatic media. Which is to say that once an idea is 'in the air' it is no longer an idea but a feeling, a sensation, an emotion, and with these the drama can deal. For one thing, where no doubt exists in the hearts of people, a play cannot create doubt: where no desire to believe exists, a play cannot create a belief... [the dramatic form] literally has no existence if it must wait until the audience goes home to think before it can be appreciated. It is the art of the present tense par excellence."

(Miller from "Introduction to the Collected Plays," 1957)



Scene from *Death of a Salesman* with Brian Dennehy (center).

History")

It got more insane. Four years later, in 1956, Miller was formally called before the HUAC. By this time, news was out of Miller's forthcoming marriage to actress Marilyn Monroe and the chairman of HUAC sent word through Miller's lawyer that "he would be inclined to cancel my hearing altogether if Miss Monroe would consent to have a picture taken with him. This offer having been declined, the good chairman, as my hearing came to an end, proceeded to entreat me to write less tragically about our country."

Miller displayed a healthy sense of humor about even the most dire developments (as well as in his plays), and the fact that someone of his stature refused to name names contributed to the eventual winding down of the witch-hunt. He did not even take the Fifth (refusal to answer "on the grounds that it may incriminate yourself"). Echoing his character John Proctor, he told the Committee in effect that his associations were none of their goddamn business. He was convicted, fined, and given a suspended prison sentence that was overturned on appeal the next year.

In 1965, Miller took a four-year term as the head of PEN, the international literary association that defends writers persecuted by governments, enhancing the power and reach of the organization around the world. He stood up against the Vietnam War early and passionately. In 1985, he and British playwright Harold Pinter were thrown out of the U.S. embassy in Turkey after protesting Turkey's huge number of political prisoners at a state dinner.

Arthur Miller was an ethical man, and he challenged people to consider their responsibility to

the human race in ways that were neither blandly moralistic nor facile.

He wrote of *Incident at Vichy* (1964), his play about a collection of diverse individuals trapped for the night in a Nazi holding tank: "The occasion of the play is the occupation of France, but it's about today. It concerns the question of insight—of seeing in oneself the capacity for collaboration with the evil one condemns. It's a question that exists for all of us—what, for example, is the responsibility of each of us for allowing the slums of Harlem to exist? Some perfectly exemplary citizens, considerate of their families and friends, contributing to charities and so forth, are indirectly profiting from conditions like that."

Miller was a democrat, not a revolutionary communist. As eloquently as he exposed the reality of what the American dream actually meant for people, he continued to believe in the promise of it. Doubly ironic since he brought us play after play which made abundantly clear that America could never deliver that promise. As is often the case, the impact of the art went beyond the politics of the creator.

But right up to the end, Arthur Miller engaged the world, thumbing his nose at absolutist authorities and taking on their killing crusades. On February 15, 2003, I ran into him bundled up in the front seat of a station wagon trapped in Manhattan gridlock on the way to the huge international protest against the Iraq invasion. Two days later, he came out in a blizzard to join the poets at Lincoln Center for *Poems Not Fit for the White House*.

He seemed to never let the enormity of what confronts humanity—not to mention the pettiness of cranky theater

reviewers—paralyze him.

In the first scene of the disturbing and beautiful film, *The Misfits* (1961), Marilyn Monroe's Roslyn is trying to memorize the legal answer required by the Reno court for a quick divorce ("he persistently and cruelly ignored my personal wishes, and on several occasions resorted to physical violence..."). In the saddest way she suddenly turns to her friend, "Why can't I just say he wasn't there? I mean you could touch him but he wasn't there."

Miller's screenplay for *The Misfits*, and much of Miller's drama, unfolds tragically around this basic dilemma: we are a race of creatures capable of boundless love and courage and invention, trapped in a brittle, obsolete society in which we can touch each other but not be present. The crackling contradictions, including the potential for new things embodied there, is a story Miller tells again and again, each time anew.

Later in the film, Eli Wallach's character, Guido (a cowboy, a World War 2 pilot and one damaged individual), careens down the highway in a drunken tear, pouring out his soul to Roslyn in the back seat: "We're all blind bombardiers, Roslyn. We kill people we never even saw. I bombed nine cities... Think of all the puppy dogs and mail carriers and eyeglasses that must have gone up. Dropping a bomb is like telling like a lie. Makes everything go quiet and smooth, pretty soon you don't hear anything, you don't see anything..."

