

IS COMMUNIST UNITY BASED UPON EVOLUTION OR SYNTHESIS?

K. Abraham – March 8, 2011

In the current polemics regarding the notion of communist unity, it is necessary to first present a history of the viewpoint of our comrades in the Communist Party of Iran (M-L-M), in order to determine whether these comrades utilize the teachings of scientific communism as the starting point for uniting communists OR whether they have simply selectively chosen only those points of various theoretical lines which fit their viewpoint as to what constitutes the sole criterion for uniting communists.

After the rise to power of modern revisionism in the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party and the reversal of course by that Party and the Soviet state, resulting in the transformation of the U.S.S.R into a social-imperialist country, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rejected the revisionist line of the Soviet Communist Party and criticized the practice of socialist construction in the Soviet Union that had deviated from proletarian political leadership. The CCP decided to proceed with the Cultural Revolution, emphasizing the continuation of the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie during socialist construction, as a means to eliminate the revisionist leaders from power.

Consistent with this conclusion that the primary threat to be faced by Party leadership during that historic period was Right revisionism, Mao Tse-Tung, along with the revolutionary faction of the CCP, temporarily joined forces with the Centrist and Left factions to successfully advance the struggle against Right revisionists. This complicated ideological struggle within the CCP came to expose the Left faction's ignorance of the correct analysis of contradictions within the Party; but nevertheless, the Centrist and Right factions were eliminated in a single stroke. It was not at all easy for non-Chinese communists such as we to recognize the errors of each of the factions.

Between 1969 and 1970 at the inception of the "Revolutionary Communist Organization" of Iran, the founding comrades of this organization wished to join the "Revolutionary Organization" through a conditional group membership. The "Revolutionary Organization" did not accept this conditional "group" membership proposal, rejecting its factionalist viewpoint and pointing out that the sole form of membership in a communist organization is individual membership.

During the 1960s, Iran's Ranjbaran Party studied the implementation of the Cultural Revolution under Mao Tse-Tung and its success in eliminating revisionist influence within Party leadership, and concluded that it was a generally correct line, consistent with the continuation of the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat – and therefore defended it. During that time, the discussion between the leaders of the "Revolutionary Organization" and the comrades of the Communist League continued, but without any results. Communist League leaders held that unity between the two organizations must be contingent upon unconditional defense of the Gang of Four. They ignored our principled support of the Cultural Revolution and of continuous revolution during socialist construction as the means to prevent the return of the bourgeoisie to power; these comrades sought to restrict the essence of the Cultural Revolution to the Gang of Four. These Iranian communists, who were still in the preparatory phase of the formation of the Communist Party, which required organizing communists and forging a close bond between the Party and the masses of the workers and laborers, nonetheless were not preoccupied with the advancement of socialism in Iran! The position of these comrades was similar to a view

criticized by Mao in 1942 in stating: “For them the primary need is not ‘more flowers on the brocade of our shirts’ but ‘more heating fuel in snowy weather’.” (Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art, 1942 Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung, Vol. III, pg. 83)

In this same manner, during the first half of the 1980’s the divisions among communists intensified. The newly founded Communist Party of Iran was being taken over by a network of Trotskyists, whose primary concern was to reject communist history as it transpired after Lenin’s death in the Soviet Union, as well as in China.

In the decade of the 1990s and the first few years of the 21st Century, the comrades of the Communist League were mainly preoccupied with promoting Maoism and urgently calling for communists to join the International Revolutionary Movement. In order to join, one had to unconditionally accept Maoism as the pinnacle of revolutionary theory. Our party, Ranjbaran, while not calling itself “Maoist”, considered Mao’s thought to be part of the development of the scientific theory of communism. However, the comrades of the Communist League subsequently changed their name to “Communist Party (M-L-M)” under the slogan of “The essence of Mao has been misunderstood. Emphasis must be placed upon the People’s protracted struggle and upon the necessity of studying the Gang of Four’s view of socialism.” By copying the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP-USA)’s line, these comrades again refused to focus their efforts on the unity in theory and action which could eventually lead to organizational unity within the Iranian Revolution based upon Iran’s specific social conditions and class structure – and in so doing, they hobbled our cause. It has been nearly ten years since we posed our questions to them regarding revolutionary socialism in Iran – and they have yet to respond (although it is interesting to note that they have occasionally adopted our suggested term of “scientific communism” as the revolutionary proletarian theory to replace “Marxism-Leninism-Maoism”; an example of this is Bob Avakian’s statement that ‘Marxism, scientific communism, does not.... project any historicism...’).

