

REVOLUTION

WINTER/SPRING 1986

*Questions for These Times:
An Interview with
Bob Avakian*

\$4.00

REVOLUTION

Winter/Spring 1986
Issue number 54

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Revolution (ISSN 0193-3612) is the propaganda organ of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA (RCP,USA)

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Subscriptions:
In the U.S.: \$14.00/4 issues
Other countries: \$16.50/year – surface mail
 \$24.00/year – air mail
 \$20.00/year – institutional rate

Payable by check or money order.

Send all subscription orders to: RCP Publications,
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Questions for These Times: An Interview with Bob Avakian

The following is an interview which was done recently with Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, and which has been made available to this magazine.

Q: I'd like to start off by focusing on *the* major question which I believe confronts all of us right now, everywhere in the world, and that is the question of the likelihood of global nuclear war in the near future. Let me begin, if I may, by expressing some of my own frustration over this question. It's pretty clear by now — at least to those who don't stubbornly refuse to confront reality — that the world is dangerously close to world nuclear war. Some people share the RCP's view that it is the very social relations of imperialism which are the root problem, the *source* of impending world war, and therefore feel that the forcible overthrow of imperialist social systems is necessary. Others may not take it that far, but for many it is becoming very clear that pleas to governments to stop what they're doing are simply not going to work.

So where does that leave us? What kind of chance do we really have to stop these people, to overthrow them, if that's what is called for? I mean, there are a lot of hopeful signs I'm aware of: millions in motion around the world around the threat of war, twenty revolutionary parties and organizations united in the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM), a genuine revolutionary war going on right now in Peru (which isn't seeking alliances with *any* of the imperialists), a reawakening of political consciousness and activism in imperialist countries, including the U.S., the boiling over of social contradictions in countless hotspots in the Third World and becoming extremely intense in South Africa. I see a lot of dislocation, a lot of turmoil in the world as well as a lot of good developments for "our side" in the largest sense. I often think that if we could only count on a bit more *time*, we'd be

in pretty good shape as far as the advance of revolution in the world is concerned. But I don't get the feeling we've got much time! So I feel at one and the same time optimistic and frustrated! What would you say to this? What kind of chance have we got? How close do you think we are, not only to world war, but to a revolutionary situation in the U.S. or any other imperialist stronghold?

A: I think I'd put it like this. We're now in a period where that world war could break out at any time and could erupt out of any particular crisis in any part of the world where the interests of the two contending blocs (led, the one by the U.S., and the other by the Soviet Union) are in sharp conflict. And the fact is that in almost every part of the world, or fundamentally in every part of the world, these interests are in sharp and ever more acute conflict. So no one can predict exactly when this war will break out, if it isn't prevented by revolution. As a general framework we've spoken of the period of the 1980s, in terms of it being a period both of the possibility of world war breaking out and also in terms of heightened possibilities for revolution, including revolutionary struggle which could advance far enough fast enough in large and/or strategic enough parts of the world to prevent that world war. But the discussion of the '80s is only to establish a general framework for this; and the fact is, we are already in a period now where, as I said, war could break out at any time and out of any particular so-called local conflict where the interests of the two sides, the two imperialist blocs, come directly and sharply into conflict.

For example, world war could arise from a crisis in Central America either around some event in Nicaragua or something relating to some other place in Central America — El Salvador, for example, or events erupting in Mexico which aren't even foreseen right now but could arise out of a very deep and certainly unsolved economic crisis. With such an ongoing economic crisis as a backdrop, an all-around political crisis could erupt in a place like Mexico very suddenly, without much forewarning. So it could be in Central America that the two blocs come directly into conflict; one side can make a move and the other side make a countermove and then quickly you've got them in each other's face and there's no turning back. The point I'm trying to make, again, is that this could happen at any given time and without much warning. We're already into that kind of situation. We're already in that kind of a context where world war could break out at any time. It could similarly happen in the Middle East. World war could break out as a result of something happening in the Persian Gulf, something happening in Lebanon, or one of the many conflicts involving Israel, which is an outpost of Western imperialist interests in the Middle East and which by its very nature and very definition is continually forced to hurl itself, and deliberately and consciously hurls itself, into conflict with other forces in the Middle East on behalf of Western imperialist interests.

The point is, when I speak of a scenario where there's a move and then a countermove and then they're in each

other's face, that serves to indicate that there isn't much room for maneuver on the part of the one side or the other. The rival blocs don't have much room to maneuver before they are directly up against each other. Now sometimes it's possible to be fooled by the appearance of things, ironically exactly because there is so little maneuvering room. What I mean by this is that because they don't have much maneuvering room sometimes they deliberately hold back from making a particular move because if they do make that move it will start the process going which, with only one or two more steps, will lead directly to such a conflict.

For example, our newspaper, the *Revolutionary Worker*, has pointed out several times that world war could break out in relation to the very acute situation around Nicaragua. There are the growing, more and more open and openly bellicose threats on the part of the U.S. against Nicaragua. There is open discussion and speculation in the U.S. media about a U.S. invasion of Nicaragua, and they are openly inventing the pretexts for this *in advance* — everybody should take note that they're openly inventing these pretexts in advance and writing about them openly in the pages of the *New York Times*, for example. This is very significant: they've already talked openly about invading and they've already talked openly about the pretexts they'll use. And everybody knows that the U.S. has turned Honduras into an armed outpost of the U.S. and almost continuously carries out military maneuvers there, which are obviously for the purpose of intimidation throughout Central America in general but are also very specifically aimed at keeping the pressure up on Nicaragua and keeping constant the threat of a direct, large-scale invasion, involving U.S. troops as well as troops from Honduras. So that situation is very sharp, and of course there's also the Contras, who are based there, who wage everything from terroristic sabotage attacks to larger-scale military incursions and assaults within Nicaragua itself.

Then there's Costa Rica, which is supposed to be an "unarmed democracy" representing all the people and a model for all of Latin America in contrast to the fact that large parts of Latin America are ruled by openly repressive regimes. In reality, of course, Costa Rica has all along been ruled by a reactionary dictatorship in the service of U.S. imperialism, but this has been disguised to a certain degree and Costa Rica has been held up as a democratic model. Yet now Costa Rica too is being turned into an armed camp by the U.S., mainly at this time in the form of the U.S.-sponsored, backed, financed, trained, and directed Contras who are operating out of Costa Rica, again across the border, into Nicaragua. So the whole situation there is tense.

Now, should the U.S. decide to take the next step and get more directly involved, should it commit U.S. ground troops, should it much more heavily and directly involve U.S. air power, what will be the response of the Soviet Union if a serious threat to the existence of the regime in Nicaragua is actually brought about through these means by the U.S.? Will the Soviet Union be willing to see the Nicaraguan government — which it backs and supports and which, unfortunately, looks to it for backing and support — will it be

willing to see that regime face this kind of situation and perhaps be overthrown, at least in the short run, by the military efforts of the U.S.? Will the Soviet Union stop sending military and other support to Nicaragua? Or will it feel compelled, in response to its own global interests and global needs, to assert itself as a global power in this situation? Will it feel compelled to *extend*, or certainly to continue, and perhaps increase that aid to Nicaragua? And if it does — if the U.S. has committed itself to a major military effort to actually try to wipe out the government that exists now in Nicaragua and the Soviets respond by sending at least as much or more aid — will the U.S. then sit by and allow this aid to continue to come in even if it's resulting in significantly helping the Nicaraguan government to thwart the U.S. efforts to overthrow it? Or will the U.S., if it's going to not back off and show itself to be impotent, be forced then to take moves to try to cut off this Soviet aid?

And if the U.S. does try to cut off this Soviet aid by putting up an embargo of Nicaragua, of sea shipments to Nicaragua, for example, what will then be the situation? This is of course similar to what the U.S. did in 1962 around Cuba and the Cuban missile crisis. At that point the Soviets backed down, although they did get a few concessions from the U.S. in terms of the U.S. pulling missiles out of Turkey, and so on. Basically the Soviets backed down; when you add everything up, that's what happened. This time, if the U.S. attempts to block any ships from getting into Nicaragua, can and will the Soviet Union back down? In today's world situation are they willing to show themselves to be so impotent? Can they allow it to be shown by the U.S. that there are places in the world where, when the U.S. asserts its power, the Soviet Union is impotent and unable to help its allies and friends, that those people who are involved in conflict with the U.S. of one kind or another and look to the Soviet Union for support *cannot* count on the Soviet Union for support? And even if Central America is what the immediate focus is on — an area which the U.S. refers to as its back yard and which the Soviet Union recognizes, for now, as the U.S.'s direct sphere of influence — Central America doesn't exist in a vacuum. The Soviet Union takes into account in its tactical maneuvering and its overall plans the close geographical proximity of Latin America, and in particular Central America, to the United States, but still the implications extend far beyond Central America. If the U.S. can make the Soviets back down again like they did at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, what happens then if the U.S. on that basis asserts its interests in the Middle East and forces a confrontation with the Soviet Union? Can the Soviet Union back down again? And can they even allow it to get that far? Can they allow themselves to be put in a position where they're backed down in that kind of a direct confrontation in any part of the world?

Or you can see the same thing happening in the reverse way — the Soviet Union making a move and the U.S. getting in a position where it can't back down. The essential point is not who is making who back down, or who's refusing to back down, because from the point of view of the proletariat and from the point of view of the oppressed people of the world,

it makes absolutely no difference who in fact is making the "first move." There is no such thing really as the first move because there are continual efforts by these two powers and their two blocs to move against each other; that's in their nature as imperialists, that they have to continually challenge each other. Particularly in this period of acute crisis worldwide for the imperialist system, they have to challenge and confront each other in various ways. So, my point in making that whole example of move and counter-move is not to try to focus on who's making the first move and who's trying to counter it, but to look at the dynamics of *how* a war between them could easily break out of any particular "local" conflict, or any particular eruption of *sharp* conflict of interests in a specific part of the world. So in that sense I would say that, while no one can predict exactly when war would break out, we're in a period where it could break out any time and out of any of these particular conflicts.

Now I'm not saying that there's absolutely no room for maneuver between these two blocs. You can't say that the war will definitely start the very next time there's any kind of a local conflict which involves in any way the interests of the two contending imperialist blocs. For example, there were the events around Lebanon in 1982 beginning with the massive, vicious, and murderous Israeli invasion, both through the air and with ground forces, which resulted immediately in the death of at least 15,000 Lebanese and Palestinians and of course was followed by the murders at the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, and other atrocities under Israel's aegis and under Israel's control. Out of that situation, the immediate gainer was the U.S., with Israel acting as its pointman and attack dog. And it appeared that the Soviet Union had lost very severely; in fact it did lose in the short run. It was to a large degree cut out of the action and pushed back in terms of its influence and power in the immediate area. But over a period of the next several years, what has happened? Who is now, or what force is now the major power broker and influential force, if you will, right immediately in the area? It's Syria, and at least for the time being the Soviet Union has more influence, more hooks, and more contacts with the regime in Syria than the Western imperialist bloc does (although the Western imperialists have not given up by any means on swinging Syria into their fold either with or without Assad).

So my point with this example is that it's not the case that there's absolutely no maneuvering room, but on the other hand there is not *much* maneuvering room between them, and further what maneuvering room there is is continually shrinking, and that's the growing and the main trend. It's this we have to recognize very sharply in order to recognize that, in fact, as I said, it is quite possible that world war between the two imperialist blocs could erupt out of any particular local crisis, any particular sharp conflict which involves in any significant way the interests of the two blocs.

Q: Earlier you mentioned that the U.S. is already inventing and publicly discussing pretexts for a possible invasion of Nicaragua. Could you expand on that a bit?

A: In those articles in the *New York Times* a little while ago, they as usual stood things on their head and portrayed the aggressor as the aggressed against, portrayed the victim as the victimizer, and vice versa. In other words, to be very specific, they said, well Nicaragua's involved in conflict with its neighbors, that is Costa Rica and Honduras in particular, which is true because the U.S. is using Costa Rica and Honduras as armed camps and as base areas for the U.S. forces in attacking Nicaragua. This includes both its own forces — air forces, U.S. advisors, and actual U.S. combat forces (right now on a limited level) — and also, of course, the Contras in rather large numbers. So, the *Times* laid it out that the U.S. might at some point decide that the Nicaraguans had committed an act of aggression against Costa Rica or Honduras which couldn't go unpunished and that would be the basis, or really the pretext, for the invasion. Or more recently, Reagan made a speech which basically said that anything that's done against U.S. interests anywhere in the world, well there are certain forces that we know are behind this; and he included Nicaragua among those, as well as Iran and some other states. We will retaliate, Reagan insisted. This is just giving themselves, in advance, a carte blanche for attacking anybody anywhere in the world in accordance with their interests and how they want to move and how they feel the necessity to move. They even went so far in the *New York Times* articles to say, maybe the Nicaraguans will do something stupid, almost forcing us to invade. So you see, they're sort of already blaming them — both their evil nature and their stupidity, sort of like they can't help themselves, they're almost certainly going to force the U.S. to invade through their own evil nature and their own stumbling stupidity.

I think it's important to point out that this open creation of pretexts for attacks against Nicaragua, or in other parts of the world against enemies of the United States, and the laying of the basis for military moves by the U.S. in any part of the world where it sees the necessity to do so, is in fact a very sharp expression and a very acute reflection of their growing moves toward war, and it is of course paralleled by the moves of the other side. We could enumerate similar moves by the Soviet Union. We could take examples of its invasion of Afghanistan and its rationalization that this was made necessary because of aggression by Western imperialism against Afghanistan and a threat to Soviet interests, and we could go down the line in terms of the Soviet Union making parallel moves and creating parallel pretexts and bases for its military moves in any part of the world that it sees its interests threatened and sees its global power called into question.

Now the important point to understand is that this is not simply a question of power-hungry states. There are real dynamics of the imperialist system that are playing

themselves out here and that have brought things, have brought the world and humanity, to the brink of an unprecedentedly destructive war, almost certainly involving nuclear weapons, which does in fact hold a very real possibility of even eliminating the human race and certainly holds the basis for bringing about destruction on a scale never yet seen and barely imaginable. It's extremely important to understand that there are these underlying dynamics. I'm not going to try to get into those here. That has been done and is being done continually in various forms in the press of our party, both in our newspaper, the *Revolutionary Worker*, and the magazine, *Revolution*, and in other places; and it has been presented in concentrated form in the recently published book *America in Decline* by Raymond Lotta with Frank Shannon, which gets into the underlying dynamics of the imperialist system, both generally since its advent, more or less at the turn of the century, and particularly in this period since World War 2 and leading up to the coming together very sharply of the contradictions of the imperialist system that hold the very real prospect of this unprecedentedly destructive World War 3 in the present time. So that's on the first, and we could say the negative, part of your question: "How close are we to world war?"

Now to take the other part, the other side of your question, you say that you feel that there are many positive and favorable developments for our side in the largest sense and that you wouldn't feel so discouraged if it weren't for the fact that the danger of war is continually looming ever more ominously on the horizon, and that you feel optimistic on the one hand, but on the other hand feel that we're running out of time and there isn't enough time. And I think it's important to say, in response to that, that anybody that thinks about this, and especially from a revolutionary point of view, can feel some of the frustration and can certainly sympathize with the feeling that time is very pressing. But on the other hand, it's also important to recognize that there is a very close connection between these two aspects: on the one hand the growing danger of world war, on the other hand the favorable developments for our side, the outbreaks of mass struggle against imperialism, even mass revolutionary struggles. These things can't be completely separated. There's very close connection between them, and very close interrelationship between them. To explain this a bit more: if it weren't for the fact that world war is looming so directly on the horizon, there would *not be*, to be blunt, the same degree of questioning, of restlessness, of protest, of rebellion, and even of revolutionary struggle that there is now breaking out in various parts of the world. Some of these favorable developments for our side would not be occurring in the way that they are, or be as advanced or developed as they are now becoming. Now I say *some* because certainly world war and the threat of world war is not the only towering crime of imperialism. It's not the only atrocity committed by imperialism. It's not the only suffering that imperialism holds for the masses of people on a daily basis and has since its inception. In fact, going back through history, *all* systems of exploitation and oppression have in fact brought down

tremendous suffering for the masses of people. Imperialism daily condemns millions of people to starvation and death, both a slow grinding death and also the death of the death squad, the death of the executioners of imperialism. And even leaving out of the picture for a moment the question of world war, it condemns the masses of people to a horrible future so long as that system continues to rule in the world and to dominate the world and to dominate the lives of the human beings who make up human society. And, along with all that, it calls forth resistance — it impels and compels people to rise up against it.

So on the one hand, imperialist war and the growing danger of it is not the only outrage, the only crime of imperialism, or the only thing calling forth resistance, rebellion, and revolutionary struggle. But on the other hand, in a very real sense it is a *concentration* of all these things, of all these outrages, all these crimes, all these atrocities, and it certainly would be a *magnification* of them, certainly would be the greatest crime committed by imperialism, and a crime on a scale as yet unseen and we could say again almost unimaginable. So that fact and the recognition by growing numbers of people of the looming and ever more ominously present danger of world war and its destructive potential is drawing growing numbers of people to question, to rebel, to protest, and to fight back against the imperialists and even, in fact, is giving stimulus to revolutionary struggles in many parts of the world. The point I'm trying to make in a general sense is that the overall crisis of the imperialist system, which holds within it the basis for this war to break out, and the intensification of that crisis is also bringing forward and holds within it the basis for the intensification and the further development of revolutionary struggles in many different parts of the world.

So on the one hand, yes, we're racing against time, but this very sharp conflict between these two trends — world war on the one hand and revolutionary struggle on the other — can be resolved one way or the other. It isn't yet determined which way it's going to be resolved. That is, it can result in world war breaking out and then the necessity for revolution to be waged within that context. Even in the terribly destructive process or even the aftermath of such a war, there would still be the question and the possibility of waging revolutionary struggle in different forms. But it's also possible that that revolutionary aspect within the present situation and its tremendous intensification in these times could bring forward revolutionary struggle that would in fact radically alter the whole structure of world relations, and in such a way that it would prevent that world war which is now shaping up and looming ever more ominously. These things are interconnected and we can't just look at it and say, on the one hand there are some good developments but I wish all these bad things weren't there. Of course, in one sense you can certainly agree with and sympathize with anyone who wishes all those things weren't there. Nobody in their right mind, and nobody who isn't a cold-blooded henchman or executioner for imperialism, could even possibly feel differently. But on the other hand, in another

sense, we can't just want to wish them away. They're part of the objective situation, they're part of the intensifying crisis, they're part of the drawing together and heightening of the contradictions of the imperialist system worldwide, and most importantly all this holds *within it* the heightening possibilities and prospects for revolutionary struggle throughout the world, and *that's* what we have to seize on.

And this brings us to the last part of your question, where you ask: How close are we not only to the possibility of world war breaking out but how close are we to a revolutionary situation — and specifically how close are we to a revolutionary situation in the U.S. or any other imperialist stronghold.

First of all, we have to say that, especially since World War 2 and as a general rule, the prospects for revolution have been more favorable in the Third World than they have been in the imperialist countries. This is exactly because it is the case that the imperialist countries *are* the strongholds of imperialist rule; this is where the imperialists both have the ability and have the necessity to most strongly enforce their rule. They are concerned to most strongly secure their home base and as far as possible to keep the population there, and even the oppressed classes, pacified. Now I'm not saying that there's no contradiction, even sharp contradiction, in the imperialist countries. I'm not saying that there's no class conflict or class struggle, and certainly I'm not saying that there's no revolutionary struggle or at least the potential for revolutionary movements in these countries — there is all of that. But nevertheless, it's been a general rule, and particularly it's been the case since World War 2, that the bases and opportunity for revolutionary situations and even the development of large-scale revolutionary mass movements in the imperialist countries don't occur that frequently and generally are associated with some major event or key turning point within the world imperialist system and the network of imperialist-dominated world relations.

But, again, in the Third World the possibility for initiating revolutionary struggles and in an overall sense the existence of more favorable and fertile ground for revolutionary movements, revolutionary struggles against imperialism, is something on a more ongoing basis. This is not to say there are not ups and downs in the situation, not to say it's a straight-line process. But, in an overall sense, there is a more favorable opportunity for the development of revolutionary struggle, there are more favorable conditions for that development and for the initiation of revolutionary struggle, including revolutionary armed struggle as its highest form.

So that's just a general point, but I understand why you're raising the question right now of imperialist strongholds, because this is very important in terms of the possibility of preventing world war. That's not to say that it's only by having revolution in the U.S. or the Soviet Union or some other imperialist country, or a number of powerful imperialist strongholds, that, as we put it, the whole structure, the whole equation of world power relations could be changed in such a way as to prevent world war. But certainly if there were revolutions in the U.S. or the Soviet Union, or some

other significant imperialist power, that would have a very big effect, a very immediate and dramatic effect on this whole equation and structure of world relations. I think it's necessary to say that at the present time, both for reasons of the objective conditions (which I've somewhat touched on, that is, that these are the home-base areas and the strongholds of imperialism) and in terms of the subjective factor, that is, in terms of revolutionary forces themselves, in the last decade or more there has not been the development of revolutionary movements in the imperialist countries. There has not been either the outbreak of mass revolutionary movements or the development of significant revolutionary communist parties in these imperialist countries, as a general rule. Now in the U.S. there is, of course, our party which plays a significant role. It is still a role of only influencing a minority of the proletariat, a minority of the oppressed people, but this role is significant. Yet at the same time we have to say bluntly that we are far from being in a position *right now* to be able to lead a revolutionary movement aimed at directly overthrowing the imperialist ruling class.

However, in the imperialist countries and, in particular, some of those that are on the faultlines of some of the sharpest contradictions of the imperialist system and in some of the arenas where the developments toward war and preparations toward war have taken their sharpest expressions, there are growing mass movements of opposition with beginning revolutionary currents within them and certainly with potential for a revolutionary movement to develop. For instance in Germany, particularly West Germany, this has been very sharply expressed. At the same time, for reasons that are beyond our discussion here, the Marxist-Leninist movement in most of these countries has undergone a debacle. This is not to say that there are no Marxist-Leninist forces in any of these countries. It is specifically not the case that there are no significant Marxist-Leninist forces in West Germany. There *are*, but one of the perhaps ironic, and certainly interesting, quirks of history and expressions of the nature of the imperialist system, and specifically in the present period, is that these forces are largely represented by people who are *not* Germans but are in fact immigrant workers, or immigrant revolutionaries, in particular immigrants from Turkey. They represent a potentially very significant force for revolution and for conscious revolutionary leadership, not only in relation to their home country, such as Turkey, but also in relation to the development of a revolutionary movement in Germany itself. This holds very strategic implications and potentially strategic promise for the revolutionary movement internationally as well as in those particular countries.

So the fact that German Marxist-Leninists have undergone a debacle is not the end of hope for proletarian revolution there. (Again, it's beyond the scope of this discussion to get into any thorough discussion of the reasons for that debacle, but I can't let it go without saying that in part it has to do with not breaking with the whole framework of nationalism and attempting to be the best upholders of the national interests and the national flag of the country — this has been

a disease which has infected the revolutionary movement, as well as the pseudorevolutionary movement, in all the imperialist countries. That's one thing we have to touch on, but nevertheless an overall analysis of the reasons for this debacle are beyond our discussion here I'm afraid.) Despite this debacle there is the potential and the basis for a development of not only a mass revolutionary movement, as the contradictions sharpen even further, but also the basis for the emergence of a vanguard force capable of exerting influence and perhaps even gaining leadership of this movement and directing it in a very consciously and powerful revolutionary direction that could come into a position of being able to directly challenge the ruling class and the imperialist interests for state power in society. So this is important to note, and it's important to note that this is again an expression of the nature of the imperialist system, particularly in the present period and of how its own oppression, its own pillaging, its own plunder, its own exploitation worldwide, rebounds back against it in very important ways. And this is a phenomenon not only in West Germany but generally throughout the imperialist countries, whether you're talking about England, which has seen important rebellions of immigrants in the last few years, or whether you're talking about other imperialist countries, generally. And certainly this applies to the U.S. So, by the very nature of these imperialist countries, events in some other parts of the world — and in the Third World in particular — that may not seem at first, in their early stages of development, to be so directly related to developments in the imperialist countries may in fact have at least very great potential for having tremendous repercussions and tremendous effects within those imperialist countries.

I remember, for example, the last time I was around in the U.S. I was on a tour in 1979 and I was on a radio station, I think it was in St. Louis, and I was being interviewed by one of these reactionary talk show hosts. I started talking about the struggle in Kurdistan at that time, which was an important aspect of the situation in Iran and remains an important aspect of the situation in Iran and other countries in the region today. This guy kept interrupting me and saying, "Who cares about Kurdistan, nobody cares about Kurdistan, nobody wants to hear about Kurdistan," and of course he got all of his backward listeners with visions as broad as a gnat's to call in and say, "Yeah, we don't care about Kurdistan, who cares about Kurdistan, I don't even know where Kurdistan is," as though that were something to be proud of. And then just a little while after that came the whole hostage crisis, so-called, in Iran, and events in Iran, including in Kurdistan, very directly impinged on all these people's lives and they had to sit up and take notice — even if, given where they were coming from, they did it from a reactionary standpoint, at least to begin with. So my point is that, because imperialism is a worldwide system and because these imperialist powers (and this is certainly true in a very concentrated way of the U.S.) are worldwide exploiters and oppressors and their whole system's a worldwide system, things happening in any part of the world which these philistines may regard as remote and totally unconnected to

them can have very direct and powerful repercussions and send shockwaves back through the home country.

This is true not only of Iran, but it is certainly true of events in South Africa. I've already read how some of these preachers and others in the U.S. are very concerned that if things get out of hand, as they look at it, if they get beyond the bounds of a so-called civil rights movement in South Africa and begin to reach revolutionary proportions and then the U.S. in pursuit of its interests is forced to get more directly involved on behalf of reinforcing reactionary interests and imperialist rule in South Africa, then this will have *tremendous* repercussions in the U.S. and tremendous shockwaves in the U.S., especially among the Black people but also more generally. This could have *terrible* consequences for the U.S. the way they look at it, and *tremendous*, tremendously *positive* consequences from our point of view, from the revolutionary point of view. The same is obviously true of events in Latin America, generally, and particularly Central America. Today things may appear relatively calm in the U.S., but if the situation in Central America takes some leaps and becomes even more acute, if conflicts there become even sharper with or without a direct confrontation between the two imperialist blocs, certainly if there are major eruptions of political crisis in Mexico, the signs of which are already present, this will have *tremendous* impact upon the U.S. in terms of shattering the relative calm and shaking things up a great deal and adding fuel to the fire of already developing protest movements and of embryonic revolutionary movements.

It's important to look at the prospects for revolution in the imperialist countries, and in particular the U.S., in this light and not to look at it statically or look just within the borders of the U.S., although there are important developments taking place there too, which we'll talk about more later. But I think it's important to look at it in its global context and not just to get a global picture in the abstract but to see the interconnectedness of things and the way in which events in one part of the world can dramatically affect things throughout the world and in particular in these imperialist strongholds, the U.S. not least of all.

Similarly with the revolutionary struggle in Peru — which again, in an overall sense, is the most important revolutionary struggle going on right now in the whole world. The U.S. has already not only expressed concern about this but acted on that concern by increasing its aid to the reactionary regime in Peru. The U.S. imperialists are very concerned not only about the struggle in Peru, which is important in its own right, but also the spread of this example and how it could further "destabilize" U.S. rule and the clampdown of U.S. dictates throughout Latin America. All these things, I think, are indications of the positive side, and of the growing favorable developments for our side and the growing prospects for the further development of revolutionary movements not only in various other parts of the world but within the imperialist countries and within the U.S. in particular.

So I think you have to answer that just as no one can say

just how close we are to world war, so too no one can say exactly how close we are to a revolutionary situation in the U.S. Certainly there isn't one now nor is it possible to see the development of one right before us, or to see the outlines of a specific revolutionary situation. In other words, there's not one on the horizon right now — an actual revolutionary situation where it would be possible to wage an all-out struggle for the seizure of power and to overthrow and defeat the imperialists; but there are the *elements* of a potential revolutionary situation that are present both in terms of things happening inside the U.S. and most of all in terms of things happening throughout the world and specifically in areas of great strategic concern to the U.S., including right within its own "back yard." So, again, the point is we can't say exactly whether a revolutionary situation will develop within the next period, nor certainly *when* it will develop. But just as world war could erupt out of the heightening of any particular conflict in any particular part of the world, so too could a revolutionary situation, particularly in the U.S., develop out of all that. The point is to be doing our work in such a way that the embryonic revolutionary movement that now involves tens of thousands, in one way or another and on one level or another, and that now influences hundreds of thousands, is strengthened and developed, so that we are laying the basis to influence and win over and eventually mobilize millions and be able to at least neutralize millions or tens of millions more to have a real shot at it when, perhaps suddenly and seemingly out of nowhere, a revolutionary situation does erupt.

Q: I'd like to ask you something which has been bothering me for some time. I count myself among those who sincerely hope that revolution in the U.S. and other parts of the world will happen soon enough and restructure the world enough so that nuclear war can be prevented. But what if the bombs start falling within weeks or months, which is not totally out of the question. I mean, if this starts to happen I know that I for one would be trying to link up right away with any surviving party people. I'd be running all over the place, scrambling through the rubble, trying like hell to find some sign of the party! Anybody waving some RCP flag or remnant of an RW, believe me, that's where I'd want to be, so we could figure out what to do next. That's assuming anybody's still alive out there! But sometimes I think I'll wake up some morning in the midst of full-scale nuclear war and be cut off, maybe not from all *people*, but from the leadership of the party. What should people do in such a situation? How does what we do today prepare us to know how to act? And how would we regroup? Obviously these questions would pose themselves urgently in the midst of

imperialist war, but they are also relevant to the development of a revolutionary situation and attempted seizure of power, when a lot of people are going to be cut off and have to act on their own. I know that you have touched on this in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*, but could you elaborate on this point?

A: Well, first of all on the point about waking up one morning in the midst of full-scale nuclear war, I won't say that's impossible; it could happen. But in general I think that these things don't just erupt suddenly out of nowhere. Of course there is the general context and the general conditions that provide the basis for this war to erupt at any time, which we've already talked about. But within that, any particular immediate crisis that would be the spark to set off this world war has a certain dynamic also. And it would be possible to recognize the features of it even if they're very condensed and telescoped so to speak. This points to the fact that it's very important to be paying very close attention to world affairs, and of course very important not to just pay attention in general but to be trained in, and to continually sharpen our Marxist-Leninist method, in other words, to be able to get at the essence and the truth of what's going on, to see the underlying processes on the one hand and also the particular things that are happening, the particular expressions, that these underlying processes take at any given time. Without that you can be paying attention to what's happening in the world but not really understand what's going on, not understand what the essence of something is and what the relationship is between a particular event and the overall situation. Not understand, for example, what those kinds of things we talked about in relation to Nicaragua have to do with the rivalry and growing contention between the two imperialist blocs. Not see how those events could not only lead to a U.S. invasion but could in turn possibly be the thing which sparked off world war. So you need to have the correct, scientific method, the revolutionary method of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought, in order to understand in the fullest sense world events and the relationship between particular things that happen in the world and their underlying basis and how particular things fit into the overall picture of what's happening.

Now, not only is it true in a general sense that you have to have that scientific view, but right now that's a very acute problem, and the way that you pose the question, waking up one morning and perhaps seeing the missiles flying being too late, underlines very powerfully the need for people to wake up and also be willing to stare reality in the face and recognize what is going on. But it also points to the need to go beyond that and be willing to, and be determined to, get a scientific view of what's happening so that you can really understand it, and more than that, do something about it, act on it in such a way as to change the course of events in a revolutionary direction, as we've touched on.

With that viewpoint, with that method of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought, it's possible to see the development of particular crises and the potential they hold

— both the potential for positive things, that is, for revolutionary developments, and also the potential for negative things, that is, for world war to develop out of them. And these too, again, are very closely interconnected. In other words, in responding to your previous question, I said we can't just say, good things are happening but I wish all these bad things weren't happening, in a sense of wanting to wish them all away; we have to recognize that they're all part of the same overall situation, the same overall development, the same overall intensification of contradiction and conflict. Just as we have to do that we also have to recognize this would be true in any very specific event or acute crisis of even a few weeks or a few days.

