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# Statement of Purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

#### Submission guidelines

Articles in the *Platypus Review* range in length from 750–4,500 words. Submissions and inquiries may be sent to *review\_editor@platypus1917.org*. Submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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# The Platypus Review

Issue #26 | August 2010

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An Interview with Jairus Banaji

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To this you add, "in [Roy's] vision of politics, there is no history of the Left that diverges from the romantic hagiographies of Naxalbari and its legacies." Thus you contend that Roy's thinking is impeded by a kind of amnesia. How precisely does Roy's lack of awareness of and confrontation with the history of the Left comprostage an emancipatory politics today? How does awareness of the history of the Left in the sense you intend differ from simply knowing the Left's past? What are the differ from simply knowing the Left's past? What are the differ from simply knowing the Left's past? What are the differ from simply knowing the Left's past? What are the differ from simply knowing the Left's past? What are the differ from simply knowing the Left's past? What are the differ from simply knowing the Left's past? What are the consequences we face because of the Left's widespread failure to work through its own history, a failure of which Roy is but a recent and prominent instance?

Where does the rest of India fit in? What categories do we have for them? Or are we seriously supposed to believe that the extraordinary tide of insurrection will wash over the messy landscapes of urban India and over the millions of disorganized workers in our countryside without the emergence of a powerful tryside without the emergence of a powerful social agency... that can contest the strangle-hold of capitalism... without mass organizations, battles for democracy, atruggles for the radicalization of culture, etc.?

**SL**: In online comments on Roy's article posted on kafila. org, you responded to the preoccupation with tribals and Naxalites with a series of rhetorical questions:

by state governments, and violence from the police and except in terms of harassment by forest officials, neglect state power," since the state itself is such an abstraction of the tribals in India have no conception of "capturing whatever the CPI (Maoist) might think, the vast majority to attract investment from mining and steel giants. But areas are up for grabs as state governments compete do so. Today the huge mineral resources of the tribal the government could have stopped if it had the will to has gone on even after Independence was something towards them. The massive alienation of tribal land that violence and from the racism that much of India exudes to life, to livelihood and dignity, including freedom from been denying them. The tribal struggle is for the right resources that belong to them, but which the state has state but to succeed in securing unhindered access to spectives! The tribal aim is not to overthrow the Indian together."3 There is a big difference between those per-(Marxist-Leninist) fought for a new structure of rule alconcessions from the established rulers, while the CPI

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JB: The idea that the tribals and the CPI (Maoist) share the same objective is ludicrous! What the tribals have been fighting against is decades of oppression by moneylenders, traders, contractors, and officials of the forest department—in short, a long history of dispossession that has reduced them to a subhuman existence and exposed them to repeated violence. A large part of the blame for this lies with the unmitigated Malthusianism of the Indian state. By this I mean that the adivasis have been consigned to a slow death agony through decades of neglect and oppression that have left them vulnerable to political predators across the spectrum, including the Hindu Right. As Edward Duyker argued in Tribal Guerrillas, the Santals whom the Naxal groups drew Guerrillas, the Santals whom the Naxal groups drew Guerrillas, the Santals whom the Naxal groups drew into their ranks in the late 1960s "fought for specific into their ranks in the late 1960s" fought for specific

anti-Marxist, tribal revolutionary romance? Marxism) of the Maoists? How do you understand Roy's ambivalence respecting the actual Maoism land the ent in India." What do you make of this curious political groups) has kept the dream of revolution real and presand said. The party he founded land its many splinter Mazumdar was a visionary in much of what he wrote theoretician who first founded the CPI (M-L): "Charu instance, this is what she says of the Naxalite leader and But she also wants to have it the other way around. For history of resistance that predates Mao by centuries." [they] forget that tribal people in Central India have a a war between the Government of India and the Maoists... si steanot ant ni new ant tent eveiled [amos]" tent satets marginalized group, in this case "the tribals." Thus she question of Naxalite politics in favor of siding with a SL: In "Walking with the Comrades," Roy sidesteps the

more fighters into the Bastar region. with the intensified repression of 2005 that drove even flare up of conflict in Chhattisgarh is largely bound up ern part of the state, in the 1970s and 1980s. The recent up in Andhra, or more precisely in Telengana, the northpened with the squads that had been trained and built times of intensified repression.2 This is exactly what hapterritory which it can fall back on with relative security in without rearguard bases, by which he means a swathe of Arms points out that no guerrilla movement can survive to the north and east. Regis Debray in his Critique of the undivided region of Bastar or southern Chhattisgarh Maharashtra, directly north of the A.P. border, and in squads (dalams) across state borders, in Gadchiroli in capability and a network of safe havens for its armed from 1985, PWG was able to build a substantial military

a dramatic escalation of conflict in Andhra Pradesh refused to have anything to do with elections. Following seen as more militant because, among other things, he able to attract the younger elements because he was tryside. Kondapalli Seetharamaiah, its founder, was that sent middle-class youth into the Telengana councultural workers, and a "Go to the villages" campaign Ryotu Coolie Sangham, which was like a union of agrimass work, the launching of mass organizations like the years of preparation that involved a unique emphasis on was formally established in 1980 after some crucial Mazumdar, and the movement we see today. The PWG 70s, dominated by the charismatic figure of Charu continuity between the rapturous Maoism of the 1960s-People's War Group (PWG) as the decisive element of gence of Naxal politics in the 1990s, we have to see the dent state in 2000. To explain the successful reemersouthern part of Bihar which also became an indepenthe MCCI had its base almost entirely in Jharkhand—the India, since People's War was largely Andhra-based and flected a confluence of two major streams of Maoism in which resulted in the formation of the CPI (Maoist), re-Communist Centre of India (MCCI). That 2004 merger, Group fusing with Party Unity in 1998, and the Maoist tween People's War, itself the result of the People's War most important of these was the merger in 2004 bementation through a series of successful mergers. The 2000s is that they began to reverse decades of frag-JB: The key fact about the Naxals in the late 1990s and

Sunit Singh: Please explain the confluence that led to the formation of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) in September 2004, which united the Naxalite splinters, the People's War Group, and the Maoist Communist Center? What explains the dramatic revivification of Naxalism after its decimation in the early 1970s and how do we understand the CPI (Maoist) as a political force today? To what extent has today's Naxalism changed from its predecessor, the original CPI (Marxist-Changed from its predecessor, the original CPI (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI (M-L))?

The Naxalites have always seen the so-called "principal contradiction" as that between the peasantry or the "broad mass of the people" on one side and "feudalism" or "semi-feudalism" on the other. They have never abandoned this position since it was evolved in the late primarily agrarian, except that now "agrarian" has come to mean "tribal," since their base is on the whole conto mean "tribal," since their base is on the whole contorned.

But the Naxal presence in these parts of India has little to do with the factors she talks about. Naxalism, or Indian Maoism, goes back to the late 1960s. What distinguishes it as a political current from other communiate in India is the commitment to armed struggle and the violent overthrow of the state. It is not as if the perspectives of Naxalism flow from the circumstances one finds in the forested parts of India. The question is why, after its virtual extinction in the early 1970s, the movement tavirtual extinction in the early 1970s, the movement its virtual extinction in the early 1970s, the movement for sable to reassemble itself and reemerge as a less fragmented and more powerful force in the course of the fragmented and more powerful force in the course of the fagorate. To account for that we have to look to different factors than those Roy identifies.

