

# Why There Was No Revolution in the '60s and Why There May Be in the '80s

Bob Avakian Speech in Cleveland

Following are excerpts from a speech given by Chairman Bob Avakian in Cleveland, Ohio during his national speaking tour last summer. See RW, March 21, 1980 for Part One.

I want to address, in the time we have left, one basic question that many people raise when we expose and bring to light what people feel, and concentrate their experience that this capitalist system is rotten through and through and can only bring more suffering and destruction on people, and needs to be overthrown; that revolution is the only possible way and the only road forward. Many people raise the question that I want to spend the rest of the time addressing, and that's the question of not only is it possible in general to make revolution, but what many people raise specifically: "Listen, I agree with you, this system is rotten, it needs to be scrapped, it needs to be swept out of the way, it needs to be buried; but listen, a lot of people have talked about and struggled and strived for revolution in this country before—I've heard this same talk before, this is the same shit I heard back in the 1960s. People were talking about revolution then, people tried to make revolution then, people went to jail for revolution then, people were killed for revolution then. So, since revolution didn't come about then, since all that effort didn't actually bring about a revolution, and in fact capitalism is still ruling over us, why then should we think that now, or in the future even, revolution is a real prospect? That revolution could actually come about? If it couldn't be made then, why do we think, or do we even dare to hope, that revolution can actually be made in the future?"

Now this is a big question, obviously. I can't and we can't go into it thoroughly in one meeting, but I think it needs to be addressed in a couple of aspects and we need to get down on some of the basic points on this. First of all, when we're talking about the movement of the 1960s and the revolutionary developments of that time, the revolutionary organizations, the revolutionary sentiments—the hopes and the dreams that were in the hearts of thousands, perhaps even millions of people, that a fundamental change could be brought about in this society—when we're talking about that, and then we look at what's here today and see that in fact that did not happen, we have to look deeply at it and we have to analyze, what was the character of the movement at that time? What gave rise to it? Why did it take the form that it did? And why ultimately was that particular movement not able to be carried all the way through to the goal of revolution?

And we have to understand this from two sides, in two aspects. First of all, from the standpoint of the enemy, from the strengths as well as the weaknesses of their system, from the ability that they had to maneuver and the moves that they made, the steps they took to prevent revolution from occurring; how and why they were able to do that, has that changed and if so how? And second of all, we have to look at it in terms of the revolutionary forces at that time, the people who stood to the forefront, called on others to take up the goal of revolution and fought for that goal: What were their achievements? What were their accomplishments? And what, on the other hand, were their mistakes, their shortcomings and their limitations? Why in fact did many of those forces fall by the wayside, why were they either destroyed or disintegrated as revolutionary organizations? And what can we learn from the positive and negative aspects of their experience?

In order to understand this, we have to look at and understand that we've been living in a rather unusual period in history in this country, and also how and why it is coming to an end. We have been living in a situation where those who rule over this country and who make our lives miserable every day have until recently been undisputed kingpins among all the imperialists, holding sway over vast parts of the world. They have had an unparalleled ability to plunder and rob and loot hundreds of millions of people and large parts of the areas and resources of the whole world. This is a period that existed coming off of and as a result of World War 2, and it is now coming to an end. And the capitalists in this country are trying to regain their "undisputed kingpin" position by going to war

once again and grabbing more of the world and beating out their Russian rivals at the cost of millions of lives.