Let me step back and give an example. Many people in the U.S. have made a pledge of resistance that if the U.S. invades in Nicaragua they will take to the streets and engage in massive acts of civil disobedience and so on in opposition. This is a reflection of the fact that especially in the context of today's world situation, people recognize the acute importance of sharp developments in the world; even if they don't have a fully developed or fully correct view of how these things fit together or in what context they're occurring, they have at least a sense of that — or many people do. And I think if we had one of these situations where a particular event or a series of events was leading very directly toward world war, even if that were a matter of a few weeks or even a few days, people would be responding on the other side — that is, in opposition to this. People would be jolted awake, people who are already awakening would feel compelled even more strongly to act, and there would be turmoil all the way around. I'm not saying this to sort of say we have a built-in guarantee that they can't sneak a nuclear war in on us. That's not my point. My point is that such a particular event that would lead directly to world war would telescope and would magnify events very, very greatly and would force people up against a recognition of what was happening and would confront them with the necessity to act in an even sharper way than is already happening.

I say all that, again, not to say we've got some sort of built-in guarantee but to stress exactly the need for people who do, as you spoke of, see the need for revolution and support the revolutionary line, to be able to act upon these events, particularly those events that do magnify and telescope the overall developments in the world so sharply. I'm not saying that it's possible to know with certainty, when a particular event begins to develop, whether that's going to lead directly to world war or not. There have already been some things that might have. For example, the U.S. provocation around the 007 airplane and the Soviet response might have; it didn't, but it might have led to world war. But there was a very clear crisis developing there, it was very important then and it's very important in general in such crises to act very powerfully upon them and to turn things in a revolutionary direction and to influence people, and if such things don't lead to a full development of things right then, either world war or revolution, they certainly have a lot to do with laying the groundwork for future developments and for our

ability to act upon them.

And at some time it may be that we will be confronted directly with a situation that is leading toward world war, and it's going to be necessary to be able to act upon that in such a way that right within that context we turn things toward a revolutionary development.

Q: If I could just interrupt here for a second. Getting back to the example of flight 007, a U.S.-inspired provocation which the Soviets responded to in a strong but nevertheless limited way. Obviously this situation could have led very quickly to a much more direct and all-out confrontation. But there's a contrast here between that situation and the situation around U.S. provocations vis-à-vis Nicaragua. In the latter case there are a lot of people in the U.S. who are preparing to react if there is a direct military invasion of Nicaragua by the U.S. But around the 007 incident there weren't a lot of people in the U.S. who were taking a revolutionary defeatist stand toward the U.S. Not many people were ready to respond in that way, and yet that situation could have led to the outbreak of world war!

A: Well, of course, that's an important point, and I think what it underlines is the necessity for particularly the *advanced* — people who do have an understanding of world events generally or are at least awakening to political life and to questioning events in the world — for them to be *trained* concretely through all these political events in the world and particularly through these acute crises. To be trained to an understanding of what actually is going on, what are the actual interests involved, so as not to be fooled by the appearance of things and by the propaganda and deception of the various sides but to see the essence of things: to see that the interests on both sides, both the U.S.-led bloc and the Soviet-led bloc, are imperialist and reactionary and fundamentally opposed to the interests of the masses of people in the world, and thereby to be able to act in a revolutionary direction to *divert* things and in particular to divert the anger, the concern, and the activity of masses of people away from the direction in which the imperialists are trying to drag them and toward the path of opposition and ultimately revolutionary struggle against the imperialists. That's why Lenin stressed, and we've stressed learning from Lenin, the importance of acting upon and conducting concentrated work, particularly in such minor crises, as well as conducting ongoing revolutionary work in relation to world events and important political developments and important struggles of the masses of people in general.

Now there's no way that we're going to be able to simply overcome or to cancel out the years and years and years of conditioning that people have received from living in these imperialist countries and from the massive ongoing miseducation, misinformation, and brainwashing that peo-

ple have received through the mass media as well as the educational system and other means in these countries. But the thing we have going for us, besides the overall nature of the system and its basic contradictions, is precisely these world events that do jolt people and at least cause them to think. One of the things that experience shows is that, if at the beginning people tend to spontaneously follow in the wake of the imperialists and to be taken in by them and led down the path that the imperialists are attempting to take them, as things develop and the contradictions force themselves to the surface more sharply there is a basis for winning people away from that. I've seen that happen with the Iran hostage crisis in '79-'80 and I've seen it happen on many other occasions, most dramatically in the course of the Vietnam War. While significant U.S. military involvement in Vietnam went on for over a decade and the transformation of people's thinking and action was occurring throughout that, in acute crises, which are telescoped and magnified, this all happens much more quickly — or can happen much more quickly. So what this stresses once again is the need for the advanced forces to be trained, to recognize, as Lenin said, the class interests at the foundation of all such conflicts, for without that, as Lenin said, people will always be fooled and misled. That's why we have to develop people's ability, very concretely and in relation to these ongoing events and particularly these acute crises, to grasp the essence of things, so that after a series of such crises there is a growing number of people who already have a foundation and a basis for recognizing the essence of what's going on the next time and in turn can influence a greater number of people. And if such a particular crisis does give the appearance of going all the way to some full eruption, either a revolutionary eruption and/or the eruption of world war, these advanced forces can in fact put themselves at the head of the masses and lead them in the direction of revolutionary uprising.

That, I think, does get us back to the last part of your question. Whether it is an invasion of Nicaragua, whether it is a Soviet move in some part of the world, whether it's both those things occurring at the same time, or whether it's something like the 007 thing, while there are differences, the underlying thing that's the same is the need to have trained people and to be continually training people, especially through these crises, so that when people are thrown up against the full development of these things, the full eruption of war and/or revolution, they're able to act upon them in a revolutionary way and influence others and win them to the revolutionary position. Because what you raise is very true and very important. When these crises become much more acute, and especially if we get a crisis that does go all the way to that full dimension I've been speaking of, it's not going to go down smoothly where we're able to operate in the same way that we operate now. People are going to be cut off, undoubtedly the party will come in for tremendous repression, its structures may be temporarily shattered, its links may be temporarily broken, and this is where all the work and training that's gone on throughout this whole period of preparation for revolution will tell, and will be so crucial. It's where,

as I stressed in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*, we have to count on people to step forward. So we have to be preparing people now to be able to step forward then — people who are *not* at the present time leading forces within the revolutionary movement, perhaps are not even yet fully committed to the revolutionary movement, but are being won in that direction and are at least supporters of the revolutionary movement, as well as those who are more actively involved and are more leading people, are going to have to rise to the challenge and are going to have to find the ways to take initiative and in the course of that to reestablish the links and the contacts of the party structure and of the revolutionary movement; they're going to have to take the reins and go, not just everybody going in their own direction, but precisely according to a unified line and an overall direction that's been set and whose basis has been laid through all this preparatory work.

Again, I can't give a guarantee that nuclear war won't break out before we're able to prevent it by revolution, I can't even say that it's impossible by any means that you could wake up and see the missiles flying or not even wake up and never have the chance to see them, if that's something anybody would want to see. But the point I'm making is this: there are the possibilities that revolution can develop, including a revolutionary movement in the U.S., that would be able to turn things in another direction and prevent this world war; and specifically in relation to the points you've raised in this question, any such crisis that would lead to the flying of the missiles is going to have a certain process of development, however short, however magnified, however telescoped, and all the work we do now gives us the *best chance* to be able to act upon that and for people who are not even party leaders, or even perhaps party activists right now, to be able to rise to the occasion and take the reins and be able to not only develop a revolutionary movement coming from the bottom up but also be able to restructure a party apparatus that would be able to give leadership to this, for this would be the only way that it could in fact carry all the way through and overthrow the imperialist power and turn things away from the direction in which they were heading.

There are no guarantees. And as I've said before, we're playing a long shot, but it is our *best* shot and certainly it is not an impossible shot, it's a real shot even if it's a long shot. I think this is the only answer that can be given to this question. If we were in a position of holding power in large parts of the world already, obviously the whole world would be different; but we've lost power in places where we've held it up to this point and most recently, and most devastatingly, in China. This is another part of the objective situation that we have to deal with and that we have to transform. It's a part of the world situation that confronts us and that we have to change through revolution, that's all. So there are no guarantees, but there are possibilities and there are growing opportunities, and it's this that we have to build on. And the last thing that we want to do is panic, because all that will do is guarantee that we will not be able to act on this to

transform it into revolution.

So on the one hand, everybody who has a revolutionary understanding is, and everybody should be, filled with urgency. And certainly if people are filled with jitters about the present situation, that's perfectly understandable and it corresponds to what's going on, but it's a question of what we do with that, it's a question of taking our best shot.

Q: Recently someone in the U.S. asked an RW seller: "If we rise up, won't the Russians take over U.S. territory? And wouldn't both the U.S. and Soviet governments destroy the whole world rather than see us run society?" What would you say to that?

A: We have to take this in several parts. First of all, if we rise up, won't the Russians take over U.S. territory?

Well, they might like to. And whether they would try to or not would depend on a whole lot of things; it would depend on the overall situation, the situation the Russians, that is, the Russian imperialist rulers, found themselves in, the situation of resistance and uprising against their rule that they had to deal with, the power relationships among the imperialists who were still running different governments, the advance of revolutionary movements in different parts of the world — many different factors like that would enter into the equation in determining whether or not the Russians would even try to take over U.S. territory. Just to answer it on that level.

Second of all, we have to answer it this way: right now the imperialist ruling class that's in power in the U.S. and using the U.S. as a base from which to oppress people all over the world is the U.S. imperialists and not the Soviet imperialists. Therefore the struggle in the U.S. must and should be and will be aimed at the U.S. imperialists directly. Of course, on a world scale, and in an overall sense, we oppose all imperialism, all reactionary forces, and that certainly includes the Soviet Union and the whole imperialist bloc of which it's the head, but in terms of the direct struggle and our direct contribution to the revolutionary struggle, it lies in rising up against and overthrowing U.S. imperialism. And we can't be worried about whether or not, in the course of that, somebody else might come in and take over some parts of what's now the territory of the U.S. I mean we can't be worried about it in the sense that we can't allow that to keep us from waging revolutionary struggle or to tie our hands or make us hesitant to wage revolutionary struggle. I've made this point before, and it's a point that has to be made over and over again — it's a basic principle of our party, and a basic principle of internationalism — especially when you're residing in an imperialist country, there's *nothing sacred whatsoever* about the territory of the U.S. If you want to look back in history, the territory and present world position of

the U.S. as it now exists has been forged through blood and fire, particularly through genocide against the Indians, the Native peoples here; through theft and plunder of lands that were part of Mexico; through the massive use under the most brutal conditions of slave labor as well as the deaths of tens of millions of slaves even on the passage over the oceans in the slave ships. The present territory and the present world status of the USA is based on a whole historical and, especially today, international foundation of the most cutthroat and bloodthirsty exploitation and oppression and plunder. There's nothing in that we want to preserve or protect — that's got to be the stand of the proletariat and its internationalist outlook. That's a bedrock point, that's just a fundamental point of departure.

On the other hand, from that standpoint, with that orientation and because in a strategic sense the imperialists in general and certainly the Soviet imperialists hiding under the banner of socialism are also enemies of the international proletariat, we also have to do everything we can to help defeat and overthrow them; if directly in the course of the revolutionary struggle in the U.S. these Soviet social-imperialists seek to intervene and take advantage of the situation, then of course we will have to deal with them. We will have to figure out the ways to deal with them while at the same time dealing with the U.S. imperialists, or if they're overthrown, the remnants of their forces and reactionary forces that seek to restore imperialist rule and so on. It's likely to be a very complex situation, and it's quite possible, it's not for sure but it's quite possible, that as part of all this we would have to deal with the forces of the Soviet social-imperialists, and we certainly would do so and would consider it part of our internationalist duty and part of our internationalist contribution to the world revolution to take them on as well if that's what we have to do. So that's on the first point.

On the more general question, wouldn't both the U.S. and Soviet, and I would add all imperialist, governments destroy the whole world rather than see us, the proletariat, run society, and run the world for that matter?

I would say, again, they would not *hesitate* to bring down and to rain down tremendous destruction in order to preserve their rule and preserve their system and their top-dog position — and we have to be prepared for that. That's also got to be part of our strategic orientation. Whether or not they're *able* to destroy the whole world rather than see us run this society and run the world is another question. That, again, involves a lot of different considerations including not only the strength of our struggle against them but also the revolutionary movements aimed against them in different parts of the world, as well as the relationships between the imperialists and the conflicts among them. In the course of the Chinese Revolution, for example, there were times when the revolutionary forces took over a city and rather than let them have power there the reactionaries did virtually destroy the whole city, including all the civilians in the city. So that's certainly something they're capable of, and they wouldn't hesitate if they feel that's what they have to do in the pursuit of their best interests.

Even in World War 2, for example, look at the Normandy invasion which they've been celebrating of late. When the U.S. and British and allied forces came into France, they reduced some French cities to rubble as part of dealing with the Germans, and they didn't think twice about it even though the French were their allies and they were supposedly saving and liberating the French people from German domination and Nazi rule. So yes, it's certainly within the realm of possibility that they would rain down a tremendous destruction, and in terms of their basic orientation, I think you would have to say they'd rather see the whole world destroyed rather than lose it. But we're not helpless in the face of that nor is their will to do things the only thing that counts. And that's been proven a lot of times, including recently in Vietnam where they brought down lots of destruction and wanted to maintain their domination there but were unable to do it.

I think what this emphasizes is that we've got to really deal with things as they are, and let's not in the course of building a revolutionary movement try to promote any shortcuts or tell anybody any tales that don't prepare them for what we really have to go up against. It's quite possible that even if we, the international proletariat and oppressed people throughout the world, rise up and make revolution in such a way as to alter the whole course of events, such as the world war that is now shaping up but doesn't actually take place, then in response to our very revolutionary uprisings they may launch nuclear weapons either against each other because each of them sees the other trying to take advantage of these revolutionary uprisings, or, possibly also, against us and against the territories that we've liberated. So no matter how far and how fast our struggle advances, even if revolution should occur in the U.S. and perhaps also in the Soviet Union, and the world war that's actually shaping up now therefore does not take place in the way it's now shaping up, there still could be widescale use of nuclear weapons. There's no way to get around the real possibility of that and no way to guarantee that it won't happen. But the question is: if there's going to be tremendous destruction, if there's going to be tremendous suffering and the horrors that they're planning to bring down, then we have to see to it that out of all that, in any case, comes an advance for humanity, and in particular an advance toward abolishing the whole basis for all this so it won't happen yet again and the system won't be able to perpetuate itself and all of its horrors including that one. And second of all, we have a good chance of affecting the quantity of that, in other words, the way that comes down and the *extent* of it, and that's not at all irrelevant. If we are in the field, if we have revolutionary regimes that we've brought into being through our revolutionary struggle and *then* they bring down nuclear weapons against them or against each other or both, then we'll still be in a much stronger position to deal with that and move on it than we would be if we didn't rise up in revolutionary struggle and didn't seize power and seize parts of the globe. So, however it comes out, the answer's the same: Only the advance of the revolutionary movement based on the outlook and the in-

terests and the ultimate goal of the proletariat of abolishing all these horrors of imperialism through abolishing the imperialist system and ultimately all forms of exploitation, oppression, and class-divided society, only that holds any future for humanity *other than* senseless destruction and carnage simply to keep the same system going.

Q: I know that in analyzing the social forces for revolution in the U.S. the RCP has placed particular emphasis on the role of true proletarians, the truly dispossessed in society, including the vast majority of Blacks and other oppressed nationalities, and immigrants driven to the U.S. from the Third World. But today, much of the resurgence of political activism seems concentrated in the youth — college students, high school youth, even some younger kids — and among some of the more middle-class elements involved in the antinuclear, antiapartheid, and anti-intervention in Central America movements. There is also a growing trend of militancy and radicalism among some women, who are drawing links between the particular oppression of women and the overall reactionary state of affairs in the world. But while there are some recent indications that there are proletarians who are thirsting for revolutionary change and some are taking up revolutionary work, it is clear that many who should be active are still holding back. What do you think is going on here, and how do you see this situation changing?

A: I think there's a lot of truth in what you say, that today it's more youth and middle-class elements of various kinds — students, professionals who have taken some positive stands in unity with and in support of struggles around the world against imperialism — it's more these kind of people who are in motion right now. This, as you point out, and it's very important to point out, does *not* mean that there are not large numbers of people among the proletariat and the dispossessed generally in society, at the bottom of society, who are thirsting for some kind of radical and dramatic change. There are in fact millions and millions of people who have a desire — or who at least dream from time to time — of some vastly and radically different world. And more than that, there are today thousands who are positively gravitating toward, and in one way or another taking up and identifying themselves with, the revolutionary position — particularly that put forward by our party.

But if you look at various struggles and important political events in society, it's true that the main forces in the field right now are the middle-class elements, especially the youth among them. That's also not a very unique experience in history, nor very surprising, nor very discouraging. It's

not something we can just be complacent about, it's something we have to change, but it's not something that's *bad*, in the sense that it's not bad that these middle-class elements are coming more and more into motion. That's very good. On the other hand, they have their obvious limitations. They are not the people who can be the backbone and leading force of the revolution. They are not those who are in a position to carry it all the way through, either in the sense that their interests demand the most thoroughgoing revolution in society or in the sense that their life conditions prepare them to carry through a fight like that on their own initiative and under their own banner. If left to themselves, they'll stop short and seek some way to just reform the system, which, on the one hand, is impossible to reform, but on the other hand, the system does continually throw up illusions of reformability and these people are more susceptible to those illusions.

So the proletarian forces that you mention have to be the backbone and leading force and they have to be brought to the fore to play that role. And the party is the one force that can and must do that, can bring them to the fore to play that role. I think what's involved here is, on the one hand, the middle-class elements have a little bit more freedom, if you want to put it that way, a little bit more room, to come into political motion without immediately having to pay as heavy a price both in their personal lives and the sacrifice they have to make in that sense and also in terms of political repression.

The ruling class recognizes the great potential danger to them of the proletarians coming into motion, particularly marching to the forefront of revolutionary struggles, and they take very extensive measures and vicious measures to nip this in the bud, to cut it down at the start and to prevent it from happening. So, again, on the one hand these more middle-class elements and the youth more generally have more freedom, and it's good that they take advantage of that freedom, such as they have it, to come into motion and to find ways to protest and rebel politically. On the other hand, they don't have the ability to resolve through revolution the contradictions that erupt in society. You could make a kind of analogy to the Cultural Revolution in China in the late '60s and into the '70s. In a lot of ways it was the youth and students who were the initiating force of this, but then they weren't able to resolve it; they weren't able to carry it on to a higher level and to make the kind of transformations in society that were eventually made when the proletariat came more forcefully onto the stage and in a more conscious and determined way fought on the basis of *its* interests to carry the Cultural Revolution through and make these transformations. I think there's a certain analogy there that's true, or a certain basic point or principle that is true in all revolutions, and it's true in the U.S. today in terms of the building of a revolutionary movement: a lot of times the nonproletarian elements, middle-class forces and others, come into motion and have more freedom, especially at the beginning of things, to get involved, and the question is how to bring forward especially the advanced awakening forces of the proletariat, the ones who are becoming class conscious and see

their revolutionary interests. How to bring them to the fore of the movements as they develop, and increasingly through the whole process to bring the class-conscious proletariat as a force to the forefront of the whole overall struggle so that it can be led in a revolutionary direction and so that it can go in a resolute way toward a revolutionary resolution, in fact toward a revolutionary overthrow of the system.

So again, that's where the work of the party comes in. It's only the party that can and must take up the task, in any kind of thoroughgoing way, of bringing these advanced proletarians to the forefront of these different movements as they erupt and that can enable these proletarians to play the leading role in injecting and infusing these different movements with the thoroughgoing revolutionary stand of the proletariat as a class and directing all these different streams of struggle toward the revolutionary goal. And it's the party's work, consistently through the use of its newspaper and the agitation and propaganda it carries out, to expose the system and to show both the real contributions and also the shortcomings of these different other class forces that are involved, and, in a sense, to enlighten the proletariat as to its own interests as distinct from those of every other class in society, even at the same time as it shows the proletariat how and on what terms it has to unite with these other class forces that are striking back and rising up against the system — in order to transform that into a revolutionary movement and carry it through.

But let's address this in its sharpest terms. I mean, the fact is that because of their life conditions, the mere struggles for survival as well as the more repressive conditions that they're involved in, it's generally also a fact of revolutionary movements throughout history, and I believe it will also be true in the revolutionary struggle in the U.S., that the proletarian forces in their masses tend to come onto the stage when things approach closer to and in fact get to the stage of the all-out armed struggle for power. At that point you see a rapid and dramatic increase of political activity on the part of all classes and strata in society, but you see in particular a very dramatic increase in the political activity and the actual joining in the armed struggle on the part of the proletarian masses.

To put it another way, continually in our work we come into contact with people who express agreement with our general aims and our general view on the need for revolution and express deep hatred for the system and for its crimes but who say, "Listen, I got to deal with other things. When the time comes, for the armed struggle, let me know and I'll be there." Now obviously some people are bullshitting when they say this, but I think a great number of them actually mean it; they actually feel that way, and actually will be there whenever the situation does finally emerge. This is a real thing that we have to deal with. There is something very basic about the conditions of the proletarian masses that does in fact tend to hold them back from being involved short of the actual full development of a revolutionary situation. Not that we should give in to that, not that we should give up, certainly, on involving proletarians in the political struggle

leading up to and preparing the ground for the armed struggle. But we have to be realistic, and at the same time that we seek to maximize all possible involvement of especially the advanced proletarians at any given time in the political struggle and in the work to prepare the ground for revolution we have to also be thinking strategically in terms of what to do when in fact millions of those other proletarians who aren't going to be involved for much of this suddenly do get involved and are ready to be armed and organized into an actual all-out armed struggle.

So there's a relationship there. On the one hand we have to, for one thing, involve in political activity and give political training to the advanced at any given time who are awakening to political life, who are ready to take up and feel compelled to take up political struggle. We have to train them not only in taking part in political struggle but in actually learning more about and giving leadership to other strata and forces of the kind you've mentioned who are also fighting back in their own way against the system.

We have to, in addition, spread the influence of the party and its revolutionary line and bring the impact and imprint of the class-conscious revolutionary proletariat to bear as broadly in society as possible, first of all through the newspaper and other organs of propaganda and agitation and also through our work in relation to all the various different social movements and struggles. And at the same time as we're doing all that and through all that we have to be laying the groundwork for a sudden and dramatic change in the situation when we have suddenly an army, appearing seemingly out of nowhere, of millions of people — or to put it more accurately, a potential army, that still has to be won over politically even when the revolutionary situation emerges, and together with being won over politically, has to be actually organized, coordinated, and led in an armed struggle.

Now this, I think, is the perspective in which we have to view this question.

Q: You have spoken about the strategy for revolution in the U.S. in terms of a united front under proletarian leadership, and you have said that the "solid core" of this united front has to be the revolutionary alliance of the class-conscious proletarian movement as a whole with the struggles of the oppressed peoples against a common enemy, the imperialist system and bourgeois dictatorship. Do you consider that Black people are the most decisive section of the masses in the U.S. in terms of swinging things to a revolutionary situation?

A: Well, to take the last part of your statement or the direct question first, yes, I think I do in an overall sense. Black people are the most decisive section of the masses in

the U.S. in terms of revolution there. One of the things that struck me, and has continued to strike me since being out of the U.S., actually in some ways even more than when I was in the U.S., is the fact that people that I've met from all over the world have continually spoken to me in terms of how much they're counting on the masses of Black people in the U.S. in terms of the struggle to overthrow U.S. imperialism. People from all different parts of the world have expressed this. Sometimes they put it positively, stressing how much they look to and how important they see the role of Black people in any possible revolution in the U.S.; and sometimes they put it more negatively — looking at the last period since the high tide of struggle of Black people in the U.S. in the late '60s and early '70s, sometimes people will ask, what's happened to the Black people in the U.S., what are they doing, how come they're not rising up the way they were before? But whether it's put more negatively like that or more positively, it comes down to a real recognition of the strategic and crucial role of Black people in any kind of revolution in the U.S.

This has its historical roots in the whole history of development of the U.S. but, more importantly right now, it has its basis in the present configuration, the present structure and relationship of different groups and forces, and most fundamentally classes within U.S. society today. It has historically been recognized that any kind of revolution in the U.S. that would abolish the present system would have as a very central and driving force the masses of Black people, and, as I said, if anything, that's more true than ever. And it constantly comes up among immigrants from Central America, for example, including those who have been involved in or supported revolutionary struggles in the countries they come from and who are at least considering the question can there be a revolution in the U.S.: well, what about the Black people, what are they doing, how can we get in contact with revolutionary Black people? In other words, in the way they pose this question there is a real recognition of the crucial role that Black people have to play in this revolution.

So in that sense I think the answer is yes. In the most fundamental sense the revolution we're talking about has to be a proletarian revolution, it has to be a revolution in which one class, the proletariat, overthrows another, the bourgeoisie. And the imperialist system can only be abolished entirely and completely in that way, and in the final analysis that's what it's going to require, the revolution of the proletariat as a class. In the U.S., while the Black masses are overwhelmingly proletarian and have a crucial role to play in proletarian revolution, the proletariat is not only Black but it's also people of other oppressed nationalities, immigrants, and so on, and it also includes a large number of dispossessed and poor white people who are in the position of being proletarians and do not occupy such a privileged position. And, in answering yes, in the sense I've discussed it here, Black people do constitute the most decisive section of the masses in terms of revolution in the U.S. I don't mean to say that only struggles or movements among Black people have a crucial

role to play in that revolutionary process, or that only such struggles and movements could provide the spark that ignites or the force that sets in motion a revolutionary struggle. Such a spark, such an igniting force could come from among other sections of the oppressed masses — the masses of immigrants from Central America, for example. But, again, it's pretty clear that among other sections of the oppressed masses, including immigrants from Central America, there is a real recognition that for any revolutionary struggle in the U.S. to have a chance of succeeding, Black people must play a decisive role. Of course, the point of all this is not to pit sections of the oppressed masses against each other but to identify the forces that are crucial for such a revolution and to recognize the basis for uniting them on the most powerful basis — which means on the basis of the program of proletarian revolution.

Beyond the most basic and decisive forces for such a revolution in the U.S., there are obviously broad strata of better-paid workers and middle-class strata who are overwhelmingly white, who do occupy a more privileged position. Some of them can be won to support for revolution and will be allies, some of them at best can be neutralized — that is, won to a position of at least *not opposing* revolution — and some of them will even be opponents of the revolution.

Our overall strategic orientation is precisely that it's necessary to unite all who can be united in order to develop the most powerful struggle against and to carry through with the overthrow of the present system and establish the rule of the proletariat and to carry that struggle through both within the U.S. and fundamentally as part of a world revolution to achieve the ultimate goal of communism and the abolition of class divisions throughout the world. Now, on the one hand, only the proletariat as a class has a fundamental interest in carrying through this revolution in such a thoroughgoing way to the ultimate goal of communism. On the other hand, these other intermediate class forces and strata and different groups in society are compelled and propelled into motion by the different contradictions in society, the different conflicts in society, the different oppression that the system is forced to bring down on different strata of the people. All this compels people to come into motion against it — around the question of war, around things like the fact that, for example, small farmers are being ruined by the very operation of the imperialist system in the present period. Significant numbers of small farmers are being ruined and they're being propelled and compelled to go into motion to resist this, and the same is true of many different strata around many different issues, both major world events and also some things having to do more directly with their own livelihood.

So many of these people, speaking generally of these middle strata, will come into motion against the system, they'll resist it, but at the same time as they're compelled to fight back they don't feel themselves compelled to carry that through and uproot the whole system. They are intermediate, between the system and its ruling class as they now exist on the one hand, and on the other hand the proletariat, whose interests lie in completely overturning the existing

order and completely revolutionizing society. And it's only with a proletarian outlook, and only with the leadership of a party that's based on that outlook and that keeps those long-term interests in mind, that it's possible both to develop unity with these different forces as they do come in motion against the system and to struggle with them to enable them to see that the resolution of the underlying causes that have propelled them into motion can *only* lie with a revolutionary transformation of society in accordance with the interests and outlook of the proletariat. That is, a solution can only lie in moving to abolish the whole system of capitalism, the whole system based on the exploitation of the working class and the whole system which in fact must turn everything into a means of making money at the expense of others in order to continue functioning.

Now, of course, it's very important to realize — it's something that Lenin stressed, and that our party has stressed — this doesn't mean that the proletariat, by mere fact of its position in society as the class whose exploitation is the whole wheel on which the system turns, is conscious of its revolutionary position, of its revolutionary potential, and of its revolutionary goal. This consciousness has to be brought to the proletariat from outside the realm of its direct experience with its own employers and outside the realm of its direct experience and immediate experience generally. It has to be brought by a revolutionary party which, through the theory of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought, has a systematic understanding and a program based on that systematic understanding that represents these revolutionary interests and puts forward the revolutionary goal of the class-conscious proletariat. It's when the proletariat and in particular its politically awakened and advanced sections are armed with this theory and this understanding in a concrete and living way, it's then that there's the basis for the development of a revolutionary movement among the proletariat. And the more this movement develops, the stronger becomes its ability to unite with these other forces and to show them the way forward.

Now a lot of these middle strata don't want to see a proletarian revolution in a thoroughgoing sense, if left to themselves. But on the other hand they also don't have much of a future under the present system, which is crushing them, which is right now directly threatening them with the massive destruction and perhaps even the extinction of the human race that could come with world war, which drags them into all kinds of conflicts and crises whether they want to be or not, for example, Vietnam, or now the sharpening events in the Middle East or in Central America or whatever. These people are caught in between. On the one hand, their interests may not directly and fundamentally lie with revolution as the proletariat's do, but on the other hand, they have no future except the future of destruction and suffering under the imperialist system, and this provides a basis for the proletariat both to unite with them in resisting the system and to struggle with them to show them the necessity for a revolution based on the interests and the goal of the proletariat.

Q: Don't a lot of middle-class elements fail to draw a distinction between what they see as the narrowness and backwardness of many proletarians in today's society and the basis, the material basis, which proletarians as a whole (as a class) have for radically transforming social relations and through that also the outlook of individuals? Isn't that one of the reasons these middle-class elements fear a proletarian revolution? I think many middle-class elements, and intellectuals in particular, have gotten a whiff of Archie Bunker-dom and have written off all proletarians as hopelessly incapable of lofty social vision.

A: Well, that may be part of it, but I don't think that's what is fundamentally involved. First of all (*laughs*), a lot of these middle-class elements are no less narrow and selfish in their outlook, spontaneously, than the Archie Bunker types. But more importantly, Archie Bunker types are not proletarians — they are not the real proletariat we're talking about as a real social base for proletarian revolution. I think the fundamental reason that middle-class elements tend to minimally have hesitation about — if not outright fear of — a proletarian revolution is that they are not themselves in the position of the proletariat — a position of being wage-slaves under the existing system. They don't have, as the proletariat has, nothing to fortify in the existing relations and the existing conditions, no stake in the existing system. They may, many of them, have very little to fortify but very little is not the same as nothing. Of course you could say that some proletarians don't have "nothing" in the sense that, if they're able to work, they are able to get something, get some wages and buy a few things, but there's still a fundamental difference.

I don't think that difference is blurred over in the real world or can be blurred over, or that it is blurred over in the minds even of these middle-class elements. They see the difference between their position and that of the proletariat; and they see that they have a little something that they'd *like* to try to hang on to under the present system, even many times while they're resisting against it. Economically they may have some things that they think make life enjoyable or tolerable to them, and they are reluctant to risk losing them, or politically, particularly when they live in these imperialist strongholds, they're allowed some freedom to at least complain a little bit and they're not in a situation where they might at any time have their door kicked in if they do a few things of a mild nature against this system; or even if they don't do that, their daily and private lives are not interfered with constantly by the state. If you would try to tell a woman on welfare about how the state doesn't interfere in people's lives in America you might get quite an argument, but these people don't see it that way. They have a little bit more leeway, a little bit more freedom. These are the things that correspond to their position in society, that make them different than the proletariat and hold them back from wanting to see a thoroughgoing revolution, whether they're professionals or whether they're small shopkeepers or small

farmers, school teachers, or whatever. And, on the other hand, when there's an acute crisis in society and all these things are called into question and threatened by the very explosion of the conflicts and contradictions of this system, then that puts them in a position where they can support and many will support a revolutionary struggle, especially if it really does have a forceful impetus and a powerful drive coming from the proletariat.