Naturally, by calling themselves the “Communist Party (M-L-M)”, these comrades have virtually forgotten about the goal of unification of Iranian communists, and they merely pay lip service to the serious consideration of other communist viewpoints. Their activities and viewpoint have been borrowed wholesale from the RCP-USA. In addition, they tend to push other communists to accept the “new synthesis” line put forward by Bob Avakian.

Now, having considered the brief historical introduction above, which attests to the longstanding self-absorption of these comrades, we proceed to evaluate this “new synthesis” promoted by the RCP-USA and accepted by Iran’s Communist Party (M-L-M). We shall also pose a number of questions to these comrades, in the hope that, at least this time, they will respond. These issues cannot be resolved by their silence.

In dictionaries, synthesis has been defined as follows:

The composition or combination of parts so as to form a whole;

Synthesis is the opposite of analysis

The production of a substance by the union of chemical elements, groups, or simpler compounds or by the degeneration of a complex compound

Deductive reasoning from general to particular or from cause to effect

From the point of view of philosophy: deductive reasoning; the combination of thesis and antithesis in Hegelian dialectics into a new higher stage of truth

In mathematics: method of refutation in testing a known truth via a series of deductions

And....

From all of the above, we can conclude that synthesis is a trend in the composition of things or ideas that necessarily does not contain the characteristics of their component parts, but rather has an independent position; perhaps it is even in contradiction with its primordial components. On that basis, it cannot be a thing or an idea subject to dialectical growth.

Now let's pay attention to the following definitions of "growth"

Growth as dynamic development. Also, a change, or evolution, or germination – such as the sprawl of an urban region;

Growth is also a phenomenon, which implies that people are able to control their future city. It is a phenomenon that allows people to recognize that they can improve their material living conditions. In the modern world, growth can also be applicable in biology and other sciences;

Growth as the development of the organic substance, as in a gradual act of expansion and making growth possible;

To reach or to bring to a more advanced subsequent stage or, to become more widespread;

To develop or being a cause of a gradual development;

To breed, or to engender;

And...

From all of these definitions we can rationally draw the conclusion that to develop a thing or an idea requires more than simply aggregating details of the thing/idea or clarifying certain dimensions of the thing/idea in a new context.

Based on the above facts, we can see that both the precise sciences and the social sciences have potential for growth. New experimental uses of things and ideas contribute to the development of our sciences, and therefore "synthesis" is not an applicable term here. In the precise sciences, "new" science does not typically negate the "old" science. Synthesis does not come into existence via negation, nor does it grow out of material proof. Therefore, the leading comrades of the Communist Party of Iran (M-L-M) and the RCP-USA must clarify the origin of their claims – among them:

From our American comrades: "For the past 30 years, Bob Avakian has not only secured our leadership in its totality but, he continued to deepen scientific analysis from the experience of the international communist movement and the strategic approach to the communist revolution. The result of this effort has been the emergence of a new synthesis, new meaning, and the greater development of the theoretical framework for the advancement of this revolution."

From our Iranian comrades: "The new synthesis is a new ideological weapon for explaining this reality and its changes. The first endeavor of our class for changing the world is to change a part of today's world. Today's world is carrying that along. Our actions became part of History. Consequently, we must grasp it in a more scientific way and more profoundly than ever before in order to explain it. The new synthesis involves the main elements and the main indicators of our science – such as historical materialism, dialectics, philosophy, the science of ideology, class, party, the state, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the question of leadership, the strategic position of the proletariat, and strata and classes within society. All of these are central terms with which the new synthesis must deal."(M. Partou, Haghghat #52

In the above two claims, synthesis has been purported to be the further development of the theoretical framework. Whereas, the synthesis of scientific communism, based on its definition, means that its negation resides at a higher stage of rational and scientific analysis!