But let's go back to what happened at the end of World War 2. Why was great struggle unleashed right within the U.S., along with rebellion against U.S. imperialism all over the world and especially in the colonial countries, in that period? Why did it erupt to tremendous dimensions in the 1960s and why did it take the shape that it did? You see, coming off World War 2, certain far-reaching changes came about in this society, not out of any concern on the part of the ruling class for the well-being or the needs or the conditions of the oppressed people in this country, but out of their own capitalistic drive, their dog-eat-dog necessity, their law of "gobble up or be gobbled up by others" (just like Chrysler has faced: even though it's a billion-dollar corporation, it's still on the verge of bankruptcy). And this never ending dog-eat-dog, eat or be eaten, swallow up or be swallowed, drive that these capitalists all have pushes them on and on to expand and gobble up more and to push workers out of the way and to replace them with machines, only to see this in turn cause more ruin and bring about more chaos and bring a greater threat to their system. And coming off World War 2, it's important to look first at the millions and millions of Black people who, even after the slave system was ended, formally abolished, at the end of the Civil War, still for many generations lived in virtual slavery, with the physical chains removed but the chains of debt strangulation, of being owned—if not outright, then still belonging almost body and soul to the man who still lived in the big house and owned the land and forced you to sharecrop from "can't see in the morning till can't see at night"—not much different from the old slave days, a system of sharecropping on the same plantation reinforced by KKK night riders, by the police, by all the laws and codes and conventions of segregation and all the rest of it. And this went on for decades, for nearly a hundred years, from the end of the Civil War until the beginning of World War 2. Millions and millions of Black people (along with several million poor white people, who had some privileges denied to Blacks and were often incited against them on this basis, but were poor and powerless themselves)—forced to live on plantations, working with only a mule and perhaps a little seed and having to turn over the greatest part of what they produced to the master, the owner of the land—not much different from in many of these countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America that still have widespread feudal conditions.

And what happened through and at the end of World War 2? First off, out of their need for war production, when millions were in the armed forces and the so-called defense plants and other industry had to be (and was temporarily able to be) cranked up almost to full gear, the capitalists needed and lured many Black people off the plantations of the South to the cities of the North—where many were promptly laid off once the war came to an end. But also, after the war, again out of their own drive for more profit, out of their need to compete with other capitalists in this country and even around the world—in Pakistan, for example, or in Egypt where the British still had control—out of all that, the capitalists in this country finally decided that it was more profitable and necessary for their survival as capitalists to introduce machines massively onto the plantations. And so they brought in tractors in a big way, they brought in picking machines, they brought in planting machines and they pushed millions and millions of people who had been sharecroppers off the very land they had for generations held them on, chained by debt and terrorized by the KKK, the police, and other night-riding scum. Now they unleashed the same terror to drive them off the land, forcing them onto the road. In this great land of opportunity—where everybody, of course, lives and works exactly where they've always dreamed of living and working!—millions of people were forced to leave the land that they'd worked and poured their sweat and toil into and were driven into the cities, some in the South but more and more into the North, into the Cleavelands, Chicagos, Detroit, the New Yorks, the Pittsburghs, driven by the anarchy and the dog-eat-

dog ways of this system.

But something new also happened. A very important change took place along with this. Because before, while people had been chained in backward and isolated conditions, each or only a few on separate plots of land with backward conditions, often not seeing each other, now all of a sudden millions were thrown together in the miserable, teeming and sweating slums of the cities. The system could not assimilate them on any basis even approaching equality, it had long since become parasitic and declining; it gave a few jobs to the Black people driven into the cities, but the great majority it kept in the most menial positions, always last hired and first fired, barely able to survive if they had a job at all, forced at more than twice the rate of whites into unemployment and in large numbers even into the degradation of welfare. But at the same time, millions were being crowded more and more in this hellhole and rat-infested housing of the city slums, hundreds of thousands strong in many different cities. And this actually provided a stronger basis for them to fight back.

It is a fundamental law that wherever there is oppression, there is resistance. Wherever you look in history or whatever country you look at, the oppressed have never passively accepted their oppression. They have always found one way or another to resist, to rise up, to revolt, to rebel. The history of this country is no different and the history of Black people in this country is certainly no different. If you look back to the slave years, there were over two hundred recorded—actually recorded—slave revolts, to say nothing of the others they wrote out of history to keep the slaves, along with those who sympathized and stood with them, from learning about them. And when the Civil War came along, and finally the slaves saw their chance to be free of slavery—much against all the lies of *Gone With the Wind* and all the rest of this reactionary Robert E. Lee bullshit—hundreds of thousands of slaves enlisted in the Union Army and went to the front ranks and fought the most decisive battles, despite the fact that even in that war and that Union Army they were paid *half the wages* of the white soldiers. The history of all the oppressed people in the world, including this country, has always been that wherever they're oppressed, they seek and strive and struggle to rise up and find a way out of it.