We've seen that already in situations that didn't quite develop all the way to a revolutionary situation in the U.S., for example in the '60s and into the early '70s with the whole uprisings of Black people and the Black liberation struggle and the struggle among other oppressed peoples in the U.S., the antiwar movement, and the development of the struggle against women's oppression. All these things brought many people into motion, and particularly it was the involvement of a lot of basic proletarian Black masses and Chicanos and Puerto Ricans and others who were mobilized under various banners but with a revolutionary thrust that influenced and won a lot of middle-class people, many students but some others as well, at least in the direction of supporting a revolutionary movement. Certainly with a full ripening and eruption of a revolutionary situation there'll be even greater potential for that, although then too things will be extremely and acutely contradictory and it'll be back and forth with a lot of these people, and that's all the more reason why the proletarian movement has to be built as powerfully as possible and has to bring its imprint and impact to bear on the overall situation and all the different movements and struggles in society as powerfully as possible. That's the whole back and forth that's involved in the united front and the whole strategic orientation of the united front under proletarian leadership.

Within that, as you pointed out, there's the question of the solid core which takes particular form in the U.S. in the sense that there's both historical and present-day basis for the Black people and other oppressed peoples in the U.S. — Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, and others — to wage powerful revolutionary struggle against the imperialist system. The workings of the system itself compel and propel them into struggle against the system and against their oppression as peoples. This goes on whether anybody likes it or not; whether the ruling class wants it to happen or not, which they obviously don't, it still happens because of the workings of their own system, and it's independent of anybody's will. Even when and even as, among these oppressed peoples, the proletarians are won more and more to a class-conscious proletarian stand and an internationalist, not a nationalist, stand, even as that happens there still will be, among Black people and others, struggles that from varying viewpoints rise up against the oppression of these peoples as peoples. There should be and must be such movements, and it is a crucial task of the party and of the advanced class-conscious proletarians of all different nationalities to unite with these various movements and to help to direct them toward the goal of proletarian revolution because that's the only way, first of all, that the basis for the oppression of these

peoples can be finally uprooted, and more fundamentally and looking at the more strategic long-term goals, it's the only way that the basis for all exploitation and oppression in society and the world can be finally uprooted.

Further, given the history of the U.S. and its present situation, the oppressed nationalities are in a very strategic position and their struggles against their own oppression as peoples will be a very important component of any revolution in the U.S. And for a proletarian revolution to succeed there needs to be, on the one hand and most fundamentally, a powerful force of proletarians of all nationalities, with a very powerful component of Black people and other oppressed nationalities within it, rising up on the basis of and with the banner of proletarian revolution and proletarian *internationalism*. And at the same time there needs to be the closest unity built at the very core of the broader united front, between the revolutionary movement of the class-conscious proletariat and these struggles of the oppressed peoples as peoples; and the bringing together of those forces will in fact be the driving force of a larger overall movement to batter at and overthrow the imperialist system and the bourgeois dictatorship. That's the strategic road for and the driving force for carrying out that proletarian revolution in the U.S., and it's the task of the party to both wield the strategic weapon of the united front and to play the leading role in forging as powerfully as possible that solid core within that broader united front, under proletarian leadership — with the outlook, program, and most advanced forces of the proletarian revolution in the forefront.

So to go back to the point about whether or not Black people in particular are, as you put it, the most decisive section of the masses in the U.S. in terms of swinging things to a revolutionary situation, I said earlier that I would answer basically yes, and I'll repeat that. But in light of everything that's been said, what has to be stressed is that that full potential of the basic proletarian masses of Black people can only be realized as and to the degree that the masses are won to taking up a proletarian revolutionary position and a proletarian internationalist stand. And it's precisely on *that* basis that they will infuse their greatest force, make their greatest contribution, and play their most decisive role in terms of swinging things, as you say, to a revolutionary situation and in carrying through the revolutionary struggle.

Q: The RCP has been instrumental in popularizing the slogan "Down with Imperialism and National Oppression, From the USA to the USA," that is to say from the Union of South Africa to the United States of America. Some people say that blacks in South Africa have to have a revolution, that this is the only way they can emancipate themselves, but that this isn't necessary in the U.S. where the conditions of people in general, and even of the Black masses, are usually not quite so desperate. And some people further say that even if it were desirable for Blacks to seek emancipation through revolution in the U.S. also, it would not be possible because Blacks in the U.S. are a small minority of the population, whereas in South Africa they are the overwhelming majority. Could you comment on this?

A: First just a brief comment in passing. As you know, the actual name of the South African state now is the Republic of South Africa; it used to be called the Union of South Africa. But since we don't recognize the legitimacy of that state anyway we decided to keep the "Union" in our slogan because USA to USA expresses an essential point and an essential identity between the two countries. There are, however, some significant different particularities in the two countries which takes us to the main part of your question.

First of all, as for the argument that revolution isn't necessary in the U.S. while it may be necessary in South Africa, this is of course an argument that's made by people, including some people who do genuinely support the struggle of the black masses in South Africa against the South African state. Well, both from the point of view of the masses of people, Black people and other exploited and oppressed people in the U.S., and more fundamentally in terms of the interests of the people of the world, the oppressed people and proletariat of the world, revolution in the U.S. is most definitely necessary. It's not only necessary but urgently demanded. In light of everything we've discussed, I think the reasons for that are clear. On the other hand, it is true that the situation of the masses of people, even including the Black masses in the U.S., is not as desperate as it is in South Africa or in other parts of the world as well. But this doesn't mean that revolution in the U.S. is not desirable, not necessary, or not possible. It does mean, along with other factors, that it is more difficult to get a revolutionary movement going in the U.S. and to build it in such a way that it can be carried all the way through and actually succeed in overthrowing imperialism in one of its major strongholds. But again, this doesn't at all mean that revolution is not desirable, nor possible, nor, for that matter, urgently needed. It is all of those things.

But to get to the other part of the question which I think is more at the heart of things here, the argument is, as you phrased it, that it wouldn't be possible to have a revolution in the U.S. in which the Black people would be a driving force because Blacks in the U.S. are a small minority of the population whereas in South Africa they are the overwhelming majority. Well, first of all, this is factually true: the black people

in South Africa are the overwhelming majority and in the U.S. they are a clear minority, though a very significant part of the proletariat in the U.S. and a very significant part of the people as a whole. But, I think the important thing is not the percentage of the population. I think the important thing is strategic position in the society. Black people in the U.S. are, as I've discussed somewhat, in an extremely strategic position specifically in terms of revolution in the U.S. But their situation is of course different in some significant ways from the position of the black masses in South Africa.

South Africa is a state whose fundamental basis is the exploitation and oppression of the black masses in that country. That's what defines South Africa as a state. The class contradiction in South Africa, the class struggle, the driving forces within the society, and the solution to the situation in South Africa can't be understood without recognizing that its defining characteristic, the defining characteristic of the state as a whole there, is the oppression and exploitation of the black masses.

In the U.S. the exploitation and oppression of the Black masses is an extremely important part of the overall picture and it's an extremely important ingredient historically as well as in the present day of the whole capitalist system, now in its imperialist stage, within the U.S. It's an extremely important part of the whole basis of U.S. imperialism; but it is not in an overall sense *the* defining characteristic of the society and the state in the U.S. as a whole as it is in South Africa. That's an important difference.

In South Africa, it's not only because black people are a majority but because of their position in society, their defining role in the society as a whole in South Africa, that a revolutionary uprising with revolutionary leadership based on a proletarian program and outlook which brings forward the black masses in revolutionary struggle in South Africa is the road to revolution there. And this involves both achieving the national liberation of the Azanian people, the black people who are oppressed by the South African state and the whole system there, and involves moving on to the socialist revolution and carrying forward the class struggle to achieve socialism and move forward toward the goal of communism as part of the worldwide struggle of the international proletariat. The bringing forward of the masses of black people under that revolutionary banner is what is involved, and is the essence of what's involved, in a revolution in South Africa.

In the U.S. the bringing forward of the Black masses around such a program and under such a leadership is an extremely important component of any revolution and particularly of a proletarian revolution, but it is not in and of itself *the essence* of the whole process. To put it another way, and perhaps in both sharper and more positive terms: in the U.S. specifically the masses of Black people are in a position to play an extremely important role as a spark, as a lever, and as a driving force to bring forward the broader forces that must be brought forward and united for a revolution in the U.S.

In South Africa, it's correct for a revolutionary move-

ment based among black people to seek to unite, first of all, with the other people, the Indians, the so-called Coloureds, and so on, who are also oppressed in South Africa, even though their oppression is not as fundamental as the oppression of the black masses there — it's correct and necessary for a revolutionary movement, first of all, to seek unity as broadly as possible with them. It's also even correct to seek allies and to seek unity with any whites who break with the system and who take a stand against it and who stand with the black people in rising up against it there. But to put it in a certain provocative way: *even if no white people* in South Africa take a stand in support of the revolutionary movement, even if they all oppose it, that is not going to be enough to stop the revolution in South Africa.

Now in the U.S. the picture is more complicated. Nothing that I've said should imply and no one should listen to anybody who says that because white people are a majority Black people shouldn't step up and play a powerful role in accelerating a revolutionary movement in the U.S. Quite the opposite is true. And in fact, history has shown — even recent history of the '60s — that the more powerfully and forcefully a revolutionary movement comes forward from among Black people, the more it can make allies and win over people to a revolutionary position even among the middle classes, and certainly among broad numbers of white people both within the proletariat and among other strata. But at the same time, from a strategic standpoint you cannot say that the Black people in the U.S. can make a revolution all by themselves, while in a certain sense, keeping in mind the strategic question of alliances, it still can be said, if you want to be a little bit provocative, that the black people in South Africa could make a revolution all by themselves. But in the U.S. it's not that they can make a revolution all by themselves, but they can play a *tremendously* important role as an initiating force, as an activating force, as a driving force, and as a spark and a lever to bring into motion a lot more of the forces that are necessary in the final analysis to carry that revolution through. And the important thing is not, then, that they're a minority in the U.S. The important thing, as I said before, is that they're in an extremely strategic position, both in the sense of being concentrated in the lower rungs and the most exploited sections of the proletariat and also in terms of being concentrated in the urban cores of the U.S.

And the city in the U.S., despite the development of suburbs and so on, the city is still strategically the most significant, is strategically *decisive* in terms of U.S. society and in terms of a revolution to transform U.S. society. The city is still strategically decisive and Black people are strategically concentrated in the cities as well as in the most exploited sections of the proletariat, speaking of the masses of Black people. Therefore, for these reasons, a revolutionary force arising from among Black people which has a proletarian program and a proletarian outlook and seeks to win over and influence and bring into the revolutionary movement people of *all* nationalities who can be rallied to the banner of that revolution or who can be rallied at least in the

united front against the imperialist system — this is a very powerful force indeed. This is where the real potentially crucial role of Black people in the revolution in the U.S. lies.

Let's look a little bit more at this question of the cities for a second. I've written on this some in my book *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?* and in a few other articles. But I think it's necessary to come back to it again because this is a point that the ruling class seeks continually (and for good reason from their standpoint) to cover over, to hide, and to keep the masses of people — in particular the masses of Black people concentrated in these urban cores — from understanding and from acting upon. The fact is, if a revolutionary movement gets started in the cities in the U.S. — which are strategically decisive — this will have a tremendous impact in the society as a whole. Even the development of *real* revolutionary struggle in a number of such cities will have a tremendously important role in terms of raising up a banner and a standard which has the *potential* then to win over broader ranks of the people and to spread to other places, especially the cities but to all parts of the country.

So here we have the cities which are strategically decisive and *within* the cities Black people are strategically decisive, especially if we consider them in unity with other oppressed nationalities who are also overwhelmingly concentrated in these urban cores. They are strategically decisive in that sense and in that context. And they are in a position to be initiators of a revolutionary struggle which, by the time it reaches its full potential and in order to reach its full potential and be capable of actually carrying through and winning a revolutionary struggle for power through force of arms, is going to have to involve, win over and unite many different forces of different nationalities. But in terms of getting a revolution started in the strategically decisive locations and strategically decisive sites within the U.S. society, Black people have a tremendously powerful role, and it's one that, of course, the ruling class is desperately seeking to keep them from recognizing and, furthermore, acting upon. And we can see the potential for this in the urban uprisings in the '60s. They didn't go all the way to a full revolutionary potential. They didn't become, that is, an actual struggle for power. But they certainly showed the potential and possibility of that; and there certainly have been concerted efforts — both in terms of repression and also in terms of some concessions — on the part of the ruling class since then to prevent anything like that from happening again. And particularly they're concerned about it not happening now in such an explosive period when all the contradictions of the system are being pulled to the exploding point and at the same time being brought together and concentrated in a very explosive way.

So I think it's tremendously important to understand this, and it's impossible to overemphasize this. It needs to be brought out and emphasized over and over and over again. So in a sense there is an analogy. Not only is there national oppression of the Black people and others in the USA, that is the United States of America, as there is in the USA, that is the Union of South Africa; but there's also a tremendously crucial role to be played by the Black masses in both cases

even though the situation and their particular roles have important differences at the same time.

Q: Towards the end of his life Martin Luther King had to deal with the fact that a lot of young militant Blacks were fed up with his pacifism and reformist program aimed at getting a few more crumbs and were calling for a much more fundamental social change, for genuine revolution. Rather than argue straight up that he really didn't want a revolution, he started more to talk about revolution being impossible in the U.S. Could you speak to that?

A: I think, of course, he did also continue to argue that a revolution wasn't really a good idea, it wasn't really necessary and so on, but you're hitting on the important point that he couldn't rely on that kind of argument. He had to argue that revolution was *impossible*, that it couldn't succeed.

Now a lot of times these people are portrayed as attempting to be saviors of the masses, and we've spoken of people like Martin Luther King, or people like Bishop Tutu today in South Africa, as attempting to be condescending saviors of the masses; but it's also true, and even more fundamentally true, and very important to bring out, that these people basically seek to be saviors of the *system*. That's the first point you really have to understand. That was the role that Martin Luther King played. Again, going back to Bishop Tutu, it's very instructive to look at the role he's playing now, because if you want to understand what role Martin Luther King really played in the U.S., I think Bishop Tutu gives you a very, very clear insight into it. There are so many parallels, it's really very striking even down to the level of Bishop Tutu, like Martin Luther King, being given a Nobel Peace Prize. Now I'm not going to say that everybody that gets a Nobel Prize is no good. That would be wrong. But I think we have to view with a lot of suspicion somebody who gets a Nobel Peace Prize for playing a role of promoting peace between the oppressors and the oppressed, which is what both Bishop Tutu and Martin Luther King and, for that matter, Gandhi (who didn't get a Nobel Peace Prize but deserved one) were all about. What is Tutu doing, openly? What's he openly saying? He's saying, look there's not much more ground for me to stand on, I'm trying to prevent this thing from getting out of hand, I'm trying to keep it all in an arena where it can be reconciled. He's saying to the ruling class and to the U.S., which is the real power behind the South African state, that if you don't give me something more to work with and give me some concessions, then the ground that I'm standing on is not only going to shrink, it's going to be completely cut away, and then you're going to have the full eruption of a situation that's going to be beyond the bounds where I can control it.

In other words he's openly saying, look, I'm trying to save your system but you got to give me something to work with. This is what the man is saying. For anybody that listens, that's what he's saying. He even gets up and talks about how if the black people don't stop using methods of struggle of dealing resolutely with collaborators and informers for the system then he's going to pack and leave, which is of course a threat that he will not carry out, unfortunately. At least he won't carry it out until he's got no more role to play as a savior of the system and on behalf of the system there. But he precisely plays the role of conciliating, of seeking concessions in order to prevent the struggle from breaking out of the bounds of accepting the system or being confined by the system. He is desperately trying to prevent a situation where the struggle fundamentally goes up against the system and seeks to overthrow it. This is the role that Tutu's playing now very openly and obviously for those who look at it, and this is the role that Martin Luther King played. It was also the role, by the way, that Gandhi played.

I must say I finally brought myself to see the movie *Gandhi*, and it's very striking — and you got to remember, this movie, with whatever historical inaccuracies it may have, is a movie to praise, not to bury or condemn, Gandhi; it's a movie made to promote Gandhi. And in this very movie, at one point when the people finally strike back and deal out some justice to these police who've been gunning them down as well as beating them up, then it's at *that point* that Gandhi says, as Tutu has said, "Well if we start using these methods then maybe we're not ready for our freedom yet." And Gandhi in the movie goes on a *fast* — to do what? — to kill the movement because it's threatening to get out of the bounds of peacefully resisting the system by Gandhi's methods of nonviolent noncooperation and is beginning to meet the counterrevolutionary violence of the system and its enforcers with the revolutionary violence of the people. At that point, Gandhi, according to this movie that's made to praise him, goes on a fast because he's convinced that unless he fasts and continues fasting the movement will gain momentum and moreover will continue to get out of bounds. So he fasts in order to kill the movement, in order to stop it.

This is the role these kind of people play. There was no revolution in India, there was only a change in the form of colonial oppression of India from outright colonial to neocolonial domination after World War 2, and this had not nearly so much to do with Gandhi and the movement that he was at the head of as it did with the changing position of the imperialist powers in relation to each other and in relation to the oppressed masses of the world coming out of World War 2. In particular this was due to the emergence of the U.S. on the top, the fact that it didn't have an interest, or need, in many cases, including in India, to maintain the old form of colonialism but saw it to its advantage, and saw both the necessity and opportunity in, the replacement of old-line open colonialism with neocolonialism and in shoving the British aside as top dog in the world, while also maintaining them in a certain position, within the overall structure of the imperialist bloc headed by the U.S.

The reason I raise all this is because people like Gandhi, or Tutu, or Martin Luther King, play the role of seeking to be saviors of the system while pretending to be saviors of the masses, and they are built up by the system in order to keep the struggle from breaking out of the bounds that are acceptable to the system. So it was necessary, vitally necessary, desperately necessary, for Martin Luther King to argue that revolution was not only undesirable but specifically that it was impossible in the U.S. I think it's very worthwhile and ties in with your last question to look at some of the specific arguments he made around this.

In his book *Chaos or Community, Where Do We Go from Here?*, King makes the following argument: "Now the plain, inexorable fact is that any attempt of the American Negro to overthrow his oppressor with violence will not work. We do not need President Johnson to tell us this by reminding Negro rioters that they are outnumbered ten to one. The courageous efforts of our own insurrectionist brothers such as Denmark Vessey and Nat Turner, should be eternal reminders to us that violent rebellion is doomed from the start. In violent warfare one must be prepared to face the fact that there will be casualties by the thousands. Anyone leading a violent rebellion must be willing to make an honest assessment regarding the possible casualties to a minority population confronting a well-armed, wealthy majority with a fanatical right-wing that would delight in exterminating thousands of Black men, women and children."

Well, there are so many things that are outrageous here that it would take a long time to go through them all, but let's just hit the highlights of it. First of all, notice how the inspiring example of revolutionary uprisings in the history of Black people in the U.S. is turned around into an argument against rising up. Such people as Denmark Vessey and Nat Turner and the slave revolts they led, which in the final analysis contributed to the eventual overthrow of the slave system and to arousing the slaves to play a crucial role within that, these things are written off as dismal failures and proof that violent rebellion can't possibly work. In fact what they prove is that at that particular time these rebellions, while they sounded a clarion call and inspired people, took place in the context where the conditions weren't yet fully ripe for the overthrow of the slave system. But this far from proves that they didn't play a positive role and an important role in preparing the ground for the eventual overthrow of that system and for the very crucial role of Black people within that.

King writes, "We do not need President Johnson to tell us this by reminding Negro rioters that they are outnumbered ten to one." Well, it may be true that King didn't need Johnson to tell people that, but Johnson certainly needed — and *had* — King, as well as some of these other so-called Civil Rights leaders of the time, to say it was wrong and hopeless to violently rebel. Johnson certainly had them to stand up and tell Black people at the very time that they were rebelling, for example at the time of the Detroit rebellion in 1967, that it was wrong for them to rise up. That in fact, they [these Civil Rights leaders including King] supported Johnson and his call for the suppression of this violent upris-

ing of the Black masses and his "reminding" the Black people that they could only suffer themselves in this rebellion. They openly supported the government in violently suppressing this rebellion (and others like it). So while King may argue that "We do not need President Johnson to tell us this by reminding Negro rioters that they are outnumbered ten to one," Johnson certainly needed *King* and King came through for Johnson and for the system Johnson represented in telling people this and in siding with Johnson in sending in federal troops to back up the police and National Guard to suppress this rebellion. And anyone, King or otherwise, who wants to argue that the rebellions of Black people in the '60s did not have a tremendously powerful impact in shaking the whole system to its foundations and inspiring revolutionary struggle in the U.S., and in fact throughout the world, is going to have to argue against an overpowering reality, and this is going to be an argument they cannot win, because historical fact is historical fact and truth is truth, and King cannot, and no one can, succeed in denying this truth.

And this gets us to the most important point here. "In violent warfare one must be prepared to face the fact that there will be casualties by the thousands." Okay, let's stop there for a second. This is also raised by these types in relationship to what's going on in South Africa now. What will they focus on? They'll focus on the fact that hundreds of black people have been killed in the course of the present uprising which has lasted more or less a year. And this is true. And it is also true, as King says, that you cannot have a revolution, you cannot have a violent rebellion even, which does not involve sacrifice and casualties on the part of the masses of people rising up. But first of all, black people, whether in South Africa or in the U.S., are murdered by the system in hundreds at least every year. Whether or not they rise up, and if there's not a single rebellion, this fact remains true. Across the U.S. police murder scores and hundreds of Black people every year, and in South Africa masses of black people suffer tremendously vicious and atrocious repression and exploitation to the point of death under the normal workings and operation of the system, whether or not they rise up. Now it's true that if you rise up the repression will also be intensified against you. That's to be expected, and King with all of his perverted arguments has seized upon a truth, which is that anyone leading a violent revolution must be willing to make an honest assessment regarding the possible casualties. That's true, you can't talk about revolution, no serious revolutionary would talk about revolution, without talking about the sacrifices that are required and the fact that there will be losses on the part of the revolutionary masses rising up. But what we do say, and what King is attempting to hide, is that it's far better to make those sacrifices, in order to contribute to the overthrow of the system and to moving beyond the horrendous conditions that people face under it every day through its normal workings, than it is to suffer casualties and repression and murder and other forms of brutality silently and simply accepting this system — or still worse, as in the case of King, helping to perpetuate this system with all of its horrors.

Finally, and I think most strategically important, King argues that Black people in seeking to rise up would be a minority population confronting a well-armed, wealthy majority with a fanatical right-wing that would delight in exterminating thousands of Black men, women and children. Now it's true that if it comes to it there is certainly, first of all, the ruling class as such, the imperialists who run this country, and among the population at large there is a social base of support for them, among what King describes as fanatical right-wingers, who would be certainly willing to exterminate, and in that sense would delight in exterminating, thousands or more of Black people in order to suppress an uprising in which they played a crucial role. But King's picture of a small and basically helpless minority of Black people up against a "wealthy majority with a fanatical right-wing," etc., is a gross distortion. As we've already discussed, the population in the United States other than the Black people — that is, the white people in particular — is not one reactionary mass. That's not to argue that there are not many reactionary people among them — there are. But there are also many people who are at least potential supporters of revolution, or at least can be neutralized and won to a position of what Lenin called friendly neutrality with regard to a revolutionary movement. And in fact there are many among them who would eagerly take up and join with a revolutionary struggle, especially once it was blasted powerfully onto the scene, for example, by massive uprisings of Black people in the core cities in the U.S.

So King's picture is a gross distortion — it's aimed at overwhelming the masses of Black people with a feeling that their situation is hopeless, that they are helpless, and that there's no possible means of doing anything because they're up against one reactionary mass that would unite to the last man and woman against them and would give free rein to a fanatical right-wing that would delight in exterminating thousands of Black men, women and children. I mean King wasn't speaking in a vacuum! He was speaking at a time when there were massive uprisings of Black people, which he was all too aware of and seeking to suppress, and he was lying about what was going on right around him — totally misrepresenting it. Here you had Black people rising up, and, while there were some among the white population that sought to join in the efforts to suppress this, there were *large* numbers of people who ranged from sympathizing with it to seeking in various ways to actively support it and even in some cases joining in. And there was at the same time a massive movement developing against the war in Vietnam and other social movements and upheavals going on in society. It was overall a very favorable time for the revolutionary forces in the sense that they had a great deal of initiative — though not in the sense that it became possible to actually carry it through all the way to a revolution. But the revolutionary forces had a lot of initiative, and the struggle of Black people had a lot of support and sympathy among broad ranks of the white population, ranging into the middle class. Significant other sections of proletarian masses among other oppressed nationalities and also among white proletarians,

particularly the youth, joined in their own way as well as actively and consciously seeking to join in unity with the Black people in rising up against this system.

So the picture was *far* from as negative and as hopeless as King desperately sought to portray it, with gross distortion. Again, things then didn't develop all the way to an actual revolutionary situation or to an all-out struggle for power; and while a revolutionary situation is certainly full of acute contradictions and especially the intermediate sections of the people will swing back and forth in such a situation — one day supporting revolution and the next day swinging over to the side of counterrevolution, and all the time tending to vacillate back and forth — it's even more true in a fully developed revolutionary situation that the basis and potential for winning over broad ranks of the intermediate strata as well as uniting more firmly the basic masses of proletarians, including white proletarians, is a lot greater.

So the truth is exactly the opposite of what King says in the fundamental sense, and he's exactly turning reality on its head, again in seeking to save the system. The most damnable part of this is that he is seeking this at a time when first of all the uprisings of Black people are reaching their most powerful expression and *beyond that* when they're influencing and getting support and bringing forward unity from other sections of the people, including other sections of the proletariat. In just these circumstances he's seeking to paint the picture as totally hopeless! This is completely conscious on his part, it's a completely conscious distortion and it's the most grotesque, and the most unforgivable kind of craven service to the most monstrous system.

Now some people might say, after hearing this put in such strong terms, well then why is it that King was, after all, knocked off by the system? If he was such a bootlicker for the system and sought so consistently to be a savior of the system and suppress the masses from rising up against it and to discourage any revolutionary uprising, then how come he was knocked off by the system (as it's portrayed)? Well, let's go back to Bishop Tutu again. It's entirely possible — I certainly don't know and I don't even think that the ruling forces in South Africa or the U.S. imperialists know at this point what is going to be the fate of Bishop Tutu — but it's entirely possible that if he's not able to play the kind of role that they want him to play and are demanding that he play, and if there's a shift in the relationship of things or if there's a sharpening conflict within the ruling forces, any one of these things could result in Bishop Tutu being knocked off by people hired by one or another faction of the ruling forces or the ruling forces in a unified effort. And this is essentially the kind of thing that gave rise to the assassination of Martin Luther King: he was *not* (legend and mythology aside) cut down because he was a champion of the oppressed and moving more and more in a direction of supporting the struggles of the oppressed. He was cut down in a crossfire of struggle and conflict within the ruling structures of the imperialists themselves and for a number of reasons, including the fact that at least certain sections of the ruling class felt that he was of more use to them dead than alive at that point. It's as sim-

ple as that. That's a brutal truth but no less a definite and fundamental truth.

It's very important that we look not just at one aspect of a situation, for example the fact that King was assassinated, but look at the overall situation and the overall role of people, King or anyone else, within that situation. If we do that we'll see that whether it's King or Tutu today, or Gandhi before them, their position, their program and their actions were aimed at supporting and upholding the system and preventing the struggle from breaking out of the bounds acceptable to the system and confined within it; they did in fact contribute to the suppression of the struggle of the oppressed, not to the development and to the further advancement of that struggle.

Q: I know that the RCP has made it very clear that it has no intention of leading people into ambush by launching a premature attempt at insurrection and the armed seizure of power. So I know you're saying the time isn't quite right yet. But what conditions do you feel must be fulfilled before the necessary armed struggle for power can be initiated? And, in relation to that, could you comment on what you consider to be the significance of the *Basic Principles for the Future Revolutionary Army of the Proletariat* which was recently issued by the party, in RW No. 306?

A: First of all, it's very correct and very important that a premature attempt at insurrection and the armed seizure of power must not be made, and the party must not attempt to lead the masses in such a premature attempt which could only result in its being smashed and furthermore result in a *political defeat* for the party and the advanced forces of revolution because they would be discredited in the eyes of the masses. It's one thing to be defeated — defeats in an overall sense cannot be avoided. In other words, in the process of revolution there are going to be some defeats even if you're ultimately victorious. But if you make serious errors, and certainly attempting a premature insurrection is a serious error, then you're also going to be politically discredited in the eyes of even the masses who would support you, and that's much more serious than any particular *material defeat* you might suffer. So it's very important to recognize the danger of a premature attempt at insurrection.

But having said that, it's also important to say that a greater danger in the history of the revolutionary movement, and a greater danger overall, projecting also into the future, has been and will be *not* premature attempts at insurrection but the failure to grasp and even recognize that a revolutionary situation is developing or has developed even when that's the case.

Historically there have been many revolutionary situa-

tions that have not been seized, many possible revolutions that have never even been embarked upon, because in particular the revolutionary party failed, or even refused, to recognize that there was an opening through which the suppressed anger of the masses could erupt and be led and transformed into a revolutionary struggle for the seizure of power. As I said, either they've failed, or sometimes even refused, to recognize that this was the situation and to act upon it; that is, to actually seek to unleash and moreover to coordinate and to lead such a revolutionary uprising and to carry it through. So while it's important to be aware of the danger of a premature attempt at uprising, it's even more important to guard against what is even a greater danger, that is, the failure to even recognize the possibility when that possibility actually *has* come into existence — when a revolutionary situation, in other words a revolutionary opening, has in fact occurred.

Now, to move on and deal with other parts of your question, specifically, the heart of this question, I think: What conditions must be fulfilled before the necessary armed struggle for power can be initiated?

Well, that's a question that's obviously difficult to answer, and in getting at the answer it's first necessary to look at it in light of some important history. In the history of the proletarian revolution there are two great models: the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Chinese Revolution of 1949. The first, the Russian Revolution of 1917, is in general terms a model for revolution in imperialist countries. Russia at that time, although it was very backward in many important respects, was nevertheless an imperialist country. It was not a leader of an imperialist bloc, it was not one of the very top imperialist powers, in fact it was in some ways subordinate to British and French imperialism, but it still was an imperialist country.

On the other hand the Chinese Revolution, which was brought to victorious conclusion in 1949, in terms of the countrywide seizure of power by the proletariat led by the Chinese Communist Party, was a revolution in a colonial or semicolonial country which was also semifeudal. And this is a basic model, and remains a basic model, for revolution in the Third World countries generally which are under colonial or neocolonial domination and have many important features stemming from their domination by imperialism. But Mao and Lenin were always very clear and emphatic in stressing that revolutions in other countries and in other circumstances should not try to copy the revolution in Russia or China as the case might be. And this is not only generally true and a general principle, that revolutions in any one country and one set of circumstances cannot be copies, certainly not exact copies, of previous revolutions, but this is a very important point to grasp and to go into deeply in terms of a revolution in the U.S. today.

The revolution in the U.S. today, to put it simply, will *not* be a copy of the revolution in the Russia of 1917. Not only will it not be an exact copy but it certainly will differ in many important features whenever it occurs. This does not mean that the Russian Revolution is *not* a model for the revolution

in the U.S. today; it is in the most general and basic terms, particularly in that it's necessary first to carry out a period of political work which prepares for and lays the ground for the going over to insurrection and then the carrying out of civil war to achieve and consolidate victory through armed struggle. This is what was done in Russia in 1917, and that basic model is what will have to be done and in fact is being done by our party in the U.S. — at this point in the form of carrying out political work as the preparation for the going over to the armed struggle when the objective conditions do emerge and the opening that we're looking for does in fact occur.

So that model of a period of political work laying the basis for and preceding the going over to insurrection in the cities followed by a civil war throughout the country is our basic model, as opposed to the basic model for the Third World represented by the Chinese Revolution, which is more or less one of armed struggle from the beginning and continuously, armed struggle which is initiated first in the remoter rural regions of the country and takes place initially in the form of guerrilla warfare building up over a protracted period to encircle and eventually seize the cities and win political power throughout the country in that way. So that Chinese model is obviously not a model for an imperialist country like the U.S.

But even with the Russian Revolution, which in fundamental terms is a model for revolution in imperialist countries, it is not only the case that it should not be copied in every detail exactly down the line, but further, there will be many important features in the U.S. which will be different. This is both because of what is rather obvious in the first place, that the U.S. today is a vastly different country and occupies a different position in the world than Russia seventy years ago, but also the world as a whole is vastly different and also the character of the world war which is looming before us, if it does break out, will be vastly different than World War 1, which was the context within which the Russian Revolution occurred. Even the looming shadow of that world war presents far different conditions than existed when the Russian Revolution took place. And the overall situation in the world, in many important and different respects (which I don't want to get into right now), is vastly different than the world at the time of the Russian Revolution.

