

# BOB AVAKIAN:



Revolutionary Worker

## Revolutionary Communist Leader

Bob Avakian is the Chairman of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party. Today—along with 16 other Mao Tsetung Defendants—he is facing charges carrying 100 years prison time, stemming from a police attack on a demonstration in January in Washington D.C. against the visit of Teng Hsiao-ping.

Especially since these charges came down many people have wanted to know more about Bob Avakian and particularly about his political history. So we are reprinting excerpts from biographical material on him which has recently been sent out to the media all over the country.

For over a decade Avakian has been a central figure in the development of the revolutionary movement in the U.S. He was closely associated with the Black Panther Party in its most revolutionary period and was an influential figure within SDS at its height in the late 1960s. He was involved in the actions at Berkeley that gave birth to the Free Speech Movement in 1964 and was actively organizing against the Vietnam War from 1965—at a time when this was still a very controversial and frequently unpopular cause.

The Report by the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Internal Security says of him:

"Robert Avakian was born March 7, 1943, in Washington D.C., but little is known about him until July 22, 1967, when, at the close of a meeting of the Bay Area Emergency Action Committee, a circular was distributed which contained a proposal by Avakian that guns be purchased for the use of Black militants in the San Francisco area, adding 'we must... come to the aid of the black revolution...'

He... achieved some notoriety on July 15, 1968, when he burned the American flag while participating in a Black Panther Party demonstration at the Alameda County, Calif., courthouse. He was arrested and charged with disturbing the peace, malicious mischief, and desecration of the flag. Avakian was convicted and sentenced to 30 days in jail."

What the report doesn't say is that Avakian was sentenced only after the

FBI wrote up a special report on him, calling for a jail sentence because they considered him a dangerous revolutionary.

The student movement that rocked the country in the 1960s was sparked by the struggle of Black people. And the first shot in this decade of campus turmoil was fired with the Free Speech Movement at the U.C. Berkeley campus. Avakian was among hundreds arrested in actions that ignited campuses across the U.S.

The Vietnam War was a major issue confronting students and the whole country at that time. Thousands studied, debated and demonstrated over U.S. involvement there. Avakian, like many, had questions: Could it be true that the U.S. government was there for the benefit of the Vietnamese people?

The explosion in Selma, Alabama shook the last bits of illusions from his eyes and propelled him into action against the war. "If the government would not hesitate to unleash dogs (human and otherwise), bayonets and clubs against Black Americans, they could only be up to no good in Vietnam."

By 1965, Avakian says, "I hated this country; the way it treated Black people and others here, as well as people around the world; the bloody fangs, the hypocrisy, the way it turns people into petty 'me first' zombies. I hated everything it stood for—religion and all. So I loved it when the U.S. rulers, pompous, pious, murdering pigs that they are, got their ass kicked in Vietnam. Anything against their 'American way' was worth checking out."

In 1966, Avakian dropped out of school and became a reporter for the radical, left-wing magazine *Ramparts*. At that time an acquaintance correctly prophesized, "One day you're going to be a professional revolutionist." While working at *Ramparts*, he met Eldridge Cleaver. It was the first time he heard anyone talk about *armed* struggle to overthrow the ruling class in the U.S.

He remembers covering a Panther rally protesting the police murder of Black people. "There were 20-30 Black dudes in leather jackets, berets and gloves—and with guns, I kept thinking, 'Now this is a revolutionary organization with a purpose and discipline.'"

That was not the prevailing opinion at the time. When the Panthers first became known, pacifism was a widespread sentiment among many who considered themselves progressive. Liberals and "leftists" alike were appalled at the revolutionary, armed defiant actions of the Panthers. But Avakian saw it as a very good thing. He led and won the struggle within the California Peace and Freedom Party to support the Panthers and their campaign to free Huey Newton. The alliance between the Panthers and the Peace and Freedom Party developed even stronger ties between the Panthers and Avakian. At a "Free Huey" demonstration held on Newton's birthday in the spring of 1968, Avakian was the only white political activist to speak on the same stage with such Black militants as Eldridge Cleaver, Bobby Seale, James Foreman, Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael.

### From Political Activist to Revolutionary Communist

In 1968, Avakian was the driving force in forming the Revolutionary

Union (RU), forerunner to the RCP. Cleaver tried to talk Avakian out of building the RU, offering secret membership in the Panthers, but Avakian refused. "If it was correct for a white person to be a member, then it should be open; otherwise it wasn't correct." Avakian had many very intense discussions with Cleaver and others in the leadership of the Panther Party. By the end of 1968, major differences had developed around what sector of society would lead the revolution. The Panthers held it was the lumpen, street people of the oppressed nationalities. Avakian and the RU maintained it had to be the multi-national working class.

Searching for answers to difficult questions, many in the New Left movement took inspiration from China and the Cultural Revolution. The so-called "Marxism-Leninism" of the Communist Party, USA and its mentors in Russia had disgusted most, and some had rejected Marxism-Leninism entirely because of the example of these stodgy, bureaucratic reactionaries. But, Avakian recalls, "People looked at the Cultural Revolution in China, where there had already been a victorious revolution, and here was this 70-year-old dude, Mao, telling the young people especially and the masses of people generally to go out and raise hell. We could already see what had happened in the Soviet Union. If that was the future, forget it. But here was Mao, leading the battle to keep the same thing from happening in China. It was a tremendous example and inspiration."

"And when Black people rose up in rebellions against generations of oppression in ghettos across the country, Mao came out supporting them. This added to the reason why people loved him and listened to him. He alone, among all the leaders of the world, gave his support."

At the SDS conventions in the spring and summer of 1969, the RU played a major role in moving many there toward the Marxism-Leninism represented by Mao. Avakian was a key figure in that struggle. At the same time, the RU steered clear of the adventurist terrorism of the Weathermen while keeping the orientation of mass, armed revolution sharply in sight. "In addition," Avakian said, "the RU saw the necessity to support and unite with the battles of the minority nationalities not from the standpoint of patronizing liberals who aim to gold-plate the chains, but from the stand of the multi-national working class which aims to break the chains of all oppression."

Over the next 5-6 years the RU established roots in the working class and went among the struggles of other sections of the people as well. With Avakian playing the leading role, it carried out revolutionary mass work and ideological struggle in the communist movement, laying the basis for forming a new and genuine communist party.

When the Revolutionary Communist Party was formed in October of 1975, Avakian was elected Chairman of the Party's leading body, its Central Committee. ■

## This System Is Doomed Let's Finish It Off!

Speech by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party at May Day rally, May 5, 1979 in Washington D.C. Includes historic call for revolutionary May Day demonstrations on May 1st 1980.

### Workers' Responses

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