
Commemorating a Major Struggle in the RCP, USA Upholding Mao's Revolutionary Line: A Turning Point

This winter marks a great anniversary in the history of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA. It is ten years since the party's victorious struggle to uphold Mao's line and repudiate the revisionist coup-makers in China. It was a life-and-death struggle that saved and greatly strengthened the vanguard party for revolution in the U.S. It was the most important inner-party struggle to date in the RCP.

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In October 1976, a month after Mao's death, some top leaders in the Chinese Communist Party staged a coup, seizing control of the party and Chinese state, and went on to reverse the achievements and gains of the Chinese revolution and restore capitalism. This event was a tremendous setback for the proletariat internationally and represented one of the most crucial junctures in the history of the international communist movement. The struggle waged to understand, explain, and go forward in the aftermath of the events in China became a crucial turning point for this movement.*

A year after the coup in China, in the winter of 1977-78, opportunists within the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA attempted to seize leadership of the party. Their ideological and political outlook was in unity with those who had seized power within the Chinese party. If they had won, these forces within the RCP, USA would have gutted the revolutionary essence of the party and succeeded in removing from the stage in this country the only organization capable of leading the proletariat in revolutionary struggle towards communism. This attempt to wreck the party was defeated and these counterrevolutionaries split

* The coup was marked by the arrest of the "Gang of Four," Chiang Ching, Chang Chun-chiao, Wang Hung-wen, and Yao Wen-yuan, who had united closely with Mao in his struggle against the revisionists in China. On October 6, 1976 these four were seized and imprisoned and a campaign of slander was launched against them and the revolutionary line they upheld. In internationally publicized trials Chang Chun-chiao and Chiang Ching refused to renounce their revolutionary stand and opposition to the new Chinese rulers, while the other two did not hold firm in the face of attacks against them and ended up renouncing their previous stand.

from the party (quickly degenerating into insignificance). The great significance of the victory of the revolutionaries in the RCP is that in the line struggle — which was waged principally around cardinal questions related to carrying forward revolution in a socialist country — the RCP was able to lay the basis for crucial ideological, political, and organizational gains in the face of the setback in China. These key gains were expressed in the decisive theoretical contributions of the RCP's chairman, Bob Avakian.

The Turning Point: What Was at Stake?

Mao Tsetung was the greatest revolutionary of our time. He stood with and led the Chinese masses in overthrowing reactionary rule and imperialist domination and in continuing the revolution as the masses themselves became the rulers of socialist China. The Chinese revolution had liberated one-quarter of humanity in a nation characterized by extreme poverty and backwardness that had been enforced for centuries by foreign domination and internal exploiters. Mao was guided by and continuously developed a vision of liberation which would accept nothing less than all-the-way revolution — shattering all exploitation and thoroughly rupturing with and transforming all existing relations and conditions — and for the whole world, not just for China.

This vision was expressed in the leadership given by Mao in the twists and turns of the Chinese revolution, which reached its greatest heights in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Initiated by Mao, the Cultural Revolution was a "revolution within a revolution," attacking the vexing problem: how to prevent revolution from being betrayed "from within," how to keep society moving in a revolutionary direction after the old, reactionary regime had been overthrown and the new, revolutionary regime had come to power.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was

... a mass revolutionary upheaval, initiated and inspired by... Mao Tsetung... against those in authority who sought to become the new party of order, restoring capitalism in the name of "socialism," using their revolutionary credentials as capital. The Cultural Revolution involved literally hundreds of millions of people in various forms and levels of political struggle and ideological debate over the direction of society and affairs of state, the problems of the world revolutionary struggle and the international communist movement. Barriers were broken down to areas formerly forbidden to the masses of people — science, philosophy, education, literature, and art. Putting self above the interests of the revolution, in China and the world,

was an outlook under attack and on the defensive and few were those who would openly utter such phrases as "my career." Through all of this, transformations were brought about in the major institutions in society and in the thinking of the masses of people, further revolutionizing them. (Bob Avakian, *For a Harvest of Dragons*, p. 111)

The Cultural Revolution burst forth in the 1960s, in the midst of a high tide of revolutionary struggle internationally. In this period there was an emergence of many new communist organizations and parties. Many of these based themselves on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought and were in opposition to the revisionists of the CP in the Soviet Union.*

The Revolutionary Communist Party, USA,† founded in 1975, was such an organization. It had its roots in the period of the '60s, and as Bob Avakian has stated,

it is no exaggeration to say that without the theory and line developed by Mao and the practice of the Chinese masses in carrying it out, especially through the Cultural Revolution, our party would not and could not have been founded when it was and on such a revolutionary basis. ("Second Party Congress Deepens Victory: Opening Remarks at Congress," *Revolution*, April/May 1978, p. 12)

One can understand why the coup in China, coming a month after Mao's death in 1976, was such a tremendous setback for the international struggle and the international communist movement. Not only had the inspiring and unprecedented advances achieved in the Chinese revolution been reversed, but China as the major base of ideological and material support for world revolution was gone.