2 – The development of the science of human society is the result of a summation of the existence of classes and strata, of different groups of people in different societies which exist at different economic, political, social, philosophical stages, levels of religious development....etc.; the struggles of the conflicting classes during the centuries and the epochs; the development of science and technology to address the laws of existence; the development of production and its effect on the individual's share in production and finally, the action and reaction of billions of people in a continuous manner – which grow and develop and which express the most universal laws of the development of human society at every stage of its evolution.

The science of class struggle necessarily does not admit the exactitude of the precise sciences (mathematics and physics), which deal with far fewer dynamic variables. For this reason, except in general instances, the determination of the development of societies based on the assessment of the mode of production / class struggles and the presentation of the main characteristics of changes and developments which result from them; in other cases this must be specifically analyzed in practice in each country, through each implementation of policy, in each organization or work method. For instance, the revolution in Russia took place via an urban uprising, while in China it was via a protracted people's war. Therefore, violent revolution is the common, general and correct line for both revolutions. However, the manner of its implementation from one country to another, due to material conditions, is different. The resolution of general questions such as the goal of the revolution, revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces and classes, the leading force of the revolution, the main force of the revolution and the counterrevolution, must take place within a concrete analysis based upon the stage of each revolution in each country. Note that these questions are not necessarily alike in each country. The study of the class struggle in a socialist society, created out of a victorious revolution in an imperialist country, and that of the class struggle in a socialist society emerging in a peripheral country, will show that except in their general guidelines, these are not necessarily homogeneous in their components.

What we recognize from the science of class struggle is that there are some general laws which are verifiably applicable everywhere; for the remaining cases, we are faced with distinct laws of class struggle specific to each country. For this reason we say that scientific communism was founded by Marx and Engels and then further developed by Lenin and Mao Tse-Tung (taking into consideration the revolutions in each of their countries, within the context of international questions posed during their time).

Internationally, this is the most general law is that of class struggle. There have been communists who correctly posed some questions regarding class struggle, but they failed to develop and advance scientific communism as to the basic question of international revolution. That being the case, even for those who merely repeated the errors in the work of previous proletarian leaders, such activities cannot serve as a substitute for the development of the science of revolution, nor can a simple critique of these activities substitute for the development of scientific communism.

For instance, Engels's use of Hegel's one-dimensional formula of "thesis – anti-thesis – synthesis" to explain the transition from primitive communism to class society to advanced communism was incorrect, since the law of contradiction is the intrinsic law of phenomena, the basic law of dialectics. The materialist dialectics of Marx and Engels negated the idealist

dialectics of Hegel, in order to explain the material universe and human society in vivid, understandable terms. If one considers the entirety of Marx's and Engels's dialectical materialist analyses, once can see that the error of determinism did not seriously harm the class struggle of the workers and laborers of the world, nor has it been the cause of any defeats in that struggle.

For another example, their prediction that future revolutions would occur in a few advanced European capitalist countries, taking into account the objective changes resulting from the transition of capitalism to imperialism, turned out to be incorrect. Instead, the revolutions took place in relatively backward countries, among the weaker links of the capitalist chain [per Lenin], where the principal world contradictions were concentrated. But now, considering the expanding globalization of capital, this prediction has regained its stature within the countries of the European Union; it is more likely that the proletarian revolution will advance through the cooperation between movements within member countries. Here again, however, the scientific communism formulated by Marx and Engels cannot be classified as a "synthesis", simply because here and there we find incorrect or inaccurate points in their line!

By the same token, Lenin's criticism of the Second Congress of the International, to the effect that the "International" had become "Russian", cannot be classified as the negation of the International nor seen as a "synthesis".

The scope of these criticisms can be extended to the incorrect analyses, policies and activities of the Soviet Communist Party after Lenin's death as well as to the CCP. But again, these criticisms cannot be classified as "theoretical synthesis", nor can we call them "scientific communism"!

3 – In advancing the science of class struggle, as with the precise sciences, the criterion for validity of a theory or policy is found in revolutionary practice. And the test results can be seen in the response of the working masses in advancing policies, leadership, organization, and work methods according to distinct criteria at any given point in history. This scientific viewpoint holds that truth is relative; but the search for truth in the social arena is not solely contingent upon claims. Any claim must demonstrate its validity in practice. It is a tenet of this scientific viewpoint that in class society, individuals encounter phenomena on the basis of their social status – whether as exploiter / oppressor or exploited / oppressed – not as passive isolated subjects. That is the only means to effectively discuss truth in a scientific manner.