Jairus Banaji: There certainly is a Maoist insurgency raging in the tribal heartlands of central and eastern India, much of which is densely forested terrain. The tribal heartlands atraddle different states in the country, so at least three or four major states are implicated in the insurgency, above all Chhattisgarh, which was hived off from Madhya Pradesh in 2000. To the extent that there has been a drive to open up the vast mineral resources of states like Chhattisgarh and Orissa to domestic and international capital, there is the connection mestic and international capital, there is the connection fast of the connection and or the connection of the conjuncture. That has dominated the conflict since the late 1990s, she is clearly right.

fundamentalism and economic totalitarianisms?" other, what Roy refers to as the combination of "Hindu the Naxalite aborigines on the one side, and, on the as a Maoist might say, consist in the struggle between agree with this framing? Does the "main contradiction," ally, does Roy frame today's Naxalite struggle and do you events reached such a critical state? How, more generpiction of the current situation accurate? If so, how have "will have serious consequences for us all." 1 Is Roy's derillas and the Government of India," one that she expects in the jungles of central India between the Naxalite gue-Outlook. There Roy speaks of "the deadly war unfolding With the Comrades," published in the Indian magazine Roy's widely read and controversial essay, "Walking terview on the Naxalites or Indian Maoists is Arundhati Spencer Leonard: The immediate occasion for our in-

Given the considerable international interest in the progress of Naxalism on the Indian subcontinent, particularly in the wake of the Maoist "revolution" in Nepal, we are pleased to publish the following interview with Marxist and historian Jairus Banaji conducted on June 28, 2010.

Spencer Leonard and Sunit Singh

The Platypus Review

An Interview with Jairus Banaji

The Maoist Insurgency in India: End of the Road for Indian Stalinism?

## The Platypus Review

## Maoist Insurgency, continued from page 1

JB: Roy lacks any grasp of the history of the Maoist movement in India, which is why she can make that silly statement about Charu Mazumdar being visionary, when the bulk of his own party leadership denounced his "annihilation" line as pure adventurism and a whole series of splits fragmented the movement within a year or two. Mazumdar also played a disastrous role in splitting the movement in Andhra through a purely factional intervention. Roy's background is clearly not the Left or any part of it, including the Maoists. What she does reflect is the disquiet generated, beginning in the 1990s, by the opening up of India to the world economy and the drive to create a globally competitive capitalism regardless of the costs this would inflict on workers and the mass of the population.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), the campaign to halt the project to build a hydro-electric dam on the river Narmada, was the best example of the kind of "new social movements" that emerged in India in response to issues that the party left simply failed to take up. It was not led by any party, was related to a major single issue, and had roots very different from those of the organized left. It involved large-scale mobilization of the communities uprooted by the dam, but the NBA of course was eventually defeated in the sense that it failed to stop the dam from being built despite massive resistance. The defeat of the NBA generated a profound disillusionment with the state of Indian democracy, which is strongly reflected in Roy's work— a kind of "democratic pessimism." The most extreme expression of this is the idea that India has a "fake democracy," whatever that is supposed to mean

But, let's get back to Roy's bizarre reference to Charu Mazumdar as a "visionary" who "kept the dream of revolution real and present in India." The fact is that the "annihilation" line had led to such disastrous results by the end of 1971 that the majority of his own Central Committee denounced him as a "Trotskvite" and expelled him from the party! Indeed, the majority of a twenty-one member Central Committee had withdrawn support from him by November 1970, and Satya Narayan Singh, who was elected the new general secretary, described his line as "individual terrorism." Even when the AICCCR (All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries) transformed itself into a party in April 1969, leading figures of the early Maoist movement in India were unhappy with the decision and many stayed out.

- **SS**: Elaborate, if you will, on the exact form of struggle that Charu Mazumdar is associated with. What was the "annihilation line," exactly?
- JB: Like all Maoists, Mazumdar believed that the key social force in the revolutionary movement in India would be the peasantry. He adhered to the strategy mapped out in the deliberations between the CPI leadership and Stalin at the end of 1950, one product of which was a document known as the Tactical Line, which spoke of a two-stage revolution starting with a People's Democratic State that would be ushered in by an armed revolution. Of course, by then Liu Shao-ch'i was already recommending the Chinese revolution as a model for all colonial and "semi-colonial" countries in their fight for national independence and people's democracy. This would have to be an armed revolution based on the peasantry and "led by" the working class. The reference to the working class was purely rhetorical, since the leading class force in the revolution was the peasantry and the leadership of the working class existed in the more metaphysical shape of the party. The distinctiveness of Mazumdar's politics was that he seriously believed it would be possible to arouse revolutionary fervor among the "masses" by annihilating "class enemies" such as the jotedars or larger landowners of Bengal, by forming small underground squads that would selectively target landlords, state officials, and other representatives of the exploiting class and state apparatus. Such shock attacks, he felt, would create a decisive breach and unleash a mass response. Mazumdar believed that the revolution in India could be completed in this manner by 1975! The idea was that the masses were simply bursting with revolutionary zeal and only needed a catalyst. As I said, the line generated considerable dissent, not least because it abandoned any notion of mass work.
- **SS**: So, when the Mazumdar faction constituted itself as the CPI (M–L) in April of 1969, what followed? Were other factions loyal to Peking folded into the new party? What happened to Mazumdar's Maoist critics, those who argued that their M–L comrades had substituted terrorism for mass organizations such as trade unions and kisan sabhas?
- JB: The Chinese Communist Party backed away from the Naxals pretty early when they realized that they were talking about different things. There was a distinct loss of enthusiasm from Peking, and Mazumdar faced increasing criticism. Parimal Dasgupta, a prominent union leader, advocated the building of mass organizations among workers, and criticized the neglect of urban work by Mazumdar's followers. He disapproved of the idea of a clandestine party organization because it would mean abandoning any effort to build broader class-based organizations. Another leading figure, Asit Sen, split on similar grounds. T. Nagi Reddy, the leading communist in Andhra Pradesh, disagreed with squad actions that were isolated from any mass struggle and simply substituted for it. He wanted a period of preparation and mass work before the armed struggle, but the group around him was disaffiliated from the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR), the body that transformed itself into the CPI (M-L) in April 1969. Even people who were otherwise close to Mazumdar like Kanu Sanyal and [Vempatapu] Satyam, a leader of the Srikakulam Movement, disapproved of individual assassinations based on conspiratorial methods by small underground squads. As Manoranjan Mohanty shows in his book Revolutionary Violence (1976), a unified M-L was already in decline by the middle of 1970, roughly a year after the party was proclaimed.4
- **SS**: How should we view the embrace of revolutionary violence as a tactic by the Naxalites, both in its moment of inception in the late 1960s and in the present day by groups such as the People's Liberation Guerilla Army? Does this zealousness signal radicalism, or helpless-

ness? Can it be seen as the outcome of the defeat of the Left in previous decades, the consequence of the abandonment of a politics seeking to abolish alienated labor or, indeed, the abandonment of any explicitly laborbased politics?

JB: When the CPI (M–L) was formed in 1969, its key function was seen as "rousing" the peasant masses to wage guerrilla war. Mazumdar believed that the killing of landlords would "awaken" the exploited masses. This, classically, was what Debray calls a "politics of fervor," a politics in which revolutionary enthusiasm substitutes for ideas rooted in mass struggle and for the class forces that conduct those struggles. But there were tendencies in Andhra that rejected this line and even went so far as to argue that, if the armed struggle were waged as a vanguard war, the people would become passive spectators. One writer quotes Nagi Reddy as saying, "Their [the people's] consciousness will never rise. Their self-confidence will suffer."

Today we can see that this is a vanguard war trapped in an expanding culture of counterinsurgency, and the most the CPI (Maoist) can do is flee across state boundaries and regroup in adjacent districts. What they have not been able to do and cannot do, given the nature of their politics, is consolidate enduring mass support in their traditional strongholds. In Andhra, where the fight against the Naxals has been most successful, from the state's point of view, the backlash has been ferocious and beyond all legal bounds. The state there has institutionalized "encounter" killings, India's term for extrajudicial executions, on a very large scale, and trained special counterinsurgency forces to hunt down the Maoists. In Chhattisgarh the state has sponsored (armed and funded) a private lynch mob called the Salwa Judum, or "Puri-fication Hunt" in Gondi, the local language, that has emptied hundreds of villages by forcing inhabitants into IDP (internally displaced persons) camps where they can be easily controlled. In Chhattisgarh both sides have recruited minors. Both states have seen staggering levels of violence, with a pall of fear hanging over entire villages in Telengana, and the atomization of whole communities in Dantewada. We should remember that it was successive waves of repression in Andhra Pradesh that drove the PWG squads into regions like Bastar and southern Orissa in the first place.