This setback took on even greater significance when viewed in the context of the strategic developments in the world and the implications of this for revolutionary struggle worldwide. The RCP had analyzed that the basic underlying economic and political relations which had driven imperialism since the Second World War were becoming strained to the breaking point, and that the period ahead would increasingly be marked by major shocks and convulsions with things accelerating towards world war and un-

* In the 1950s, leaders within the Soviet party had "revised" Marxist theory, using this as the theoretical basis to restore capitalism in the Soviet Union. Restoration of capitalism in a formerly socialist country was an unprecedented development in the history of the communist movement. This Soviet capitalist restoration, which sought to sweep along with it the entire world communist movement, was indeed an earthquake in that movement. Above all, it was Mao and the Chinese Communist Party who led the way in analyzing this development, standing firm against it, and leading the revolutionaries of the world forward in the face of it.

† The political and organizational center of the RCP at its founding in 1975 was the Revolutionary Union which was formed in 1968 in the San Francisco Bay Area and spread nationwide thereafter.

precedented opportunities for revolution worldwide, including within the U.S.

What was at stake was nothing less than this: would there be revolutionary parties which had prepared themselves and the revolutionary sections of the masses and would they be ready to seize these opportunities and turn them into major revolutionary advances for the proletariat on a world scale; or would revolutionaries compound the defeat in China and the setback it represented internationally by capitulating, going along with the line of the new Chinese rulers, or by becoming demoralized and just giving up on revolution, and in the process throw away the revolutionary possibilities in the period ahead?

Rising to the Challenge

Even before the coup in China, the RCP had treated the death of Mao Tsetung as a great loss and in his memory had dedicated itself to living up to the lofty standards set by Mao and continuing forward, overcoming new obstacles and challenges, and advancing the struggle towards communism. In a speech given at a memorial meeting for Mao Tsetung in September 1976, before the coup, Bob Avakian struck a note of sober challenge and at the same time revolutionary optimism:

What is inevitable is that people will continue to fight back against their oppression and exploitation, that this system of capitalism is not here to stay, or eternal, that it only developed at a certain stage . . . and that the very development of capitalism . . . [has] drawn together as capitalism's gravedigger a mighty army from those who were scattered and separated . . .

So when they raise the question who will be Mao Tsetung's successors, the working class is ready with its answer: We will be Mao Tsetung's successors, in our millions and hundreds of millions, and we will continue the cause for which he fought and in which he led us and to which he devoted his entire life, until that great goal of eliminating exploitation and oppression and achieving communism has finally been achieved.

The coup in China brought to a head important differences in line and outlook which had been developing within the leadership of the RCP for some time. Forces who no longer upheld revolution, or upheld it only in name, had been factionalizing within the party, promoting their line and program. While never engaging in a frontal attack on the party's line, the influence of these members, some of whom were leaders in the party, had succeeded to an extent in imposing a conservative and a nonrevolutionary mark on the party's line and work among the masses. What characterized the line of these forces was their insistence on narrowing party work to day-to-day reform-type issues and

refusing to confront, or bring to the masses, the difficult questions and problems of how to carry forward revolutionary struggle in a country such as the U.S. They raised to a principle their refusal to educate and struggle with the proletariat around key international questions. Their world outlook had nothing in common with a genuine communist outlook that is characterized by its continuous struggle to understand the world in order to transform it, to end all exploitation and oppression. Their pragmatic worldview was defined by their rejection of revolutionary theory and in its place searching for easy formulas and short-term gains — gains defined by motivating people to act in their own narrow and selfish interests.

In the view of these revisionists in the party, their own outlook and narrow views were validated by the coup in China. After all, people with a reactionary, revisionist view like their own had come to power in China, and people with all those wild "idealist notions" about revolutionizing all of society, and the world, had been crushed! Their main approach to dealing with the questions surrounding the coup in China was to try and forestall any serious discussion on these events while organizing for their line outside of party channels.

