

Amongst the Undead: Report from New Synthesis Event in NYC.

Com. Neftalí Paolo

The Bob Avakian show has landed in the cities of New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and the Bay Area. I myself was lucky enough to attend the event in New York City that was on March 9th. I attended this event, which was put forward by the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, with people who flyered the event informing them of the Kasama site and the "9 Letters" by former writer and editor for the Revolutionary Communist Party's paper, Mike Ely. All of those who did flyer were allowed inside the event by the RCP with the exception of one of the people associated with the Kasama project. He was told he could not enter the event by the RCP and were kept out and watched outside through the event. This was sadly quite embarrassing for an organization that proclaims that it wants those who disagree to have a "wrangle-ism" around Bob Avakian's work. The 9 Letters, despite our own disagreements on particular areas, is in very fact an embodiment of this "wrangle-ism" in that it confronts the work of Bob Avakian and the practice of the RCP that it can't simply be ignored.

Despite this embarrassing display of RCP silencing prominent disagreement and trying to stifle struggle, I and a few others, that were outside flyering briefly, were allowed inside. It has to be said, that the RCP has to be thanked for finally bringing forward the "New Synthesis" and "Epistemological Break" [as they have coined them] in a way in which those who have disagreed with the line of Bob Avakian can really debate. It was immediately palpable and clarified what the significance of these supposed theoretical "breaks" were for the RCP. However it is the opinion of this observer that the event failed to show the breakthrough of Bob Avakian's work, if it is in fact anything at all like a breakthrough.

I was immediately struck about how stagnant the philosophical thinking was. Lenny Wolfe in mapping out the philosophical concepts of Idealism, "relativism", pragmatism and summarizing Hegel's work, stuck to a narrowly conceived opinion that is directly transposed from old and vulgarly simplified work that found itself in vogue with the instrumentalism and dogmatism of our historical tradition as Communists (the very same tainted legacy Bob Avakian claims to break from). Post-modernist, or contemporary philosophical work coming out of the structuralist/post-structuralist trend, is thinly attacked as "relativism." Pragmatism is defined as an "American philosophy" that is just a "do what works" and Idealism is basically summarized as Religion. These comments, while it can be agreed in part with some of these generalities, shows a certain laziness in the actual approach of real philosophical work over the past century. Further these generalities are used in the most vulgar of way throughout the talks, in their sort of pop-philosophical connotations. This is a terribly bad treatment of philosophy. Hegel's work receives such a treatment worth noting.

Hegel is more or less defined as a Platonic, semi-religious figure, who has his head in the clouds. The depth and breath of his work is just passed over as the most philistine Idealism. It is true Hegel describes his work as Absolute Idealism, and he is greatly influenced by German Idealists such as Kant, Fichte, Schiller, and Schelling, but this is problematic of course if you simply define Idealism as, for more or less, religion, which Lenny Wolfe had done. You miss the greater scope of his work if that is done. So what is of importance of Hegel for the RCP? Its his "dialectical method," that of course Marx and Engels had stood him up right "on his feet" and off his head; however everything is quite simply missed if dialectics justs need to be inversed, turned inside out. In fact throughout the presentation by

Lenny Wolfe, nothing is outrightly spoken about that begins to address the question of the dialectical method itself. This in my opinion seems to implicate something strongly damning of the RCP project itself and Bob Avakian's "break." Simply its not of its time, it is sadly caught up in its own self-referential system and just doesn't relate to the actual theoretical developments outside itself.

Lenny Wolfe in the presentation, presented the work of Bob Avakian's theoretical in three spheres. Epistemology (a historical branch of philosophy that studies the essence of Knowledge and Truth), socialism, and revolutionary organizing. To break this down, I'll schematically outline each.