One consequence of the massive escalation of conflict from the late 1980s was a substantial weapons upgrade, a major increase in lethality. The Naxals have used land mines on an extensive scale, using the wire-control method, and inflicted heavy losses on the paramilitary. The crucial result of this conflict dynamic is a wholesale militarization of the movement, a major break with the pattern of the late 1970s when they built a considerable base through mass organizations, in Telengana especially. The civil liberties activist K. Balagopal, who saw the movement at close quarters, became progressively more disillusioned as the military perspective took over and reshaped the nature of the People's War Group. In 2006, a few years before he died, he described the CPI (Maoist) as a "hit and run movement," underlining precisely these features.6

- **SS**: What kinds of affinities do the Naxalites share with other militant New Left groups?
- JB: I would hardly call them "New Left." I think the best comparison for the CPI (Maoist) is Sendero Luminoso in Peru. Abimael Guzmán's idea that the countryside would have to be thrown into chaos, churned up, to create a power vacuum, is a mirror image of the CPI (Maoist) strategy. Guzmán called it Batir el campo—"hammer the countryside." The idea was to generate terror among the population and demonstrate the inability of the state to guarantee the safety of its citizens. That is how Nelson Manrique has described the strategy. 7 In the end it meant the assassination of village heads and increasing violence against the peasantry (from the Senderistas) that brought about their rapid downfall. A key element of the Batir el campo strategy was the systematic destruction of infrastructure with the aim of isolating whole areas of countryside from the reach of the state. The idea was that, effectively, these would become "liberated zones.'

The CPI (Maoist) have been pursuing a very similar strategy. The role they played in sabotaging the movement in Lalgarh bears a striking resemblance to the Sendero's interdictions against all forms of autonomous peasant organization. The drive of the CPI (Maoist) to isolate the areas under their control from the rest of the country, to impose an enforced isolation on the tribal communities, is similar to the way the Senderistas worked in Peru. This is the deeper meaning of forced election boycotts. During elections the threat of violence is palpable. Sabotaging high-tension wires, goods trains, railway stations, roads, and bridges is simply the physical analogue of the election boycott. Interlinked with this is the continual execution of "informers," a kind of exemplary punishment that is clearly designed to bolster a culture of fear in the CPI (Maoist) "base," which breeds the kind of resentment that creates more informers. Balagopal was a powerful critic of these practices that, I suspect, were largely a product of the new leadership that took over the PWG in the early 1990s, when Kondapalli Seetharamaiah was driven out of the party.

A movement like this will obviously tolerate no dissent. There have been repeated instances of the different armed struggle groups murdering each other's cadre, sometimes over the course of years and on quite a large scale. Indeed, at least one reason for the merger between the PWG and the MCCI was the turf war between them in the years before 2004, when on one estimate they killed literally hundreds of each other's supporters. Left parties like the CPI (Marxist) have also seen their party activists being murdered, as if this is what the People's Democratic Revolution needs and calls for! I should add that the CPI (Marxist) is hardly blameless, either, since they have their own vigilante groups or terror squads called the "harmads."

- **SS**: It seems to me that the perspectives of the Maoists do not arise from the circumstances of those they claim to represent, but are rather static in and of themselves. Party documents and Maoist "theorists" seem capable of little more than the recycling of desiccated fragments of ideology.
- **JB**: Maoist theory has a timeless quality about it. It deals with abstractions, not with any living, changing reality. The abstractions stem from the debates and party

documents of the late 1940s and early 1950s, when the agrarian line emerged as an orthodoxy for the Left in countries like India. The Chinese Revolution was an incorrigible template and everything about India had to be fitted to that. Within India itself this generated what were called the "Andhra Theses." As I said, the deliberations with Stalin generated a series of documents that all factions of the undivided Communist party accepted to one degree or another. The Tactical Line mapped out the outlines of a strategy that flowed straight into the Naxalism of the late 1960s. Some of the terminology was changed, such that "People's Democracy" became "New Democracy," but these shifts in rhetoric marked no crucial differences. So there is a sense whereby the Naxalite split from the CPI (Marxist) did not represent a total break with orthodoxy within the Indian movement. It was the CPI (Marxist) that was poised ambiguously between the USSR and China.

- SL: Embedded in this refusal of reality, this insistence upon rehashing empty abstractions, there seems an unmistakable retreat from the very project of Marxism. Am I wrong to see an elective affinity between Roy's insistence that the tribal people's impetus to resist comes from outside of capitalism, on the one hand, and on the other, the rhetoric popularized by Charu Mazumdar, which identifies the peasantry as the primary revolutionary class? Roy and Mazumdar seem to share the idea that the old anti-feudal struggle was and remains viable. Both exhibit a lack of interest in the question, What dynamics within capitalism point beyond themselves? While I agree that Arundhati Roy lacks any grounding in the history of the Left, there does seem to be common ground between the Naxals' nihilism and her romantic
- anti-capitalism. In earlier comments you argued that Roy's "democratic pessimism." as you referred to it, has led her to argue that the ongoing Naxalite insurgency "is the best you can hope for." Similarly, with respect to Maoists, you have suggested that, at bottom, they view those whom they claim to represent as "cannon fodder," so that "it is not hope but false promises that will lie at the end of the revolutionary road, aside from the corpses of thousands.' To begin to understand what has brought together these two political streams—the new social movements and late Stalinism—is it fair to say that both, as expressions of political defeat and despair, are equidistant from what you have called "the vision of the Communist Manifesto," in which Marx argues that the task of the Communists are, as you put it, "not to prevent the expansion of capitalism but to fight it from the standpoint of a more advanced mode of production, one grounded in the ability of masses of workers to recover control of their lives and shape the nature and meaning of production"?
- JB: There are different strands here. One is Rov's tendency to see Maoism as the passive reflection of a tribal separatism that is rooted in decades if not centuries of oppression of the adivasis. The trouble with this is that it makes the Maoists purely epiphenomenal. It is a reading that has little to do with politics in any sense. More to the point, Maoism simply is not a continuation or extension of tribal separatism. It is a political tendency committed to the armed overthrow of a state that is both independent (not "semi-colonial") and democratic in more than a formal sense. Millions of ordinary people in the country have immense faith in democracy, despite the devastation that capitalism has inflicted on their lives—and when I say capitalism here I include the state as an integral part of it. The other strand relates to the way the Left has reacted to "globalization" and the isolationist stances that have flowed from that. This is not peculiar to the M-L groups—it is the soft nationalism of the whole Left and stems from the inability to imagine a politics that is both anti-capitalist and internationalist in more than purely rhetorical ways. The rhetoric of antiglobalization, which opposes the reintegration of India back into the world economy, forms the lowest common denominator of the entire Left in this country. The Indian Left today cannot conceive revolutionary politics apart from national isolationism. Everything is reduced to defending national sovereignty against the forces of international capitalism. But modern capitalism is not an aggregation of national economies, however much the working class is divided by country and in numerous other ways. It is hard to see how the movement in any one country, even one as big as India, can overthrow capitalism as long as it survives in the rest of the world. Paradoxically, it is the smallest countries, like Cuba and probably Nepal after the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) takeover, that survive best in these conditions!
- SS: In its 1970 program, the CPI (M-L) claimed that "India is a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country.... the Indian state is the state of the big landlords and comprador-bureaucrat capitalists.... and its government is a lackey of US imperialism and Soviet social-imperialism." What are the limitations of such a vision of anti-imperialism and of what might be referred to as the "semi-feudal" thesis of capitalist development in India?
- JB: The Naxalites haven't substantially modified their positions except to the extent that they realize that the forces they are up against today have more to do with capitalism than feudalism. So, if you read any of the interviews that they give to various publications like *Economic and Political Weekly*, there are more references to capitalism than there used to be back in the 1970s. Back then it mattered much more whether you defined the social formation as mainly "capitalist" or mainly "feudal." Today it doesn't seem to matter as much, since it is obvious to everyone that India is capitalist. Perhaps this wasn't so obvious forty years ago.