I think Miller saw a kind of moral equivalence in the savagery of modern society and the violation of the truth. He did not wish to take part in either, and with his art he broke open some of the wretched secrets lying beneath the surface, so that we could sift through and confront this reality, quietly at first, together in a dark room—but ultimately with the hope that once we know we can never be quiet again.

Sitting Together in the Dark and Moving Towards the Light

Unfortunately these days people look much more to movies and TV for their stories and inspiration (as well as sheer diversion). Too many folks rarely set foot in a theater, including, I imagine, some people who are reading this article.

Miller would argue, and his plays offer proof, that there is something about the way the theater works its magic that can be found in no other human experience. A play is not a "live movie."

Think about it, you're sitting in a dark room with strangers—moving towards the light. People pretending to be other than who they are appear on stage. Real time is suspended at the very same moment that it is clicking by, steady as your pulse. Stories you have never heard are slyly brought to life. There is an intimacy unlike watching a film—it can be like the first time you overhear your family arguing about you, or your father crying. But this is done with an intensity that cannot happen in real life—a decade compressed to a scene change, a second of terror rocking the stage with light and sound for an excruciating minute.

You get to peer in on secrets but—miraculously and thankfully—you are taking this journey sitting beside other people. Miller: "... My concept of the audience is of a public each member of which is carrying about what he thinks is an anxiety, or a hope, or a preoccupation which is his alone and isolates him from mankind; and in this respect at least the function of a play is to reveal him to himself so that he may touch others by virtue of the revelation of his mutuality with them. If only for this reason I regard the theater as a serious business, one that makes or should make man more human, which is to say, less alone."

Great theater creates a certain audience. (Live music, dance, spoken word—any performance art—can do this too.) Communities come together and are transformed by the truth embodied in these artists' works. Such communities can flourish outside of, and in sharp counterpoint to, the dominant ideas of the realm. They can nourish unconventional thoughts and rebel people. They can get out of hand.

Miller's work, especially in the 1950s, drew forth this kind of community. And the power and universality embodied in his plays has meant that they continue to thrive in a way that happens with very few playwrights—on Broadway, on TV (17 million people saw *Death of a Salesman* in 1966), in church basements, high school gyms, and in theaters around the world.



AP Photo

On the set of *The Misfits*. (Front row left to right) Montgomery Clift, Marilyn Monroe, Clark Gable. (Back row left to right) Eli Wallach, Arthur Miller, John Huston.



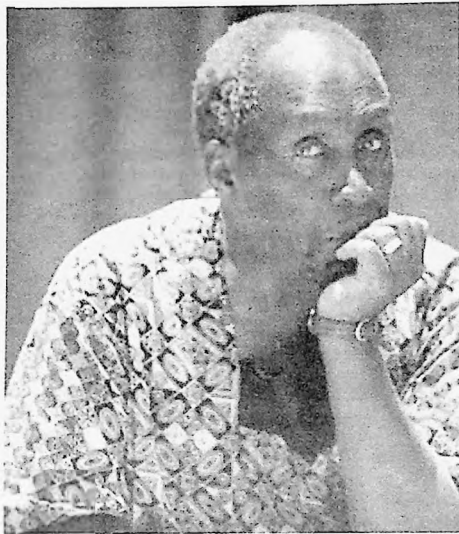
Arthur Miller and Stanley Kunitz backstage at "Poems Not Fit For The White House," February 2003.

Special to Revolution

PEN: Making New Maps



Wole Soyinka



Ngugi wa Thiong'o



Azar Nafisi

Continued from page 4

We always hear how desensitized we are to the violence and brutality surrounding and sometimes even infiltrating our own lives. Falling in love with the characters so affectionately created for us by the writers I have mentioned and more is one antidote for curing us.