But, again, something new had developed. Millions of people were no longer isolated and kept largely apart from each other, but were thrown together—yes, in miserable, wretched conditions—but nevertheless able to recognize and realize a potential strength—for the first time, perhaps, even if in the most menial, dirtiest jobs, working together with others in industry, crowded into the same slums and ghettos. And particularly the youth who were not born in these backward conditions but were born (the first generation perhaps) on the streets of the city slums, particularly they marched to the forefront, struck out first, rose up and burned this country down from one end to the other and brought forth many of the older people. And I remember seeing at that time on the television news old people hobbling out with a cane in one hand and a shotgun in the other to take part in these rebellions. And I remember myself and thousands of others feeling a pulse of joy leap up from our hearts at seeing the oppressed rising up and setting an inspiring example for people all over this country and indeed the whole world.

This is what was happening all across the country. And at the same time, throughout the world, because the rulers of this country were the biggest world-wide looters and plunderers, because wherever England had to pull back at the end of World War 2, wherever France had to pull back at the end of World War 2, wherever Germany and Japan or Italy or Holland or Belgium was no longer able to hold on to their colonies, wherever they were forced to pull back and try to liquidate their losses, in came the rulers of this country, letting a bunch of puppets run up a phony national flag and squeezing the life blood out of the people of the country even more viciously. And because of that position all over the world, from Asia to Africa to Latin America, and throughout the world, "Yankee

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**Black youths face off against National Guardsmen in Pittsburgh, Pa. at the height of the urban rebellions of 1968.**

Go Home!" became a rallying cry of the people rising up, and from one end of the world to the other people rose up, unarmed and then armed to battle against this colonial domination and imperialist oppression.

And at the same time something was also going on in this country that affected a whole generation of people. Because, again, not out of any concern for the needs of the people, not out of any desire to see their conditions improve, not out of any sharing of the dreams of people to make a better life for themselves and their families, but out of their *own need*, out of the laws of their capitalist system and because of the panic that was created among their ranks. After the Russians put their space satellite "Sputnik" into orbit, the rulers of this country in the '50s and '60s opened the college doors a little wider than they had before, built some new colleges and expanded admissions to colleges, more than they had in previous periods. They let some of the lower middle classes in more, let even some of the working class in, and in the face of tremendous struggle, some of the very poorest and even the oppressed minorities got into college a little bit more; tens, maybe even hundreds of thousands of students went to school, perhaps the first one in the history of their family that ever went to college. Why? Because as I said, it is the constant tendency of capitalism to replace workers by machines and to introduce new technology which requires a handful of people to have a little bit more technological understanding, engineering understanding and so on to be able to run it. And along with this was the fact that while Khrushchev brought back capitalism in the Soviet Union in the mid-'50s, at the same time as he sent the red flag crashing into the ground he sent the satellites into the sky. Sputnik was the first signal that capitalism restored in Russia was going to be a potential challenge and danger to the rule of the U.S. imperialists and their undisputed position as kingpins on top of the whole imperialist dung heap. When Sputnik went up in 1957 the rulers of this country panicked, and this added to their need to train a few more engineers and technicians and scientists.

And for all these reasons, a generation of youth was affected. More went to college. For the first time, perhaps, in the history of their families they were let into the college doors. And what did they find? They found another example of the lie of the American Dream. They found that you can go to four years of college and join the ranks of 100,000-plus unemployed teachers. They found that the best that you can hope for after being pushed around, after being treated like a faceless number, given an IBM punch card and shuffled around from one place to another and lied to and bullshitted by a bunch of drunken fools or fossilized idiots who call themselves professors (not all are like this, but many are)—that after going through all that, and being told to stick your nose in a book and mildew away, body and mind in some ivory tower—after going through all that, the most that you could hope for and the highest that you would achieve would be to become a minor cog in the machinery and the gears of oppression, and more likely still, be directly ground down under that machinery. And this is what thousands and ultimately millions of youth rebelled against. They rebelled against a whole shitpile of the "American way." They looked out at the life that had been cut out for them. And they also looked out at the world as it was changing and being turned upside down, and they wanted to be part of that. And let's face it—many, many parents were shocked and outraged by what their kids did. "We scraped, we hustled, we worked two jobs, we suffered, we sacrificed, to send you to college—and what did you do? Damn if you didn't burn the goddam thing down?" Well, right on!