Most Naxalite groups still accept the four-class bloc, and the "national bourgeoisie" is part of that alliance. This position derives from the "semi-colonialism" line, and its only practical function today is that it can help the Naxalites justify a whole nexus of relationships necessary for the party to fund itself, largely by means of the tax imposed on traders and contractors. For example, in Jharkhand it is said that the Naxalites demand (and are paid) 5 percent of all large, government-funded projects in the rural areas. If "national bourgeoisie" is supposed to refer to the smaller layers of capital, those are of course among the worst exploiters of labor, as the appalling conditions in small-scale industry and so much of the caste violence in the countryside show. As for "semifeudalism," the irony is that the Naxalites' survival in the late 1970s and 1980s depended precisely on creating a

base of sorts among the *dalits* and *adivasis*, the vast majority of whom have always been wage laborers. Indeed, the bulk of the population in India comprises the wage laboring and salaried classes, and a political culture that does not start from there—that does not start from the right to livelihood, the right to organize, and the aspiration to control resources and production collectively—is not going to make the least bit of difference. To keep referring to the land-poor and landless as a "peasantry" shows how much one's political thinking is defined by dogma as opposed to reason.

- **SL**: Earlier you spoke of how the Naxals, like the Sendero Luminoso, created a kind of ghetto around themselves. Is this the endgame of the politics launched in the 1960s and 1970s, which itself represented an inadequate response to what had become an increasingly bureaucratic and opportunistic Stalinism in India? How can the left politics that now trails this long legacy of failures reconstitute itself? But what about the larger question of intersecting the Naxalites, since many of these groups have been attracting some of the brightest young minds in India and, in this respect as in others, they represent a major impediment to the reemergence of the Indian Left? How do we break the appeal of political nihilism?
- JB: As I said, the vast mass of India's population are wage laborers. They work in very different sorts of conditions from each other. So it's not as though we are dealing with a homogenous or unified class. One way forward as far as I can see is through the unions. Unions have been a stable feature of Indian capitalism and always survived despite repeated attacks. As a small but significant example of the kind of left politics we should be concentrating on, the New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI), which was formed around 2005, is an attempt to organize a national federation of all independent unions in the country, regardless of which sector they belong to. This started as an initiative of the unions themselves and it has seen slow but steady expansion all over the country and includes, for example, the National Federation of Forest Workers and Forest Peoples. There is also a great deal of rethinking on the Left, both against the background of the public relations disasters of the CPI (Marxist) in Singur and Nandigram and of course the violent internecine conflicts within the party left. There is a whole layer of the Left in India that can be called "non-party," which is for that reason both more dispersed and less visible perhaps. It includes numerous organizations active in areas like caste discrimination and atrocities, communal violence, civil liberties, women's liberation, child labor, homophobia, tribal rights (e.g., the Campaign for Survival and Dignity), the Right to Food Campaign, campaigns against nuclear weapons and nuclear power, and many others. Dozens of Right to Information activists have been murdered, and there are numerous movements against displacement throughout the country. All of this reflects a different political culture from that of the left parties, more specialized and professional, also more autonomous, and the true agents of the churning of democracy that India is currently witnessing.
- **SL**: How do you imagine the potential political expression of that? Does this take a party political form? How does it intersect parliamentary politics?
- JB: If India could establish a workers' party on the Latin American model, then much of this non-party left would gravitate to that as its national political expression. But the culture of such a workers' party would have to be radically different from the sterile orthodoxies of the old left parties. It would have to be a massive catalyst of democratization both within the Left itself and in society at large, encouraging cultures of debate, dissent, and self-activity, and contesting capitalism in ways that make the struggle accessible to the vast mass of the population. The fact is that the bulk of the labor force still remains unorganized into unions and a workers' party could only emerge in some organic relation to the organization of those workers.
- **SL**: What you are arguing then is that the Naxalites constitute a major impediment to the reinvention of the Left?
- **JB**: Absolutely! That would be an understatement. The militarized Maoism of the last two decades is a politics rooted in violence and fear. Those in positions of leadership refuse to do any "hard thinking" in Mao's sense. You cannot build a radical democracy, a new culture of the Left, on such foundations. The recent beheading of a CPI (Marxist) trade-union leader who refused to heed the bandh (strike) call of the CPI (Maoist) is a spectacular example of how profoundly authoritarian the Naxal movement has become under the pressure of its overwhelming militarism. When actions like that damage their credibility, they are explained away as "mistakes." But these continual "mistakes" fall into a disturbing pattern. As a friend of mine wrote in Economic & Political Weekly, "the CPI (Maoist) is as little concerned about the lives of non-combatants as is the state."8 | P

<sup>1.</sup> Arundhati Roy, "Walking With The Comrades," *Outlook*, March 29, 2010, <www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?264738>.
2. Regis Debray, *Critique of Arms: Revolution on Trial*, Two Volumes, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Penguin Books, 1977-78).

<sup>3.</sup> Edward Duyker, *Tribal Guerrillas: The Santals of West Bengal and the Naxalite Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Manoranjan Mohanty, Revolutionary Violence: A Study of the Maoist Movement in India (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1977).
 Debray, Critique of Arms.
 K. Balagopal, "Public Intellectuals in the Chair 7: 'All the

News we get is Killing and Getting Killed," interview by Vijay Simtha, *Tehelka*, January 21, 2006, <www.tehelka.com/story\_main16.asp?filename=hub012106inthechair\_7.asp>.
7. Nelson Manrique, "The War for the Central Sierra," in *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980–1995*, ed. Steve J. Stern (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 193–223.
8. Nivedita Menon, "Radical Resistance and Political Violence Today," *Economic & Political Weekly* 44, no. 50 (December 12, 2009), 16-20.

## Chinoiserie, continued from page 2

of Stalinist "methods," which are considered bureaucratic and authoritarian in the sense of stifling revolutionary initiative: Stalin did the right things but in the wrong ways. Not secretly manipulated purge "trials," but people's justice would have been the better way to stave off the threat of the "capitalist road" in the USSR of the 1930s. Most telling about the RCP's "new synthesis" is how they conceive its first two figures. For the RCP, a combination of Marx and Lenin taken without Mao becomes a perspective of "Eurocentric world revolution." This is because, in the RCP's estimation, there is a significant difference between Lenin and "Leninism," the degree to which the former, according to the RCP, "did not always live up" to the latter, and the latter is assimilated to what are really phenomena of Stalinism and Maoism, building "socialism in one country," in which Mao's own practice, especially in the Cultural Revolution, takes priority. But this begs the question of the Marxist perspective on "world revolution"—and the need for revolution in the U.S., which Marx and Lenin themselves thought was key. Instead, the problem of socialism in China dominates the RCP's historical imagination of revolution.