On Writing and Catastrophe

"Writing and Catastrophe" was a panel of writers at the PEN Festival who cover real-life natural and man-made disasters. The event included Svetlana Alexievich (Ukraine), who has written several books on the Chernobyl disaster, the most recent being the upcoming *Voices from Chernobyl*; Francois Bizot (France) who recently published his memoir, *The Gate*, detailing his time as a captive of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia; Carolin Emcke (Germany), a reporter at the German newspaper *Der Spiegel*; Philip Gourevitch (USA), author of *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*; Ryszard Kapuscinski (Poland), whose four decades of reporting brought him close to Che Guevara, Salvador Allende, and Patrice Lumumba; Elena Poniatowska (Mexico via France) whose publications include *Massacre in Mexico* and *Nothing, Nobody: The Voices of the Earthquake*.

The rapid pace at which natural disasters and horrific massacres take place combined with the brief flash of media allotted these stories, push the voices of victims into the background. Catastrophic events often become "retrospective stories" and "anniversaries," said Philip Gourevitch. The story fades from our view, but the avalanche of violence being perpetrated on the people does not end.

Carolin Emcke covers human rights violations and war crimes in Lebanon, Colombia, Nicaragua, Kashmir, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq. In her presentation, she described how victims of violence lose their language and ability to completely

describe the trauma they have experienced. One's loss of language is a result of losing their trust in the world, of being part of a community, which is required for a people to share language and communication.

Gourevitch asked the audience to think about the words used to describe genocide: "unimaginable, unspeakable, and unthinkable." These are "the words by which the press gives you permission to forget about and ignore things." Part of the writer's challenge in documenting catastrophe is to collect the pieces of personal narratives from the people struggling to regain their language. The reporter assembles the individuals' stories as well as reaches between the narratives to discover what people are unable to describe.

The writers were asked if the subjects they wrote about made it more difficult for them to enjoy the beauty in the world. In response, Elena Poniatowska, the author of *Massacre in Mexico*, beamed and delightedly exclaimed that she had never considered a question like that because before she could, the people of Mexico were out and running in the streets again and she had to join them. Poniatowska never gets very far in contemplating her personal life because "suddenly the Mexicans arrive, they take over,

and things happen, like the earthquakes, or revolutions, or killings, and then you can't be in your house writing about how you feel or you can't stay there. You have to go out and see what's happening and speak." Missing the action of the masses would dampen Poniatowska's spirits more than she would ever allow their oppression to sink her determination.

As she smiled, a spark in Poniatowska's eye reflected her confidence in the capability of the masses. Her lifetime of work following the lead of the people in the streets is her evidence.

This reminded me of a section from Bob Avakian's "The Revolutionary Potential of the Masses and the Responsibility of the Vanguard" (in *Revolutionary Worker* #1270): "I hate the way the masses of people suffer, but I don't feel sorry for them. They have the potential to remake the world, and we have to struggle like hell with them to get them to see that and to get them to rise to that. We shouldn't aim for anything less. Why should we think they are capable of anything less?" Avakian and Poniatowska share a respect for the great leaps the people take in changing the direction of politics at a given moment.

The victims of violence demand that the writer "confirm that," no, what you are enduring

is not right, it's wrong," said Emcke, and it brings the people back into the global community they had been isolated from. Writing creates "a we that is sort of a normative we, a moral we, a we that is bigger than the realities of the war zone."

Emcke pointed out, as she writes from the war zone, the people there are not naive enough to believe that her words will alert the global community to mobilize and bring an end to their suffering. The truth alone will not restore humanity.

Translation

Throughout the PEN Festival I was constantly amazed by the writers I heard, and I felt fortunate to have access to them. At the same time I felt cheated that in all my years of reading I had not come across many of their works. Upon closer investigation I found out why. Of all the works published in the U.S. each year, not just works of fiction but non-fiction, textbooks, instruction manuals—about 5% are translated from another language into English for American consumption.

I heard this statistic and thought, *Damn, what are we missing?*

Writer Khaled Hosseini was born in Afghanistan and as a young adult his family moved from Kabul to Paris, and finally

to California. The success of his first book, *The Kite Runner*, is attributed to curiosity, word-of-mouth, and the support of local book clubs. These factors combined with Hosseini's tremendous talent as a writer and the immense beauty of his novel have carried *The Kite Runner* into over 50 languages and 1.4 million copies printed in the U.S.

I wonder who would be reading *The Kite Runner* if Hosseini's family had remained in Kabul and he had written the book in Farsi or Pashtun. Major publishing houses are not translating and publishing the latest works by young Afghani novelists, or Iraqi novelists, or Filipino novelists, or Chilean novelists, or Serbian novelists...