1) I'll begin of course with the claim that Avakian has broken out from the pack and really put forward something that is rupturing from previous Epistemology. However for the RCP the question relates more to the history and theoretical struggle of the International Communist Movement on this question and largely nothing is presented on the field of work on epistemology itself. Further, most of the argument proceeds on the basis of challenging what is called relativism or pragmatism by the RCP. The actual epistemological claim made by Bob Avakian isn't itself anything new, that Truth reflects Reality has been a standard claim of materialists whatever their methodology. However it is not in fact Avakian's claim that he is making an "Epistemological Break" in the proper sense of a break within the framework of epistemology itself, but rather that he is breaking the Communist "instrumentalism," the warping of Truth for political principle. It is the claim of Avakian that Communists historically have been "instrumentalist" in the sciences and arts based upon prejudiced political aims. Specifically here the claim is that there is no such thing as "political truths" or "class truths," and what is given as empirical examples against this is the Lysenko case in the Soviet Union and the certain ultra-left dogmatic deviations made by revolutionary leaders and revolutionary youth in fighting revisionism or other bourgeois manifestations in social relations.

While these excessive and dogmatic traits must be fingered out and criticized, the summation that this was a result of the conception of there being "political truths" is false. Bob Avakian wants to down play the relativity of our partisanship, but this is unfortunately ill conceived. Being we're dialectical materialists, the process of the coming to Truth is intricate and nuanced and can't be thrown down in simplisms as truth being synonymous with that which is outside us. Unfortunately, in my opinion because of the lack of "engagement" with revolutionary communists such as Gramsci, Lukacs, and Althusser [not to mention to the already spoke of neglect of Hegel] RCP can't answer this question. But to look at it in a simple way, propositions and claims if validated inductively (through sense-experience of the world) or deductively (through logic and pure mathematics) becomes a truth. What is a muddle is the simple dualism that is presented to us. We are presented the question in this stark dichotomy of subjectivity vs. objectivity. Truth can't help but be partisan, it can't help but have a subjectivity. The mind is immanently a part of the world and isn't just its mirror or its sponge, it projects into it. That is why what is our unearthed knowledge of the world is always subjective and objective at the very same time. The dichotomy of Subjective Truth vs. Objective Truth is a false one, this much Avakian understands this, but at the rate of heaving up the relation of subjectivity toward the world. It is a turn against dialectical materialism into a more mechanical materialism.

Here again we are presented with some clear indication of this when we present the political-ethical axioms that guide the principles of MLM itself. Mao Zedong said Marxism itself can be summed up in one Truth, "Its Right to Rebel." This one simple axiomatic phrase will show us the subjective-objective relation, and how political partisanship matters. "Its Right to Rebel" is a political truth founded on the class consciousness, the subjectivity of a Revolutionary

Communist. It couldn't be derived any other way but a pure political partisanship as such and has no reference to the world outside of a class consciousness imperative and the basis for such a consciousness objectively.

The dialectical position of understanding consciousness reveals the "subjective" within the "objective," and always has the self-consciousness of the relation between the two.

2) We are presented with Bob Avakian's vision of socialism itself, and what a socialist society "must" be. It is a very interesting part of Avakian's work and it is where the main function of his slogan and concept of needing a "solid core with lots of elasticity" lays. Avakian also looks at it in other ways in his article on *Three Alternative Worlds* and *A Radically New Kind of State, A Radically Different and Far Greater Vision of Freedom* where upon in the first he criticizes a social welfare vision of Socialism which provides the basic needs of the people, essentially a utilitarian society, and the latter in which he speaks about a certain contradiction of his about "upholding" revolutionary socialist countries while not wanting to live there.

These things presented by Bob Avakian must be said to be a genuine consideration of the fact that there is a certain crisis amongst the International Communist Movement in the summation of the previous epoch of Proletarian Revolution, where we rely upon dogmatic faith to models, we've ended up as apologists for periods that must be criticized and even become historical revisionists, or we have become defeatist in the aftermath and death of "*actually existing socialism*" across the world. All this shows is a general lack of summation that can help us move forward to build a successful revolutionary movement. We need in fact to reconceive questions of the Party and its relation to the State; whether we need "multiparty" socialism or not, etc. However what is problematic about Lenny Wolfe's presentation and Bob Avakian's work is that there is hardly anything that makes up for the problems we face.