## World revolution

Kant, in his theses in "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View" (1784), addressed Rousseau as follows. Kant warned of the danger that,

[T]he vitality of mankind may fall asleep.... Until this last step to a union of states is taken, which is the halfway mark in the development of mankind, human nature must suffer the cruelest hardships under the guise of external well-being; and Rousseau was not far wrong in preferring the state of savages, so long, that is, as the last stage to which the human race must climb is not attained.... [Mere civilization,] however, is nothing but pretense and glittering misery. In such a condition the human species will no doubt remain until... it works its way out of the chaotic conditions of its international relations.20

Marx considered his political project to be a continuation of Kant's, no less than Rousseau's or Bentham's, albeit under the changed historical conditions of post-Industrial Revolution capitalism, in which "international relations" expressed not merely an unenlightened state, but the social contradictions of the civilization of global capital.21 Writing on the Paris Commune of 1870-71, Marx addressed the antithetical forms of cosmopolitanism in capital:

If the Commune was thus the true representative of all the healthy elements of French society, and therefore the truly national government, it was, at the same time, as a working men's government, as the bold champion of the emancipation of labor, emphatically international. Within sight of that Prussian army, that had annexed to Germany two French provinces, the Commune annexed to France the working people all over the world.... The [preceding] Second Empire [by contrast] had been the jubilee of cosmopolitan blackleggism, the rakes of all countries rushing in at its call for a share in its orgies and in the plunder of the French people.2

The RCP remains hampered by the Stalinist perspective of building "socialism in one country," at the expense of a direct politics of world revolution that characterized the Marxism of Marx's own time, in the First International. And so the RCP fails to recognize the degree to which Marx's own politics was "emphatically international" in nature. As Marx scholar Moishe

Now, the revolution, as imagined by Trotsky because it's Trotsky who really influences Lenin in 1918—entailed the idea of permanent revolution, in that, revolution in the East would spark revolution in the West. But I think Trotsky had no illusions about the Soviet Union being socialist. This was the point of his debate with Stalin. The problem is that both were right. That is, Trotsky was right: there is no such thing as "socialism in one country." Stalin was right, on the other hand, in claiming that this was the only road that they had open to them once revolution failed in the West, between 1918–1923. Now, did it have to be done with the terror of Stalin? That's a very complicated question, but there was terror and it was enormous, and we don't do ourselves a service by neglecting that. In a sense it becomes an active will against history, as wild as claiming that "history is on our side."  $^{23}$ 

Bob Avakian, the leader of the RCP, writing about "Leninism as the bridge," put the matter of the relation between Marx, Lenin and Mao this way: "Marxism without Leninism is Eurocentric social-chauvinism and social democracy. Maoism without Leninism is nationalism (and also, in certain contexts, social-chauvinism) and bourgeois democracy."24 But Avakian and the RCP have a fundamental ambivalence about Lenin. In the same article, Avakian wrote that, "as stressed before there is Leninism and there is Lenin, and if Lenin didn't always live up to Leninism, that doesn't make Leninism any less than what it is." This is because, for the RCP, "Leninism" is in fact Stalinism, to which they recognize Lenin's actual politics cannot be assimilated. It is therefore a standing question of what remains of Marx and Lenin when they are unhitched from the Stalinist-Maoist train of 20th century "communism," the eventual course of the Russian and Chinese Revolutions to which the RCP points for inspiration and guidance. But the RCP's imagination has always been fired more by the Chinese than the Russian experience. If "Leninism" was a historical "bridge," it led to Mao's China.

# The image of China

China has provided a Rococo mirror reflecting global realities, whether in the 18th or the 20th and 21st centuries. The Middle Kingdom has stood, spectacular and confounding, for attempts to comprehend in social imagination both civilization and barbarism, now as then. The ancien régime at Versailles awaiting its historical fate would have liked to close itself up in a Forbidden City; the fervid imaginations of the 18th century *philosophes* such as Rousseau would have liked to breach the walls of its decadent customs. Both projected their world through the prism of China, which seemed to condense and refract at once all the splendors and horrors-Kant's "glittering misery"—of society. This has also been true of the Left from the latter part of the 20th century to the present. The very existence of China has seemed to suggest some obscure potential for the future of humanity, both thrilling and terrifying. What if China were indeed the center of the world, as many on the Left have wished, ever since the 1960s?

If today China strikes the imagination as a peculiar authoritarian "communist" capitalist powerhouse that may end up leading the world in the 21st century, in the 1960s the Cultural Revolution symbolized China. Immediately prior to the student and worker upheaval in France of May 1968, Jean-Luc Godard directed his film La Chinoise (1967) about young revolutionaries in Paris. At around the same time, Horkheimer worried about the appearance of "Chinese on the Rhine," as students began reading and quoting from Mao's Little Red Book. If in the 18th century the Jacobin revolutionaries wanted France not to be China, in the 1960s would-be French revolutionaries wanted China to be the revolutionary France of the late 20th century.

In his critique of Jacobinism, Burke wrote that,

[T]he age of chivalry is gone: that of sophisters, economists, and calculators, has succeeded.... The unbought grace of life... is gone!... All the pleasing illusions... which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason.

On this scheme of things, a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal; and an animal not of the highest order.... On the scheme of this barbarous philosophy, which is the offspring of cold hearts and muddy understandings... laws are to be supported only by their terrors, and by the concern, which each individual may find in them, from his own private speculations, or can spare to them from his own private inter-

Still, the Jacobin terror continues. Today in Communist China, a bribery case in producing chemically adulterated pharmaceuticals, baby milk formula, and pet food results in a death sentence, to prevent any decrease in demand from the United States. Chinese authorities dismiss the criticism made on human rights grounds, pointing to the need to be vigilant against a constant threat of "corruption." No doubt American consumers wonder what such swift "justice" could do to improve corporate behavior in the U.S.

The connection between revolutionary France and China in the bourgeois epoch, from the 18th century through the 20th century to the present, is summed up well in an apocryphal quip supposedly made by the Chinese Communist Premier Zhou Enlai, in response to a question about the historical significance of the French Revolution: Zhou said it was still "too soon to tell." Because of its Revolution in the 20th century, China came to have cast upon it the long shadow of Jacobinism and Rousseau's 18th century critique of social inequality. But, as Marx discovered long ago, inequality is not the cause but the effect of capital. Such confusion has contributed to the perspective of "Third World" revolution that had its heyday in the post-WWII Left-after the 1949 Chinese Revolution—and that still stalks the imagination of emancipatory politics today. Not only post-postmodernist neo-communists such as Badiou, but also Maoists in the more rigorous 1960s-70s tradition such as the RCP, remain beholden to the specter of inequality in the mod-

China, as a result of its 20th century revolutionary transformation, has gone from being like the India of the 18th century, its traditional ways of life breaking down and swamped in pre-capitalist obscurity, confronted with the dynamics of global capitalism, to becoming something like a potential Britain of the 18th century—the manufacturing "workshop of the world"—albeit in the profoundly changed circumstances of the 21st century. As Marx, in a 1858 letter to Engels, pointed out about his

There is no denying that bourgeois society has for the second time experienced its 16th century, a 16th century which, I hope, will sound its death knell just as the first ushered it into the world. The proper task of bourgeois society is the creation of the world market, at least in outline, and of the production based on that market.... For us, the difficult question is this: [in Europe] revolution is imminent and will, moreover, instantly assume a socialist character. Will it not necessarily be crushed in this little corner of the earth, since the movement of bourgeois society is still, in the ascendant over a far greater area?20

What the  $16^{th}$  century meant to Marx was the "primitive accumulation of capital," the process by which society was transformed, through the liquidation of the peasantry, in the emergence of the modern working class and the bourgeois social relations of its existence. If this process continued in the 19th century, beyond Britain, through the rest of Europe and the United States and Japan, in the  $20^{\text{th}}$  century it proceeded in Asia—through the Russian and Chinese Revolutions. The reconstitution of capital in the 19th century, unleashing a brutal process of late colonial expansion, was, to Marx's mind, not only unnecessary and hence tragic, but also regressive and potentially counterrevolutionary. Marx's warning should have resounded loudly through the "revolutionary" history of Marxism in the 20th century, but was instead repressed and forgotten.