But one thing I do want to come back to and stress is this question of the difference between the wars. That is, in World War 1, and again in World War 2, it was the case that the most important revolutions that took place and the ones that in fact succeeded (speaking specifically of proletarian revolutions) either came to a victorious conclusion or had their pivotal periods during those world wars: the Russian Revolution in World War 1 and the Chinese Revolution in relation to World War 2. (Even though the Chinese Revolution won final victory after World War 2, the pivotal point of the Chinese Revolution which laid the basis for that final victory occurred during World War 2.) And it was the case, again returning to the Russian Revolution, that the outbreak and then the course of World War 1 brought the contradictions within Russian society to the breaking point and laid the

basis for a revolution. More specifically, it was the case that Russian society, historically speaking, was sort of rotten ripe for revolution; the war brought all this to a head, and after a certain point the state power in Russia more or less crumbled. The Tsar was toppled, but the foundation under the Tsar was completely rotted through. And the revolution of October 1917, which brought the proletariat to power, while it certainly was an armed and violent revolution, was going up against a state power which right at that particular time was greatly weakened. This revolution was occurring during the final stages of a war which had been going on for three years or so and which had, over a protracted period, ripened the contradictions and ripened the conditions for revolution in Russia.

My point in raising this is not to go into a thorough analysis of all those aspects of the Russian Revolution but to contrast that with the situation and the prospect of revolution in the U.S. today. Should world war break out, if revolution is not able to prevent it, this world war will be vastly different than World War 1, and the situation in the U.S., particularly in terms of revolution, will be vastly different than in Russia at the time of World War 1. We're not going to have a situation where a protracted four or five years of world war eventually thoroughly undermine the foundations of the existing power and it more or less topples from its rotten foundation with a push. I don't think such a war is likely to go on four or five years in that kind of way; but including its after-shocks and its aftermath it may go on for quite a long time, perhaps even decades — that's something I can't say for sure and I don't think anyone can, but it's quite possible. But it won't go on in the form in which it began, more or less, with the states, as we're now familiar with them, and their armies and very well-defined battlefields and so on for a protracted period of years like that. There will be qualitative, dramatic, and devastating changes if such a war breaks out, rather quickly, in the early stages of that war almost certainly. And that will present a drastically different situation if that's what occurs.

As we've been stressing recently, this puts all the more emphasis on the need to step up efforts to make revolution in order to prevent world war if at all possible. But if that is not possible it doesn't mean the end of our attempts to make revolution. Those attempts have to be carried forward even if it means doing so in the course of or in the aftermath of that world war. Still, this understanding does give added emphasis to the importance of seeking to make revolution so as to prevent that war and, again, I don't think that we can expect a situation where the state power that exists in the U.S. is going to be like that of the Tsar and the Russian ruling class, that it is going to more or less topple with a push. There are some new problems and some new conditions that are going to have to be dealt with in the building of a revolutionary movement and, in particular, the carrying out of the armed struggle in a country like the U.S. when the opening does exist.

So it remains true and of decisive significance that you cannot make a revolution and, in particular, carry out an

armed struggle with just the vanguard alone or just because you want to. It's necessary for the objective conditions to exist and it's necessary for the revolution to be, and in particular for the armed struggle to be, a war of masses and not of the vanguard alone. But what I'm trying to stress here is that it would be a very serious error to sit around waiting for the kind of situation to arise as arose in Russia in 1917. Even then most of the vanguard, most of the Bolsheviks, didn't recognize the opening when it was there, and Lenin had to fight like hell to get them to recognize it and then to carry through. But our situation is bound to be quite different. A revolutionary situation is not going to emerge the same way, and it's not going to be a case of a rotten foundation vulnerable to the same kind of push in the same way. This doesn't mean that we should be prepared to wait longer, in the sense that we should sit around thinking this pushes the armed struggle into the never-never land of the far-off distant, imponderable future; rather it means that we have to sharpen our ability to recognize what such an opening would look like and how it can be seized on.

As far as what conditions would have to exist, Lenin has made some very important statements analyzing this basic question, which I think are very instructive. In one of these, he says that a revolutionary situation exists when the masses of people, the lower classes, are unable and unwilling to go on living in the old way; that is, they are no longer going along, putting up with the normal workings of the system as they've been grinding along and putting up with the oppression that's meted out to them daily. On the other hand, Lenin said, in a revolutionary situation the ruling classes find themselves in acute crisis and are unable to go on *ruling* in the old way. And finally, there must be a *vanguard* with the ability, with the program, with the ties with the masses, and with the organizational as well as ideological basis for leading and carrying through an armed struggle to make a revolution. These, he says, are the three basic conditions necessary for a revolutionary situation.

Lenin also wrote something which was reprinted in introducing these *Basic Principles for the Future Revolutionary Army of the Proletariat* which you referred to. I want to read this here because I think it's very important.

Lenin emphasized that: "To be successful, insurrection must rely not upon conspiracy and not upon a party, but upon the advanced class. That is the first point. Insurrection must rely upon a *revolutionary upsurge of the people*. That is the second point. Insurrection must rely upon that *turning point* in the history of the growing revolution when the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its height, and when the *vacillations* in the ranks of the enemy and in the *ranks of the weak, half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolution* are strongest. That is the third point. And these three conditions for raising the question of insurrection distinguish *Marxism from Blanquism*" (or terrorism, Blanquism being a particular word for what is called terrorism today).

Of course, whenever one uses the word "terrorism" these days, given the way it's being thrown around — and in particular how it's being used, among other things, to attack

genuine revolutionary struggle against imperialism — it's very important to make clear what you mean. And it's very necessary to point out that such people as the U.S. imperialists have absolutely no right to say anything in condemnation of terrorism, given their whole history and their continuing record of literal genocide of whole peoples and mass slaughter of millions and millions and millions of human beings, along with their other crimes — like literally enslaving millions of people for hundreds of years and right today exploiting hundreds of millions. But what I am referring to when I speak of terrorism is, in general terms, the use of various forms of military or quasi-military actions, usually conducted by irregular armed forces or groups of individuals, with or without the backing of any particular state, for the purpose of pressuring or influencing the policy of the target of such actions, usually a state or group of states. More specifically, I mean actions that are not part of an overall revolutionary armed struggle involving and fundamentally relying on revolutionary masses, actions which attempt to substitute for a revolutionary war of the masses or which are carried out in opposition to the mobilization of the masses for the waging of a revolutionary war.

Such terrorism is in the final analysis an expression of reformism, if not worse, and at best a kind of militant reformism. In many cases this is rather clearly so — the explicit object and purpose in these instances is to wring a concession from a particular state (or group of states), and this is not part of or meant to be part of any strategic orientation for the revolutionary transformation of society, not part of any overall plan or any particular program of mobilizing the oppressed masses for a revolutionary war. Many of the actions in the world today that are called terrorist do in fact fall into this category. At the same time there are actions — and even some guided by whole strategic conceptions — that are conceived of as a means of igniting a mass armed uprising, or setting in motion a process that will lead to such an uprising, but which nevertheless still fall into the category of terrorism (as I have defined it here) and which fail to achieve, and in reality have no basis for achieving, that objective of unleashing a revolutionary armed struggle of masses.

The problem — specifically from the standpoint of proletarian revolution — is that engaging in these kinds of actions, in this form of military combat, means in effect entering into a state of war with the object (or target) of these actions. It means putting the organization or group that does these things on a war footing — that is, gearing its whole structure and operation primarily in line with the task of leading a revolutionary war. This should only be done if there is the basis for mobilizing masses to actively take part in and for still broader masses to be a firm base of support for warfare against the reactionary state power (and its die-hard supporters). Or at least there must be the basis to set in motion the kind of dialectical process where the repression by the reactionary state power will call forth more mass support for the revolutionary forces (or provide the basis for winning such support rather immediately), enabling them to draw greater numbers of masses into the armed struggle and to hit

back at the enemy and its repressive measures with more initiative and greater effect. Otherwise, the inevitable fierce repression by the reactionary state will mean that the forces engaging in such actions will be crushed, or in any case that they will not be able to sustain themselves and develop as *revolutionary armed forces*. For this to happen and, more particularly, for an armed struggle to succeed in clearing the ground for a thoroughgoing revolutionary transformation of society, there must be set in motion that dialectical process which will enable revolutionary armed forces to sink deeper roots and establish a more powerful base of support among masses of people and increasingly draw greater numbers of them into the armed struggle. This, in turn, requires that these armed forces and the armed struggle have the leadership of a communist vanguard and be guided by its political program, representing the interests of the revolutionary proletariat. Furthermore, and more specifically, it requires that the initiation of the armed struggle conform to a situation where the objective conditions necessary for such an all-out revolutionary armed struggle exist, including the political conditions that make it possible to win over, rely on and activate masses of revolutionary fighters from among the proletariat and other oppressed groups. And this takes us back to Lenin's three points concerning insurrection and what distinguishes it from terrorism.

These three points or conditions that Lenin focused on are crucial and essential. First, a revolution is not made by a party alone, but is made by the advanced class, which means the proletariat. We've discussed that already.

Secondly, and I think this is *crucial* to grasp, an insurrection depends upon a revolutionary upsurge of the people. For example, in South Africa today you have a revolutionary upsurge of the people that's threatening to break out of all bounds, all confines, set by the system. It's certainly on the verge of doing so. That is a very powerful example of what Lenin meant when he said that insurrection must depend upon a revolutionary upsurge of the people. It's out of such an upsurge of the people, even though that upsurge may for a long period itself not mainly take the form of armed struggle, it is still out of such an upsurge of the people that the armed struggle has to be built. And finally, an insurrection has to occur in a situation where not only the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its height and there's a growing revolutionary ferment and struggle among them but also when the vacillation in the ranks of the enemy and in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted, and irresolute friends of the revolution is at its height. In other words, when the conflicts within the ruling class are sharpest, in large part in response to the revolutionary uprisings of the masses as well as in other ways, and when those forces that we've talked about before, the middle-class, intermediate elements who tend to vacillate and swing from one side to the other, when their ability to act as a buffer and, to put it that way, sit on the masses and *hinder them* from rising up in revolutionary struggle is paralyzed and they're in the weakest position to do that and frankly also least inclined to do that. This is also another important condition that makes possible a revolutionary

opening.

Now again, Lenin didn't emphasize this to say we wait until everything falls right into our lap, because, again, he was at one point *the only one* who saw the revolutionary possibilities in the situation when the Russian Revolution did occur and he had to fight uphill for a while to get the rest of the Bolshevik leadership to recognize this and go along. Still, if these things don't exist then the chances of insurrection succeeding are going to be correspondingly much less. So these are the kinds of things we're looking for, and not only looking for, these are the kinds of things we're *working* toward. There's the objective workings of the system, there's the conflicts within the ruling classes, the underlying contradictions of the system, its underlying dynamics and the crisis in which that system is enmeshed now. On the one hand, those things are occurring more or less independently of us, but on the other hand, there's our work, which takes place within that overall context, to heighten the preparation of the masses for revolution, to heighten the consciousness, particularly of the advanced, to spread the influence of a revolutionary line and to prepare the ground, so to speak.

It's also true, as I pointed out, that events in different parts of the world interact very powerfully with the situation in the U.S., and that certainly includes revolutionary struggles in different parts of the world. South Africa is an outstanding example, as is also the revolutionary war in Peru or the revolutionary movement in Iran several years ago — and I would point out that the revolutionary possibilities in Iran are far from over at this time. So any particular place in the world or any number of places together could act to dramatically change the situation in the U.S. and begin to lay the basis for revolutionary conditions to emerge; and this is the kind of thing we've got to be very tense and very acute in looking toward and looking for the emergence of. At the same time we have to be working very actively to heighten our ability and the ability of the advanced forces of the proletariat in particular to seize on these conditions as they do ripen and particularly to seize on such an opening for revolutionary armed struggle when it does occur, in such conditions as Lenin mentioned.

Let me elaborate on this. I think it's very important to say this: *in terms of a revolutionary upsurge of the people* as Lenin spoke of it, we don't have to have a majority of the people involved in a revolutionary upsurge before the conditions for a real revolutionary armed struggle might emerge. We have to have revolutionary masses, thousands and thousands of them actively involved, and millions and millions at least actively sympathetic. We have to have revolutionary masses, not just the party, but we don't have to have some absolute numerical majority. Many people may still not be directly involved on one side or the other. So we have to have an upsurge of masses. Take the kind of thing that occurred in the U.S. in the '60s: if a number of other things had been different, including the overall world context, then the mass uprisings of Black people in the context of a war in Vietnam, which the U.S. was losing and which was putting tremendous strains on the society itself in the U.S. —

all this *might* have led to the kind of situation that Lenin's talking about and might have provided the opening. That did not occur for a number of different reasons, but it *might* have occurred then, and it's certainly not inconceivable to envision a situation like that erupting again, perhaps again without much warning. We've got to be very tense, as I said, in looking for it and very *actively* working to prepare the ground for it, particularly among the advanced proletarians but also among other different forces, especially those who do break out into resistance and rebellion against the system.

So this is the best way I can answer that question: these are the kinds of things that would have to emerge. I can't sit here and paint a picture and say this and this and this particular thing has to happen, in this and this and this order; but I think these are the kinds of conditions, these are the kinds of things that have to occur, and while we should guard against premature attempts at insurrection, even more important to be vigilant against is missing the possibility of these situations. And in particular (again I raise this in relation to the Russian Revolution as a model, as well as in general) we have to guard against a tendency to wait for everything to sort of ripen up to where it just takes a push. Now I've overstated the matter in order to stress this point — the Russian Revolution involved quite a bit more intense struggle than the way I presented it by saying it just took a push. But there is a point there that the *initial* seizure of power in Russia (which was then followed by a civil war) was a definite armed struggle, but it was *something* of a push as opposed to the kind of struggle it's going to take to overthrow U.S. imperialism in all likelihood, in the world today. Strategically speaking, we have to guard mainly against the tendency to just wait for everything to fall into our lap and for everything to line up just so, and to read things like the necessity of a revolutionary upsurge of the people to mean a majority of the people, or anything like an actual numerical majority, have to be in the streets screaming for revolution before the conditions might emerge.

Just to conclude on this, then, by taking up the question of the significance of the *Basic Principles for the Future Revolutionary Army of the Proletariat* which were recently printed in the *Revolutionary Worker*. As was said in introducing those principles, the important point is that while now is not the time to seek to actually launch the armed struggle in the U.S., now is definitely the time to step up political preparation for that armed struggle, for when the conditions do emerge for it, and an important part of that preparation is popularizing and making more of a living reality the *possibility* of waging the armed struggle when those conditions emerge.

In other words, it is a question of removing that from the realm of the distant and almost unthinkable to the realm of, if not the *actual and immediate*, at least the very *practical*, in a political sense. It is something which has to begin to be brought down to real terms and be actively thought about and actively grappled with, right now in the realm of theory and strategic thinking; it is something that, in the sense I've spoken of, has to be actually prepared for not only by the party but by revolutionary masses of people, particularly among

the proletariat. So that is one of the most important points that underlies the bringing forward of these *Basic Principles for the Future Revolutionary Army of the Proletariat* — to carry out that kind of preparation in the context of our overall political preparation.

Both the two basic points of those principles — that is, the first one that sets forth the basic aims and basic nature of that future revolutionary army of the proletariat, and the one that more specifically sets out points of orientation and discipline for it — both these points begin to give a concrete sense, and concrete life, to these principles, to what such an army would look like and how it is fundamentally different and opposed to the armies of the imperialists and reactionaries just as the goals and aims for which it fights are fundamentally different and opposed to theirs. In studying this and taking this up I think that masses of people can begin to get a deeper grasp, first of all of the fact, as I wrote in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?* (which is also quoted in introducing these principles), that an army is actually a concentration of the kind of society that it's fighting for; that is, the principles of that army, its fighting doctrine, its relationship with the masses of people, and so on, are all in important ways the concentrated expression of the kind of society and the kind of world that army is fighting for. That's also powerfully reflected in these principles.

So the object is to spread these principles broadly, to popularize these among masses of people, particularly the proletariat but broadly among different sections of the oppressed as well, and to inspire and encourage discussion and struggle over these principles, over the question of whether such an army can really be built when the conditions emerge, over whether such an armed struggle based on these principles can really be carried out, and what that would actually look like and what is the role of the masses of people who are coming into contact with these principles, who are taking them up and studying them — what their role would be in that whole process. How would they relate to such an army, how would they be involved with it and support it? And shouldn't they be involved with it and support it, and so on? This is the kind of ferment we want to go on around this, to make this much more of a living thing and, as I said, to remove it from the realm of the abstract and the really sort of unthinkable and bring it right down to the earth and right to the ground and make it very real and vivid for people.

The other thing I want to stress in relationship to this is one basic point that's driven home in these principles, which is the relationship between the party and the army. I've several times stressed that the party has to lead the army. As Mao once graphically put it, the party must command the gun and the gun must never be allowed to command the party. This is one of the most important things that distinguishes a revolutionary army from a reactionary army, whether it's the imperialist army of the USA or whether it's a crime syndicate or an armed gang of thugs terrorizing the people. Also, however, it's important to take up this question of the relation between the party and the army from another angle. As is stressed in these principles and as I stressed in *A Horrible*

End, or An End to the Horror?, the backbone of the army must be class-conscious proletarians, and this must also be the backbone of the party, which has to be the leader of the army. But at the same time there are going to be many people, particularly youth, who are perhaps not yet ready to join the party and be a part of the political, the overall, vanguard of the revolution but who are ready to come into the revolution in the form of taking part in the armed struggle, joining in with and becoming a part of the revolutionary army of the proletariat when that's the order of the day, and through that becoming trained and developed and disciplined as revolutionaries and many of them being eventually recruited into the party. So it's important to see both the relationship between the party and the army in the sense that the party has to be the vanguard of every part of the revolution, including leading the army and the armed struggle. On the other hand many people will be good recruits for the army and be great fighters in the army of the proletariat before the point at which they would be ready to join the party; some perhaps will even be important fighters in the army of the proletariat and never actually join the party. It's very important to recognize this. We don't shrink from looking at the fact that historically for the proletariat and in revolutions generally the youth have played a tremendously important role and that often revolutionary armies are made up of people as young as twelve years old and many, many teenagers. It's not that we only want teenagers, but we're certainly not going to turn them away, and we don't think that they're incapable of playing a tremendously important role, particularly in the armed struggle. They are, and they must play a very important role in that, and also in inspiring other people, including older people, to come forward.

One last thing in response to this question that I want to stress, that is very much emphasized in these principles, is the question of women. This is an important dividing line question in revolutions generally and it's especially one in terms of the prospects for revolution in the U.S., and this takes very important expression also within the army — and again I would urge people to read these basic principles and to study them seriously and grapple with them on this point in particular as well as more generally. But just one important thing to stress is that just as in the party, in the overall vanguard of the revolution, so also in the revolutionary army of the proletariat when it is finally formed, the role of women on all levels, including as leaders of that army, is going to be tremendously important and also be a very sharp focus of struggle.

This is another way in which we're preparing the ground politically for waging that struggle on the most favorable terms. And this ties in with the question of people who may make very good soldiers in the army in an overall sense but perhaps are not yet on the level of joining the party as the vanguard of the revolution. To put it simply, it's going to be a very complicated picture of many people, including youths and others, who are going to want to take up arms against the system and it would be a crime to turn them away simply because they have weaknesses and because their outlook

and their understanding is not highly developed and in some ways they have not yet developed the political understanding and the discipline characteristic of the proletariat. Obviously, if they were only people fighting for themselves, and not taking up the basic principles of the army (as set forth in that article in the *RW*) then they wouldn't belong in that army. But if they can be won to those principles, then even though they may be sharply contradictory in some ways they should be brought into that army and trained in that context. But if they are to be brought in, as they should be, then there is going to have to be very sharp struggle over these attitudes and some sharp lines drawn and firmly held to. Just to get to one sharp expression of this, it's going to be a case where you have women political and military leaders who are giving direction and leadership to a lot of men, many of whose fighting spirit includes a lot of *machismo*, a macho attitude. That's inevitable in a society like this. Again we can't turn them away simply because they have these shortcomings. But it's going to be */laughs/* a very sharply contradictory situation, and I think it's one we can handle and must learn how to handle.

Putting out these principles now, and laying some fundamental groundwork and putting these things down very sharply and clearly for people to grapple with beginning now is only part of, but it's an important part of, laying the basis for being able to handle it. That's going to be *very tough* to handle, you can start imagining and thinking about it, you can see how tough that is going to be to handle. Just look around you, at some of the masses, including some of the very best, and some of the ways in which they are very sharply contradictory over this and some of the ways in which their weaknesses and shortcomings are going to assert themselves in terms of not wanting to follow the political and military leadership of women on various levels, including up to the highest levels. Of course, struggle around these questions must go on and will go on within the party itself, and at times very sharply, but that is on a different basis than how this struggle must and will be carried out among broader masses, including within the ranks of that future army.

In fact, the problem of giving correct leadership around this and correctly carrying out the necessary struggle around it in the army is a particularly sharp expression of the need to recognize the difference between the army and its role and the party and its role — the party as the overall leader but the army as the actual fighting force — and what is the relationship between them and how does that express itself in terms of some very important and very sharp contradictions. These are the different ways in which the setting forth of these *Basic Principles for the Future Revolutionary Army of the Proletariat* is helping to prepare the ground and beginning to bring into the consciousness of the masses the *reality* of *actively preparing* for the emergence of a revolutionary situation where the armed struggle can be taken up.

Q: If I could pursue this further, I'd like to probe a bit more the question of how you visualize the revolution actually getting started in a country like the U.S. I mean, even if things get to the point where people are ready, the conditions are ripe and so on, that won't be enough. The armed struggle will somehow have to be *initiated* and it will have to be done as part of a coherent plan to actually seize power. In Peru, the revolutionary communists have been engaged in armed struggle for the last five years now, and they seem to be making significant advances, setting up zones where they organize new forms of democratic popular power and from which they can launch further assaults on the armed forces of the central authorities. As they expand their control and influence in the Andean mountains and in other parts of the country, they seem to be clearly laying the basis for eventually moving to take even the coastal zones and strategic cities, in keeping with Mao's military strategy of surrounding the cities from the countryside. Now I know you've just explained that the revolution in the U.S. would have to be different than the revolution in China, and clearly what you've been describing is different than what's going on in Peru today for instance, but do you see any possible application in a country like the U.S. of the policy of establishing revolutionary base areas in some parts of the country, from which to carry forward the armed struggle?

A: First of all, on the point that, as you put it, somehow it has to get started, it has to be initiated. This is an extremely important point. Lenin wrote that getting started, speaking specifically of the armed struggle, is the most difficult part. I think that has a very particular application in countries like the U.S., which are the strongholds of the imperialists and where the state power reaches very forcefully and effectively into all parts of the country.

So getting started, taking the first steps in initiating the armed struggle, is in fact extremely difficult, and obviously it's crucial for being able to carry through the armed struggle, because without getting started there won't be an armed struggle. On the other hand, as difficult as it is, there are also things which are strategically favorable to the initiation of armed struggle beginning in the urban cores in a country like the U.S. Now again, let's go back to our earlier discussion about "the USA to the USA," that is the similarities and differences between the situation in South Africa and the U.S., in particular with regard to Black people but overall in terms of the strategic orientation toward revolution. Going back to that discussion it's important to bring out again that while there are differences, the strategic position of Black people — in particular their position in the most exploited sections of the proletariat and their position concentrated in the urban cores of the strategically decisive cities in the U.S. — is a very favorable condition strategically for the prospects for revolutionary warfare in the U.S.

One of the particular problems that will mark the armed

struggle in a country like the U.S. as opposed to, for example, the situation in Peru today, or the historic example of China, is that from the very beginning the revolutionary army of the proletariat will have to be forged right in the process of fighting decisive battles with the enemy, battles which have *strategic* impact upon the overall course of the revolutionary war. In other words, in a place like Peru or China they're able to initiate battles on a smaller scale and take on the enemy in pieces and in its weaker outlying areas rather than in its strongholds. And the revolutionary forces are able through a series of such battles and stages to build up their forces before they have to and can engage the enemy in *decisive battles* which would bear on the whole outcome of the armed struggle. In the U.S. we're not going to be able to do that.

That's a problem because we're going to be forging and developing our army right as we carry out decisive, strategically important battles with the enemy. And so, what do we have going for us that would enable us to do that? What we have going for us is the potential for tremendously powerful revolutionary upsurges of masses, especially masses concentrated in the urban cores. And if this occurs at the same time that throughout society generally there's unrest, there's crisis, there are deepening splits within the ruling class, then we can see the possibility of making a breakthrough and actually forging an army right out of that revolutionary mass upsurge. For example, let me say, if there were in the U.S. today a situation, just in the urban cores, like there is throughout South Africa, if there were that kind of revolutionary upsurge among the Black masses, other oppressed nationalities, and other proletarians, especially concentrated in the urban cores of the strategically decisive cities in the U.S. — *that* would provide a possible basis to actually forge an army that could wage those decisive battles even as it was being welded as a revolutionary fighting force.

In South Africa the situation, in terms of the revolutionary upheaval of the masses of people, is extremely favorable and growing more so, but unfortunately a decisive element is still missing from that situation this time and that's the existence of a revolutionary vanguard party based on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought; and only if such a party is forged right in the furnace of that mass upheaval will it be possible for that revolutionary upsurge to actually be carried through into a thoroughgoing revolutionary struggle. Otherwise this upsurge will ultimately be resolved in some other way that won't be a thoroughgoing revolution.

In the U.S., while there is not yet an overall political situation or revolutionary upsurge that's anything like that in South Africa, and the situation has not yet developed anything like those favorable dimensions, there is such a vanguard party based on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought — our party. And if there develops, in the strategic urban cores of the U.S. among the oppressed nationalities and among other proletarians generally, such a revolutionary upsurge, and if it is coupled with growing political movements also among other sections of the people, as I've

talked about — as happened, for example, in the '60s in the U.S. — and if further there are developing and sharpening conflicts within the ruling class such as occurred around Watergate, for example, in the U.S., then we can begin to see the elements that would make for a revolutionary situation and provide the basis out of which in fact a revolutionary army of the proletariat could be forged even as it begins to wage those decisive battles against the enemy's armed forces. And this begins to remove the question of how to make a beginning from the realm of the very abstract and the almost impossible to the more concrete and the much more conceivable and much more possible realm. So we can see that to make a beginning in a country like the U.S., to actually initiate the armed struggle for power in such a country, will be extremely difficult, but there are also potentially favorable factors, not the least of which is the existence and the work and the role of a vanguard party, and fundamentally what this hinges on, what it depends on, is the development of mass and widespread political upheaval and struggle and in particular a revolutionary upheaval based among revolutionary proletarians.

As for the last part of your question about the possible role or basis of base areas in the process of the armed struggle in a country like the U.S., there will be in one sense some application to this: *not*, as is the case in Peru or was the case in China, that the armed struggle will begin in rural areas where the state power is weaker, will gradually build up established base areas in the countryside, gradually enlarge the base areas of the revolutionary forces and eventually go over to a situation where the strategic assault can be made on the cities and state power can be captured throughout the country, following the overall strategic orientation of surrounding the cities from the countryside. *Not* in that sense. But in a country like the U.S. *after* the initial urban uprisings have occurred, even if this is successful, even if real revolutionary breakthroughs are made and revolutionary power established, it is unlikely that it will be established throughout all of what is now the territory of the United States, all in that one initial phase. It's much more likely that there will be revolutionary regimes, or revolutionary power, perhaps of a provisional character, established in a number of different urban centers, which in turn will give rise to further uprisings in other urban areas and even other parts of the country. And it will be crucial to link up these revolutionary strongholds in these urban centers as much and as rapidly as possible and not to simply "sit in the cities" — which would mean sitting and waiting to be isolated and crushed.

Advancing from urban strongholds to link up the revolutionary forces and revolutionary power, extending over as much territory as possible — without getting overextended at any particular point — will be of decisive importance. But still it will be extremely unlikely that in this phase a revolutionary regime will be established throughout the entire territory of what is now the USA. So next there will be a phase where the revolutionary power that has been established so far will be consolidated — but only in the sense of making it a

base (or a number of base areas) from which to immediately carry forward the continuation of the armed struggle to thoroughly defeat the forces of the overthrown ruling class and of counterrevolution generally. Viewed in this light, then, there will be the necessity for having base areas — areas that are under the rule of the revolutionary forces, that are revolutionary regimes that serve both as a consolidation of the power that's been gained so far and most importantly as a rear area and base area for continuing the armed struggle through to its complete victory. So this will be on the one hand different than the situation in Peru or in China before, but on the other hand there will be, in the sense I've just discussed, some role, an important role, for revolutionary base areas and rear areas to carry forward and carry through the armed struggles.

Q: I'd like to get back to looking at the makeup of different social strata in the U.S. in relation to the question of revolution or the possibility of revolution. I'd like to ask you what you think is going on among the politicized "middle elements" in the United States. I have in mind the growing numbers of people, from the middle classes especially, who may not be convinced of the need for revolution in the U.S. but who are nevertheless engaged in some pretty serious opposition to the U.S. government. The Plowshares actions and unrepentant stand, the Pledge of Resistance to U.S. intervention in Central America, the sanctuary movement, some of the more militant sections of the anti-apartheid and antinuclear movements, many of those participating in "No Business As Usual Day" and so on. It seems to me that there is a trend in the U.S. towards more "determined resistance" among such forces. And while pacifism is still a big trend, there certainly seems to be fewer illusions about the kindly nature of the state than there were among the white middle-class forces in the early to mid-'60s for instance. The youth especially are less likely to be putting flowers in the bayonets of National Guardsmen than their counterparts in the early stages of the '60s movements. Could you comment on this?

A: First of all, as to the question of what's going on among these politicized middle elements in the U.S., I think it's pretty much what you touched on in your question: that is, they are responding to the growing and acute and explosive crisis that's shaping up internationally, in particular the threat of nuclear war; the threat of invasion directly by the U.S. in Central America, the carrying out of its present war moves through proxy forces already in Central America, and its death squad and death-dealing policy against the masses of people there; its suppression of immigrants who

are driven to this country in large part as a result of U.S. aggression against the people in those countries; the upsurge in South Africa and the clear role of the U.S. in backing up the state of South Africa against the masses of people there. All these things, and others, are calling people forth into struggle and impelling people into motion against the system and against the very real outrages it commits and the looming horrors that it's bringing onto the horizon. Very clearly that is what is going on, and it's important to recognize that it's the system itself and its very nature and its very operation and what the ruling classes in the world are compelled to do themselves that's calling people into motion against it. This system calls forth the forces that oppose it and ultimately calls forth the forces that will overthrow it. This is very important to understand.

It is important at the same time to understand, as we talked about earlier, that so far in a country like the U.S. the *main* forces in motion politically are from among the middle classes. There are embryonic and developing revolutionary forces of the proletariat coming onto the stage, but that's what they are at this point — embryonic and beginning forces, the first stages of the development of a powerful revolutionary movement of the proletariat. And among these middle-class elements who are mainly on the political stage now there is bound to be a strong pull toward such things as pacifism, bound to be a strong pull toward seeking some way other than a violent rupture and violent upheaval and all the destruction that that necessarily involves. They are bound to seek some way other than all that to try to eliminate these evils. In other words, even if they oppose the system, even if they don't believe in the kindly nature and good will of the system and the people that rule it, they're still bound to try to find some way other than the revolutionary uprising of the masses and revolutionary armed struggle to deal with these things and eliminate these evils. The fact is — and this is a fact which impinges powerfully on everyday events and on the course of events overall — the fact is, *there is no way* other than violent means to resolve this and to eliminate these evils. A violent revolution is necessary in order to eliminate the things that people are being called forth to struggle against; and this is a very sharp contradiction that these people face. Because of their position in society, they are drawn toward and gravitate toward a position of seeking some peaceful means of resolving this: their position is not one in which they are subjected to the most brutal violence and in many cases undisguised violence from the ruling class; in their situation, both economically and politically, they've been able to get a little something, have a little maneuvering room, feel a little sense of freedom. Generally speaking, they don't feel the direct hand of the state coming down on them, and they don't feel the direct workings of the system literally depriving them of even the means to live — or, minimally, driving them into a desperate situation — as people throughout large parts of the world and even many people on the bottom layers of U.S. society do in a very real and very vivid way. So they tend to hope for some way to resolve all this sort of a whole violent upheaval and violent revolution.