In scientific research, especially in the precise sciences, even non-materialists must function in this manner, for in a laboratory, idealism will get you nowhere. But laboratory conditions cannot be replicated universally. When it comes to the problems of class struggle in a specific society, the conflicting classes have their own perceptions of reality, which are not necessarily scientific. For that reason, it can be said that all those people who struggle against the oppression of the ruling class, at any stage of history, are more correct than others. A simple worker, who may not yet have any proletarian consciousness, still understands that he/she is being exploited; yet his/her foreman may not think in the same way, and fails to perceive the exploitation. Consequently, in encountering various questions of class struggle within a given society, at the limit of individual perception, the relative truth belongs to those classes which would advance the struggle in the development of history "from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom". There are no exceptions to this. It may be that a member of the bourgeoisie could more correctly assess the nature of society and class struggle than any given worker. But more broadly, the denial of the reality of class struggle and the role of the working class, or of the fact that one class occupies a more correct position than another social class is to fall into

the trap of class neutrality and the “ultra-class” mentality in the pretext of defending “scientific truth”. Have slave owners, feudal lords, or capitalists ever offered a better solution to the problem of creating an egalitarian society, free from oppression and exploitation, than that offered by the slaves, peasants and workers ?! If so, then the truth of relative class does not exist. Marx’s emphasis on the revolutionary nature of the working class [as compared to other classes; reference is made to his Critique of the Gotha Programme] is the result of the working class being at the center of productive work while at the same time directly experiencing exploitation – and thus being capable of a far better understanding of capitalism than the bourgeois oppressor.

4 – In this section, we shall consider the claim of “involvement in the new synthesis” in the context of the foundational questions of scientific communism, and we shall closely study the shortcoming of some of these claims:

As we have quoted above, they write:

The new synthesis involves the main elements and the main indicators of our science, such as historical materialism, dialectics, philosophy, science, ideology, class, party, the state, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the question of leadership, the strategic position of the proletariat, and classes and strata within society. All of the above are central terms with which the new synthesis must deal.

Regarding philosophy, the comrades of the RCP-USA state: “Bob Avakian has argued that ‘the negation of the negation’ can produce a tendency toward ‘ineluctability’- as if something can inevitably succeed something else, via negation, and be transformed to a pre-determined synthesis.”

Lenin in his notes on the “Eleatic School” in Hegel’s Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume I, states that: “dialectics in the proper sense is the study of contradiction in the very essence of the objects.” Likewise, in “On the Question of Dialectics” he defines the law of the unity of opposites as “the recognition (discovery) of the contradictory, mutually exclusive, opposite tendencies in all phenomena and processes of nature (including mind and society)”. (as quoted by Mao in On Contradiction- Vol. I, Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung, August 1937). Mao Tse-Tung adds: “The law of unity of opposites is the most basic law of dialectical materialism” (Ibid.). Furthermore, in his discussion, “On Philosophy” (August 1968, translated by J. Ramezani, People’s Publishing House), Mao states:

“In reality, nothing like negation of the negation exists. Form of development, negation, new form of development, negation, new form of development . . . represents the actual evolution of phenomena; each link in the procedural chain is both negation and development. Slave society negated primitive communism, and in terms of feudal society, we see that slave society was the foundation of feudal society . . . I do not believe that communism can progress without qualitative change which will separate into various forms and cycles . . . progress under any other schema is simply inconceivable under the laws of dialectics.”

In light of these points regarding the role of contradiction in the study of phenomena, and the critique of the “negation of the negation” by Mao, we must also reference the general critique of Hegelian idealist dialectics. First of all, today, “negation of the negation” is no longer propounded as a pillar of scientific communist theory. Secondly, Stalin’s incorrect prioritization of the laws of dialectics has not had a role to play in scientific communism for many years, and it

has been severely criticized by the international communist movement. Thus it is not at all clear what development or synthesis has been accomplished by Bob Avakian.