For Marx and Engels, it was not a matter of China and other countries, newly swept into the maelstrom of capitalist development by the mid-19th century, "catching up" with Britain and other more "advanced" areas, but rather the possibility of the social and political turbulence in such "colonial" zones having any progressiveemancipatory impact on global capital at its core. As Marx wrote, in *The Class Struggles in France*, 1848–50, about the relation of England to other countries,

Just as the period of crisis began later [elsewhere] than in England, so also did prosperity. The process originated in England, which is the demiurge of the bourgeois cosmos. [Elsewhere] the various phases of the cycle repeatedly experienced by bourgeois society assume a secondary and tertiary form.... Violent outbreaks naturally erupt sooner at the extremities of the bourgeois body than in its heart, because in the latter the possibilities of accommodation are greater than in the former. On the other hand, the degree to which revolutions [elsewhere] affect England is at the same time the [barometer] that indicates to what extent these revolutions really put into question bourgeois life conditions, and to what

extent they touch only their political forma-

On this all the reactionary attempts to hold back bourgeois development will rebound just as much as will all the ethical indignation and all the enraptured proclamations of the democrats.2

This means that the "democratic" politics that engenders "ethical indignation" at the rank inequality in global capital remains woefully inadequate to the task of overcoming the "bourgeois world" within which the RCP accuses Badiou et al. of remaining "locked." For subsequent history has clearly shown that the Chinese Revolution under Mao remained trapped in global capital, despite the "socialist" ferment of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution that gripped the imagination of the international Left of the time. "Maoist" and otherwise.<sup>28</sup> Without revolutionary socialist consequences in the "heart" of the bourgeois world, revolutions in countries such as China cannot, according to Marx, "really put into question bourgeois life conditions" but "touch only their political formations." As Engels put it, in a 1882 letter to the leading German Social Democratic Party Marxist theorist Karl Kautsky,

[T]he countries inhabited by a native population, which are simply subjugated... must be taken over for the time being by the [world] proletariat and led as rapidly as possible towards independence. How this process will develop is difficult to say... [Such places] will perhaps, indeed very probably, produce a revolution... and [this] would certainly be the best thing for us. We shall have enough to do at home. Once Europe is reorganized [in socialism], and North America, that will furnish such colossal power and such an example that the semi-civilized countries will follow in their wake of their own accord. Economic needs alone will be responsible for this. But as to what social and political phases these countries will then have to pass through before they likewise arrive at socialist organization, we to-day can only advance rather idle hypotheses.29

#### "Locked within the confines of the bourgeois world"

Despite the RCP's critique of the post-1960s New Left neo-communism of Badiou, and its partial recognition that Marx and the best of Marxism sought to go beyond "bourgeois" discontents and demands for equality in capital, the RCP perspective on Marxism remains compromised by its focus on capitalist inequality. This leads to an ambivalent and confused conception of the potential role of "intellectuals" in revolutionary politics—a role highlighted in the mid-20th century by even such unreservedly "bourgeois" perspectives such as that of Joseph Schumpeter, and also by figures influential for the 1960s New Left such as C. Wright Mills.30 The RCP, along with other tendencies of post-New Left politics preoccupied by problems of inequality and hierarchy, such as neoanarchism, suspects intellectuals of containing the germ for reproducing capitalism through inequality. Likewise, the RCP remains confused about the supposed problem of a "Euro-" or "Western"-centric perspective on "world revolution." In this sense, the RCP remains trapped by the preoccupations of 1960s-era New Left Maoism in which they originated, despite their attempts to recover the critical purchase of the earlier revolutionary politics of Marx and Lenin. Despite their intended critical approach to this history, they fail to consider how Maoism may have represented a retreat rather than an advance from such revolutionary Marxism. For, as Lenin recognized, the best of Marxist revolutionary politics was not opposed to but rather necessarily stood within the tradition of Rousseau and the radical bourgeois intellectual "Jacobin" legacy of the 18th century, while attempting to transcend it.31 Like it or not, and either for ill or for good, we remain "locked in the bourgeois world," within whose conditions we must try to make any possible

1. For Communism: The Beginning of a New Stage, see <www. rwor.org/Manifesto/Manifesto.html>. Lotta et al. is available online at <www.demarcations-journal.org/issue01/demarcations\_badiou.html>.

2. David Bholat, "Beyond Equality," Rethinking Marxism vol. 22 no. 2 (April 2010), 272-284.

3. Marx, Critique of the Gotha Program (1875), in Robert C. Tucker, ed., The Marx-Engels Reader (New York: Norton, 2nd ed.,

4. Bholat, "Beyond Equality," 282. 5. See "An Open Letter from Raymond Lotta to Tony Judt and the NYU Community on the Responsibility of Intellectuals to the Truth, Including and Especially the Truth about Communism, in Revolution #180 (October 25, 2009), available online at <revcom.us/a/180/Lotta\_Open\_Letter-en.html>, in which Lotta

> Yes, revolutionary power must be held on to: a new state power and the overall leadership of a vanguard party are indispensable. But leadership must be exercised in ways that are, in certain important and crucial respects, different from how this was understood and practiced in the past. This [RCP's] new synthesis recognizes the indispensable role of intellectual ferment and dissent in socialist society.

6. Bholat, "Beyond Equality," 282.

7. See Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" (1962), New Left Review I/41 (January-February 1967), 15-35. Also in For Marx (1965), trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1977), 87-116.

8. See, for instance, Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971), in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, ed. D. F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139-164, available online at <www. scribd.com/doc/4475734/foucault-nietzsche-genealogyhistory>, in which Foucault ignored that Nietzsche's famous On the Genealogy of Morals (1887) was "a polemic" against any such "genealogy," and so turned Nietzsche, in keeping with Foucault's own intent, from a philosopher of freedom into freedom's "deconstructionist"

In this sense, genealogy returns to the... history that Nietzsche recognized in [his 1874 essay "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life"].... [But] the critique of the injustices of the past by a truth held by men in the present becomes the destruction of the man who maintains knowledge by the injustice proper to the will to knowledge. (164)

- 9. See Alain Badiou, Being and Event, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2007).
- 10. See the interview with Badiou by Filippo del Luchesse and Jason Smith, conducted in Los Angeles February 7, 2007, 'We Need a Popular Discipline': Contemporary Politics and the Crisis of the Negative," Critical Inquiry 34, no. 4 (Summer 2008], 645-659,
- 11. See Richard Wolin, The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the
- 1960s (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). 12. See Peter Hallward's essay on Badiou's *Logiques des Mondes* (Logics of Worlds), "Order and Event," New Left Review 53 (September-October 2008).
- 13. As James Miller, author of *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (2000), put it in his 1992 introduction to Rousseau's Discourse on the Origin of Inequality (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992),

The principle of freedom and its corollary, "perfectibility"... suggest that the possibilities for being human are both multiple and, literally, endless. Contemporaries like Kant well understood the novelty and radical implications of Rousseau's new principle of freedom [and] appreciated his unusual stress on history as the site where the true nature of our species is simultaneously realized and perverted, revealed and distorted. A new way of thinking about the human condition had appeared.... As Hegel put it, "The principle of freedom dawned on the world in Rousseau, and gave infinite strength to man, who

14. Quoted by Rosa Luxemburg in  ${\it Organizational\ Questions\ of}$ Russian Social Democracy (1904), available in English translation as Leninism or Marxism? in The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism? (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), available online at <www.marxistsfr.org/archive/ luxemburg/1904/questions-rsd/ch01.htm>. Luxemburg's pamphlet was a critique of Lenin, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: The Crisis in our Party (1904), available online at <www.

thus apprehended himself as infinite." (xv)

- marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1904/onestep/q.htm> 15. Marx, "On The Jewish Question," in Tucker, ed., Marx-Engels Reader, 46. This essay was written by Marx in 1843 as a response to Bruno Bauer's work The Jewish Question, of the same year
- 16. Raymond Lotta, Nayi Duniya, and K. J. A., Alain Badiou's "Politics of Emancipation:" A Communism Locked Within the Confines of the Bourgeois World. Available online at <a href="http://www.de-roll.">http://www.de-
- marcations-journal.org/issue01/demarcations\_badiou.html> 17. Max Horkheimer, "The Authoritarian State," in The Essential Frankfurt School Reader, Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, eds. (New York: Continuum, 2005), 95.
- 18. There is an important affinity here with the anarchism of Noam Chomsky and Michael Albert, who consider Marxism to be an ideology of the aspirations to social domination by the "coordinator class" of intellectuals, which is how they understand the results of, e.g., the Russian and Chinese Revolutions. In this view, Marxism is the means by which the intellectuals harness the class struggle of the workers for other, non-emancipatory ends. Their understanding of the "party-state" is the regime of the coordinator class.
- 19. The first Five-Year Plan in the USSR saw the accelerated collectivization of agriculture, in which the Communists unleashed "class struggle" in the countryside, with great popular participation. This coincided with the Communist International's policy of refusing any political alliances with reformists, whom they dubbed "social fascists," during this period, which they considered the advent of revolution, following the Great Crash. Such extremism caused, not only mass starvation and brutalization of life in the USSR-whose failures to "build socialism" were blamed on "Trotskyite wreckers," leading to the Purge Trials in the mid- to late 1930s-but also the eventual victory of the Nazis in Germany. Just as the Purge Trials in the USSR were in response to failures of the Five-Year Plans, the Cultural Revolution in China was a response to the failure of the Great Leap Forward
- 20. Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View," trans. Lewis White Beck, in Kant on History (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 11-25. Also available online at <a href="http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/">http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/</a> kant/universal-history.htm>.
- 21. See, for instance, the British Trotskyist Cliff Slaughter's argument, in "What is Revolutionary Leadership?" (1960), available online at <www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/ slaughter/1960/10/leadership.html>, in which he pointed out about Stalinism that,

As a part of [the process of Stalinization], certain theoretical distortions of Marxism play an important part. Above all. Marxism is twisted into an economic determinism. The dialectic is abstracted from history and reimposed on social development as a series of fixed stages. Instead of the rich variety and conflict of human history we have the natural series of slavery, feudalism, capitalism and socialism through which all societies pass.... An apparent touch of flexibility is given to this schematic picture by the doctrine that different countries will find their "own" roads to Socialism, learning from the USSR but adapting to their particular national characteristics. This is of course a mechanical caricature of historical materialism. The connection between the struggles of the working class for Socialism in, say, Britain, Russia and Vietnam, is not at all in the greater or lesser degree of similarity of social structure of those countries, but in the organic interdependence of their struggles. Capitalism is an international phenomenon, and the working class is an international force.

- 22. Marx, The Civil War in France, in Tucker, ed., Marx-Engels Reader, 638. Also available online at <www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ch05.htm>.
- 23. Moishe Postone, "Marx after Marxism," interview by Benjamin Blumberg and Pam C. Nogales C., Platypus Review 3 (March 2008). Available online at <platypus1917. org/2008/03/01/marx-after-marxism-an-interview-withmoishe-postone/>.
- 24. Bob Avakian, Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Can and Must, III. "Leninism as the Bridge," available online at <www.rwor.org/bob avakian/conguerworld/index. htm#section III>.
- 25. Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France [1790], J. C. D. Clark, ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). 239-240. Also available online at <www.constitution.org/eb/ rev fran.htm>.
- 26. See "Europocentric World Revolution," in Tucker, ed., Marx-Engels Reader, 676. The selection in Tucker, which omits the first sentence, is from a letter from Marx to Engels of October 8, 1858, available online at <www.marxists.org/archive/marx/ works/1858/letters/58 10 08.htm>.
- 27. Marx, The Class Struggles in France, 1848–1850, In Tucker, ed., Marx-Engels Reader, 593. Also available online at <www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/class-struggles-france/ ch04.htm>.
- 28. For instance, even many avowed "Trotskyists" were fascinated and inspired by the GPCR. See, for example, Gerry Healy and David North's International Committee of the Fourth International's British journal Newsline of January 21. 1967. where an article by Michael Banda stated that "the best elements led by Mao and Lin Piao have been forced to go outside the framework of the Party and call on the youth and the working class to intervene [in this] anti-bureaucratic [fight]." See David North. The Heritage We Defend: A Contribution to the History of the Fourth International (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1988). 424. North, who became critical of Banda's positive perspective on Mao in the Cultural Revolution, is currently the leader of the international tendency of which the Socialist Equality Party is the U.S. section.
- 29. See "Europocentric World Revolution," in Tucker, ed., Marx-Engels Reader, 677. The complete letter from Engels to Kautsky of September 12, 1882 is also available online at <www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1882/letters/82 09 12.htm>.
- 30. See C. Wright Mills, "Letter to the New Left," New Left Review I/5 (September-October 1960), 18-23.
- 31. Georg Lukács addressed such transcendence in his eulogy, "Lenin—Theoretician of Practice" (1924), available online at <www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/xxxx/lenin.htm>. It is also included as part of the "Postcript 1967," in Lukács, Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought, trans. Nicholas Jacobs (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), in which Lukács described Lenin as follows:

In the chain of democratic revolutions in modern times two types of leaders, poles apart, made their appearance, embodied by men such as Danton and Robespierre, in both reality and literature.... Lenin is the first representative of an entirely new type, a tertium datur, as opposed to the two extremes. (93)

But Marx was also a representative of this new type of revolu-

# Chinoiserie: A critique of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA's "New Synthesis"

Review of *Communism: The Beginning of a New Stage, A Manifesto from the RCP, USA* and Raymond Lotta, Nayi Duniya, and K. J. A., "Alain Badiou's 'Politics of Emancipation': A Communism Locked Within the Confines of the Bourgeois World" Demarcations 1 (Summer-Fall 2009).<sup>1</sup>

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#### Proloque

**DAVID BHOLAT ADOPTED**, as epigraph for his essay "Beyond Equality," the following passage from Joseph Schumpeter's classic 1942 book *Capitalism*, *Socialism* and *Democracy*:

First and foremost, socialism means a new cultural world.... But second—what cultural world?... Some socialists are ready enough with folded hands and the smile of the blessed on their lips, to chant the canticle of justice, equality, freedom in general and freedom from "the exploitation of man by man" in particular, of peace and love, of fetters broken and cultural energies unchained, of new horizons opened, of new dignities revealed. But that is Rousseau adulterated with some Bentham.<sup>2</sup>

Bholat's essay follows Schumpeter in seeking to demonstrate the inadequacy and problematic character of the call for social "equality," for which he finds warrant in Marx's critique of capital. This is most notable in Marx's statement, echoing the French socialist Louis Blanc, that an emancipated society beyond capital would be governed by the principle of providing "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need."

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) argued, in his 1754 Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, that society alone produced "inequality," since in nature there are only "differences." Marx sought to fulfill Rousseau's demand for a society freed from the necessity of commensurability, of making alike what is unlike, in the commodity form of labor—a society freed from the exigencies of the exchange of labor.

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), the founder of Utilitarian philosophy at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, famously called for society to provide "the greatest good for the greatest number." Marx considered his project to fulfill this aspiration as well.