For their part, the revolutionaries at the party center, led by Chairman Avakian, took a qualitatively different approach. This is explained by him in an interview a couple of years ago:

The restoration of capitalism in China, the seizure of power by the revisionists after Mao's death, was a tremendously discouraging thing for every revolutionary in the world. But what it did was force us to confront more deeply the problems and contradictions involved in carrying forward the revolution toward the goal of communism. That was a choice you had, either you would go more deeply into that and try to develop a more profound and all-around understanding of that and be able to go forward again on the basis of that, or else you would be defeated by it. ("Questions for These Times," *Revolution*, Winter-Spring, 1986, p. 58)

With this outlook the revolutionary center in the party issued a series of inner-party bulletins arming members with the seriousness and paramount importance of events in China and the line questions involved, and giving guidance to study around these questions.

After a period of study — and of intense struggle, involving increasing factionalism and violation of party principle by those who supported the revisionist coup in China — the question of what stand to take on the momentous events in China was battled out to a resolution at a meeting of the RCP's Central Committee ten years ago. At the Central Committee meeting Chairman Avakian submitted a paper which examined in-depth and all-sidedly the key line questions involved and the role of key figures in the Chinese Communist Party and put forward his analysis that the

wrong side had won in China and the reasons why this had happened.*

The meeting itself was lengthy, exhaustive in its approach to struggling out the problems involved and arriving at a correct and all-sided understanding of the events in China. All members of the body were called on and encouraged to hold back nothing and say all they thought.

The struggle focused on Mao Tsetung and the Four and the capitalist roaders in power in China and the lines and programs they concentrated and gave leadership to. People had to draw on their understanding and view of revolution and a number of questions flowing from this to critically study and evaluate these crucial questions of line and program.

The meeting went through days of intensely sharp and wrenching struggle. At one point, when it became clear that their line was being defeated, the revisionists threatened to split the party. However, the revolutionaries on the Central Committee were not about to throw down their defense of Mao Tsetung's revolutionary line and their support for the role of the Four in order to preserve a party that would be rendered nonrevolutionary by such a compromise.

As revolutionary communists say, the vanguard is forged through struggle — and this struggle in the RCP was exactly that way. Rising to the challenge posed by revisionism required a leap in the ideological and political development of the party. During the period of study and struggle sharper clarity was achieved on the fundamental divergence between a revolutionary communist outlook and that of revisionism. Bob Avakian has explained this, in a concentrated and at the same time sweeping way, in the book *Bullets: From the Writings, Speeches, and Interviews of Bob Avakian*:

The goal of the revisionists is not to change the whole world, from bottom to top, but to rise to the top of the world as it is. Their aim is not to make the two radical ruptures† Marx and Engels spoke of in *The Communist Manifesto*... but to make some changes in form and appearance while leaving the essence unchanged. They want new faces, new forces in power — themselves — but no revolutionary overturning of all hitherto existing relations and conditions. They want a socialism, even a communism with no mass revolutionary upheaval, no overthrowing of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat, of the old by the new. In short, they want capitalism in the name of socialism and communism. (pp. 264-5)

* Bob Avakian, "Revisionists Are Revisionists and Must Not Be Supported, Revolutionaries Are Revolutionaries and Must Be Supported," from *Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (Chicago: RCP Publications, 1978).

† "Two radical ruptures" refers to Marx and Engels' statement that the communist revolution involves the radical rupture with all traditional property relations and all traditional ideas.

Rising to the challenge also required making a rupture with a view of revolution in which things go forward in a straight line and there are only advances and great gains, one after another, and never twists and turns or setbacks. A number of forces and groups internationally were so overcome by the tremendous defeat of the Chinese revolution that they were never able to overcome their demoralization and dropped away from the revolutionary struggle. They were unable to confront and deal with the fact that a socialist country like China, having gone through a protracted revolutionary struggle to seize power and having made unprecedented leaps in the revolutionizing of Chinese society after power had been seized, had been defeated and all of its achievements had been reversed.

In confronting this great setback it was necessary to deepen one's understanding of the revolutionary road, to base oneself on the difficult but liberating truth that

Things do not proceed in an unbroken straight line forward, but through spirals; they do not have a preordained course, but they do have identifiable fundamental contradictions and a motion that can be grasped, in all its complexity. Great leaps backward are possible... but great leaps forward are also possible... Thus, there are two possibilities, two futures that are posing themselves very directly and urgently before us and that are locked in acute conflict. (Bob Avakian, *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?*, Ch. 8, p. 269)

In taking the stand that it did, the RCP had to go up against the tremendous credibility that the Communist Party of China held internationally. The Chinese revisionists who had taken over continued to uphold Mao in name and were trying to disguise themselves as the heirs to Mao. They were trying to cash in on the respect that Mao had from hundreds of millions of the oppressed throughout the world. The RCP was not a party in power in a socialist country, and it did not have other "credentials" that would impress those who view revolution as just another concern where what matters is how much "capital" one has accumulated — where the struggles and sacrifices of the oppressed are appropriated as such capital by opportunist leaders waving the banner of "revolution." So, in the view of such people, who was the RCP, USA to go up against the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, whoever they might be? On the basis of thinking like this, many groups unquestioningly went along with the new rulers in China. Other groups and parties, even large parties influenced greatly by Mao Tsetung, stood aside at the time and did not engage in the struggle, never taking a position on what had happened in China.