But again, on the one hand they have that pull; but time and time again they come up against the reality that this isn't going to be possible, that even serious protest and rebellion against policies of the government, let alone a movement that aims to change the whole system itself, is met with growing and ever more vicious repression. And so people are grappling with this question, even the people drawn toward pacifism and who believe in nonviolence as a principle are grappling with this and are having to come to terms with the fact that you can't solve the very things that they feel very deeply need to be dealt with. So you see people who on the one hand say, well I'm for pacifism, I don't believe in violence but maybe in places like South Africa, or Central America, or in the Third World generally, maybe there needs to be violence in order to get rid of these horrible conditions; but they still insist that it's not necessary in a country like the U.S. because they are drawn somewhat towards democratic illusions and they still believe in many of the deceptions of bourgeois democracy. Or they couple this with the argument that violence is degrading even on the part of people who wage it against oppression.

So there are very sharp contradictions in the thinking of these people; and they're being pulled very sharply in two different directions. It's particularly as the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, with a proletarian outlook and a proletarian program for a thoroughgoing revolution, gains in strength both internationally and also within the U.S. that these kind of middle forces will be drawn more toward support for a revolutionary position, including the necessity for violent revolution. We saw that happening in some important ways in the '60s in the U.S., even though it didn't go all the way to a revolutionary showdown for the seizure of power. Still, even while people will be won or influenced more toward that position, this tendency toward pacifism and toward illusions about the possibility of change through democratic and nonviolent means will continue to be a problem, there will be a growing struggle within people and there will be the need for ideological struggle on the part of the revolutionary forces, the advanced forces of the proletariat, with these middle elements over these questions even while uniting with them in struggle and uniting with them where they come into motion against the system. What I would say very pointedly to these people who've come into motion, including around such things as mass starvation in Africa, and who've attempted to do something, whatever they could do to try to alleviate this problem and eliminate such an unspeakable and totally unnecessary horror; or to people who've come into motion around the threat of nuclear war; or against U.S. policy in Central America; or its treatment of immigrants; or the oppression of Black people and other oppressed nationalities in the U.S., or of women, or any number of other outrages committed by this system, by its very nature: I would say to them, be true to your *own principles*, carry through to the *end* on the very things that have brought you into motion, that have made you feel compelled to act. That is, carry through to the end in the sense of *don't stop* until you've done and contributed to doing everything

that has to be done in order to eliminate those evils that have made you feel compelled to act. And *if* and *as* people do that and carry through they will see that there is no other way than a thoroughgoing and, yes, violent revolution to accomplish these things — such as eliminating mass starvation in Africa, which is a direct product of imperialist domination in the world and in Africa in particular, or the threat of war, or U.S. actions in Central America, or all these other outrages. There is no way that any of these and certainly all of them can be eliminated without a violent revolutionary upsurge and revolutionary struggle and change throughout the world. So if people do carry through decisively on this, and carry it through to the end and act in this way around the very things that have brought them into motion, they will be brought up against the fact that they will need to make a leap to understanding that only a violent revolution can change these things and that they will need to support such a revolution in order to accomplish the things that they themselves feel compelled to seek.

Now on the other hand, you raise that there seems to be a difference between some of the white middle-class forces, particularly the youth, for example, now as compared to the early '60s, that there are less illusions about the kindly nature of the system, less tendency to think that the forces of the state are not repressive and so on. I think there is truth and importance to what you say here, even though pacifist tendencies will continue to exert a pull on people as I've already discussed; but I think there is truth here and this is for a number of reasons.

First of all, there is the threat of nuclear war, which is being recognized by growing numbers of people and which is looming so ominously that it's difficult not to recognize, and the whole magnitude of this calls basically everything into question. The continuing development of new weapons systems, the arms buildup, the more bellicose actions by the imperialists on both sides, the fact that, despite their talk about peace and never fighting a nuclear war, they are obviously preparing to be able to fight such a war and to be able to win it, whatever meaning that has — these facts make it much more difficult for people to have illusions that just by appealing to the governments to be reasonable, or by appealing to reasonable forces within the ruling classes and so on, they will be able to turn these things in a fundamentally different direction.

Secondly, speaking of the U.S. in particular, although this is by no means limited to the U.S., all the experience that people have over the last several decades — of seeing the system exposed, of fighting against it, of coming up against its real nature and its brutally oppressive and repressive character — has not been lost, either on the people who are directly involved in that, or even on people who were not directly involved, who were too young for example, but have learned from the collective consciousness and collective memory, if you want to put it that way, that's been gained through all that — through the Vietnam War, and the uprisings of Black people and other oppressed people in the '60s in the U.S., and so on. And this includes even some who were

supposedly too young to have been involved: I remember reading recently about one of these youth, who is now high school age, I think, who was involved in the No Business As Usual actions recently and who talked about, well this is nothing, back when I was six years old I went to demonstrations with my parents in Berkeley and we were all teargassed by the police and involved in fighting the police and so on; and that was when he was six. And another kid talked about how his mother was brutally beaten by the police in a demonstration against the Vietnam War, I think it was, and how out of this the whole family developed a very deep hatred for the police and how this is something that they'll never forget. The ruling class is desperately trying to paint it as if *all* of the people from the '60s movements have become Yuppies, or whatever they call them, they're all driving BMWs, they've all become conservative, three-piece suiters and so on, and they've all forgotten, or given up on or turned away from the stand of opposing the system which they had in the '60s — they've grown up, and so on. And this is far from the truth, this is true of only a *minority* of people from even among the middle classes who were involved in protest and rebellion in the '60s and into the early '70s — to say nothing of the masses of the Black people and other oppressed peoples and proletarians who were involved in that movement, whose position, speaking of the majority, is even worse and is one of even more intense oppression and suffering than it was then.

But even speaking of the middle-class forces, once again, it's far from the case that these "'60s people," as I spoke of them once in another interview, have all turned their back on their previous beliefs and previous actions. In fact we see examples of such people being drawn forward once again by the upsurges of new forces, fresh forces coming forward among the youth and others in the present period right now. We have examples like the one of a lawyer, who had put on a three-piece suit but was just sort of marking time, waiting for something new and fresh to come along, and as soon as it did he quit his job and went to one of the centers of student protest and struggle and joined in, saying: I've been waiting for something like this for years.

Now many people don't take steps that dramatic, but we know there are many, many people out there that our party's in contact with, that we correspond with, or even many others that we learn about through more indirect means, who still hold to those basic beliefs and the basic hatred for this system and the basic understanding they gained of the nature of the system through the whole course of the '60s and into the '70s. And when that's put together with what's happening in the world today, including the growing movements of protest and even revolutionary upsurges, then a lot of this combines to make it much more difficult for the illusions about the peaceful and kindly nature of the state and of the ruling class and their intentions for the world and so on — it makes it much more difficult for those illusions to hold as powerful a sway as they might once have on such people, again to say nothing of the basic proletarians and other people more brutally oppressed by the system.

So in conclusion on this point, I think that such things as pacifism will continue to exert an influence particularly among these middle-class elements, but on the other hand there is a wealth of experience and a great deal of present reality that works to undermine and undercut these illusions as well.

Q: In your book *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?* you made a very strongly worded statement about the question of the oppression of women. You said it is "a touchstone question among the oppressed themselves," and you went on to say that how one views this question is "a dividing line between 'wanting in' and really 'wanting out': between fighting to end all oppression and exploitation . . . and seeking in the final analysis to get your part in this." And these comments seemed aimed particularly at men who might be pretty revolutionary-minded in every area except this one! Recently it has become apparent that significant numbers of women, including some very young women, are becoming increasingly involved in revolutionary politics in the U.S. and that these women are often in the forefront of the struggle to break with "business-as-usual" forms of protest. Not surprisingly, quite a few of these radical women seem to be drawn to the "unconventional" politics of the RCP, and it strikes me that the party itself seems to have a high proportion of women in its membership, including in positions of leadership. The importance the RCP attaches to combatting the oppression of women as an integral and crucial part of the revolutionary process, before and after the seizure of power, seems evident from some of the theoretical work it is inspiring and promoting and from its political practice more generally.

But, let's face it, there are a lot of men out there who should know better but who are having a lot of trouble dealing with this question. I heard about one proletarian man, for instance, who read over the list of the May Day slogans for this year and who then turned to an *RW* seller to say that he agreed with everything that this said, except for that one slogan, "Break the Chains. Unleash the Fury of Women as a Mighty Force for Revolution." He felt that was going a little too far! Why do these men, even revolutionary-minded men, get so stuck on this? And what do you think can be done about it?

A: In the Christian Bible it says at one point that it is as difficult for a rich man to inherit the kingdom of heaven as it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. And maybe it's not quite that extreme, but perhaps it's very, very difficult for men to be thoroughgoing revolutionaries in every

aspect, in particular on the question of the oppression of women. Now that's a kind of provocative way of making a point — or stressing a contradiction. Men among the proletariat, among the oppressed, even among the revolutionary-minded, are oppressed and exploited and the victims of the system, that's the most basic thing; but on the other hand, in one realm they are oppressors, or there is a basis in society and a pull in society and the operation of society pushes for them to be oppressors in one realm — and that is in the realm of their relations with women.

So the fact is that in a class-divided society a major factor of that society is that men are oppressors of women. And sometimes what I would call an economist explanation for this is put forth: that men among the proletariat are pushed around, exploited, and kicked around all day in every sphere, on the job and every other relation in society, so they come home and take it out on their wives, and kids perhaps, and act as the oppressor in that situation. And I think that's part of what goes on but it's not the main aspect, it's not the essence of what goes on, and to treat it as such is what I would call an economist explanation of what's happening. It really slips by the fundamental terms of the question.

The fact is that patriarchy and the oppression of women by men is an integral part of the present system and of all societies divided into classes. And the question presented for men — in particular men who are part of the oppressed and want to fight against oppression, men who are revolutionary-minded, even men who are in the ranks of the revolutionary forces — is do they want to carry forward a struggle to abolish every form of oppression and exploitation, uproot the entire basis for this, and eliminate the very division of society into classes and move on to a whole new world of completely, radically different social relations and different ideas and values in which exploitation and oppression by one part of society over another in any form will be completely left behind; or do they want to try to preserve a part of this, in particular the part where they can act as the oppressor? This is a very sharp contradiction for men, including men among the oppressed and in the revolutionary ranks.

Again, the main thing about proletarian men, and men among the oppressed generally, is that they are oppressed and exploited by the system. But this is in sharp contradiction to their own role as oppressors over women, and this contradiction gives rise to some of the things that you've talked about. This requires the leadership of the party, and it requires a very sharp struggle involving masses of people, bringing forward the fury of women around this, and generally, including within the revolutionary ranks, making this a decisive focus of struggle — to make radical transformations in this whole situation and to carry forward the struggle to completely and radically uproot the basis for men to be the oppressors over women. This, again, is a very important part of the overall struggle to radically uproot the basis for any one section of a society to exploit and oppress another.

One other thing I would just point out is that the argument that men oppress women because they're kicked

around, and then they come home and take it out on the women and so on, also doesn't take into account the fact that while this is a severe problem in the proletariat, and a severe weight holding back the development of a revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, the oppression of women by men is by no means limited to the proletariat. In fact it exists within all strata and all classes of society, and while it's more covered over among the upper classes and within the ruling classes, it's certainly no less extensive or vicious there. And we can't say about a Rockefeller that he oppresses women because he's kicked around all day in every other sphere of society. So this is another reason why this just doesn't get to what's going on. The oppression of women has to do with the very division of labor of society and the whole foundation of society and its breakup into antagonistic classes, and the elimination of this has everything to do with the abolition of such an oppressive division of labor and the elimination of the very division of society into classes.

But returning specifically to the men among the proletariat and among the oppressed, while it's a fundamental truth that they are oppressors of women, and unless they consciously take up the struggle against that and commit themselves to the abolition of this as well as every form of exploitation and oppression, they cannot be thoroughgoing revolutionaries — while that's true, it's also true that in general men don't see it that way, spontaneously. The oppression of women by men is so much an integral part of the whole society and is reinforced so much by the whole superstructure of politics, of culture and ideology generally, of education and advertising on TV and everything else, that many men just see this as "the natural order of things." It's very striking that people who have learned that other components of the so-called "natural order of things," such as the discrimination against and oppression of one nationality by another, or the waging of wars of aggression by imperialism, and other things, are not part of any so-called *natural order* but are part of the order of imperialism and of class-divided society, still don't see this in relation to women. They see it as *natural* that women should be subordinate to men, as *natural* that men should be the master, at least of his own house, that men should be masters over women, that women are inferior to men or at least can't help but be dependent upon men, and so on and so forth.

As for what can be done about this, this has got to be taken up as a part of, but as a very *decisive* part of, building a revolutionary movement to overturn and uproot all forms of exploitation and oppression, and a very sharp ideological struggle as well as a very sharp practical political struggle has to be waged around this to enable people to see that this is by no means natural, by no means inevitable, by no means eternal, but is rooted in the oppressive and exploitative nature of the current society and its ruling structures and has to be uprooted as part of overthrowing and abolishing those ruling structures and that whole system — that there's not going to be any liberation for people which doesn't have as a central part of it, and a decisive and driving force within it, the liberation of women.

There is not going to be and cannot be any thoroughgoing revolution, any thoroughgoing emancipation for the exploited and oppressed, that does not involve as a *central* question the abolition of patriarchy and the elimination of the domination of men over women.

Q: I'm sure you are well aware of the increasingly repressive atmosphere which is developing in the U.S.: strenuous attempts are being made to get people to take pride in the Rambo-style slaughters that were committed by U.S. troops in Indochina, and, in a perverted twist on the old slogan "bring the war home," the government orders the bombing of a household of Black men, women, and children in Philadelphia for the crime of nonconformity to traditional American values, and underscores the point by burning down an entire "stable" neighborhood of Black homeowners. The INS ruthlessly pursues immigrants who have fled the violence and destitution unleashed in their home countries by the U.S. and its puppet governments. In the major urban areas of the U.S. innumerable campaigns are being launched under the cover of so-called "wars on crime" to justify increased police terrorism and encourage neighborhood "snitch programs." A major federal campaign has been launched officially to overturn the right of women to abortion and revive the worst of the "Kinder, Küche, Kirche"* morality, with all the violence and degradation that that entails for women. And perhaps most cynically, the same system which napalmed children in Indochina, and which today incarcerates children of Central American refugees in attempts to trap their parents, launches a massive national campaign to fingerprint and photograph children, record and computerize vital statistics, health and school and residence information and so on, under the cover of combatting child abuse! While I wouldn't bandy the term around lightly, would you say U.S. society is going over to fascism?

A: Before getting directly to that question, I'd just say in terms of what you call Rambo-style slaughters and the whole building up of this Rambo character as a model and so on, I think this is a very important and necessary part of what the U.S. imperialists are doing in terms of trying to reverse all the verdicts on such things as the war in Indochina, trying to wipe away the exposure of U.S. imperialism that was brought about through that war which it lost and which brought millions of people in the U.S. and hundreds of millions of people throughout the world in opposition against it. They're trying to reverse all that and stand it on its head.

*This was a Nazi slogan for women: "Kids, Kitchen, Church."

And bringing forward characters like this Rambo — as grotesque as it is — is a necessary and important part of doing that, particularly in the ideological sphere.

During the time of the Iran hostage crisis we made a statement about all these gung-ho types, who now might be called Rambo-types, who were talking about how they wanted to deal with these Iranians and so on; we offered to try to find the ways to send them over to Iran so that they could directly confront the aroused Iranian masses, who at that time were rising up in a wave of revolutionary struggle. We thought that that would be a very good way in which they could meet their just fate. Similarly today, maybe the U.S. can make arrangements for, not the fictional character Rambo, but any real-life Rambo clones or those who portray Rambo and so on, if they would perhaps like to go to South Africa on behalf of U.S. imperialism? They can't go to Vietnam and refight the Vietnam War, at least the one that took place in the '60s and '70s, but maybe they can go to South Africa on the part of U.S. imperialism and be parachuted amidst the aroused masses there. And although I wouldn't really wish it on the people there, maybe they would like to go into the Andes of Peru and see how they do against the revolutionary guerrilla fighters drawn from the masses in Peru there. So if there really is any real inclination on these people's part to do things like that maybe some way can be found for that to happen.

But to get to this point more seriously, what I'm pointing to here is that these gung-ho types are in some ways typical of your Troglydte American. They are real bad and tough as long as they don't really have to do anything about it or pay anything for it. What happened to such types during the course of the Vietnam War? The Vietnamese people and people of Indochina made heroic sacrifices in what was then a revolutionary and just war against U.S. imperialism. The Americans who fought the war and the people who had family members fighting the war had to pay a certain price, even if one that, compared to the sacrifice of the Indochinese people, was a very mild sacrifice and of course was fundamentally different in that it was sacrifice on behalf of an unjust and reactionary imperialist war. But when these Americans suffered just a bit, even to the degree they did in that war — 50,000 dead, when there were millions of Indochinese slaughtered by U.S. troops, air forces and so on in Indochina — this shook up the whole fabric of U.S. society. It deeply shook U.S. society when the U.S. wasn't able to win that war and began to suffer even that degree of casualties. And the Rambo-types at the time were put on the defensive as the U.S. lost and as the war began to be brought home in the positive sense — in the sense of resistance, rebellion, revolutionary upsurge against U.S. imperialism right at home. There's an important lesson to learn here for the future, when things come to a head in a much more dramatic and more explosive way than they did in that period of the Vietnam War for example.

One thing that, while perverse and disgusting in itself, is a reflection of something very positive is you notice that coming from a lot of these backward and even reactionary

Vietnam vets, who are coming out of the woodwork now and being called forth by the U.S. imperialists in many different ways, you hear the recurrent theme over and over again: we came back from Vietnam and they called us baby-killers, and so on and so forth. Well, first of all, a simple fact has to be said: that's what you were. You *were* baby-killers. It was the policy of U.S. imperialism to declare the population of South Vietnam — except those who were openly supporting the Saigon government and U.S. imperialism — to declare the mass of people in Vietnam as potential enemies and supporters of the revolutionary forces and in particular to declare them objects of warfare. And everyone knows, it's an objective fact well documented, that time and again U.S. forces not only bombed from the sky with napalm and phosphorus and crop- and life-destroying weapons, but also went into villages and wiped out whole villages — burned them to the ground and killed all the adults and, yes, children and babies, in the villages. This didn't happen just once, it wasn't just one aberration, it happened over and over again. So U.S. soldiers in Vietnam, as a matter of policy and orders, were baby-killers. That's a fact. That's what you were. Why pull any punches about it? That's what you were. People called you that because that's what you were. People were outraged by it and they were certainly right.

Different veterans had different responses to that. Some veterans of the Vietnam War recognized what they were being made to do and were repulsed by it and rebelled against it in many different ways, including taking a very active political role in the struggle against the Vietnam War. There were others who recognized it and couldn't deal with it, who just couldn't stomach it on the one hand but couldn't really understand the whole context of it on the other and became very disoriented. Then there were others, a minority — maybe they had to bite their tongues and bide their time for a while — but who basically looked square in the face what they were doing and faced the reality of it and got into it. And if they shut up about it and didn't boast and swagger about it at the time it's because the political temper and character of the times didn't allow them to do so. It's these people who are the Rambo-types who are being called forth now along with new generations of such would-be killer zombies, who are, they *think*, itching for the chance to do it again. And I say "they think" because we'll see what happens when they actually have to pay for some of the crimes they're salivating to commit.

Just to finish on this point of honoring the Vietnam vets, I think that the ones who deserve to be honored and are honored by the revolutionary proletariat and the oppressed people of the world are those who recognized what they were being forced to do, who stared straight in the face of what they were doing, recognized it for what it was, what as a matter of policy they were being ordered to carry out, and found it totally repulsive; particularly those who rebelled against it and joined in the struggle against those atrocities and against U.S. imperialism and some of whom actually became revolutionaries. These people not only are the ones who the revolutionary proletariat has consistently upheld

and who certainly deserve to be upheld, but they have a very important role to play in the coming period in terms of bringing out the truth of all this and helping to shatter the whole reactionary offensive to reverse verdicts that's going on. In particular they have a very important role to play in influencing the youth who are blinded to a lot of this reality and are being drugged with a lot of this bloodlust, a key role in helping to divert them onto a correct understanding of the nature of the system and what it has in store, not only for them but more importantly for the people of the world, and to help raise up a revolutionary pole that forces can be rallied around. I think they have a very important role to play in terms of this.

Now to get to the heart of your question: keeping in mind some of the things you cited and others, would I say that U.S. society is going over to fascism?

In *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?* I spoke to this somewhat and specifically spoke of what I think has to be called a fascist offensive within the ideological sphere in particular, with many different facets to it. At the same time I think it's very clear that there is not only increased repression on the part of the government in the United States but also some qualitative changes in terms of strengthening the repressive apparatus and carrying out repressive acts. A lot of these things are sort of your "things are seldom what they seem, skim milk masquerades as cream," phenomena. That is, things are done under a banner which seems not only harmless but seems as if it's designed to deal with some outrage rather than to perpetrate another outrage. For example, the moves to begin now, supposedly voluntarily, fingerprinting children. Well you can ask the people in South Africa about the fingerprinting of everyone in the society, or all the black people, and what that is all part of. This is done here under the guise of helping to deal with the problem of lost children, but the result of it, if it's carried out, will be that the state will end up sooner or later with the fingerprints of everybody (or a great, great many people) in the U.S. And it's very clear what a state like this in particular would do with such a thing. You have to ask why do they *really* want this. Or any of these other things they do, even aimed at seemingly harmless things like dealing with drunk driving, or making sweeps to round up minor criminals, so-called, and so on and so forth — all this is part of strengthening the repressive apparatus and doing trial runs for when these things are aimed much more directly against political opponents and revolutionary forces within this society.

At the same time, there is both an ideological and political offensive to say that if you're not with the whole program, that if you're not part of the "Reagan revolution" (which is of course no revolution at all but just the sharpening of the reactionary state power and the reactionary actions of the ruling class); but if you're not part of all that, if you're not with it, even within the ruling class, then you're being put on the spot — get on board and get in line. This is going on even within the ruling class. I'm not saying that there's a fascist wing represented by Reagan and an antifascist wing, because overwhelmingly the political representatives of the

ruling class are jumping on the bandwagon. Even if they have their own way of saying I can carry this out more effectively than you, they're jumping on the bandwagon because that's the necessity of the system now.

But clearly there is an ideological and political offensive even on that level. "Let's have none of these liberal arguments about how what we're doing in Central America is inhumane or whatever; it's what we have to do and we should start being proud of it and carry it out with a vengeance." Similarly we see that the recent decisions and precedents being set by the Supreme Court in reversing earlier decisions and precedents are very clearly hacking away at some of the things which acted as impediments, however limited, to the police kicking down people's doors and dragging them out and making arrests without any cause whatsoever. These things are being eliminated and the hand of the repressive forces of the state, police and others, is being freed up a great deal more to do this kind of thing. All this is preparation for what they know is very clearly on the agenda and the explosions that could be ignited at any time in terms of world war and, in any case, the very greatly sharpened conflicts that are going to be occurring in U.S. society and throughout the world in which the imperialists are going to have everything at stake. So certainly things are going to become much more repressive, even qualitatively more repressive than they've been; and there are already steps being made in that direction and the basis being laid for further steps.

Fascism should correctly be understood as the open terroristic dictatorship of the imperialists (or of the bourgeoisie). Now whether that's what will happen and such an open terroristic dictatorship is installed in the U.S. itself, or whether they go to war before fully implementing such an open terroristic dictatorship or, on the positive side, whether revolution occurs before things come to that point, is something that I can't say for sure. When you ask would I say U.S. society is going over to fascism, I would say that there are fascist elements ideologically and politically in what the ruling class is doing now and it is certainly a possibility that they will install at some point an open terroristic, that is, fascist, dictatorship. But I think the important thing to focus on is the repression that is being carried out now and the qualitative leaps in that and the preparation for further leaps in the repressive apparatus and the carrying out of repressive actions by the state — and the need to expose and fight against these and to build that fight as part of the overall effort to build a revolutionary movement that can overthrow the system before the question of their installing fascism could become a reality, and even more fundamentally, before they (along with their rival bloc) drag the world into the horrors of a nuclear war.

One thing I would say is very striking to me is that I've seen public statements in the form of ads, in prominent newspapers, which have been signed by a number of prominent people saying things like the scent of fascism is in the air and commenting as well on the danger of world war, on the increasingly imminent danger of it. And I would say that this

reflects something very real. I think prominent people like that — who also for their own reasons don't bandy the term fascism around lightly — when they begin to talk about the scent of fascism being in the air, this reflects something very real and they're picking up something real. Now a lot of times this was posed in terms of the need to oust Reagan from office, by voting for the Democrat or whatever. Well, I would like to pose a sharp question to such people: what are you gonna do now, and who are you gonna call? Because you can't make statements like the scent of fascism is in the air, the danger of world war is growing, and the reelection of Reagan is going to strengthen this tendency, and then just sort of fold up and say nothing or do nothing to follow up on that. Now I disagree and our party disagrees that it's *because* of Reagan that these things are happening. Rather, we see Reagan as an instrument and expression of this and of the necessity of the imperialist ruling class as a whole now; but, nevertheless, the imperialists *did* out of their own necessity put Reagan back in. They have set it up so he has "a mandate," and the things that people were reacting to that made them say things like the danger of world war is growing more imminent, there's a scent of fascism in the air, and so on, are very real. So what are people going to do about this? How are people going to follow through on this?

I'm raising this in the same spirit as when I raised earlier, when we were talking about the pull of pacifism on people, that if they follow through consistently on the things that they have identified as evils that must be eliminated, then they will be brought to the necessity of recognizing the need for revolution — violent revolution to overthrow the system. And I would say again, people have to act upon the understanding that they do have. If they see and recognize the scent of fascism in the air, the growing danger of war, they have to carry through and fight against those things and, to put it a certain way, they have to be willing to go wherever that fight leads them even if it leads them to revolution. And I know that a lot of times such people — people who aren't among the bottom layers and the most oppressed in society, who aren't within the proletariat — resist, for reasons we've discussed, the pull towards seeing the necessity of a violent revolution. But I would like to say to them: carry through consistently on this; follow through on the very things that you yourself have taken a stand on and don't stop until those things have been dealt with and those things that you have raised a warning about have been eliminated.

Q: Do you think these changes in the political atmosphere are going to require significant changes in the way political opposition to the government is waged in the U.S.? I mean, not just for the RCP, but increasingly even for some of the progressive forces which have a more limited agenda, there seems to be a contradiction between getting the political message out broadly and openly on the one hand, and protecting forces and organization so as not to provide the political police with all the information they need to arrest and round up activists any time they want to. Sometimes people in the U.S. strike me as so naive about that kind of thing! The comedienne Whoopi Goldberg does one of her intense and moving character sketches in which the philosopher-junkie Fontayne visits the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and reflects on the horrible repression that befell the Jews in World War 2 Europe; and in what is clearly meant as a warning to people in the U.S. and Black people in particular, Fontayne also bitterly reflects on how many people back then deluded themselves into thinking things could never get to that point — they didn't see things coming, they closed their eyes, they didn't make preparations — so by the time the round-ups started it was too late to do much about it. Do you think we can draw on some of those lessons?

A: Yes, definitely, I think there are many important lessons that have to be drawn from such things as the experience of the Jews during World War 2 and the genocide that was carried out against them, and the atrocities committed against many, many others as well. As applied to the U.S. in particular, for reasons I've talked about, there's a very strong pull on people to be drugged by illusions of democracy and the notion that while there may be evils committed by the system, it couldn't possibly go to such extremes, or even greater extremes, than the genocide committed against the Jews and the other massive slaughters carried out in the context of World War 2.

Particularly for the middle classes in a country like the U.S., with its prosperity for large numbers of people large amounts of the time, and because of the stability, most of the time, of the rule of the imperialists within their own strongholds, their ability to allow a certain amount of leeway to people to speak out and protest, within certain acceptable bounds in any case — these things tend to drug people and put blinders on them and keep them from seeing many of the things that are shaping up. And of course there's a pull on people not to *want* to face some of the implications of what they *do* see. This pull exists not only among the white middle class in the U.S., but especially with the concessions that have been made as a result of the '60s and the building up of certain petty-bourgeois and even bourgeois forces among Black people and other oppressed groups, there are sections among them who don't see, or don't want to recognize, the implications of what is already going down and furthermore what is shaping up. But this pull also exists even among the

most exploited and oppressed. I remember one time I was told a story about a truly dispossessed proletarian woman who was reading a speech of mine, and when she got to the point about materialism and the speech began to deal with religion, she put it down and said: "I don't want to read this anymore." And the person who was talking to her said, "Why not?" She answered, "Well if I read this then I'm not going to believe in God any more." It was very striking to me that even in this kind of situation there are certain things that people feel that they need to rely upon to get them through the day, get them through life, things which they are reluctant to give up, that they resist giving up. People come up against the need to shed these things and it's a struggle to get them to do it. Now, I don't know what the final outcome was in that particular case; people *do* cast away these illusions and cast off these ideological burdens, but not without wrenching struggle within themselves and on the part of others struggling with them.

So we should take a warning from experiences like what the Jews suffered in the holocaust; but it's also necessary to recognize that people — and even more so people with a more privileged and somewhat comfortable position, people who see things wrong in the world but don't feel that life as a whole is intolerable and the world the way it is from top to bottom is completely unbearable — these people are going to resist, at each point, drawing the full implications of even what they do recognize. So I do think that lessons from the past are very important to sharply draw out for people, and they help, and in some ways force, them to confront what really are the full implications of what they see, as well as helping them to recognize things which they haven't yet grasped. This plays an important part in the overall process of winning people, in particular people among the middle classes, to a stand of at least friendly neutrality towards a revolutionary movement and a revolutionary struggle for power when it develops.

And obviously for people who are already involved in political movements of opposition and especially the development of a revolutionary movement in countries like the U.S., it's very important not to wait until unnecessary sacrifices have been made and losses have been made at the hands of the state and its repressive organs before drawing appropriate lessons and making appropriate steps to carry out the movement in a way to *minimize* the losses that are suffered at the hands of the other side. It's not possible to wage even a movement of political opposition, let alone a revolutionary struggle to overthrow the system, without having to make sacrifices and suffering some losses. What is necessary and crucial is to minimize these and in particular to try to eliminate *unnecessary* sacrifices and losses, particularly ones that demoralize people exactly because they are unnecessary and could have been prevented.

The difficult problem is to do that and to keep that in mind in building political struggles and building the revolutionary movement without at the same time being paralyzed by the recognition of the tremendous repression that's going to come down, and without that recognition acting to

dampen the spirit of rebellion and the outbreaks of protest and upheaval that occur — without allowing that to keep people from coming into motion against the system out of fear of the repression that will come down. It is necessary to handle both aspects of that so that people recognize, prepare for, and deal with the real nature of the state and what it will bring down in preserving and enforcing the interests of the imperialist system, and at the same time carry out work so that they are further unleashed to wage protest and rebellion and in the final analysis a revolutionary struggle to overthrow the system.

People should, in other words, take themselves seriously and what they're doing seriously; they should take the whole situation and what's at stake seriously; but at the same that should not be something that causes them to become paralyzed, or causes them to *shrink* from rising up in protest and rebellion and revolution, but unleashes them to carry it out that much more effectively and forcefully and to draw ever broader numbers of people into the struggle against the system and eventually the revolutionary struggle to overthrow it.

Q: A lot of people who hate a lot of what the U.S. is doing still feel like they can love that country, that it is somehow "redeemable." A while back you issued a challenge. You challenged "anyone to give an explanation of why they are patriotic Americans or why patriotism for the USA is a good thing, which cannot be shown to come down to a statement of why they want to perpetuate a situation where they have a position of privilege — relatively greater or lesser, but privilege all the same — at the expense of, and at the cost of, tremendous suffering on the part of the great majority of people in the world." What kind of responses have there been to this?