A theme that was revisited over and over at the Festival was the truth carried in works of fiction, and often the imagination applicable to interpreting nonfiction for a global audience. "Facts can be abused, facts can be distorted, facts can be misunderstood...both fiction and non-fiction will be judged by whether they're truthful," said Gourevitch.

The American Literary Translators Association reports only 13 books have been translated from Arabic since 2001. When I saw the number 13 a cold stone landed in my stomach next to the frozen boulder I choked down while watching the U.S. military rain thousands upon thousands of tons of bombs over Iraq in the last decade and a half.

There is truth coming from writers in Iraq, from writers all over the world. Living in the U.S., we have to fight to discover the narratives and dreams of people writing from other parts of the planet so that their experiences are not simply "unimaginable, unspeakable, and unthinkable" because, said Gourevitch, "What are writers here to do except to imagine, speak, and think?"

¹Rushdie, Salman. "Inverted Realism." *PEN America, A Journal for Writers and Readers*, 6 *Metamorphoses*. Ed. M. Mark. New York: PEN America Center, 2005. pp. 44-45.

FILIBUSTER WARS

Continued from page 3

(according to one report) even secretly promising not to filibuster George Bush's first nominee for the Supreme Court.

But this slavish offer was arrogantly turned down by Republican Senate leader Bill Frist.

Since then, feverish attempts to forge some kind of "compromise" have fizzled—the White House and Republicans are determined to strip the Democrats of any power to stall a judicial nominee, and they think they have the power to do it. And they seem prepared to weather any fallout.

As we go to press, it is still unclear what exactly will go down on May 24 and afterwards. But no matter what, a profound change is happening in the political life and norms of the U.S. government. Those holding supreme power in the Congress and White House are making an unprecedented power grab—with the obvious intention of wrenching the Supreme Court and then the whole society onto an extreme, new and sinister course.

They have ruthlessly shown their hand. They are mercilessly tearing that existing fabric of official establishment politics in ways that even have significant sections of the Republican Party blinking in disbelief.

Conservative columnist David Brooks warned that Frist is leading the Senate "into this bloody unknown." Republican Senator Arlen Specter publicly frets that events are stampeding toward "the abyss." There is open talk that this nuclear option may "destroy the Senate as an institution." No matter how these events turn out, their actions are threatening to pull apart the

"center"—and important ways that state power has traditionally been exercised and justified.

These are important and ominous developments, even for the many millions of people who have no stake in this whole political and economic system. On one hand, the future demanded by these Christian fascists would be a horror for humanity, and the successful achievement of their plans would make the struggle for justice and liberation all that much harder. And, on the other hand, the very fact that official politics is lurching in such unpredictable and reckless ways to the right has the potential to stir millions of people to throw themselves into the political fray, and potentially raises profound new questions among them about what future we need to be fighting for together.

What Is Missing and Desperately Needed

Harry Reid, leader of the Senate Democrats, said on the floor of the Senate: "*If Republicans roll back our rights in this chamber, there will be no check on their power. The radical, right wing will be free to pursue any agenda they want. And not just on judges. Their power will be unchecked on Supreme Court nominees, the president's nominees in general and legislation like Social Security privatization.*"

This statement captures the intentions of the Republican Right with a bluntness rarely seen in Congress. The "nuclear option" of Bill Frist and Dick Cheney is intended to brush aside any official obstacles to their agenda—and, yes, their plans

obviously do not stop at picking judges, or even the new Supreme Court.

But it is worth looking closely and critically at Reid's opening sentence: "*If Republicans roll back our rights in this chamber, there will be no check on their power.*"

For one thing, Reid and his Democrats have proven to be little of a real "check on their power"!

They have responded to the steady advance of the Christian fascists in the most cowardly and stupid ways imaginable—with endless offers of compromise, with promises of collaboration, with weak and quickly spurned appeals to moderation. And they have too often promoted, among the people, a naïve disbelief that all this is really happening, and a dangerous, intolerable paralysis as events move around us.

The same cannot (unfortunately) be said for the forces of the extreme right. Their movement is highly focused, financed and motivated. The most extreme, ignorant and fundamentalist sections of the population have been riled up and mobilized for exactly this fight. They are actively directed by their leadership, which now sits entrenched in the very heights of power.