In the polemic that is feature on our site by Manuel R. Chávez López, *A Contribution to the Confusion*, it criticizes the Setting the Record Straight tour that was done by Raymond Lotta for its apologetics of the Stalinist period and generally a broad scoping of the socialist periods without any thoroughness combined at the same time with what Com. Manuel called a "Lennonist" [referring to song writer, activist, and Beetle John Lennon and punning off the coined term of 'Leninism'] to describe the proclamations that Avakian is conceiving how Socialism should look like as a breakthrough to Communist theory. Such thinking is necessary and must be done; however how Avakian proceeds with this is in fact anti-scientific and is against a Communist praxis. By projecting these musings of what socialism should look like as a definite part of his theoretical "break," he establishes an A Priorism, Idealist vision rather than one that must take the zig zag course of historical developments that emerge out of necessity. Further Bob Avakian's work isn't actually gaging questions of practice and aren't challenging certain historical problems. Avakian's work minces in no way with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and it taking up a vision of "multiparty socialism" for 21st Century Communism. Avakian speaks nothing about the Great Purges themselves and the Stalinist show trials. Etcetera.

Further whatever the merit of these question about Socialism in the 21st century, they can't be said to be theoretical breaks in themselves. Marxism never was established upon the pivot that we need to just meet people's needs, but always has had the aim of empowering the people and taking on the contradictions that made difficult for such power to be held. Lastly, without the actual experience of socialist society itself, such questions can only rely upon speculation of possibility and aren't concrete in the stone. Here we can look at Lenin's State and Revolution and

the experience of the Bolshevik Revolution as an example of how projected models are not definite when we are actually engaged in Revolution. During the Question and Answer period, when more or less this was posed to Lenny Wolfe, they answered they don't proceed "empirically" or as "positivists" on these questions, that this vision doesn't need to be brought to the reality of developing socialism through revolutionary struggle, it was adequate to analyze the previous historical models of the Soviet Union and China. It seemed this answer, during the Q&A, denigrates the role of practice and Mao's pivotal "On Practice" which shows the criterion for understanding where correct ideas come from.

3) The last significant aspect of Avakian's "New Synthesis" is then claimed to be what he conceives as revolutionary organizing and how it needs to be done. Here we are told that Avakian and the Party have Enriched "*What-is-to-be-Donism*" [reference to V.I. Lenin's pivotal polemic against Menshevism and economism, "What is to be Done?" written in 1905]. The current that has always emphasized a What-is-to-be-Donist approach have always put emphasis on getting out their politics the first principle in their practice. Many organizations on this principle make their revolutionary newspapers and literature principled organizing tools, have cleared work away from "day-to-day" needs of people to more active political campaigns, or have put "politics in command" in whatever work they do and don't hide their politics. RCP has historically, on the principle of being What-is-to-be-Donists, stepped away from Trade Union work and worker organizing in favor of promoting the role of their literature and taking on more active political work which stands on the "fault lines" of US society, such as building organizations like Refuse & Resist, Not In Our Name, October 22nd Coalition, and World Can't Wait.

The "enrichment" that they now refer to is their effort now to popularize not only the work of Bob Avakian, but to promote and polarize those around Avakian himself. It is said they are going to get Ideology and the work of Avakian right to the hands of the people so people can grab onto these ideological breaks Avakian is making, so they can have access to his vision. The new line of the RCP is to make Avakian, himself, an organizing principle, being promoted as a new Lenin or Mao who is revolutionizing theory. RCP has restructured much of its work around it, the paper, "Revolution," now features much of its articles on Avakian or written by Avakian. "Revolution Clubs" are being established and Youth Brigades are becoming non-functional in order to readily get Avakian's work to people and to organize people to listen to his talks, watch the film of his talk on the East Coast and West Coast, which is an 11 hour DVD set entitled "REVOLUTION: Why It's Necessary, Why It's Possible, What It's All About--A Film of Talk by Bob Avakian."