A: There have been a number of different responses. In *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?* I quoted extensively from one response in which a person attempted to make the argument, which I'm sure you're familiar with, that the task is to make the U.S. live up to its ideals, and it's those ideals and the potential for the U.S. to play a positive role that people should feel patriotism for — support for that and upholding that should be the content of their patriotism. And I answered that, rather at length, in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*

There have also been other responses, not only ones that have been written directly as responses, but also when this challenge was first issued a while back it was taken out on a number of campuses and to other places and a big scene was made around it; it was put up as posters, people read it out and a crowd gathered around and there was argument and

debate back and forth around it. It was used in that way also to generate a lot struggle and to focus struggle sharply on this question. But beyond the responses that have been received by me directly or other indirect responses to this challenge, the point is that this challenge focuses very sharply on and presents in a concentrated way the question of what is the real nature of America. What is the nature of the USA and what is the nature of U.S. imperialism? And in fact it highlights and underscores the point that America is U.S. imperialism. Patriotism for America is patriotism for U.S. imperialism whether anyone wants to think so or not and regardless of the intentions of anyone. You cannot say, I love America, but I'm not for American imperialism, because that's what America is, it is American imperialism. That is, what characterizes U.S. society is the nature of the system that rules in that society and its role in the world. And that is imperialism; it is nothing else. You can't make it what you want it to be just by declaring your own intentions, good, bad, or otherwise. It objectively exists as a certain system, it has a certain nature as that system and plays a certain role in the world. It is necessary to recognize this in order to deal with it. It's necessary to recognize it specifically in order to eliminate a lot of the evils that people recognize are committed by America, including the writer of this response that I referred to earlier. This writer agreed that America does many bad things in the world but attempted to say that it could be otherwise, that if America only lived up to its ideals then somehow America could have a different nature and play a different role in the world.

Now, I've spoken to that in writing about the *Declaration of Independence* in our paper, the *Revolutionary Worker*, and I've written extensively on it in a book that's going to be published in the future, *Democracy: Can't We Do Better than That?*, so I don't want to get into that whole thing now; I would direct people to those other works for a thorough discussion of that question of America living up to its ideals and why that's an impossible and ultimately a reactionary notion anyway. But the important point is that, as I've said in answering that particular response in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*, the USA is an oppressor country, in fact the USA is the Number One oppressor in the whole world right now and is doing everything — and preparing to do whatever it has to do, including nuclear war — in order to try to preserve that position as Number One oppressor in the entire world. As I pointed out in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*, patriotism for America is patriotism for that, and objectively and in its real content and effect, it can be patriotism for nothing else.

Particularly once you begin to realize this, the question is why would anybody want to be patriotic for this? Of course, if you don't see what America's real nature and role in the world really is, you don't understand this, and that's the problem which has to be dealt with first. Part of the problem is people are ignorant of some things and part of it is some people don't want to face up fully to this and to the full implications of this. But once you have stared this straight in the face and come to grips with it and recognize it, why in the

world would you want to be patriotic for this? As I put it recently: "If you can conceive of a world without America — without everything America stands for and everything it does in the world — then you've already taken great strides and begun to get at least a glimpse of a whole new world. If you can envision a world without any imperialism, exploitation, oppression — and the whole philosophy that rationalizes it — a world without division into classes or even different nations, and all the narrow-minded, selfish, outmoded ideas that uphold this; if you can envision all this, then you have the basis for proletarian internationalism. And once you have raised your sights to all this, how could you not feel compelled to take an active part in the world-historic struggle to realize it; why would you want to lower your sights to anything less?" (*Bullets*, p. 53). As you know, I'm working right now on a book, *Democracy: Can't We Do Better than That?* Well, suppose we posed a similar question about America — can't we do better than that? The answer is that it would be extremely difficult — it would be horrifying — to think of something worse than America and its role in the world, and we can and must do far better!

I know that some people raise the argument that maybe the system is bad but the people are good and that's what I'm patriotic for. But first of all, the people, as an abstraction such as that, do not determine the nature of the society. The system that exists in any society and the state which enforces that system determines what the character of the society and the country is. The people, in fact, are shaped by that system. They do not determine the character of the system unless they rise up and abolish the present system and replace it with another. But as long as they live within a particular system, they do not determine the character of the system, they are in fact shaped by that system. So potentially it's true that large numbers of people in the U.S. are good and want to oppose — and many do already oppose — the outrages and evils committed by the system of imperialism which rules in the U.S. and rules in large parts of the world with tremendously destructive and horrific consequences. But the only way that the positive qualities of many of the masses of people in the U.S. can be realized to the fullest is if they rise up and abolish America, abolish the system of imperialism which rules America, which shapes and determines America's character, and which plays the role that it does in the world.

Q: Do you expect the philosophy of revolutionary defeatism to become more broadly popular in the U.S. and other imperialist countries as we edge closer to world war, or do you think things are going to lean more the other way?

A: Both trends will exist. I think there will be growing numbers of people who will be won to an internationalist position, and especially a position of revolutionary defeatism toward the U.S. ruling class and U.S. imperialism. That is, they will welcome and seek to take advantage of all setbacks and defeats suffered by U.S. imperialism and in particular strive to turn these into opportunities for building, strengthening, and carrying through the revolutionary struggle to overthrow U.S. imperialism. That's a bedrock stand that's necessary for all revolutionary forces and for all revolutionary people. And that trend will grow through the work of our party and through the development and the sharpening of the contradictions in the world and what they bring forth.

On the other hand, there will be a growing and strengthened trend of troglodyte reaction and blind reactionary patriotism on the part of significant sections of the people in the U.S. who feel that they have a stake in the existence of the present system and who feel that in particular they have a stake to protect in the dominant position of U.S. imperialism within the world and the spoils that are, however unequally, shared out to them as a result of that dominant position. So I think both trends will grow.

In particular, as war grows closer and through particular leaps and crises which move us closer toward that war, there will be a very marked tendency for strong waves of chauvinism and jingoism to sweep over the country. Particularly at the beginning of any crisis we see this, whether it was the Iran "hostage crisis," or more recently the 007 airplane crisis, or other "hostage crises" since then. From everything that I've been able to determine there has been, especially at the beginning of these crises, a strong wave of chauvinism that sweeps over large or significant sections of the population; and if world war breaks out, that very definitely will be the case.

It was the case in Russia at the time of the outbreak of World War 1, and the Bolsheviks at the beginning with their revolutionary defeatist stand were extremely isolated, as most people were swept up in the patriotic, jingoistic, chauvinistic fervor of the time. However, over time in that war that changed. And I think very quickly, given the character and stakes and *dramatically* destructive potential of a third world war, that wave of chauvinism will be shattered and dissipated by the actual events of such a war. We have seen that in these minor crises as they develop, as they unfold, as the consequences of what U.S. imperialism is doing begin to be felt by many people, including some who are initially swept up in these chauvinistic outpourings, then the basis begins to be strengthened for winning people away from that. And that's the kind of dialectical process that's going to go on as we get closer to war and particularly through

the crises and leaps in the situation that bring us even closer to such a war.

So I think *both* things will be going on and it's very important, obviously, that we strengthen the pole of revolutionary defeatism and win people to a firmly grounded revolutionary defeatist position, so that when a new twist or turn occurs in the situation and a new crisis erupts which is different than a previous one (an 007 which is different than the Iran crisis for example), when something new and different again comes up, when the same question of whether you're going to stand with U.S. imperialism or not, or whether you're going to welcome its defeats and setbacks — when that question gets posed in a new way and from a new angle people will have a solid enough grounding that they will be able to quickly recognize the real essence of what's going on and be able to maintain their bearings and maintain a firm internationalist, revolutionary defeatist stand. The winning and strengthening of people around that pole, so that they will be able to *withstand* a wave of chauvinism and a gust of jingoism blowing and sweeping across the country, is extremely important because, as I said, these things will be undermined and the basis strengthened for winning people away from them as things unfold. whether that goes on over a process of years or whether it happens in very acute crises in a very telescoped way within a matter only of weeks. The basis will be laid for winning people away.

These two trends will be very sharply in contradiction; and the greater the gains that are made in terms of strengthening that revolutionary defeatist and proletarian internationalist pole now and through each of these crises, the greater will be the ability of the revolutionary forces to work to turn things around when an even more dramatic situation arises in which perhaps the question of revolutionary defeatism versus chauvinistic support for imperialism becomes so sharply posed that out of it erupts a revolutionary situation and an actual struggle for power.

Q: One thing I'm very interested in getting into is how you view the role of Philadelphia's first Black mayor, in light of the recent Philly Massacre — the murder of the MOVE people. What effect do you think this incident of state terrorism will have on those who still expect change to come from Black officials entering the existing power structure? Looking back at the last twenty years or so it seems to me that one of the ways the bourgeoisie in power put the lid back down on the upsurges of Black people in the U.S. was to facilitate and further the bourgeoisification of some (small) sections of Black people, thereby creating a more significant and influential Black middle class which could serve as a buffer between the state and the more desperate majority of Black people who are more

hungry for fundamental social change. And they have allowed some more "Black faces in high places," such as all the Andy Youngs, Jesse Jacksons, Mayor Goodes, Coleman Youngs, and so on. But experience has shown that these people are just part and parcel of propping up the American power structure. It would seem that the recent events in Philadelphia, or the conduct of the Black administration in Atlanta during the child murders there a few years ago, would have made that clear. And yet, even now some people can't bring themselves to let go of that cherished illusion, of this idea that Black penetration of the existing power structure will make things better. How do you explain that?

A: Well, first of all, I think it is very important what you pointed to in terms of the moves and measures that the ruling class has undertaken since it was sent into a panic by the tremendous revolutionary uprisings and upsurges among Black people concentrated in the late '60s; and what you referred to as a more significant influential Black middle class acting as a buffer — I would put it sitting on the heads of the oppressed Black masses and making it more difficult for them to find a way to break through and rise up. But that is only one aspect of the situation, only one aspect of what's happened. For example it's also important to recognize there's been, sponsored from the highest levels of the ruling class, a massive infusion of drugs, the development of gangs, the use of gangs, and other means of diffusing and misdirecting the anger of especially the *youth* among the Black masses and the oppressed. In the urban rebellions, ghetto rebellions of the '60s, these youth in the ghettos were the frontline fighters who sparked support and even active involvement by others, including many older people. They've also been a very direct object of an offensive through the use of drugs, through the strengthening and working with gangs, and through cultural and ideological means. Through a whole variety of means they've been the target of sharp efforts by the ruling class; and along with this, of course, there has been the strengthening of repression against them to keep them from being able to break through and rise up and perhaps spark not only broader uprisings but even a revolutionary movement.

All this is very important. And within all this the development of this Black buffer middle-class force is extremely important. When I say sitting on the heads of the basic masses, I don't mean to say that the masses of people are continually trying to rise up and can't quite yet find a way to throw off or break through this weight of the Black middle class. This has contradictory aspects. There's a great deal of alienation and sharp polarization between the masses of proletarian Black people concentrated in the rotting urban cores of the U.S. and concentrated in the lowest sections of the proletariat and among the unemployed and so on, on the one hand, and the Blacks who've been able to move up, perhaps move out of the ghetto, move up into a more privileged position, into a more middle-class situation, and who are a minority but who are influential by virtue of their

very position. But while there's this polarization and alienation, the existence and influence of these better-off strata among Black people has helped to spread and strengthen some illusions, even among the proletarian masses in the urban ghettos, that it's possible to make it, that some of ours have made it, that some of the things we fought for in the '60s have been realized, and so on. At the same time it makes these basic proletarian masses feel that even if they were to try to rise up and deal with their situation, which is even more desperate than it was in the '60s, these middle-class people would act against that — as they have, or as some of them have. And this certainly tends to act in the short run as a weight bearing down against such an uprising.

So it's been a contradictory effect, but the sum total of the concessions and the "upgrading" of certain strata of Black people, combined with the stepping up of vicious repression and the use of such things as drugs, gangs, and other things — which everyone knows or should know the police are very deeply involved in — all this together has worked to temporarily hold back an uprising that could break through the whole structure and could spark not only broader rebellion but perhaps a revolutionary movement. And many things have happened which should have helped dispel the illusions about the value — to the oppressed masses — of Black officials; things such as the actions of the Black power structure in Atlanta during the child murders there a few years ago, or more recently the murderous actions of Goode and his administration in Philadelphia, which you outlined. These kind of things, as you say, should have helped to expose for people the fact that Blacks entering into the power structure and acting within it *cannot* and *will not* bring liberation for the Black masses or fundamentally rid them of their oppressive and exploitative and desperate conditions.

So it should have done that, but on the other hand you also point to something important when you say some people can't quite bring themselves to let go of cherished illusions. I think that's true among the Black middle class, but it's also true among others as well, even among the basic masses of Black people and other oppressed people. To put it another way, to recognize that people like Goode are in fact a part of the ruling structure of society and serve the imperialist ruling class in *oppressing* the masses of people and enforcing the rule of the imperialist system over them, with all of its consequences, to face up to *that* and to look at people like Jesse Jackson in the light in which they must be looked at — that is, as another example of Bishop Tutu's role and a continuation of the Martin Luther King tradition and of the reactionary tradition of Gandhi and so on — to see these people as attempted saviors of the system, to face up to all that brings you right up against the fact that there is *no way* other than confronting the whole force and terror the system can bring down against you, dealing with that head on and overthrowing it.

But I think events in the world, not only on the negative side, to put it that way — such things as the growing development toward world war and U.S. actions in Central America

— but on the positive side the growing revolutionary struggles in Peru and the massive revolutionary upsurge in South Africa (to cite two very important and powerful examples), these kind of things are going to sharpen up the terms of things and are going to draw people forward into struggle and are going to put such attempted saviors of the system to the test much more sharply and expose them much more fully — or provide the basis to expose them much more fully. It's going to shake up the Black middle classes a lot because they're going to find their position undermined, the contradictory situation they find themselves in is going to become more acute and there's going to be more openings through all this for revolutionary upsurges to erupt and break through. And of course within all this the work of the vanguard forces, the advanced conscious forces of the proletariat and in particular the party, is extremely important in seizing on the openings that are created, seizing on the basis for further exposing and isolating these attempted saviors of the system and furthering the splits and cracks within the ruling structure that exists so that the masses can break through more fully. As this happens, there will be more and more willingness and eagerness, especially among the basic proletarian masses, to cast away some of these illusions, and there will be more and more ability to win, to influence, and to draw toward them some of the middle-class forces among Black people — and, more broadly, white middle-class forces and intermediate strata generally — to draw them more toward a revolutionary position and toward casting away some of their illusions about working peacefully within the system. The sharpening overall of the situation in the period ahead and the leaps, sudden ruptures, sudden changes, and eruptions that occur within that are going to provide a more and more favorable basis for these things, and as more upsurges of the masses do begin to break through, I think we'll see people coming from everywhere — and it will certainly seem like that to the enemy — people coming from everywhere to cast away these illusions and take up the revolutionary banner, or at least to support the revolutionary side.

Let's go back for a second to the Philadelphia Massacre and the role of Goode and his administration and the power structure in Philadelphia. In order to make a very forceful statement that they wouldn't tolerate people who wouldn't go along with the "American way of life," in order to deliver a powerful and murderous statement on that, they burned down and destroyed a stable neighborhood of Black homeowners, as you put it. This is also a lesson that isn't lost on broad sections of Black people and broad sections of people generally about the nature of the system, the nature of the state, and the fact that such things as owning a home and living in a stable neighborhood are far from secure, given the nature of the system and given the times that we live in and the necessity of the ruling class in terms of what it's compelled to do in the present situation.

Of course, the main crime committed in this situation was the brutal murder of those people in the MOVE house, including the children in there, who actually tried to come out but were forced back into the flames by the bullets of the

police. So that, of course, is the essence, the most important aspect, and the full horror of the crime that was committed there. But it's also important to bring out what this example also illustrates — and I think it's not lost on the masses of people, including many people among the Black middle classes — that when it comes down to it and the interests of the ruling class dictate it, they won't hesitate to wipe out the homes, and for that matter the lives, of large numbers of people who are "stable homeowners" among Black people, or for that matter even among other people, including white people if that's what the interests of the ruling class dictate. Certainly its need to go to war and the full dimension of a nuclear war will do this on an even greater scale. So in a sense, then, Philadelphia is both a vivid example of the vicious nature of the state and its dealings on a daily basis with particularly the masses of oppressed nationalities and proletarians, and at the same time it is in a sense a microcosm of the full-scale horror that this system is preparing to unleash in a nuclear war.

Q: Still on the question of the Philadelphia Massacre, let me ask you this: How would you, how would your party handle a situation like that if you were running society? I mean, I know it wouldn't come up in exactly the same way, most likely it wouldn't come up around a group like MOVE, but let's just say you were in power and some group was simply trying to live in some alternative lifestyle and actively rejected the prevailing social relations and ideas of the time, disassociating themselves both from the mainstream of society and from the more particular objectives, ideals and values which your party in power might be promoting. How would you handle this?

A: Well, I feel that a revolutionary regime that really represents the formerly exploited and oppressed people and the interests of transforming society to abolish exploitation and oppression, such a revolutionary regime should not feel itself threatened by people who challenge it in different ways, in the sense of posing alternative lifestyles or questioning some of its established norms or some of its objectives. Of course, so long as we are talking about a genuine socialist society, where the exploitation of one person by another — and more fundamentally the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class — is not the guiding principle and basic relation of society but is declared illegal and is being uprooted, then it is both necessary and reasonable to expect and require everyone (except those actually unable) to contribute their labor. It is also necessary for people — especially people who have dissenting views but who are not for a return to an exploitative society — to take part in the political

life of society and in vigorous ideological struggle in various forms.

But, of course, all this is complicated, because as we have learned, exploitative relations do emerge — they reemerge even where they have been eliminated — in socialist society. And furthermore, while socialism and the advance to communism requires and makes possible a tremendous liberation of the productive forces, it should not be forgotten that the most important productive force is the people themselves. I am not a worshipper of technology. The utilization and further development of advanced technology is one important part of what socialism, and ultimately communism, is all about, but it is not the essence of it. It is the revisionists (like the rulers of the Soviet Union) who see it this way. People, and their conscious activism, are more important than technology — they are, in fact, the creators of technology. And in the realm of technology and technological advance, no less than in other spheres, there is and can be no advance without struggle and wrangling — and without dissent and departure from conventional wisdom and established norms. Many, many of the new inventions and technological advances throughout human history have been made by "mavericks." Socialist society and the advance to communism will have to encompass — and the leadership within socialist society must learn to deal with — the need for both unity, the common contribution of labor by all those able, centralized planning and guidance, advanced levels of technology... and their opposites: decentralism, local and individual initiative, criticism, struggle, dissent, and the placing of people above machines.

As for people who actually want to go so far as to "drop out" of socialist society — that will have to be dealt with as it may actually arise, according to the concrete situation and context and the actual content of their actions. But the strategic objective should be to win those who are inclined in this direction, but do not desire a return to the old, exploitative order, to direct their efforts — and their criticism and dissent — toward furthering the advance toward communism, along the lines and in accordance with the basic principles I've tried to summarize here.

It's very wrong for communists, no less than anyone else, to think that at any given time everything they are doing is all that can be done, or every idea they have is the only possible way to look at things, or that no one else could possibly have any ideas or understanding worth anything — especially when they disagree with you! Socialist society and even communist society will be full of contradiction and will be driven forward by contradiction, and there is certainly a need and a role for people who dissent from and even in some ways perhaps drop out of the established and, in that sense, conventional way of looking at things, way of living, and so on.

Obviously at any particular time, the party is seeking to carry out and fighting for goals and objectives that it believes are correct and necessary in order to bring about the advance to communism, the elimination of exploitation and oppression, and the advent of a whole new form of society and a

whole new way of looking at the world and of people relating to each other. But there's a contradiction between what at any given time you *understand* to be true and what is objectively true; and no one, no matter how correct their general viewpoint is, can know all of the truth at any given time, nor should they be viewing things as if their ideas are *absolutely* correct and that it's not possible for there to be any correct dissent from those ideas or any correct divergence from what they're seeking to do. You have to handle this contradiction between seeking to continue on the correct path and recognizing that at any given time the particular things you're doing may have things which are incorrect or erroneous, or which don't recognize all of the picture, or which are one-sided in the way they approach problems, and so on. So I think this has to be the guiding principle in how you deal with these things.

Now a group like MOVE, I'm not familiar, to be honest with you, with exactly what are the principles of MOVE. All of what I've been able to hear about it has been indirect, and most of it has been through bourgeois media or distilled from bourgeois media and seeking to read between the lines and recognize where the distortions are and trying to distill a correct picture. Some things, from what I understand to be the position of MOVE, I would strongly disagree with; some things may have a lot of validity to them; and certainly some things they raise are unquestionably true, such as a lot of the unhealthy practices and nature of the dominant values and dominant lifestyle of American society. And there may be many things of value that could at least be distilled out of the things that people like MOVE raise. One should not turn a blind eye or a deaf ear to the things they raise, even if they were raised in opposition to you and your leading society and to the goals and objectives you're seeking to carry out from that position. So you have to have an approach of seeking to get at the truth — that's the first thing — and you have to recognize that's a process of struggle and contradiction, and you have to be willing to recognize, and it's important to be able to recognize, that dissent and criticism from the dominant views — in particular when *yours* are the dominant views — is important to not only allow but encourage.

Now if people take up arms against a revolutionary regime, certainly the strategic objective has to be to defeat them in doing so, or if possible to get them to put down those arms and seek to resolve the contradiction by non-antagonistic means if they are not themselves exploiters and oppressors. In the history of revolutionary states there have been times when violence on the part of one section of the people has been suppressed by the state; and this has been correct and necessary on many occasions — in the face of a violent uprising against the state. There have been other times when even in the face of such violence the revolutionary state has mobilized masses to go attempt to disarm the people who are caught up in this and to resolve the thing through struggle and debate and by ideological means and political means, rather than through military means.

In the Cultural Revolution in China, for example, both things happened. There were reactionary rebellions that had to

be put down by armed force, and there were also times when, even in the face of reactionary rebellions involving arms, masses of people were sent in to seek, through discussion and argument, to disarm and to turn people away from that form of reactionary rebellion into ideological struggle and debate over the road forward.

So it depends on the concrete circumstance, but the objective should be, first of all, to handle contradictions among the people nonantagonistically and if possible to turn ones that have become antagonistic into nonantagonistic ones; and secondly to keep in mind, and to base your actions on the fact, that dissent and criticism and even alternatives proposed to the way that you're going within a revolutionary society are an important part of and can contribute to the achievement of the eventual goal of communism.

Even under communism, dissent, disagreement, debate, people with minority opinions that are opposed to the prevailing and dominant opinions, may prove to be right. All these things are necessary and vital within society, and particularly in a revolutionary society. It should be a *vibrant* society and a society full of struggle and debate and critical thinking, not a society where people are reduced to automatons or robots carrying out the orders of people on high, which much more corresponds to the nature of present society than to the future society that we're striving for.

These are some of the basic principles for how we would approach such a thing. Such things will pose a real challenge to revolutionary regimes; but again, it's a challenge that they have to be up to, and once again if there are rebellions — armed rebellions — which attack the revolutionary state, then it may not be possible to avoid using armed force to suppress them, but even where that's necessary that can't be seen as the end of it; that has to be seen only as a necessary measure, and then it's necessary to get at what was *underlying* the problem, what were the underlying contradictions that gave rise to this, and to deal with them. This is particularly important if this is an armed rebellion that draws in or is based, in any significant way, among sections of the masses themselves, and not among the overthrown exploiters or newly arising exploiters, or their outright henchmen.

These are very important principles that have to be understood and popularized even now. They have to be fought for and will have to be continually fought for, even after the overthrow of the present system and in the revolutionary transformation of society that follows on that.

Now since I've raised the question of a reactionary rebellion against revolutionary regime, two things have to be said since this came up in the context of MOVE. First of all, MOVE's rebellion against the existing system should certainly not be considered reactionary and our party does not consider it reactionary; and secondly they're obviously not rebelling against a revolutionary regime but against an oppressive imperialist regime. So I was only raising that in terms of *even when* you have reactionary rebellions against revolutionary state power in socialist society it's still not a cut and dried thing what you have to do; and simply resorting to armed force to suppress it is not the whole answer. It may be necessary in that situation,

at least sometimes, but it's not the whole answer. And clearly in the case of a group like MOVE — rebelling in the present society in the form of resisting the dominant values and way of life — that's an entirely different situation, which is neither reactionary nor aimed against a revolutionary regime.

Mao once said that Marxism is the most revolutionary thing in the world and it doesn't and shouldn't fear criticism. I think this is true of Marxism, and it should be true of a revolutionary party and certainly should be true of a revolutionary state. Criticism of Marxism or disagreement with the prevailing policies and norms and any particular goals at any given time, or the particular direction at any given time, of a revolutionary society should not be something that people react to with panic and simply seek to suppress. They should not be afraid of it. In fact, in an overall sense, a strategic sense, they should welcome it and should seek to draw forward and distill what is correct and truthful out of such criticism, out of such dissent, and seek to learn from it and to help utilize it in order to carry forward the struggle to achieve the revolutionary transformation of society which should guide such a revolutionary state. It's the imperialists and the reactionaries who are afraid of the people and who can't stand even the slightest criticism from them; the revolutionaries should not emulate them in this but should be radically different on this too.

Q: There seems to be a lot of debate these days about whether each new outrage committed by the U.S. imperialists, be it the Philly Massacre, the brutal roundup of immigrants, the invasion of Grenada and military escalations in Central America, the launching of Star Wars, etc. — whether each of these things is more a sign of strength, or weakness, of the American empire. What would you say?

A: In the main it's a sign of their weakness. Of course the fact that they do these things and get away with them reflects the fact that they still have a great deal of strength and in particular they do have a very powerful military arsenal which they use to bludgeon people and to intimidate people.

But, as we've seen in Vietnam, that military arsenal is far from invincible. And that's a lesson that should not be forgotten, must not be forgotten, and is not being forgotten by revolutionary people throughout the world. So I think it's both: on the one hand, a sign of the fact that they have real strength; on the other hand, I think it's mainly a sign of their weakness — *in this sense* — it's a sign of their greatly increased *necessity* to do these things. In other words, they're not doing this because they have unlimited power and they're just reaching out to give demonstrations of their unlimited power everywhere. They're doing it because of

the increasing necessity they have, and in response to the very real challenges to their power — both from the rival imperialists headed by the Soviet Union and also from revolutionary uprisings of masses of people in different parts of the world.

And their situation is not only one of increasing difficulty — necessity in that sense — but one of increasing desperation. What they have to do in the pursuit of maintaining their position in the world, coming out on top and strengthening their hand at the expense of their rivals and against the revolutionary masses, what they have to do and what they have to call forth, the destruction they have to bring down to do that, is a reflection of the very desperate situation they're in. As I pointed out before, the imperialist system East and West as it presently exists *has no future*. There is the very real question of the future of *humanity* as a result of their desperation and what they're being called forth to do — in particular nuclear war. But *they have no future*, the imperialist system as it now exists has no future, and their situation is even more desperate than that of the masses of people in the world. The essential question is this: how to take *advantage* of the growing difficulty and desperation of their situation and how to turn it to revolutionary advantage. This is not to deny or turn a blind eye to the fact that they do have a tremendous military force at their command, with its tremendously destructive capability, but it's to recognize within that and within the very desperate and vicious things that they're already carrying out and the even greater scale of horrors they're preparing for — to recognize within all that the weaknesses and the desperation of their situation.

Mao once pointed out that it's necessary to despise the enemy strategically while taking him seriously tactically; and in the present situation, in its full implications, it's more important than ever to hold firmly to that orientation.

Q: Some people who go into the armed forces are reactionary gung-ho types who dream of bullying their way around the world John Wayne- or Rambo-style. They probably won't start singing another tune until they start getting their asses blown off. But what about the large numbers of impoverished youth, and many Black youth in particular, who don't really want to fight, let alone die, for the USA, but who go in out of economic compulsion? What do you think about them?

A: This is one of the outrages of the system that it forces people into such a situation of such desperation that the very people who are the most victimized within the U.S. by the system are forced to become part of its armed enforcers. On the other hand, this is a potentially very explosive contradiction for the enemy — that its armed forces *are* filled with people who are potentially not enforcers but overthrowers of the

system.

At the same time we have to recognize that there is a discipline, there is an indoctrination that goes on in this army, there is training — not only physical training and technical training, but ideological training and political training — that goes on, and that even for people for whom this is such a sharp contradiction (that is, the interests that they are acting to enforce by being part of this army are directly opposed to their own fundamental interests as well as the interests of the oppressed in the world generally), even that kind of a sharp contradiction is not going to lead to them just immediately putting down their arms at the first sight of an uprising against the system and coming over to the side of the revolution. A few may do that, but it's going to be much more contradictory than that and it's going to go through many more twists and turns. Underlying all this is the principle that has been stressed many times by our party and should be stressed continually: it's only by going up against, defeating, and shattering in actual warfare the armed forces of the imperialists, it's only in this way that it's going to be possible to win over large numbers of the imperialists' armed forces, remold them and integrate them into the revolutionary armed forces of the proletariat.

Certainly from a strategic standpoint, and in the final analysis, the place where such oppressed masses, and oppressed youth in particular, belong is in the revolutionary army of the proletariat and not in the reactionary armed forces of the imperialists. And the more the revolutionary movement develops and asserts its influence and puts its imprint upon society the more that these youth will be drawn toward involving themselves in this revolutionary movement and will not feel that the only choice they have, whether out of economic compulsion or because of other factors, even against their will perhaps, is to go into the armed forces of the imperialists.

What people see as their possible options and what they see as realistic choices for them is not a static, unchanging thing. It depends upon and changes, even dramatically and radically, with changes in society; and when the whole terms of what's going on in society are radically altered, and "what is" is thrown up for grabs and the whole question of where society's going and what's going to be the outcome of the turmoil in society — when that reaches a very high pitch, then all kinds of things seem possible and realistic to people that might not have seemed realistic or possible under other conditions.

In any case, once again, even for those who do go into the armed forces of the imperialists, it's important that the influence of a revolutionary line continue to reach them in various ways, and it's important to continue to prepare the ground for the time when it will be possible to fully utilize this explosive contradiction that they represent right within the imperialist armed forces and to win them over and strengthen the revolutionary movement and the revolutionary armed forces of the proletariat.

Q: The RCP was one of the groups contributing to the formation of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM), which at this point in time unites some twenty revolutionary parties and organizations in fourteen countries. I think that it is very significant that, while there must necessarily be differences among these organizations, it has nevertheless been possible to achieve unity around such key positions as: that the international communist movement must unite on the basis of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought; that the opportunities for revolution are growing; that both the U.S.-led bloc and the Soviet-led bloc are imperialist in character; that their worldwide contention and rivalry is bringing the world to the brink of world war; and that such a war, as well as all the everyday crimes of imperialism, must be combated by working for the total elimination of imperialism worldwide, through revolution. Some participants in the RIM, such as the Communist Party of Peru, have already been able to initiate the armed struggle for power in accordance with their particular conditions, while others, such as the RCP in the U.S., are actively preparing the groundwork for when this will become a possibility. I find it particularly significant that the RIM has inspired the publication of a political magazine, *A World to Win*, in a number of languages, and that all these diverse parties united to issue the same slogans for May Day last year and again this year. Could you comment on what you think the RIM has accomplished to date, and what role you expect it to play in the future? And could you also comment on how you think the question of diversity versus unity in the RIM should be handled?

A: Already the establishment of the RIM and its role up to this point has made some very important contributions to overcoming the crisis and disarray that existed in the international communist movement as a result of the setback in China with the reactionary coup d'état and the rise to power of revisionism led by Deng Xiaoping there after the death of Mao. This has represented a significant regrouping of the revolutionary communist forces on an international scale, and at the same time a struggling through to achieve a higher level of unity and clarity around some key dividing-line questions.

The *Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement* contains both a synthesis around some of these important dividing-line questions for the international communist movement — questions of basic principle and basic orientation — and at the same time takes some important steps toward establishing a programmatic orientation for the carrying forward of the revolutionary struggle and the building of the international communist movement, both on the international plane and within different countries (and in particular the two main types of countries in the world, that is, the imperialist countries and the oppressed nations, or the Third World).

All these are extremely important first steps, and as I wrote in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*, this in itself represents a very significant, if only beginning, change in the equation of world relations. It is significant, but again it's a beginning step and remains to be built on. And as you mentioned, some practical steps of great importance have already been able to be taken on the basis of the unity expressed in the *Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement*, that is, the issuing and rallying around joint slogans for May Day of last year and again this year, as well as other practical steps and practical actions which the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement and the parties and organizations affiliated with it have unified around. These are also important, if only beginning, steps which also are a foundation to be built from.

As for what role RIM can play in the future and must play in the future; I think it has to be further strengthened step by step as a force for bringing the unified strength of the international proletariat and international communist movement to bear on world events and on the revolutionary struggle in all countries, and in particular in relation to places where the revolutionary struggle at any given time has *decisive* and *strategic* impact on the world situation. It needs to be strengthened so that it can play that role further. That's not just an organizational question, though it involves the further development of organizational unity, but it's also, and fundamentally, a question of developing further unity — ideologically and politically — and thrashing through and struggling out some of the remaining differences to eventually come up with a general line for the international communist movement, around which the various Marxist-Leninist forces throughout the world can be even more firmly united. This is a process which, as I said, has to go through stages and will have to develop through struggles and will have some twists and turns in it. But the establishment of RIM and the forging and publication of its *Declaration* establishes a beginning and a foundation from which to move forward toward that goal.