'Cause that was the best thing that those students could have done. What else could or should they have

done? With military-murder training centers, so-called ROTC, what else could they have done with CIA recruiters that came in to recruit hired killers who enforced imperialist plunder throughout the world? What else could they have done when executives from Dow Chemical who came into the campuses and said they were gonna recruit people to work for them and make jelly gasoline napalm to drop on old women, old people, pregnant women and little kids in Indochina? When they said that the students there had the right, had the First Amendment right to enlist in this blood-soaked cause—what else could or should the students have done but run them and chase them off the campus and knock them to the ground if they could catch them?

Many of the parents were shocked and outraged. They said, "We sent you to college to become zombies, what are you doing waking up?" And the kids, their feelings were very much like those expressed in a song I heard recently. There is this dude out here who sings some good songs, his name is Bruce Springsteen, he's got a song called "Independence Day" and it's got a heavy line in it from son to father. It says "Poppa go to bed now"—and he just don't mean it's 11 o'clock at night. He means you and I don't see eye to eye, and if you can't help out, get out of the way. "Poppa go to bed now, it's getting late. . . They ain't gonna do to me what I watched them do to you." And this is the bitter truth and a lot of youth took that stand: "My life is not gonna be over at age 25, living this lie and just waiting 40 years to be officially declared dead and buried. To hell with this red, white and blue murdering madness. Fuck this goddamned so-called best of all worlds. I'm not standing with the rulers of this country and their murder and plunder and oppression of people here and around the world. Everything they hate I love. Everything they want to crush I cherish and uphold. Everything that they say is wrong and sinful I say is right and should be supported. The oppressed people, the very people you are trying to crush and degrade here and around the world, are my friends, my allies, I stand with them in rising up against you! To hell with the whole future that's no future that you've carved out for me!"

And it was a bitter experience, but many of the parents, many of the old people were forced to and did learn from this. They got an education the hard way—which in fact is the only way you can get it out here in the real world. Things don't come cheap and easy, and casting off illusions and giving up the idea that by going along with this system somehow you can make things better for yourself and the next generation—that's hard, it's a bitter pill to swallow, but many of the youth forced the older people to face up to reality and begin to deal with it for the first time in their lives and shatter the lie of Howdy-Doody and Leave It to Beaver.

People said, "We're not going along with this any more." This was a tremendously important lesson, not only for the youth but for many of the older people. And it went against everything established. You go and check out this movie, "The Buddy Holly Story." Again some of the truth comes through. Just to sing a little bit of rock-'n'-roll, especially some of these white working-class youth, to sing some rock-'n'-roll, was declared to be sinful, un-American, everything else, and in a certain way it was. 'Cause what they were doing was learning from and, in fact, taking up the music that was created from among a lot of the Black people. From pious sermons on Sunday to civil leaders, this was declared to be subversive, sinful, un-American, and in a certain way it was, because a whole generation of youth was subverted out here, and it was the best thing that ever happened in this country! The very best thing that ever happened in this country! Because for the first time people began to wake up thoroughly and say, "We're not gonna be whores, praising our pimps

any longer out here. We're not gonna be slaves, having our lives mangled and telling our kids that there's nothing you can do about it, look at me, live like me, be like I was and give up your life before it's even begun." Now I'm telling some hard truths, but people who've been through this know that it's true. And it's time we recognized the truth and quit being afraid of it. We don't *have* to be zombies. We don't *have* to be walking around in a daze. We don't *have* to go along with this system. But we've got to make a conscious choice to look at the truth squarely in the eye, take it in our hands and use it and join with people all over the world to use it to change the world. And that's what a whole generation of youth were rising up to do in that period.