But the RCP argued that the size of a group or its influence at any given time had no bearing on its right and responsibility to take a clear-cut, principled stand on events in China. This had been a watershed event in the international communist movement, and as one of the RCP's internal bul-

letins guiding study on the question pointed out, "The struggle in China is a life-and-death question for the proletariat and has tremendous implications for the working class and its party in every country. *And the attitude and approach every party takes in understanding and evaluating the events in China will have much to do with determining whether or not that party remains a Marxist-Leninist party or degenerates into one kind of opportunism or another*" (emphasis added).

And this has been the case. No party or organization that has failed or refused to take a firm stand in opposition to the counterrevolutionary coup in China has been able to maintain its revolutionary bearings without wavering and without sooner or later going back on revolutionary principles and stands. Even where such groups have been involved in struggle against imperialism and reaction, they have not been able to carry this out consistently on the revolutionary road leading to socialism and the final victory of communism worldwide. Unless a revolutionary line wins out within such groups, they can only end up capitulating to imperialism and reaction, in one form or another.

Ten Years Later

A very significant outcome of the struggle around the events in China was the struggle and rupturing with the outlook of viewing revolution from the point of view of "my country" outward. On one level it is clear that if the line of the new rulers in China had not been exposed by revolutionaries internationally and another, revolutionary communist, pole had not been planted and rallied around, it would be impossible for the world proletariat to make any real advances in this period in its struggle towards communism.

In the course of struggling over the socialist road and the problems that China faced as a backward country surrounded by imperialism, the RCP synthesized a deeper understanding that there are limitations as to how thoroughly the goals of communism could be achieved in one or a group of countries when much of the world was still dominated by imperialist economic and political relations. Crucial to radically rupturing with and transforming all relations and conditions is shattering the stranglehold of imperialist domination, slashing the thousands of threads of imperialism which bind the masses of people in the world in a matrix of exploitative and oppressive relations. Just as imperialism has integrated the whole world into one economic and political process, so the world revolution more than ever is an integrated process. Revolutionaries, while taking up the task of making revolution and building socialism in their own country, must proceed from the viewpoint of that whole world process in approaching and seeking to advance revolution.

In the period following the coup in China, the RCP joined with other parties and organizations who were continuing to uphold Mao Tsetung's revolutionary line in raising the banner of revolutionary communism and rallying forces

within the international communist movement around this banner. In this way a clear line of demarcation was drawn — between revolutionary communists and revisionists posing as "communists" — and on this basis new advances were made even in the face of the setbacks suffered with the revisionist coup in China. A very important achievement in this was the establishment of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM), which represents a significant regrouping of revolutionary communist forces and is playing a crucial role in furthering the struggle to achieve a higher level of unity around key dividing-line questions within the international communist movement. On the basis of unity so far achieved by the RIM, as expressed in its *Declaration*, it is striving to support and influence revolutionary struggle throughout the world. In his book *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?* Bob Avakian wrote that the formation of the RIM represents "... a real change in the equation of world relations — it represents a leap in the potential to confront and transform the world situation, including the possibility of actually preventing world war through revolution" (p. 10).

Through this process of deepening its grasp of proceeding first and above all from the point of view of the world arena and the overall interests of the world proletariat, the RCP, USA has deepened its understanding and enthusiastically taken on the responsibilities and implications of seizing state power and creating a revolutionary base area for world revolution in the U.S., one of the most powerful imperialist countries and one of the main bastions of oppression and exploitation in the world.

Positioning itself to really take on this responsibility has demanded that the party make important radical ruptures in its approach to revolution — in particular ruptures with economism, which reduces the class struggle to the economic arena and the day-to-day economic concerns of the workers and raises this above major political questions, including the most essential political question of all: the revolutionary struggle to seize power and transform all of society.

This economism has been deeply ingrained for many years in the international communist movement, especially in its approach to making revolution in imperialist countries. From the problem of how a revolutionary situation will develop in a country like the U.S. and one's view of the preparatory work leading up to that point; to what is the group in society that represents the most solid and reliable bedrock basis for revolution in such a country; to how the vanguard party must be organized and how it must play its leading role in relation to the revolutionary masses: In deepening and further developing a revolutionary line on these and other questions the party has had to break from years of tradition around some questions in the international communist movement.