And all of this, of course, is infused with a real sense of urgency because of the context within which it's occurring, that is, the world situation and the growing and conflicting trends — the developments toward world war with all its devastation on the one hand and rising revolutionary opportunities and rising revolutionary struggles on the other hand.

As for this question of diversity and unity and how that should be handled in the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement: I think the important thing, and the overwhelming thing, about the RIM is that what unites the parties and organizations that have affiliated in RIM is far greater than the differences that still exist among them. Not that there aren't some questions and some differences that remain to be struggled out that are important, even very important. But first of all, it's important to grasp and not to underestimate the overwhelming fact about RIM — that there has been a real and genuine basis for uniting these organizations and that what unites them is greater than what divides them. This has established a foundation for RIM to issue a *Declara-*

tion, to begin laying some of the programmatic guidelines for carrying forward the revolutionary struggle worldwide, in decisive places in the world at any given time, in different types of countries and in different particular countries; and it's also laid the basis for this to be carried forward through various practical activities or practical focuses that the parties and organizations affiliated with RIM have joined in, such as May Day and some other things.

It's through the process of carrying forward from the foundation of RIM and its *Declaration* and carrying this out further in practice and, in that context, carrying out ideological struggle and debate over the remaining differences that the basis will be laid for, in the future, making another leap through struggle to achieve yet a higher level of unity, which will in turn enable even a firmer ground and even clearer guidelines for carrying forward, in revolutionary struggle, the revolutionary line represented by RIM.

Already today the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement is a living embodiment and a living force of proletarian revolution and proletarian internationalism. This is tremendously significant in itself, and it is also a very important foundation from which to go forward through struggle.

Q: I'd like to get back to the question of social forces for revolution in the U.S. itself. In an article you wrote called "The City Game — and the City, No Game" (RW No. 201), you discuss how different kinds of sports have different social bases and different social roles, and you draw a particularly humorous analogy for the revolutionary united front under proletarian leadership, saying that one should "rely firmly on basketball, win over (or neutralize) as much as possible of football (and baseball) and firmly oppose and defeat golf (to say nothing of polo)." Without detracting from the humor of this formulation, could you explain a little more what you meant by that?

A: Well, in an equally provocative way I could say that, speaking specifically of the USA and more specifically of those who want to see an end to injustice, who want to see a better world, the difference between a profound love of basketball and a profound love of baseball is the difference between revolution and reform. I mean, it's sort of difficult to conceive, isn't it, of the ad going "Basketball, hotdogs, apple pie and Chevrolet." There's a reason why it's "baseball, apple pie, hotdogs and Chevrolet." I mean baseball does belong in there with Mom and apple pie and the flag. In the U.S., at least, it is part of the *mainstream*.

Now I'm not trying to argue that basketball in the U.S. is not controlled by the ruling class and that the dominant values in basketball as it's presented in the U.S. are not the values of the ruling class of society. They are. And they do

control basketball as they control every aspect of culture and the superstructure — that is, they dominate these things, and their values are dominant. And there are reactionary basketball fans too.

But with all that, the point is, as I stressed in that article "The City Game — and the City, No Game," that basketball is a product of the city, particularly of the urban cores of the city, and strategically speaking the city, particularly those urban cores — and this is especially important in the U.S. — *strategically* they belong to the proletariat. We've talked about that before and it needs to be reemphasized and can be reemphasized right here. Strategically they belong to the proletariat. And basketball in the U.S. today — its character as a sport — is an expression, an outgrowth of life in those urban cores. Of course life in those urban cores is presently under the domination of, and suffers the consequences of being under the domination of, the imperialist system and the dictatorship of the ruling bourgeois class. Nevertheless, out of those same conditions can and ultimately will arise a revolutionary movement to overthrow all this. And it's in that sort of sense that I'm saying what I'm saying about rely firmly on basketball — or that the difference between a profound love of basketball and a profound love of baseball, for example, is the difference between revolution and reform.

I remember some years back Howard Cosell actually made an interesting point: that baseball's a nineteenth-century sport. Of course, now Howard Cosell's doing baseball broadcasts (*laughs*), so that's so much for Howard Cosell on that point. But nevertheless there's an important point that he was touching on, which is that baseball's a sport that reflects a time and a situation in the U.S. in which the kind of values characteristic of a largely rural American society were dominant. It's a sport that reflects a sort of rural American life and reflects a situation other than that of the life conditions and struggles of the proletariat in the U.S.

Now, again, it would be wrong to take this too far. I'm using baseball as a metaphor, and if you destroy the metaphor you'll destroy the point as well. But it does stand in that way as a metaphor for a different period in U.S. society and a different set of conditions than now exist, particularly for the basic proletarian masses concentrated in the urban cores, whose sport, again speaking metaphorically, is basketball. Basketball speaks to conditions and speaks to a situation where the proletariat is concentrated, where it has more powerfully than ever before in the U.S. a revolutionary potential, and where, as I pointed out in that article, in rising up — and through the upsurge of revolutionary uprisings concentrated in and breaking out from the urban cores — it has the potential to sweep in and win over large numbers of intermediate strata and carry forward successfully a revolutionary struggle to overthrow imperialism and all the conditions it imposes on the oppressed masses.

Now, as I said in that article, we will try to win over or neutralize as much as possible of baseball and also football; but we will rely *firmly* on basketball. We will rely firmly, not on those who sing "Take me out to the ballgame," but on those who feel most at home on the inner-city courts.

Q: From what I understand, a lot of people you consider to be some of the most crucial elements for revolution in the U.S. — the “real proletarians” who really don’t have anything to lose by going for it — often have a hard time picturing themselves as members of a revolutionary party like the RCP. Many make it clear they’d really like to see a revolution, and that they like what they’ve seen of the RCP’s work, but they stop short of applying to join the party. Sometimes I suppose it’s because they’re not ready to take the risks which being associated with a revolutionary party might entail and feel that their everyday lives are a lot safer; but it seems that a lot of times it has more to do with people feeling incompetent. They get into political arguments with people in their neighborhoods or workplaces and get only so far before they start running out of answers and get swamped by the mainstream reasoning they *know* isn’t right. And a lot of these proletarians have been prevented from getting much formal education — quite a few can’t read, and those who do often have trouble reading long books and articles. Of course people can overcome that, as evidenced by the numbers of proletarian prisoners who have become voracious readers, including of revolutionary literature. But on the outside there are different kinds of problems: constant money hassles, scrambling to feed the kids and so on — time runs out. So it would seem that it’s not easy for revolutionary-minded proletarians to study political materials, to attend political meetings, participate in protests, etc. Many might be afraid that if they joined the party they’d be playing the fool and not have any idea what they’re doing. What would you say to that?

A: Well, I think in what you touched on here there are a number of different problems that are reflected. For one thing there’s the need for the party to find the ways to make its line, its analysis, its program even more accessible to people, particularly those who don’t have a lot of formal education and for whom reading may be difficult — to find other means, using tape recordings, video tapes, and other ways to get this line, this message, this analysis of both the basic program and the exposure of what’s going on with everyday events and important world events, to get this to people in forms that are more accessible and to help overcome this problem of the difficulty of reading. And this applies especially to the situation where there is a language question — where people read and/or speak Spanish or some other language besides English — this is an important question that constant attention has to be paid to. So all this is one general area that’s very concrete and specific and that the party is taking up and seeking to find the ways to address more fully.

Now, on the other hand, there’s the problem that revolution is not something that can be made spontaneously or just on the basis of the understanding that people come to on their own. It’s something that requires a vanguard and it requires an advanced force of proletarians armed with a scien-

tific understanding of the way in which society runs, the contradictions within it, and how the system can be overthrown and replaced with a system that does correspond to the needs of the great majority of people in the world, particularly the formerly exploited and oppressed people. There’s no way to get around this: it requires work to come to an understanding of this, it requires effort.

Again, this doesn’t deny or eliminate the need for the party to make its analysis and an understanding of all this as accessible as possible, particularly to those people who haven’t had a lot of formal education and formal intellectual training; but you can’t get around the fact that it’s a struggle to grasp these things — to grasp the necessary theory that people have to have in order to play a leading role in the struggle, and to penetrate to the essence of what’s going on underneath the surface appearance and the conscious deception by the ruling classes, to grasp what’s going on with world events and major political questions, major turning points in world history, and so on.

But as you seem to touch on, many people among the oppressed masses understand this, and there are people who have stepped forward already to take up this struggle and who recognize that they have to wage struggle in this realm just as they do in all other spheres in order to make revolution, that revolution couldn’t be conceived of without struggle and sacrifice.

I think the deeper and more underlying problem is what you touched on in referring to the mainstream reasoning and people feeling suffocated. This, I think, is the underlying problem in that it reflects the fact that the development of the revolutionary movement in the U.S. is still at its early stages and that the conditions have not yet ripened to where a large-scale revolutionary upheaval has broken through on the part of the oppressed masses. Back in the ‘60s all kinds of things were liberated, including people who were liberated to battle things out, not only battle in the streets, battle with the forces of law and order, and battle with the repressive apparatus of the state; but also to battle in the realm of ideas over all kinds of questions and to challenge all kinds of conventions and norms and established rules and regulations. Not only did this take place among the students, it took place among masses of Black people and other oppressed and proletarian people at that time. This is characteristic of what’s unleashed and set loose when people do find a way to break through and when their suppressed anger can burst up through the cracks and the openings that arise in the system. We have to do everything we can to maximize people’s involvement and their revolutionary training, both through grappling with revolutionary theory and also concretely in political struggle in relation to important events and turning points in any country and in the world. At the same time we have to be laying the groundwork for being able to *maximize* and very *quickly* transform into conscious revolutionary struggle the uprisings that do break through when more openings are created for this suppressed anger to burst through.

But certainly right now I don’t think there’s any real

basis for basic masses to feel that they couldn't join the party, or if they joined the party (as you put it) they'd be playing the fool and not have any idea what they're doing. The party is not, and should not come off to people as, a mystery or something only for people who have a lot of intellectual training. Proletarians, oppressed masses, have a life of rich experience of suffering at the hands of this system and of struggling against it in various ways, and this provides a very powerful basis for them to grasp the essence of the class relations in society, the essence of the nature of the system, and to gravitate toward and take up *consciously*, not blindly, the revolutionary line and program for overthrowing it.

In other words, the revolutionary theory that is so essential in order to guide the revolutionary movement and without which there can't be a revolutionary movement, this revolutionary theory is not something abstracted from the life experiences of the proletariat and oppressed masses throughout the world; it is something which concentrates and raises to a higher level that experience, both the daily experience and also the experience in very concentrated periods of intense political struggle (or intense revolutionary days, if you want to put it that way).

It's because of this reality and the actual role of this theory that people among the masses, even without intellectual training, certainly have the basis for grasping this theory and for making it an even more powerful material force. And their role is far from — it's the exact opposite of — playing the fool and not having any idea of what they're doing; but it's a question of being able to come to a higher understanding of what not only their own life experience but the experience of the proletariat as a whole, and internationally and historical experience generally, has been all about — in its essence — and where it is all tending and what the ground has been laid for: the revolution of the proletariat to *abolish* exploitation, oppression, and the division of society into classes.

So, far from playing the fool, the question is one of struggling to grasp this and play a *conscious* and therefore a much more powerful role in transforming the world. And again, while it is true that when there is much more of a powerful revolutionary upsurge there will be even more basis for drawing many times the number of proletarians into this process and developing them as conscious revolutionaries, it's crucial that those who see the need for revolution, who are in a position of agreeing with the need for it, of seeing and liking what the party is doing and identifying with it — it's crucial that they become part of this process now to lay a more firm and even more powerful foundation for that future time. I keep coming back to this point but it can't be stressed too many times — that the thousands who become actively and ever more consciously involved now, and the tens or perhaps hundreds of thousands that are *influenced* now, lay a foundation for and become a force for influencing and winning over to a revolutionary position, or at least a sympathy for revolution, millions and even tens of millions when a revolutionary situation approaches and then ripens.

In this connection I want to again emphasize that such a development of a revolutionary situation, while it might

seem to many remote, even very remote right now, can, for all the reasons that I've discussed, come onto the horizon and come into focus and come into real consideration or become a *practical immediate question* seemingly out of nowhere and very suddenly. And that's all the more reason why we have to very *urgently* take up this preparatory work and the training of revolutionary forces and the exertion of the greatest possible influence by those revolutionary forces *now*. This is the only way we will be able to be prepared for sudden and dramatic turns and perhaps the emergence of a revolutionary situation that's almost entirely unforeseen and comes seemingly out of nowhere — because we know the world as it is is not for long going to be able to remain as it is, and one way or another it's going to be radically and *dramatically* changed.

Q: I once knew a woman, a Black woman in her thirties with a couple of kids living on welfare in the projects, whom I've always been convinced is exactly the kind of enlightened proletarian the party should be full of. She wasn't necessarily very educated, in a formal sense, or anything, but she was the kind of person who always wants to know about the big questions, who wants to understand the big events in the world. She didn't get into gossip and petty project politics; she wanted to understand things like the hostage crisis in Iran and why the Middle East was such a powderkeg. And she also had a lot of pride and self-respect, a hatred of injustice and a generous outlook on humanity. She *demande*d revolutionary training, and she started to get it. She read the paper, got together four or five people she knew to discuss it together, invited party people to come join in some of these discussions. She also made sure some revolutionary posters and leaflets got out throughout the project, even though she knew this was driving the police nuts, and she ignored the whispers of some of her backward neighbors who were bad-mouthing her. She was also one of the bold ones who once opened her door to hide some revolutionaries who were being chased through the projects by the police. And she was seriously beginning to think about whether she should *join* the RCP. And then one day some guy she'd been seeing off and on came by. He didn't come by often, usually just around the time she'd get her check; but this guy put his foot down like he owned her and ordered her to "quit messing around with these revolutionaries." And can you believe it? She backed away! And we're talking about a forceful, outspoken woman here! But all of a sudden it's like she didn't have a mind of her own and couldn't make her own decision to join the revolution. Where the hell do

these men get the audacity to tell a grown woman she can't be a revolutionary? Is it because they're ashamed they're not more involved? Or are they more chicken-shit than the women? Or is it that they can't stand the idea that a mere woman might know something they don't, or what? There are lots of stories like this one. How do you think this brake on the revolution from right *within* the ranks of the people is going to get lifted?

A: Well, there are several points that you've raised that should be discussed. First of all, in a more general sense, in terms of carrying out revolutionary work in both the workplaces and the neighborhoods where the proletarian masses are concentrated: the party's been increasingly summing up and *acting* upon the understanding that it's necessary to carry this out in a more systematic and a more professional way. In other words, it's necessary to take into account all these kinds of problems that you've mentioned, the neighborhood snitches, the backward forces that exist in the factories, as well as in the neighborhoods, the need to protect the advanced forces who come forward, even while giving expression to and providing the forms to carry out revolutionary work, and how to combine more open forms of work and less open forms that don't expose people who come forward right away.

These kinds of problems have to be taken up and this is a *part*, though a secondary part, of the problems that you raised.

But to get more to the heart of what you've raised here, that is, the woman question. I've discussed earlier the basis for this problem — as you put it, where do these men get off having the audacity to tell a grown woman that she can't hang out with revolutionaries and can't be a revolutionary; that is, the basis for this lies in the whole oppressive division of labor in class society, between men and women, the oppression of women by men which is fully embedded in the present society and in class society generally, the whole patriarchy. This is the underlying basis for where men get the audacity to do this and why they tend to do it.

At the same time it's important to recognize that, from all the reports I've been receiving, a very large number of the revolutionary forces that have stepped forward in this period, within the proletariat in particular, *have* been women. They've gone up against, and they have found or are finding the ways to take on and to overcome, many of these kinds of obstacles, including the obstacles directly posed by men who seek to oppress them, to keep them in a subordinate position, and to keep them away from the revolutionary movement.

But the responsibility for dealing with this should not fall to these women alone. A very significant development around this was last International Women's Day when the RCP issued in a very powerful and provocative way a proclamation specifically on this question, on the question of the oppression of women and the struggle against it — in the context of the broader revolutionary struggle, but specifically on this point of men seeking to keep women from becoming actively and fully involved in the revolutionary struggle — and

calling on women to find the ways, themselves, to begin breaking free of this and also calling on masses of people — men and women — to step forward and form a powerful support for these women, to help them and to let them know that they're not going to be on their own, that there is a revolutionary movement developing and that people are being called on and people are being organized to step forward and assist them so they can't be beaten back "into their place" and can't be shackled and held back from being involved in the struggle to overturn the system and all existing social conditions and relations, including the oppression of women.

So I think this proclamation was extremely important in what it represented and what it called for, and also, from the reports I've received, it had a very provocative impact and created jolts and shockwaves in many places, especially with this phenomenon you referred to earlier of revolutionary-minded men who say, well, I agree with a lot of things you say but *that's* going a little too far. And that means we're getting somewhere, it means that we're shaking them up, it means that we're hitting at things that need to be hit at and we're hitting at the weak spots and hitting a little bit where it hurts, and sometimes, and in this particular case definitely, this is very necessary. But it's also very important that this not just be a one-shot thing, that it be followed through on systematically and that the kind of call that's issued for people to come forward, and the kind of call that's made to give assistance and support to women who do seek to break free in this way, is systematically carried through on, and that as part of this men who do seek to hold women back and shackle them in this way are exposed and in fact held up to ridicule as part of helping to break women free, and in fact helping, where possible, to break these men free and getting them to cast aside this baggage they're dragging behind them which is an obstacle and impediment to the development of the revolutionary movement.

Q: The punk youth in the U.S. today are a complex mixture of trends. A few are backward fools who like to emulate the swagger of the Nazis and bullies in general, and they've made it clear that they'd be willing to fight to defend flag and country. Most punks are much more positive by far, expressing mainly through cultural means their disaffection and rebellion against traditional white middle-class American values. They're trying to shock people out of their everyday complacency. Beyond that, a growing number of punks are getting into radical politics of one sort or another and are seeking, often very creatively, to expose and take on more directly the political and ideological structures of the state. I know that the party and the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade (RCYB), its youth group,

have increasingly been finding themselves "on the same side of the barricades" with such punks, and that in some cases close ties have been formed. Could you comment on this trend and explain the extent to which you see these youth as similar or different in relation to the radical youth of the '60s?

A: I remember a number of years back when I was on a speaking tour in the U.S. in 1979, and in one place I was interviewed on a radio show (I think it was one of the public radio stations) by a guy with more or less social-democratic politics who raised the same question but in an opportunistic kind of way and accused our party of trying to jump on the bandwagon of the punks; he said, anyway a lot of these punks are reactionary, and besides that, you're trying to act like you're the big vanguard of the punk movement and that's not the case. I remember answering at that time that the role of a vanguard could not possibly be to initiate everything new that arises in society, whether in the cultural sphere or in other spheres, but in fact its role is to try to recognize at any given time the new things that are arising, the trends particularly among the masses that are developing that are perhaps from new angles taking on and opposing and exposing this system, and to seek to unite with these and at the same time to help in an overall sense develop them and direct them toward the revolutionary goal which will abolish the things which have called forth these various forms of rebellion in the first place. I think that's both correct and important as a basic orientation of how to relate to things like the punk movement.

Since that time there's been further development of and also (as you touched on) some further differentiation within the punk movement of different trends, and there are some very acute contradictions and conflicts and struggles within the broad grouping of what could be called the punk movement. But I do agree with you that its overwhelming trend is positive, that it is going up against the established norms and conventions and seeking to shock people in a time when political and ideological shock treatment to awaken people to the reality and the urgency of what's going on is very much needed. This is a very important breath of fresh air and a very important spark that's being brought forth in this kind of way. So I think that's what I would say, by way of basic orientation, on this point.

Now, as for the particular point which, I think, goes back to something you raised earlier, whether these youth are similar to or different from the radical youth of the '60s, I think they are similar in some ways in that there is a rebellion against the traditional, established, and conventional white middle-class values and norms, although those too are somewhat different today than they were in the '60s coming out of the '50s, and what was new and radical in the '60s is not by any means necessarily new and radical now. In fact some of the things which were new in the '60s have become institutionalized and co-opted by the ruling class and are some of the things that are being rebelled against now by the youth in the '80s. So this is another lesson to be learned

from. But there is that similarity of rebellion of that kind, against established and conventional norms and values.

I think there are also some important differences. The basis for those differences is the difference in the world situation and the whole context in which these youth rebellions are occurring. There's a much sharper edge to things in the '80s, to the punk movement as compared to, say, the hippies, or the youth movement more generally of the '60s, because, although there were many sharp edges to what was going on then and many acute contradictions were exploding and being felt then, the world situation today is much sharper, it's qualitatively more explosive now in terms of its potential and how things will get resolved; this takes a magnified and concentrated form in the question of world war and everything that that represents. It's in the shadow of all that and in the context of all that that this youth rebellion and particularly the punk movement is going on, and this has a lot to do with explaining its harsh and hard edge right now.

Q: These days a lot of punks, and a lot of radical-minded people generally, seem to have a real "hard edge" about them. I think this is mainly good and appropriate given the gravity and intensity of the times we live in, but I think maybe there's a problem with a lot of people being somewhat too narrow of vision, or too grim, or both. It's almost like people are not really allowing themselves to cut loose, to dream a bit wildly, to festively create radical challenges to the putrid state of things around us. And I think that festive spirit needs to be there too, that it's crucial for really destroying the old, as well as for creating fresh new things. Do you know what I'm talking about?

A: Yes, I think I do, and I think it's a very important point. Someone recently sent me an article from a newspaper, *The Chronicle* in San Francisco, which quotes one of the people in the punk movement, someone it describes as, "one punk with pierced ears and a fuzzy haircut who has marched in San Francisco protests," and they quote him as saying: "We're a lot more cynical than the hippies, we know that love isn't going to save the world." This expresses a real difference between the punks, or more broadly the youth rebellions now, and the '60s, and it reflects in turn a dramatic difference in the world situation and what's at stake and what are the potential consequences.

It's not too surprising that when at the present time the danger of world war is growing, and beyond the ongoing horrors brought on by this system the greater horrors that would be brought about by such war loom so ominously before people, and yet the revolutionary movements that could turn the world in a radically different direction are in the immediate period in their beginning stages, so to speak — even though

there are some powerful expressions of them, they're still in their beginning stages — it's not too hard to see why in those conditions people feel a certain harsh sense, and a kind of revolutionary dreaming, as you call it, a certain festive atmosphere, does not find expression so readily. This is a question of being able to see the picture, not just as it's shaping up today, but in terms of its potential, *not only* the potential that is there for horrible devastation, perhaps even the destruction of human civilization and even the elimination of mankind, but on the other hand, the real and growing prospects for revolution which could turn the world in a radically different direction for the great advance and benefit of humanity. It's the latter aspect that a lot of people are missing and that isn't as easy to see, spontaneously, in the present situation.

I tried to address this in a book I wrote a couple of years back, *For a Harvest of Dragons*, and I'd like to read something from that book which I think speaks to this point. I wrote: "One of the significant if perhaps subtle and often little-noticed ways in which the enemy, even in defeat, seeks to exact revenge on the revolution and sow the seed of its future undoing is in what he would force the revolutionaries to become in order to defeat him. It will come to this: we will have to face him in the trenches and defeat him amidst terrible destruction but we must not in the process annihilate the fundamental difference between the enemy and ourselves." And then I went on to sum up the point this way: "We must be able to maintain our firmness of principles but at the same time our flexibility, our materialism and our dialectics, our realism and our romanticism, our solemn sense of purpose and our sense of humor."

I do think this speaks very much to what you're talking about and to the need to combine a harshness that is, as you said, mainly positive and corresponds to what's really going on in the world and what's at stake and what's at issue — but to be able to *combine* that with a certain dreaming, with a certain revolutionary romanticism and to keep in mind, as Lenin put it, that a revolution is a festival of the oppressed.

Now I do think we're also seeing some of that coming into being. I think we've seen it in recent protests and rebellion such as the No Business As Usual Day in the U.S. A lot of very creative and even festive forms of protest and rebellion took place there. And punks were among those leading in that, too. I also think we're seeing it in the uprising of the masses in South Africa. And I think the more that movements advance and develop and take on a more revolutionary dimension and more of a revolutionary character the more we're going to see this dreaming, this revolutionary romanticism, this festive character, because, as Lenin profoundly pointed out, revolution is a festival of the oppressed. To cite an outstanding example, this is definitely the case and finds very powerful expression in the revolutionary war in Peru.

Even amidst everything that is going on and the potential horror of a world war and nuclear devastation, *even* in that context we do have to maintain and breathe even further life into these things, the dreaming, the romanticism, and the

festive character of revolutionary struggle. This is a very important point. As I pointed out in that book, both things are necessary. It's necessary to be very realistic, to be very materialist and face reality squarely, and deal with it as it is, but at the same time it's necessary to dream, it's necessary to have romanticism, it's necessary to be dialectical, it's necessary not just to see things as they are right now but to see what is coming into being — not just to see the strength of the enemy and its awesome destructive power right now but also its strategic weakness, to see not just the fact that revolutionary movements are at the present time only in their beginning stages but to recognize their tremendous potential for sweeping in broader numbers of masses, in fact for dramatically turning things in a different direction and dramatically altering the world in the interests of and for the benefit of the great majority of people, indeed for humanity as a whole.

It's necessary then, in the final analysis, to maintain both our solemn sense of purpose and at the same time our sense of humor.

I recently read something which I think is interesting and important in this light. In a book called *Nowhere To Run: The Story of Soul Music* by Geri Hirshey, there's a quote from someone commenting on Robert Johnson, a famous blues musician: "What is unbearable," the reviewer writes, "is the impossibility of reconciling the facts of evil with the beauty of the world." And I think that has very important application in the present period, in terms of what we've been talking about. It's the *contrast* between the recognition of tremendous *evil*, which the imperialist system brings down and has in store, and the *possibility* of an entirely different world, the possibility of a world which could genuinely be called beautiful: a world of radically different conditions, radically different relations between people, and radically different ways of looking at everything. The world today as it is dominated and shaped by imperialism is ugly, but the mass uprisings in South Africa and the revolutionary war in Peru are beautiful and hold the promise of a beautiful future.

Q: The united front which the party is actively building includes the most diverse kinds of people. To take one expression of this, I would think that in any one city the readership of the RW usually includes quite a few Black proletarians from the projects, middle-class intellectuals from the universities, orange-haired punks, radical feminists, Central American immigrants, and so forth. How does the party bring together such disparate elements?

A: Well, first of all it's not only the party that brings them together; in a certain sense, and fundamentally, it's the *system* that brings them together. It's the system that calls

them forth — despite the wishes and interests of the ruling class — it's the system that calls them forth by its very operation and tends to push them toward each other, if you will. It tends to make them seek out each other, because to a degree even spontaneously they can recognize that they are fighting against the same system and its different outrages stemming from the same source. So this provides the basis for building unity between these disparate elements, as you say; but at the same time the party's role is crucial within that in enabling this to move beyond the level of spontaneity and unity which won't be able to be firmly cemented and carried forward to a higher level and won't be able to withstand the efforts of the ruling class to break it apart. This will be able to be raised to a higher level through the course of struggle and held together by the core element of the revolutionary stand and the revolutionary activity of class-conscious proletarians — with the party playing the vanguard role.

So that's the general principle. How does the party do it? The party seeks to work among and to spread its influence among all various kinds of significant social movements that do break out against the system. Within all that it seeks, as we say, to stretch a line into those movements through the use of the *Revolutionary Worker* newspaper and the party press generally, and as often as possible through the active involvement and participation of party members or supporters in these various movements, uniting with people in struggle and at the same time struggling with them about how to view the overall context of the particular battles and the movements they're involved in, how they in fact link up with other struggles and what is the unifying, underlying factor in all this — which is that they all stem from the same imperialist system and that in fact the overthrow of that system and the advance to a new system of socialism and ultimately communism is the only possible thoroughgoing solution to this. Within all this it's the role of the party (in the ways I've discussed) and the bringing ever more forcefully onto the political stage class-conscious proletarians actively taking up the party's line and making a material, living force out of it and putting its imprint and impact on all these different social movements and on events in society generally — it's this that's decisive in making possible this broad united front under proletarian leadership.

In fact, to be frank, I think just as you expressed a certain amount of surprise at seeing these disparate elements all reading the *RW* newspaper and finding themselves together on the battle lines and in the movements of opposition and rebellion, so these people themselves also often express surprise. Black proletarians or Latino proletarians from the housing projects finding themselves together with what you described as orange-haired punks; or radical feminists uniting with people from out of the projects, and so on. They often express surprise themselves. And at least in a beginning way — and perhaps not even fully consciously at the start — people are at least *sensing* that something that's represented by the party and its program and its outlook has the basis to unify them on a higher level and represents, at least in embryonic form, the future and a future society in

which they could be united even in a more thoroughgoing way.

I, for one, think this is a very *exciting* vision of what the future society would be like and I think it's exciting to the people who become involved and find themselves, to their own surprise, at first at least, on the same side of the barricades with these other different people that they find themselves alongside. This expresses something about the party and what the party stands for, what it represents and the way it carries out its work. While the system provides the basis for bringing people together, it's the party's work and the role and character of the party and what it represents and the future that it embodies that brings this possibility more fully and powerfully into the realm of reality.

Q: If you don't mind I'd like to try to probe the question of leadership by looking at your own experiences. The RCP was founded ten years ago now, and if you include the Revolutionary Union (RU) before it, we're talking about revolutionary roots going back fifteen years and more. And it seems that all along the way, even at times of factional turmoil or in the face of heavy repression and direct governmental threats against your life and security, you have managed to continue to lead the party's work, and to command the respect and allegiance of the collectivity of party members, as well as of quite a few revolutionary-minded people outside the party. I have heard people say appreciatively that you never seem to get stale, that you're always opening up new angles on things and forcing people to rub the sleep out of their eyes and keep step. But you yourself have often stressed the importance of people striving to deepen their own understanding of political line, and their grasp of scientific methodology, so as to be able to analyze things more deeply and correctly on their own, and in turn guide others. This would seem to be pretty essential if we're going to have a revolution which really does unleash the creative potential of the masses of the oppressed.

Given that some people still seem to believe that leadership — any leadership — will necessarily suffocate and stifle the initiative and creativity of individuals and make real uprooting of oppressive relations impossible, could you comment on what you see as the essential differences between bourgeois leadership and what you consider revolutionary leadership? And, as a related question, would you mind if I asked you how you, personally, have managed not to sell out, or burn out, over so many years of struggle? What sustains you?

A: As to the question of the essential differences between bourgeois leadership and revolutionary leadership, the dif-

ference is rooted in what interests they represent, what program they're seeking to carry out and, to put it that way, what kind of world they're trying to bring into being or to maintain, in the case of the one and the other.

Now the proletarian revolution in particular, even as distinguished from other revolutions and certainly as distinguished from the status quo, requires the *conscious* activity and struggle of masses of people. It can't be imposed from above, and it can't be carried out by just the activity of a vanguard alone, no matter how enlightened and no matter how well intentioned. And in fact the role of that vanguard, the role of proletarian vanguard leadership, is to bring forward the *conscious* activism and *conscious* revolutionary struggle of ever greater numbers of masses of people and to both learn from and lead them: Learn from their experiences, from the ideas they raise, from the criticisms they raise, from the struggles they wage, learn from them in the broadest sense, and at the same time seek to synthesize that, raise it to a higher level and then take that back to them, unite with them to carry it out to change the world.

That's the essence of *proletarian leadership*, and I think that it's obvious how it differs fundamentally and is directly opposed to bourgeois leadership, which seeks to maintain an exploitative and oppressive system, seeks to maintain a system where society is divided into an oppressor and an oppressed class, into a small minority who exploit and the vast majority of people who are exploited and kept ignorant as to what's really going on in the world and what the real essence of the relationships in society are.

One of the things that gets at this difference very sharply is that bourgeois leaders will tell you that there is no other way to organize the world, and the bourgeoisie spends a tremendous amount of time and effort and propaganda telling people over and over again, from many different angles, through many different spheres, that a world without these things — without exploitation, without oppression, without war, without the degradation of women, without the oppression of one part of society by another — is just *impossible* and it cannot possibly be realized. (The revisionists are a peculiar kind of bourgeois group — they claim to believe that socialist transformation and ultimately communism are possible, but their practice, and even the view of socialism and communism they propagate, actually uphold and serve bourgeois and not communist relations; and their methods of leadership are fundamentally the same as classical representatives and leaders of the bourgeoisie.) So bourgeois methods of leadership and the way bourgeois leaders relate to the masses and seek to lead them (that is, to impose their rule over them) flows from all that. It flows from their view of the world and what's possible and desirable.