The "enrichment" has turned RCP into the speaking vehicle of Bob Avakian. The idea is that the RCP will polarize society around Avakian's theoretical "breaks," his vision, and his own person and life lived. Lenny Wolfe spoke about this and compared Bob Avakian to John Coltrane. The analogy was essentially that Avakian like Coltrane is a path breaking figure, and his work in their fields is going to lead to intrigue into their lives. Further the analogy went a bit further because Wolfe compared the Party essentially as similar to the musicians around Coltrane when he was recording and performing. This is reason for the Memoirs presumably, and their promotion, and why the existing Cult of Personality -while existent from the early years of the RCP on- has intensified.

The temporal reality is that Avakian is not polarizing society, but the way in which the RCP has begun promoting Avakian is repulsive and alienating to most and has only served to push itself

into bizarreness by the existing revolutionary forces. It is the reason why I left the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade. Such an approach has isolated and created a water tight kingdom for the RCP, not connected seriously to the mass work around it and not understanding how to bring forward masses to a revolutionary Communist position.

To sum up largely what I felt of the event, I can only say it felt dead. Not in the sense the RCP is a dead organization, no they do have the ear of genuine revolutionaries and are relevant, but this actually is a part of the problem. The Left itself is the living dead, especially the Communist Left in this country, very much out of touch and stuck in routine. We, in general in this country, suffer from a certain intellectual shallowness and pettiness in practice. Avakian's work can only be seen as breakthrough with such conditions that the RCP is all well a part. The attempts to try to get Bob Avakian broken through and embedded into the consciousness of the structures of this seems a limited understanding of the superstructure itself and how it produces and reproduces Ideology. Such an attempt will ultimately fail if RCP insists to keep its self-referential system of questioning. It also denigrates the reality that the revolutionary left is not on the radar of politics for the masses of people, and "breaking into the superstructure" more or less seems the quick fix non-solution for the inability to organize the masses in struggle.

Undoubtedly the masses need to grapple with questions that are beyond the day-to-day, man doesn't live on bread alone as the good Christians say; however lets consider the fact of the matter for a moment with the developing struggles of Black, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Filipino, and Arabic peoples, the developing student movement with organizations like Students for a Democratic Society in the forefront, and also with millions of people being brought forward by the Obama campaign [whatever we think of this], does the RCP really think by bolstering Bob Avakian into this position as a good Freudian super-ego of the movement, that this will actually "Engage" Avakian in anything real beyond the "solid core and its elasticity" that already exists? This for me is doubtful and more so painful that dedicated revolutionaries do see this as their actual aim. It remains to be seen what this path will entail for the RCP, but it is from this perspective not a bright one. We can hope only that whatever can come from this can be summed up and better the position Maoists are in after it. We can only have faith in the cadre and supporters of the RCP to really examine all the steps they take in their process of creating "wrangle-ism" around Bob Avakian.

We must look honestly at the fact that Maoists are in a Post-Maoist period. What can we say then to a development of a "New Synthesis." Marxism is marked, in its history, not as a continuous naturally linear path of building up, but it is continually interrogating itself in the most disharmonious ways. Marxism is marked by discontinuity, and in many ways there is no totalized *Marxist* Philosophy proper as such. Marxists have a methodology of interrogation, immanent critique, and this is part of the dialectical method. This methodology is what enables us to come forward pitted from a partisanship, and to navigate a path to resolve contradictions within theory. Dialectical methodology in understanding the development of knowledge is in its simplest understanding, that consciousness comes into itself qua consciousness. The dialectical materialist view of the world understands that consciousness splits into two because of contradictions with consciousness and its relation to the world, in this way our movement continually breaks and ruptures from itself; however it is only the genuine position that keeps a fidelity to this self-consciousness of this movement. Maoists must take upon themselves this spirit to brave the waters and interrogate their praxis, and methodology as such, because it is the actual orthodoxy, the fidelity to revolution to do so. This doesn't mean apologizing for being Maoists in the post-Maoist conditions. The eclectic pauper's broth is no substitute for rigor in our theoretical work and keeping to revolutionary praxis. As it is today, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism represents most correct and coherent scientific approach to Revolution. Avakian's work is a failure

because it is regressively hindering the development of a rigorous synthesis that can supersede the contradictions that exist within our theory and movement.