There does truly need to be a "check on their power"—and more. And yet where is it? Where are the defiant cities filled with protest...and the campuses shut down in defiance...and the whole political climate where these swine are mocked and hounded wherever they move? It is not there yet, it is glaringly, maddeningly missing.

And yet, isn't the potential and possibility obvious?

Through all these events, there has been

mounting horror and even real fear over the rise of Christian fascism—among millions of people—and with it often a sputtering fury over the stand and response of the Democratic Party. There is, as Bob Avakian points out in this issue of our newspaper, a very stark "disconnect" between these people and the Democrats they have so often voted for.

It is past time to break out of the paralyzing framework of official bourgeois politics—to lose the illusions that "everything will swing back to normal like a pendulum" or that these fascists will be beaten back into their holes by politics-as-usual.

People need to be mobilized in their millions to actually fight those in power, and consciously prepare to wrench that power from their hands. And it is exactly the right time to fight to bring forward a new liberating and revolutionary vision of a whole different future—to contest boldly with the fascists in the spotlight.

Events are moving quickly. These high-level power plays will not run on forever without reaching some decisive resolutions.

In a very important sense, the outcome of it all is not yet decided. And yet, at the same time, important victories will almost certainly be won by the Christian fascists if a powerful political earthquake is not organized, and if key sections of the people are not brought into determined struggle in a whole new way.

These words are meant to sound the alarm—to provoke sleepless nights and tireless days, creative actions and defiant visions.

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Nepal People's War on the Strategic Offensive

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has declared that the People's War it has been leading since 1996 has entered the stage of the strategic offensive, when the balance of power in the country has shifted decisively against the old regime and the revolutionary forces are moving towards the country-wide seizure of power. This article looks at the dynamics behind these developments and at the challenges looming immediately before the Nepalese detachment of the world proletariat—including the threat of US-imperialist backed Indian intervention.

Malaya: Revolution and Its Abandonment

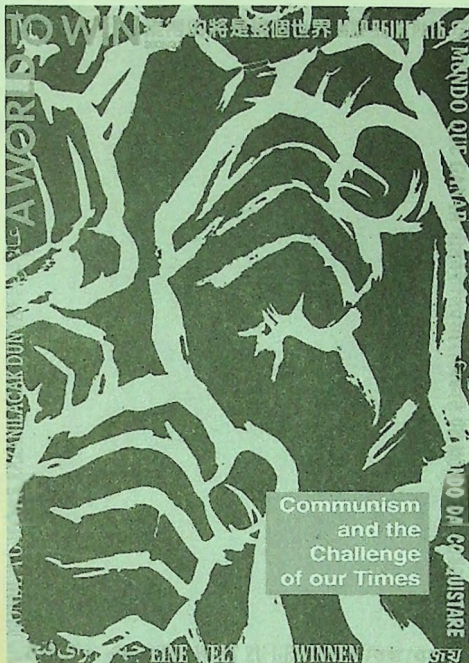
S.R. examines the history of the Communist Party of Malaya in the course of reviewing a book by the party's former leader. The inability of the party to firmly grasp Marxism-Leninism-Maoism led it to defeat and liquidation.

Afghanistan Maoists Unite in a Single Party

At a time when the US imperialists are stepping up their military aggression against the peoples of the world and setting up puppet regimes in the name of democracy, the determination of the world's revolutionaries to step up their own efforts to overthrow imperialism and usher in a new stage in human history, communism, was signalled by the strengthening of the proletarian vanguard with the formation of the Communist Party (Maoist) of Afghanistan, right in the heart of one of the US's most recent conquests.

Lessons for Revolutionaries from the Iraq War

The war in Iraq can be divided roughly into two phases: first, the US invasion and war against Saddam Hussein's regime, which ended in the complete defeat of the Iraqi army and Bush's declaration of victory ("Mission Accomplished") on May 1, 2003, and second, the guerrilla war against the occupation, which broke out in Falluja on that same date, and has continued gathering strength ever since. The first of two articles, written shortly after the first phase, examines the imperialists' real military strengths, as well as the Achilles' heel on which these strengths are founded, while the second applies this analysis to later developments.



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