And so, in a fundamentally different and opposite sense, does a proletarian leadership stem from a view of the world and what's both desirable and possible. A proletarian viewpoint and a proletarian program says that it's possible and necessary to uproot and overthrow and eliminate all those things and bring into being a world without them; it sees that as not only desirable but possible and indeed necessary to

move beyond the horrors of the present-day world and the horrors that are on its horizon. The methods of leadership of proletarian revolutionaries, of a proletarian vanguard, flow from that and correspond to that. And, once more, they involve, as a very fundamental principle, the recognition that it is only through the conscious activism and conscious revolutionary struggle of the masses that this is possible. In other words, you can have a coup but you can't have a revolution if it only involves a minority of "enlightened revolutionaries." There've been many coups like that in the world but there cannot be revolutions like that. And it's necessary, in carrying out revolution and carrying it through to the goal of communism, to uproot and overcome the division of labor in society between such things as intellectual labor and manual labor, between people who have the time, the luxury, or the opportunity to take up theory and go into the scientific realm and the artistic realm and these other things, and those on the other hand whose life is consumed with laboring simply in order to try to live and who are shut out from these spheres.

People have to understand the question of leadership and the fact that, as has very often happened, revolutionary leadership can be transformed into bourgeois leadership; they have to understand it in terms of this foundation. It's not simply a question, as the old adage (the old bourgeois adage) goes, that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. It's not so simple as that. It's that there are underlying contradictions that have to be overcome, and the process of overcoming them is a difficult and protracted process and it can't be done overnight or all at one stroke.

Furthermore, we should add into the picture that the ruling classes, where they are overthrown, put up *increased* resistance, desperate resistance, to get back what they lost and to reestablish their system and its oppressive relations, and while they still exist in the world these forces will seek to snuff out, or to turn into new oppressive regimes, revolutionary regimes that do arise. It's been the experience so far that revolutions haven't been able to succeed in the whole world all at once — it's very unlikely that this could happen — and they haven't been able to succeed even in large parts of the world all at one time. Even *that's* not very likely. So you find that revolutionary regimes, revolutionary states, come into existence surrounded by imperialists who seek to suffocate and destroy them and to work through agents and people they corrupt and buy to subvert these regimes from within at the same time. All this combines to make it very difficult — and a complex and very intense process — to uproot the base of the old society and carry forward the revolution and to spread and develop it throughout the world even at the same time as you're transforming that part of the world that you have liberated at any given time.

This is what underlies the problem that people correctly perceive — that revolutionary leadership often turns into its opposite. Often this leadership becomes new oppressors over the people and does adopt the method of the bourgeoisie and does adopt the stand of seeking to impose its will and its interests over the masses, a will and interests which become

increasingly divorced from and opposed to the interests of the masses and the fundamental task of abolishing exploitative and oppressive relations and class divisions in society.

I'm not saying all this to paint a hopeless picture or to say that the revolutionaries, the revolutionary vanguard and the revolutionary masses, are helpless in the face of this. In fact, there has been tremendous *positive* experience, for example, in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China, a revolution under the conditions of socialism to further transform society and to further uproot the soil that gives rise to oppressors, to exploiters, and to the relations on which they thrive. *But that experience also shows that there can be setbacks, as there have been in China, even with something as great and as earthshaking as the Cultural Revolution. And it shows that the nature of the process of advancing society to the stage of communism is going to be very complex and marked by very intense struggle, particularly at certain crucial points along the way. It's not going to be a straight line forward.*

All this underlies the problems involved with leadership. But it doesn't wipe out the difference between revolutionary leadership and bourgeois leadership; in fact, that essential difference, flowing from the different objectives and goals that they have, the different kind of world that they see as desirable and necessary, is a very important standard for people to hold up to judge leadership. The differences that I've described in terms of methods of leadership and what they reflect about political program and basic outlook — that's a very important standard by which to judge and by which to struggle with leadership. And it's very important that masses of people *do struggle with leadership to keep it on a revolutionary road and to root out and to overthrow those within that leadership who turn into new exploiters or new oppressors and seek to turn the revolution around and turn things back to the old way.*

In other words, to put it simply, in evaluating different leadership and different people who put themselves forward as leaders and the different programs that they put forward as the thing that masses of people should take up as their own, people should evaluate what interests do these programs and these leaders really represent, serve, and fight for. What kind of world do they present as necessary and desirable? And very specifically, do they say that the present system can and must be overthrown and that the present world must be radically transformed — and will their line and program really lead to this? It's necessary for people to dig down and evaluate what people who put themselves forward as leaders are actually saying about these very fundamental questions, and what the programs they put forward for people to follow will actually lead to in terms of these very basic questions.

Q: Well, despite what you say about the fundamental differences between bourgeois leadership and revolutionary leadership, there are some people, anarchists and so forth, who would still argue that we'd all be better off without any leadership at all. In your book *For a Harvest of Dragons*, and again in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*, you state that the Russian Revolution and all other proletarian revolutions have proved Lenin's point about how only a highly centralized and organized leadership body assuming a vanguard revolutionary role can give full play to the conscious role and initiative of the masses in revolutionary struggle. And you added rather bluntly that, conversely, "nowhere has such a revolution been made without such a party, and nowhere has the lack of such a party contributed to unleashing the initiative of the masses of the oppressed in conscious revolutionary struggle." And, I must say, you do seem to have a point there! But again, what about the fact, which you've referred to, that history is also full of examples of revolutionary leaders and organizations turning into something quite different, using their status and influence to discourage challenge and criticism and the taking of new initiatives by the masses of people? You yourself have warned people of this possibility. So this is something which does seem like a very contradictory situation. Isn't it possible to get beyond all this?

A: It is possible to get beyond it in the long run, and it is the goal of communist revolution to eventually get to the point where the underlying division of labor that I've spoken of is finally overcome and moved beyond, and where the need for leadership and a vanguard party, in the way that I've spoken about, no longer exists and in fact at that point would actually be an obstacle to the further advance of society and to the further unleashing of people to consciously transform the world. So that is a long-term goal, to get beyond the point where leaders are necessary.

But the irony, if you will, and the contradiction that you've spoken to is that, in order to get to the point where vanguard leadership is no longer necessary, it's necessary to have vanguard leadership of the struggle to arrive at that point. So that is a very sharp contradiction, and it could be considered ironic but it's nonetheless true. And because it's such a sharp contradiction we have seen the kind of things that you have talked about, where leadership has time and again turned from being revolutionary to becoming conservative, to becoming counterrevolutionary, and to becoming in fact the core of a new exploiting class over the masses of people whom it's supposed to be leading in revolutionary struggle to transform the social conditions and relations. This is a problem. It's a problem which, as I've stressed before, we can't just *wish away*, nor can we get rid of it by saying let's not have any leaders. Because if we don't have any leaders, as I've pointed out, we're not going to have revolution, we're not going to be able to overthrow the existing system and, furthermore, if we decide, well, okay, after we've over-

thrown the existing system then we'll abolish leadership, then the existing system will be brought right back to power anyway. Even after the old system is overthrown there will still be a whole struggle to transform and uproot the conditions that provide the *soil* for that system to arise anew, and that struggle can't be carried out without leadership. So all throughout the transition *worldwide* to communism we're going to have this contradiction and we're going to have to find the ways and sum up experience positive and negative to learn better how to deal with it.

And, as I've pointed out, they had a Cultural Revolution in China which went a long way and in fact was the highest pinnacle that the international proletariat has reached in terms of dealing with this problem and in terms of carrying forward the revolutionary struggle generally. But it wasn't enough. Mao, who led that Cultural Revolution, said it wouldn't be enough by itself, and he was right. That was prophetic. The forces that were pushed back by that Cultural Revolution regrouped and shortly after Mao's death were able to make a seizure of power from within the party itself, using the apparatus and the name of the party and still maintaining — in a very shoddy way and with a very shoddy and very transparent disguise, but nonetheless still maintaining — that they were communists and seeking the ultimate goal of communism. So things are complex, they're difficult, they're full of twists and turns, but there's no way to get away from this contradiction, and as I said, we're going to have to learn through positive and negative experience how to handle it better and how to push forward.

Now if, through the whole swirl of events in this period and the gathering together and exploding of the contradictions that are before us, the international proletariat is able to win power in large parts of the world, perhaps we'll be able to reach a new plateau which hasn't previously been reached by the international proletariat. Perhaps we'll be on a new basis where we'll have a significant part of the world, where the imperialists will be on the defensive, rather than us. Perhaps the forces who represent the old world and the old way will be on the *defensive* rather than the situation that so far existed even where revolutions have been successful — a situation where in a strategic sense the revolutionary regimes are still on the defensive and surrounded by hostile reactionary and imperialist powers. I don't know. That would certainly be a new qualitative leap for the proletarian revolution if we could emerge out of all this with the upper hand in the world. It's certainly something to strive for, and how well we do in this round, so to speak, will have a great deal to do with what conditions the struggle toward communism is carried forward under. But, with all that, it's still not going to be possible to either eliminate in the short run the need for leadership, or on the other hand to eliminate the tendency and the pull on leadership to become new oppressors and exploiters. That contradiction and the tension there and the struggle between those two tendencies is going to be with us all the way through the transition to communism worldwide. And it's one more thing that we can't run and hide from, that we have to face up to and find the ways to break through on.

And once that's all been faced up to, and once we've said all that, it still remains true that there's a fundamental difference between proletarian leadership and bourgeois leadership, that it's possible to distinguish the one from the other, that it's very necessary to go up against and overthrow bourgeois leadership, that is, bourgeois rule, that it's necessary to support and to rally around the banner raised by revolutionary leadership. If your goal really is to get rid of oppressive and exploitive relations in society and thoroughly uproot them, then it's necessary to have leadership. And it's necessary, more specifically, to have the leadership of a proletarian vanguard. So, with all the problems involved, we can very clearly and firmly say that proletarian leadership, a proletarian vanguard, is far from a bad thing — it's a very good thing.

But a distinctive thing about proletarian leadership is, in contrast to bourgeois leadership, that it's not an exclusive and restrictive club; it has to be constantly strengthened and invigorated by fresh forces drawn in from the proletariat and emerging through its conscious revolutionary struggle. And all those who unite with and join in the goals and objectives of the revolutionary proletariat, wherever they come from in society, should come forward, join, and become part of and strengthen that proletarian vanguard, which in the U.S. means the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA.

Q: Getting back to the more personal aspect if I may — how *have* you managed not to sell out, or burn out, over so many years in the struggle? What do you think sustains you?

A: You know, it's very interesting, back in the mid-'60s when I was first getting involved in radical politics I remember one of these reformist-socialists telling me: "Well, you know, people like you who are full of radical fire at this age are the people who *burn out* the quickest. You won't be around very long because I've seen a lot of you come and go and you're very, very extremely radical for a short time and then you're burned out." I've always remembered that because it was very striking to me that the equation being made was that to be an opponent of the system, in some form or other, over the long term meant you had to be an evolutionist and not a revolutionist, and that if you were a revolutionist and didn't seek merely to reform the system or something like that then you were bound to burn out.

Well, first of all I would say that my experience, and I think experience generally, has shown that it's the people who try to make some sort of *radical reform* in the system who, far more than revolutionaries, burn out or become irrelevant or both.

But as for the question of what has sustained me over this period of time, I'm not sure I can give a complete answer

to that. I know that what propelled me into being a revolutionary in the first place was seeing the injustices in U.S. society and in the world, particularly the oppression of Black people, the Vietnam War, things like that, which were sharp questions at the time when I was forming my view of the world, my political outlook. And I came to see through experience and through study and taking up Marxist theory that these things were rooted in the very nature of the system that dominates the world and the very nature of a society divided into classes and that they could only be eliminated through a communist revolution. And ever since that time I've always tried to do everything I could to contribute to that revolution. And I've never been shaken in the belief that that's both what's necessary and also that that's possible.

To put it another way, there's nothing about the present order of things in the world that's tolerable to me. It's completely intolerable. I can't stand it. And I don't want to make my peace with it, I don't want to find a way to make it within that world, or to try to make it. I don't want to be part of the established order. I don't want to turn a blind eye and pretend I don't see what I do see. I don't want to stand on top of the rubble of broken bodies and the suffering and destruction that this system brings down on people and never look down and see what I'm standing on while I'm stuffing my face. That doesn't hold any attraction for me; I'm repulsed by the idea of that and I just have no interest in doing that.

These are the kinds of things that continue to sustain me, as I think about it — that on the one hand the world as it is to me is *intolerable* and, you know, I feel an urgent burning desire to see everything *radically changed* and I also continue to believe that it's possible. And as I've said, ever since I've come to understand that communist revolution holds the way to do this, that's sustained me. That understanding has sustained me as well and I continued to do everything I could to contribute to that.

But I also want to stress that it's not just a question of being "sustained," it's a question of continuing to advance and repeatedly making necessary leaps and ruptures in your understanding and in your stand and your actions. And it's definitely not just a question of revolutionary will — certainly not in some existential, look-inside-yourself-for-the-daring-and-determination sense — but a question of dealing with, striving to change, the objective world and drawing strength from the advances that are made and the advanced forces that come forward. I know that, besides the other things I've touched on, what has been of decisive importance in helping me to be sustained — that is, to continue to advance — have been the revolutionary upsurges and revolutionary uprisings of oppressed masses, which have repeatedly arisen, often breaking through seemingly very suffocating situations; and also the advances that have been made among the conscious organized revolutionary forces, the international communist movement, many of which have also been made in the face of adversity and setback and on the basis of summing up the causes of such setback and difficulty. So it's all of this that has kept me going forward, that has made me feel compelled to go forward.

Q: But, objectively, there have been a lot of ups and downs in the revolutionary struggles in the U.S. and around the world, and you yourself have encountered some serious political repression, including attempts to incarcerate you, direct threats on your life, being forced to go into exile at a time when not a single government in the world is inclined to be supportive of your views and activities. To put it bluntly: don't you ever get discouraged?

A: Certainly there are *things* that I've found very discouraging. For example, 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 the 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.

And so, yes, particular things have been very *(laughs)* discouraging but I've never become discouraged in an *overall sense*, I've never become discouraged in the sense of wanting to give up on the whole thing, give up on the goal of proletarian revolution, because I've never been convinced that it isn't necessary and I've never been convinced that it isn't possible. So it comes back to that. And, again, the world as it is, its relations, its conditions, its dominant values, are thoroughly abhorrent to me. You know, it's like Eddy Grant telling 'em "deep in my heart I abhor you" *(laughs)*. That's the way I feel about it and that feeling is, if anything, *deeper than it was* when that guy told me I'd burn out. You know, it's much deeper now even. So that is a big part anyway of what sustains me.

Now you mentioned another thing that has something to do with all this — the question of trying never to get stale and always opening up new angles. I think this is also important. One of the things that I've learned more about is the necessity to go back to things that you're pretty sure of and at various times look at them anew, look at them from different angles and read what somebody who doesn't agree with you on that has to say about it and be willing to consider what they have to say, even if it's uncomfortable. I'm not going to pretend that I find it easy to be criticized or that I find it easy to have my weaknesses and shortcomings, or the weaknesses and shortcomings of what I hold very firmly as basic beliefs — that I find it easy to have those criticized or punctured. I don't. I fight very hard for what I think is correct and I don't give in easily on things I fight about. But I have learned more and more the importance of, at the same time, being willing to recognize when and where you *are* wrong. Or when and where *parts* of what you hold very firmly are wrong or have to be thought about again at the least. I think this is very important, and I try to make it part of my basic method to go back and look at old questions or old problems anew and

from a different angle, and particularly from the angle of people who don't agree with the views I hold on it.

I also try at any given time to read different things that don't have anything to do with the main problems that I'm considering directly. In other words, if I'm dealing with certain political problems I try to read something in a whole different realm which doesn't directly have any bearing on that — just to keep my mind flexible, if you want to put it that way, and to keep myself from getting into a rut and bogged down in routine and only thinking the same thoughts and considering the same questions over and over again and not getting into anything fresh and new. When I am focusing on a particular problem, when a particular question assumes major importance at a particular time, I devote a great deal of attention to it, in great detail: I try to go into it, over and over, from many different angles, studying it from different perspectives and "turning it over in my mind" in different ways. But even then I try to take the time and make a special effort to do that other thing of reading and thinking about other questions not at all directly related to the particular problem I'm focusing so much attention on, in such detail. Maybe this is one aspect, one way I've come to, of applying the principle that Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought is a telescope and a microscope.

So these are some of the ways that I try to avoid getting stale and to bring up new angles on things, but I think what underlies all this and the reason that I am consciously trying to find new ways to get at things is that I'm driven by an *impatience* with the world as it is. I'm driven by this overwhelming sense that it's *intolerable*, that it has to be changed, and that the pace of change has to be accelerated — and particularly in the present context the urgency of that is raised all the higher, and I feel that urgency all the more deeply. So these are a number of the things that have kept me going and which I believe have kept me from getting stale.

So I think that if I were to try to give an answer as to why I haven't gotten burned out, these are at least some important elements of the answer. And of course this can be misused and it may sound corny, but for me it's also been very true that it's always been important, whatever my circumstances, to try to find the ways to be in contact with and to be learning from particularly those sections of the people in society for whom life is *most* intolerable and who are most desirous of a radical change, and not to be completely cut off from them no matter how difficult my circumstances might be.

Now obviously since being forced into exile those conditions have been difficult, and it's been difficult to find the ways to do this and a lot of it has to be *indirect*. In other words, I rely a lot on reports based on the work of the party working in the U.S. among the oppressed masses and the new things that are emerging, the ideas they're raising and the questions they're bringing up in response to the revolutionary work that we're doing. And of course I rely on our party's newspaper, the *Revolutionary Worker*, as well as other publications, for this and more. This is a lot of help in sustaining me. And no matter where you are, there are oppressed masses and it is possible to find the ways to be in contact with

them — not in some ridiculous or condescending sense of rubbing shoulders, but to actually be learning from the new things that are arising and to be drawing from the whole living sense among the oppressed that the world as it is, and the systems as they rule people, are the source of suffering and torment and represent an intolerable situation that has to be somehow radically and dramatically changed. And this too is a crucial element in sustaining me.

Q: I hope you don't find this next question too personal, but I'd like to try to get a little more insight into some of your own particularities, into the basis for what could be considered a rather intriguing persona. I'm not quite sure how to formulate this. You've demonstrated through your work that you're a very developed theoretician, certainly one of the most developed theoreticians of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought, in the world today. But, how shall I put this? You're certainly not a stuffed-shirt! One would have to say that you've got style! In fact you're known for that, for a certain outlandish and unorthodox style, which comes through in your writings as well as in other ways. And you've also got a reputation in some circles for having a sharp and biting sense of humor. Are there particular life experiences which you draw on to maintain your "style," to keep from getting stale and so forth?

I know a little about your history and I know that before the RCP and before the RU you were involved in the Free Speech Movement and the antiwar movement, that you were a leading figure within SDS in its most radical period, and that you were closely associated with the Black Panther Party from its very earliest days. But looking back even further I know that you came out of a white middle-class intellectual family, but that when you were at school at Berkeley High your social ties were mainly with the Black youth with whom you played sports, sang, socialized, and so on. This must have been somewhat unusual in the '50s, even in Berkeley! Did this affect you a lot?

A: Yes, I would say that it affected me very profoundly. I would say that in a very real and important sense I am a product of Berkeley. And more than that a product of the U.S. and the world and what was going on with it and the changes that it was going through in the '60s in particular. This is what largely has shaped and molded me the way I am in many different ways.

What I mean though, in particular, by saying I think I'm a product of Berkeley, is that Berkeley, particularly in the time I was growing up there, was characterized by a sort of unusual combination: on the one hand being a university

city with an intellectual community and an intellectual environment, which I was part of; and on the other hand, having a significant Black population and a ghetto, and the strong influence of that also on the life of the city and the life of the area. This was reflected in the high school that I went to, because Berkeley at that time in housing and in education up through the junior high school level was very segregated, so that the area that I lived in, coming from a middle-class white family, was all white or almost all white, and the schools I went to in grammar school and junior high school were virtually all white as well. And then when you went to high school there was only one public high school in the whole city, so it was a dramatic change. All of a sudden you were thrown into a situation where the school was half white and half Black, more or less.

And this introduced me to all kinds of new things at a time when all kinds of things were being shaken up in this society — the late '50s and going into the early '60s when the protests and rebellions of Black people were beginning to really take off and when this was finding expression in many different arenas, including the cultural arena. And I was drawn to this and drawn into it. I remember one time someone asking me, when I was in high school, someone who was a liberal at the time, saying to me, "I can see why you like some Black athletes and some Black music and things like this, but why do you like *only* Black athletes and Black music and so on?" Now, this was a *little bit* of an exaggeration on his part, but it spoke to something real about my basic orientation. These were the things I was drawn to. And so in a certain way, the people that mainly — not exclusively but mainly — were my friends in high school were the Black people that I played sports with, and I did, it's true, form a singing group together with a number of Black guys. We (*laughs*) never had a million-seller, we never even recorded a record, but we had a lot of fun and it introduced me, obviously, to a lot of experiences I wouldn't have had otherwise.

All this had a *very profound impact on me* and it was a kind of time when a lot of things were being shaken up, you were being confronted with new things and you were being confronted with challenges, and a big question was where you were going stand on things — *lines were being drawn* very sharply. I found all this not only something that was sharply confronting me, but I found it all very liberating — something was being shaken loose. And I found that a great source of inspiration and joy and I readily joined in with it.

But at the same time there was still a gulf that separated me from the Black people that I was friends with and hanging around with. I mean, we went to each other's houses, we stayed at each other's house, all those sorts of things, we sang together in different places; we were genuinely friends. But at the same time, I lived in one kind of neighborhood and they lived in another, and that wasn't eliminated by the friendship and the closeness that we had. So this had a profound impact on me, but there was still a gulf. And I know when I went on to the university I felt this contradiction within me, sort of the contradiction of what Berkeley is, to continue that metaphor: on the one hand, the intellectual at-

mosphere of Berkeley, and particularly the protest movements that were beginning to develop and some of the cultural expressions of that, which I found exciting and exhilarating; on the other hand, it also left me with a certain amount of emptiness and there were some aspects of it that weren't fulfilling to me, and I kept finding myself drawn to Black cultural expressions, including in sports. I was drawn back to my old high school and back to the playgrounds that I played basketball in as a high school student. I was much more interested in that than I was in sports at the university, which was frankly just too white and too bland for me. And that was true of a lot of the culture there generally.

So, again, this was an acute contradiction and once again, as things further developed, I was confronted with choices. For example, when I first met Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, who were the co-founders of the Black Panther Party, I didn't meet them in a directly political context. I met them before they actually founded the Black Panther Party, and I met them *not* as a representative of a political group or something, and I wasn't talking to them as representative of another political group, but I met them through indirect means. One night I went to a rec center and was playing basketball and afterward I hung out with a couple of Black guys I knew and ended up going home with one of them and staying up till two in the morning talking about the Congo and a number of other questions, both in the U.S. and internationally, that were hot, important issues at that time. And then a few weeks later one of these guys introduced me to Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, and then the next time I saw them was when I was driving a car late in the night (or early in the morning) with another Black friend of mine with whom I hung out a lot, and we gave them a ride somewhere. And I got into talking with them about some of their political views. So later, when they had formed the Black Panther Party and I came into a more directly political relationship with them, there was already something there, previous to that. It wasn't just purely a political relationship, if you understand what I'm trying to say.

But again, new choices and new questions kept posing themselves. I was still a product of Berkeley and of its two aspects, and these were still coexisting in me at that time — sort of the white intellectual, academic side and the side of the expression of Black people and everything that that represents. At one point, after I started working for *Ramparts* magazine, I ran for Berkeley City Council back in, I think, 1967, on sort of a radical reform slate. We actually got about, or I at least got about, 30 percent of the vote. We weren't elected, but we got about 30 percent of the vote. And I remember something very interesting happening after that. Eldridge Cleaver was working at *Ramparts*, and at that time he was a revolutionary and was doing a number of good things. And one good thing that I'll always remember that he did was we were going out to lunch or something, in San Francisco, we were both working at *Ramparts*, and he said to me, well, you know, you were involved in all that reform stuff running for City Council in Berkeley and I don't remember the exact words but basically (*laughs*): That's all

over with now and you got that all out of your system and now you can do something serious like get into revolution with both feet. I sort of did have *one* foot in the revolutionary camp, because I was already a supporter of the Black Panther Party at that stage, even while I had another foot still in the Berkeley reform thing, which has reached full expression with its reformed city councils and so on. And I remember him saying that to me, well now you can put all that sort of stuff behind you and get into revolution with both feet. Which is what I did.

So this gulf or this gap was, through a series of events and through some leaps and struggles, being bridged, and what was being achieved, I think, was a synthesis of these two trends. In other words a synthesis to something that was different than either of them but integrated elements of both — both the intellectual aspect on the one hand and, on the other hand and even more importantly, everything I had learned and everything that had attracted and drawn me forward from out of the whole experience of Black people, which I'd been introduced to and been able to come in contact with in a personal and deep kind of way. More than anything else, it was this experience of Black people and how it influenced me that determined how I viewed the uprisings and revolutionary struggles of oppressed people, not just in the U.S. but internationally as well, and how I viewed political and world events generally, especially in the period when I was first beginning to form solid political views. And more broadly, in turn, it has been the influence on me of the oppressed masses, and especially of their revolutionary uprisings and struggles, that has set the terms of, the framework for the way in which I have developed — including in how I developed as an intellectual and in what ways, toward what ends, I have applied the intellectual training I have got.

So if you want to talk about what *formed* me, it was *all that*. All this had a very profound influence on me, and then again my political formation, if you want to put it that way, was occurring in the context of the Vietnam War, the upsurges of national liberation struggles all around the world, and the Cultural Revolution in China and everything that that represented. So all this is what made its imprint on me and has left its imprint on me in a very profound way and has sort of shaped me politically and in an all-around sense in terms of what I am.

And I think this has a lot to do with shaping or being sort of the basic elements or ingredients of what you referred to as my "style." I've heard our party described — and I think it was made in a complimentary sense — I've heard it described as "intelligent hoodlums." Certainly I've taken that in a complimentary sense, and in the spirit in which I believe it was intended, I believe it's a very apt and good description of our party; and I think, frankly, it's what attracts people of different kinds to our party.

But at the same time, as I said, there's always new questions, new challenges, new crossroads that you come to, and it's interesting in looking back over my own experience — I think in some ways a lot of my views on things, including on cultural matters for example, also carried some of the

weaknesses that spontaneously some of the masses, in particular, in this case, some of the Black masses, have. Let me give a concrete example. At the time that he became a phenomenon, to put it that way, I had a very *negative* view of Jimi Hendrix. And I think my view was very similar to — I know it was similar to the Black people that I knew — and I think it was similar to a lot of Black people's view that Hendrix was, to put it sort of crudely, a Black guy playing for a bunch of white people; and what was he doing hanging around with these hippies, playing this tripped-out psychedelic hippie music! It's actually kind of ironic, because the music that really touched me where I *feel*, the music that I really related to, was rhythm and blues music, which came to be called soul music; and in fact Hendrix had a strong background in this — he incorporated at least aspects of it into what became identified as the Jimi Hendrix thing, musically, in the late '60s — but I didn't see that then. I only saw the fact that he had gone off in a different direction, that he was doing stuff I just took as tripped out — like I said, psychedelic hippie music for acid-head white people. Now, I listened to other music besides rhythm and blues or soul music, I was influenced by and I liked a lot of Bob Dylan and other things like that, but I just couldn't relate to the kinds of things Hendrix was getting into. You know, it's funny, I've talked to people about this before, sometimes when we were kind of goofing, thinking back on the past, on our roots, if you want to put it that way: If you say "Fillmore Auditorium, San Francisco," and ask what it calls to mind, for me it's not the kinds of music Bill Graham was promoting there in the '60s (and into the '70s); for me it's the place, back before that, where people like Hank Ballard and the Midnighters played, and where James Brown and the Famous Flames and the Drifters performed before they got more of a white audience and made it big.

And I had this kind of negative, sort of narrow-nationalist, if you will, reaction to something like Jimi Hendrix. It's only been more recently that I've gone back and looked at that question anew and started reading up on and listening to Hendrix and trying to understand, because obviously there was something that was *radical* and there was a very positive thrust about that. I've done this *partly* to understand what there was about Hendrix that was a *break* with and a challenge to convention and established norms and the powers-that-be and the status quo, and what there was that was new and fresh about it, and what can be learned from that. It's partly to appreciate that better, but even more generally it's to not make that same kind of mistake again — or minimize that kind of mistake — of not recognizing new and fresh things that come up, no doubt in different forms, in the future. To sharpen my ability to recognize those things when they arise in the future — it's for that, as well as to learn more about Hendrix, that I've gone back and gone into this. But since other peoplehipped me to what Hendrix was about, I've been struck by the fact that at the time I had what could be called a kind of narrow-nationalist response to what he was doing.

But I think that's a secondary thing, very definitely — a

negative but a secondary thing to the positive influences that were brought to bear on me. These formative experiences in high school and continuing after that had everything to do with making me a revolutionary and propelling me in the direction of communism — although there's a leap to becoming a communist, which involves taking up a scientific understanding of the world and grasping the theory to go along with the revolutionary impulse that one feels from drawing on and being influenced and shaped by the kind of sources and influences I've discussed.

So in a real sense it's the combination, or the synthesis, of these different elements and influences that has made me the kind of person that I am and shaped my outlook and views and feelings about things. That's the best explanation I can give in answer to that question.

Q: Would you say you are optimistic about the future?

A: Let me answer that by saying I'm a lot more optimistic about the future than I would be if I were an imperialist, because they have to worry about how to deal with the challenge from the rival imperialists, whichever side they're on — the Soviet bloc or the U.S. bloc — they have to worry about all the consequences of everything they're preparing and are driven toward unleashing, including and most especially world war and nuclear devastation. But they also are driven to a frenzy by the *revolutionary upsurges* in various parts of the world and are driven to distraction trying to figure out how to douse these revolutionary fires and suppress the revolutionary energy of the masses that continually bursts forth, now here and now there. They look at such things as the revolutionary uprisings in South Africa or the revolutionary war in Peru with *genuine horror* and, on the other hand, I look at those things as a source of great inspiration and great joy.

So I think the answer to your question is that I'm a lot more optimistic than I would be if I were an imperialist, because I see in those revolutionary events and in those revolutionary struggles the possibility of a far different future for humanity than the present reality that we're faced with and the future that imperialism is preparing and that is impending under the present system. I see the possibility of a future of overthrowing this system and wrenching out of all the madness that's being brought down and that's being prepared a whole different kind of society and a whole different world for humanity.

Wrap-up by interviewer:

Well, we've ranged over quite a few topics and you've certainly provided some challenging insights. There's lots more we could talk about but I know we've got a time limit. People who are hungry for more will no doubt gain a lot by studying some of your many books and other writings which are distributed through Revolution Books in the U.S. and which are also available for distribution abroad. I also understand that plans are also in the works to make your latest book, A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror? available on cassette tapes in English and Spanish.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank you for your time, and I'd also like to say that I am very aware that the pressure is still on, that continual vigilance must be exerted to prevent harm from coming to you. And this fact has been particularly underscored since the denial of political refugee status to you in France. And I think I speak for your followers and supporters, as well as for many who may not agree with you but insist on the opportunity to hear your views, in saying that, while there are certainly those who want to see your voice stifled, there are many others in the U.S. and in other countries as well who are determined that they will not succeed. So let me conclude by wishing you well, and again, thank you.

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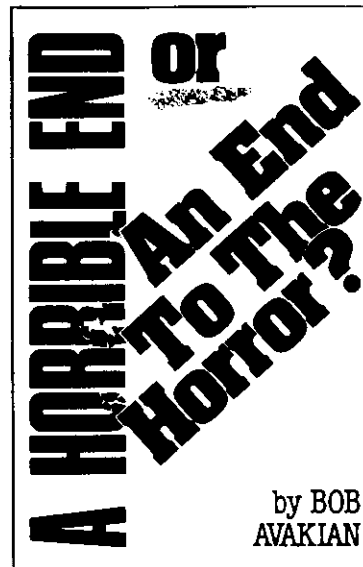
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OCCASION OF THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF
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