Do you remember this country at that time? People who were running up these filthy little red, white and blue blood-soaked rags were forced to be defensive! It was a tremendous thing. And that's gonna come again and even more deeply and profoundly. People who wanted to wave that blood-soaked rag of plunder were put more and more on the defensive, afraid to do it, afraid to step out and talk any longer about the madness that "this country is the greatest country in the world, and where else but in this country could you have so many good things?" Yes, well, where else but in an imperialist country like this could a whole generation of youth be sent off to drop napalm and burn down whole villages and murder people in another country—and then the next generation have a goddam model held up of the fucking Village People standing up singing about "join the navy"? Where else but in a country like this could such madness go on, and people have the nerve to call it the greatest thing on earth! The youth at that time, they saw through those lies, and they were striking back against them. Even among the middle classes, millions of people, especially the youth, were standing with the uprisings of Black people and other oppressed people in this country and hundreds of millions around the world fighting this same imperialist system.

But what happened? Why didn't it go all the way? Why didn't revolution get carried all the way through? What we have to recognize is that because of their position of plunder and looting in the world, the ruling class of this country had the ability and, seeing the necessity, took the steps to hold back that one force in society that could transform that movement from protest and rebellion into revolution, the one force which when it became radicalized and jolted awake could not only shake this country to its foundations, as was done in the '60s, but could lead a movement to carry the fight all the way through and uproot it and overthrow it—that one force that is and must be and will be central and decisive in revolution—the working class in this country, Black, white, Puerto Rican, Chicano, Native American, Asian, all nationalities, men and women. But this force did not come to the fore and unite as a class, conscious of its interests, and lead all the oppressed toward the goal and struggle to carry things through to revolution. Why?

Let's face up to it. Now I go around and talk to these reporters, and a lot of them say, "You'll never make revolution in this country—people are too fat and happy—everybody's got a color TV." Well I wonder, how many people here got a color TV? Let's be honest. I do. Now how many people in this country right now—how many people in this room at least, right now—wouldn't take that color TV and bash it over a pig's head to make revolution—I want to know that! See, there you are, just about everybody. But nevertheless, it is true that the working class did not step forward to take the lead, even in the face of a tremendous upsurge and rebellion that engulfed millions of people in this society and shook this country to its foundations, that panicked the rulers of this country and caused them to drop much of their tattered cloak of democracy and come out openly as the murderers that they were, in Fred Hampton's apartment, at Kent State and many other places. They panicked, but they also saw what they had to do, and in the short run they were able to do it and they did it. They had thrown and consciously continued to throw out crumbs to the workers, especially the basic industrial workers. Coming from their plunder and looting in the world—and even though threatened and battered in many parts of the world, they still held on to much of their ability to plunder, and they gave out a few crumbs, especially to the better organized, better unionized workers. They gave a few more benefits in exchange for a lifetime of slavery and oppression, they gave a dental plan and took back a health plan, they gave with one hand and took away with another, but they kept people, millions of workers in factories with their heads down, chasing the same piece of cheese through the same rat maze, ending up nowhere but with a broken dream and a burning gut.

They were able to do this, and they paid careful attention to pacifying crucial sections of the working class. Because they understand its potential role in rising up against this system. And we should understand, we should learn from our enemy. They understand very well and acted upon the understanding that when the working class becomes radicalized, when it becomes revolutionary, when it becomes politically conscious and steps out onto the stage of history, it has the potential strength to move along millions and millions of oppressed people, and not only shake this whole country to its foundations, but more than that, uproot and overthrow the whole rule of capitalism.

But they not only move to pass out a few crumbs as

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long as they can, they also move to shackle people's minds—and they didn't do this by accident, so, again let's learn from them—they made a very deliberate attempt to say to people in this country, especially people rebelling against this system, "the working class in this country is not only not revolutionary now, *it never will be*. It is reactionary and it always will be." And why do you think, other than to say that, they put Archie Bunker on TV? Now first of all, he's just a goddam foreman (just like the foreman in *The Deerhunter*—the guy they had in *The Deerhunter*, who's supposed to be a "Joe Dumb Worker," was in reality a goddam foreman in a steel mill in Gary that they got to act in the movie to say "this is your typical worker"). They know what they're doing! They hold up as examples and models of the working class the most hide-bound, idiotic, sour-bellied, narrow-minded backward fools! And they say to the masses of people, workers and others in this country who are looking for people to unite with to make revolution, "Give it up, forget about it, here is your working class—people who don't give a damn about oppression in this country and this world, who don't know about it, don't care about it, and don't want to know about it—they just *love* this system and they even love Richard Nixon when millions of other people hate him." They didn't put that on TV by accident, they put it on there on purpose. And we know there are Archie Bunkers and there are Edith Bunkers out there in this working class of ours. But even they—like the people in Levittown I spoke of earlier (see last week's *RW*, March 21, 1980—Ed.) are being banged on the head and forced to question, and millions more people will be in the period ahead as things sharpen up.