Regarding Internationalism, our American comrades' state:

Internationalism, from the very outset, has been a central principle of communism, but Avakian has succeeded in summarizing the methodological errors starting from the origins of the communist movement and has strengthened the theoretical foundation for advancing the struggle toward victory over the deviations from internationalism, and for advancing the communist revolution via a methodology which is profoundly more internationalist.

According to this statement, the origin of proletarian internationalism is not criticized by Avakian; he only criticizes the incorrect methods of some of the communist parties over the course of the history of the communist movement. Thus, there is no evolution or synthesis in regard to scientific communism and its relationship to internationalism. In regard to the implementation of any communist principle, it is always possible that communist parties fall victim to deviations. Studying these deviations, and relating them to broad principles is a necessary and acceptable exercise.

For example, in the early 1940s, shortly after the outbreak of WW II, the imperialist governments of the US and Great Britain pressured the Soviet Union to dissolve the International as a precondition for cooperation in the fight against Nazi fascism. It was emphasized at the time of the dissolution of the International that it could be reconstituted in the future at an appropriate time. However, this was an unprincipled collaboration which, correctly, must be criticized.

Likewise, in the struggle against modern revisionism, the "Revolutionary Organization" of Iran has posed the following question to the comrades of the CCP: Why does the CCP not include in its program the creation of a new International? The CCP response has been that, under the present conditions, bi-lateral relations between communist parties work better to resolve issues, due to the fact that ideological disparities are so widespread among communist parties.

We can certainly criticize this response; at the very least it is inconsistent with revolutionary theory, and pessimistic. However, our criticism arises from our resolute support for the advancement of the principle of proletarian Internationalism and for the re-affirmation of Internationalism in those parties which are ignoring it. And it becomes meaningful only to the extent that it seeks to root out the cause of this deviation – not because it "contributes to the evolution of Internationalism"! Therefore, in this case, we cannot label our criticism "a synthesis" or the "evolution" of scientific communism!! It is worth noting what Lenin has propounded regarding party building, and the important new points he raised which had not been recognized by social democratic parties at that time. In addition, the new Leninist concept of a vanguard party became the criterion for the formation of communist parties only after Lenin's concept was proven correct through revolutionary practice. And so this question must be asked of our American comrades: What practical revolutionary experience of yours has proven the validity of your line, such that you expect your line to be accepted by other communist organizations, and that your line will ultimately serve as the criterion for unity among communists?! Is it not true that by comparing Bob Avakian's conception to that of Marx and Engels of the 19th Century, you are serving the interests of factionalism, by carving out a new –ism? Marx's and Engels's conception transformed itself, over the course of nearly 50 years of struggle against anarchist and bourgeois tendencies, into proletarian revolutionary theory –even if it did not play a key role in the uprising which led to the Paris Commune.

As to other questions, such as “the character of the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialist society during the transition to communism”...etc, we can offer a similar rational approach. In the absence of the stamp of revolutionary practice upon your various conceptions of socialist society, your line does not represent any real progress. This is especially true for the advanced capitalist societies where production has become so widely socialized. The material basis for transformation to socialist society is much more prevalent there than in backward capitalist societies where the foundation for socialist construction must develop through the growing experience of the working class and communist parties. Consequently, these intellectual assertions that this or that policy / work method is the most appropriate for building socialism, and the description of such assertions as “the evolution of scientific communism” must be seen as mere symptoms of the author’s infection with the disease of metaphysical idealism.

Therefore, as long as the RCP-USA has not achieved a revolutionary victory in America, it cannot be claimed that useful results from the new revolutionary experience of the American proletariat in following Avakian’s line have been gained. Likewise, in other countries, Avakian’s line has not been put into revolutionary practice and has thus not proven its validity. To present his line as the “evolution” and/or “synthesis” of scientific communism is to depart from the truth, and it is a wide deviation from the dialectical materialist viewpoint.

Let’s pay closer attention to Marx and Engels in their mastery of dialectical materialism and to their extraordinary commitment to the cause of the working class. They also could have written hundreds of pages in regard to how socialism must/ should be. But their commitment to proletarian revolution did not permit them to do so. They spent their very productive lives criticizing class society and developing general and universal revolutionary theoretical lines pointing in the direction of socialism and communism, with no other focus.