As Bob Avakian has pointed out:

... it is ... a law of revolution, and especially of proletarian revolution, that in order for it to succeed in

any particular country, the struggle in that country and those leading it will have to depart from and even oppose certain particular conceptions or previous practices which have come to be invested with the stature of "established norms" in the revolutionary movement... because every revolution arises out of the concrete conditions (contradictions) in the country (and the world) at the time it is occurring, and every new revolution inevitably involves new questions, new contradictions to be resolved. (*Mao Tsetung's Immortal Contributions*, p. 312)

There has never been a revolution in an advanced imperialist country such as the U.S.* While the general principles of Marxism developed up to this point through the experiences of the Russian and Chinese revolutions can and must be applied, there still remain many difficult contradictions and questions of revolutionary strategy in the political, military, and organizational spheres which must be solved not only in theory but in practice. The fact that the RCP took the correct stand at the decisive turning point brought about by the coup in China has opened the door to really confronting these problems of making revolution in a country like the U.S.

All of this is why we say that this party is different from any other party that exists or has existed in the U.S. There have been other revolutionary groups and parties in the U.S., and some have made very important contributions to the revolutionary struggle, but no other party in this country has been so firmly based on the principles of Marxism, as developed to their highest stage so far by Mao Tsetung, and no other party in this country has stood the test of upholding these principles, and deepening its ability to grasp and apply them, in the face of everything that has happened as a result of the counterrevolutionary coup in China and in the period since then. All of this underscores the significance of the two-line struggle in the RCP ten years ago and the reasons why that struggle is genuinely cause for commemoration and celebration. To put it simply: If that struggle had not been won, if the opposing line had triumphed in the RCP, this party would not exist today — or it would not exist as a revolutionary vanguard — and it would certainly not have made the advances it has, in theory and in practice as well, in coming to grips with what must be done to prepare for and carry out the struggle for the seizure of power in a country like the U.S. and to make the greatest possible contributions to the international communist movement.

Where are we ten years after?

The revolutionary banner of Mao Tsetung was picked up

* Although Russia was an imperialist country in 1917, there are significant differences between its level of development and role in the world and that of the more highly integrated and developed imperialist world today and the U.S.'s major role within this system.

by many forces internationally, and in the face of the setback in China these forces have defended and struggled to further develop the science of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought as well as move towards a programmatic orientation of solving critical problems of proletarian revolution and on this basis further advancing that struggle. Clearly these achievements represent important gains in the face of the tremendous setback ten years ago. They are the basis of an international movement carrying forward the revolutionary struggle and strengthening its ability to confront the difficulties, and the opportunities, that are being ever more acutely posed by the developing world situation.

It is true that what characterizes the situation today is that the international communist movement is still lagging in its ability to respond to developments in the world and particularly to link up with revolutionary struggles wherever they may break out and bring its strength and influence to bear in a way which will have a decisive and strategic impact on the world. Yet in a more fundamental way what characterizes and influences events in the world today is the accelerating pace of events moving the world closer to the moment where all the contradictions holding the imperialist world together are stretched to the point of explosion, holding the danger of unprecedented destruction and the possibility of unprecedented revolutionary advances on a world scale, including the advance of the world revolutionary struggle that could prevent world war.

In this situation the possibility exists of making major qualitative leaps even beyond where things were at *before* the coup in China — to perhaps liberate even more of the world and the world's oppressed people.

The following two quotes from Bob Avakian both capture the tension between the difficulties and possibilities of this period and provide an orientation to confront them.

... the problem in this period is not that revolutionary possibilities may not arise but that they may not be seized — or may be thrown away. We must not be unprepared and must not leave the international proletariat unprepared for those great days in which decades are concentrated, and we must not repeat the historical error of sounding a retreat just when the opportunities no less than the difficulties are the greatest. (*For a Harvest of Dragons*, p. 153)

No one, that is no Marxist and least of all Mao Tsetung, ever told us that the struggle to achieve communism would be easy. But at the same time Mao Tsetung has told us — and taught us, in both word and deed — that nothing is hard in this world, *if we dare to scale the heights*. This is the strategic orientation we must stick to, basing ourselves on the understanding that Mao poetically and powerfully proclaimed, "Look you, the world is being turned upside down." ("Second Party Congress Deepens Victory," opening remarks at the Second Congress of the RCP, USA, *Revolution*, April/May, 1978, p. 12)