But in the short run, in the late '60s and early '70s, the capitalists still had enough strength, economically and therefore politically and ideologically, to keep the majority of the working class divided, fighting among itself, and playing a backward, not an advanced, not a revolutionary role—not a role at the forefront but a role of largely standing aside from this struggle. Though thousands of workers, young and old, Black, white and others, joined in the various movements of the time, nevertheless, as an organized united force, conscious of its interests as a class, our class did not step to center stage and rally the oppressed forward. We have to face up to this, but more than that we have to analyze why. And what we have to understand most basically is this: that it stemmed from the position and the temporary strength, the top-dog imperialist in the world position and strength that our ruling class still maintained at that time—and to a certain degree still

maintains, though it finds it challenged more and more, at home and abroad, through the very workings of its system, through the struggle of people oppressed by it throughout the world and through the growing rivalry of yet another powerful imperialist force, the Soviet Union.

This temporary strength, the remaining reserves, of the imperialist rulers of this country, stemming from their top-dog position and enabling them to pass along crumbs to pacify crucial sections of the working class—this is the basic reason why that movement at that time did not get carried all the way through. In the face of it, serious questions and problems and obstacles posed themselves for revolutionaries at the time, questions they came up against and attempted to deal with. What to do in the face of that? How, in fact, could the revolutionary movement be maintained, what direction did it have to take, how did it have to move in the face of the fact that this upsurge of the '60s and early '70s was ebbing, how did it have to and how could it prepare for the next upsurge, and prepare in such a way as to make it decisively and qualitatively different, get ready for the future possibility of bringing the working class to the forefront when crisis deepened and conditions sharpened up in the period ahead?

Most of the revolutionary forces at that time broke their heads against these obstacles and were not able to find the way forward. But a tremendous achievement, and the most lasting and most important product of the movement of that time was the formation of a genuine Marxist-Leninist vanguard party, that because it went deeply into the science of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought, because it fought for a correct political program and ideological understanding and outlook, was able not only to survive but to become strengthened and tempered as a revolutionary force. This is our Party, the Revolutionary Communist Party, which was formed in 1975 but whose roots lie in the revolutionary upsurges of the 1960s and early '70s, not only in this country but world-wide, and which was able, for the reasons I've just stated, to advance beyond the limitations of that movement, especially in this country, to build on its real achievements but to learn from its shortcomings and make the leap to a revolutionary organization on a level that in truth has never existed before in this country. This does not mean we can stand still and sleep on our achievements—just the opposite, we have to keep on advancing and prepare for much heavier struggle than anything that has come before. And to do this, and more than that to arm and bring forward many, many more people to join in this process, it is extremely necessary for us to deeply sum up the experiences and lessons, positive and negative, of the movement of the 1960s, through which many thousands of people turned toward revolution and out of which our Party, the

vanguard party of revolution in this country, developed.

And in particular, it is important for us, in the time that we do have left tonight, to look at what was in fact the most advanced revolutionary organization at that time, the organization that more than any other in the upsurge of the late '60s up to the early 1970s stood as the most militant, most serious organization calling for and leading people toward revolution and stood in the most fundamental way at the forefront of the upsurge at that time. What were its strengths, what were its accomplishments, what were its achievements, and what on the other hand were its shortcomings, weaknesses and limitations that led to its ultimate destruction as a revolutionary organization? And I think you know that I'm talking about the Black Panther Party.

(To be continued next week)

## The Loss in China and The Revolutionary Legacy Of Mao Tsetung



Speech by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA at the **MAO TSETUNG MEMORIAL MEETINGS 1978**

RCP Publications, P.O. Box 3486, 151 pp. \$2.00  
Merchandise Mart, Chicago, IL 60654.