The modern society of capital has indeed sought to achieve these various desiderata, of the individual diversity of incommensurable difference, as well as increased wellbeing of all its members, but has consistently failed to do so. A Marxian approach can be regarded as the immanent critique of capital, the critique of capital on its own ground, as expressed by the classical "bourgeois" liberal thinkers such as Rousseau and Bentham at the dawn of modern capitalist society, in that capital fails to fulfill its promise, but it would be desirable to accomplish this

Schumpeter, writing in the mid-20th century, thought that modern society was moving inexorably toward "socialism," and that this was due to the unique and potentially crucial role that modern society allowed "intellectuals" to play. The far greater access to education that modern capitalist society made possible entailed the emergence of a stratum of people who could articulate problems for which they were not directly responsible, on behalf of social groups to which they did not belong. This meant the possibility of a more radical critique and the fostering and mobilizing of broader social discontents than had been possible in pre-capitalist society. This role for intellectuals, combined with the inherent structural social problems of capital and the rise of "democratic" politics, created a potentially revolutionary situation in which "socialism," or the curtailment of capitalist entrepreneurship, was the likely outcome.

Bholat concluded his essay "Beyond Equality" by citing favorably Slavoj Žižek and Jacques Derrida's critiques, respectively, of "Marx's tolerance for the defects of first-phase communism," and of the principle of "equality before the law."

The possibility of a "dialectical" transformation, the simultaneous negation and fulfillment of capital, its Aufhebung through a "proletarian socialist" politics, as capital's simultaneous historical realization and overcoming—as Marx conceived it, following Hegel—has proven elusive, but continues to task theoretical accounts inspired by Marxism.

# Entre nous

The Maoist Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), USA published in 2008 the manifesto, Communism: The Beginning of a New Stage. This was followed, in short order, by the launching of a new theoretical journal, Demarcations, whose inaugural issue included a lengthy critique of Alain Badiou by RCP members Raymond Lotta, Nayi Duniya, and K. J. A., titled "Alain Badiou's 'Politics of Emancipation': A Communism Locked Within the Confines of the Bourgeois World." Taken together, these and other recent writings of the RCP amount to a significant departure and change in orientation for their tendency of American Maoism. This is noteworthy as they are one of the most prominent Marxist Left organizations in the U.S., helping to organize, for instance, the major anti-war group The World Can't Wait. The RCP's spokesperson Sunsara Taylor is regularly invited to represent the radical Left on Fox News and elsewhere. Recently, the RCP has conducted a campaign of interventions featuring Lotta and Taylor as speakers at college and university campuses, including the top elite schools throughout the U.S., on the topic of communism today, in light of the history of the 20th century revolutions in Russia and China and their defeats. In this, the RCP demonstrates a reorientation towards intellectuals as potential cadres for revolutionary politics.5

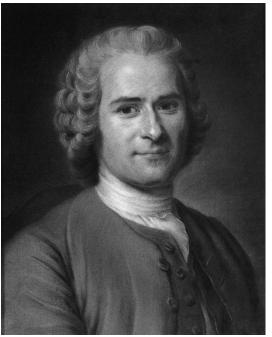
The RCP's critique of the latter-day and post-Maoist "communist" Alain Badiou's conception of "radical, anarchic equality" is a part of their program of demonstrating "How Communism Goes Beyond Equality and Why it Must." It strongly resembles David Bholat's critique of the traditional Marxist Left in "Beyond Equality." For, as Bholat wrote, "in light of the world-historical failure of Marxism," the "one-sided emphasis of historical left movements on equity... might be reevaluated today," for such discontents remained "vulnerable to fascist elements motivated by ressentiment and revenge" that

"represented a reactionary desire... to return to a romanticized, precapitalist moment."

So, some clarification—and radicalization—of discontents has appeared necessary. For what is offered by such apparently disparate perspectives as Bholat and the RCP is what might be called a "post-postmodernist" politics, in which the radical reconsideration of the experience of  $20^{\text{th}}$  century Marxism seems in order. This links to Badiou and Žižek's attempts to advance what they call the "communist hypothesis." Žižek has spoken of "the Badiou event" as opening new horizons for both communism and philosophy. Badiou and Žižek share a background in Lacanian and Althusserian "poststructuralist" French thought, in common with other prominent post-New Left thinkers—and former students of Louis Althusser—such as Etienne Balibar and Jacques Rancière, Althusser found, in the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, a salutary challenge to the notion of the Hegelian "logic of history," that revolutionary change could and indeed did happen as a matter of contingency.<sup>7</sup> Althusser took great inspiration from Mao in China and Lenin in Russia for advancing the possibility of emancipation against a passive expectancy of automatic evolution in the historical process of capital. Michel Foucault took Althusser as license to go for an entire historiography of contingency.8 For Badiou, this means that emancipation must be conceived of as an "event," which involves a fundamental reconsideration of ontology.9 There is a common background for such postmodernist politics, also, in Sartre's "existentialist" Marxism, the anti-Cartesian phenomenology of Henri Bergson and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and the "Spinozist" materialism of Georges Bataille. 10 The coincidence of vintage 1960s Maoist New Left Marxism with contemporaneous French thought—Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida—has resulted in a veritable chinoiserie prominent in reconsiderations of Marxism today. 11 But what does the—distinctively French—image of China say about the potential for a reformulated Leftist politics?12

#### Rousseau

The mid-18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment *philosophe*Rousseau stands as the central figure at the critical crossroads for any consideration of the historical emergence of the Left. <sup>13</sup> Rousseau has haunted the self-understanding of Marxism, and indeed of revolutionary politics more generally, if only for the problematic influence he exercised on the pre-Marxian Left, most infamously in the ideas of the radical Jacobins such as Robespierre in



Jean-Jacques Rousseau, portrait painted by Maurice-Quentin La

the Great French Revolution. Lenin famously described himself as a "Jacobin indissolubly joined to the organization of the proletariat, which has become conscious of its class interests." <sup>14</sup> Modern conservatism was in an important sense founded by Edmund Burke's [1729–97] anti-Jacobin critique of Rousseau.

In his critique of Bruno Bauer's *The Jewish Question* (1843), the young Marx cited the following from Rousseau's *Social Contract* (1762):

Whoever dares undertake to establish a people's institutions must feel himself capable of changing, as it were, human nature, of transforming each individual, who by himself is a complete and solitary whole, into a part of a larger whole, from which, in a sense, the individual receives his life and his being, of substituting a limited and mental existence for the physical and independent existence. He has to take from man his own powers, and give him in exchange alien powers which he cannot employ without the help of other men.

Marx wrote that this was "well formulated," but only as "the abstract notion of political man," concluding that,

Human emancipation will only be complete when the real, individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a *species-being*; and when he has recognized and organized his own powers as *social* powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as *political* power.<sup>15</sup>

The RCP's Lotta, Duniya and K.J.A., under the chapter heading "Why Alain Badiou is a Rousseauist, and Why We should *not* be," point out that Rousseau's perspective is that of "bourgeois society:"

The forms and content of equality in bourgeois society correspond to a certain mode of production: capitalism, based on commodity production and the interactions it engenders: private ownership, production for profit not need, and exploitation of wage-labor. Commodity production is governed by the exchange of equivalents, the measure of the labor time

socially necessary to produce these commodities; that is, by an equal standard.<sup>16</sup>

Like Bholat following Derrida in "Beyond Equality," Lotta, Duniya, and K.J.A. attack "the standard of 'equality before the law' of bourgeois jurisprudence [as] a standard that serves the equal treatment of the capitalist property holders in a society governed by capitalist market relations," adding that, "for the dispossessed, formal equality masks the condition of fundamental powerlessness." What Lotta et al. dismiss as "formal equality" is not the liberal conception formulated by Rousseau that Marx cited favorably, precisely in its recognition of the "alienation" of the "changing" of "human nature" in society. Rather, the RCP writers let slip back in the onesided conception of "politics" that Marx criticized and sought to overcome. For them, the opposition between the social and political that Marx diagnosed as symptomatic of modern capitalist society becomes instead the rigged game between exploiters and exploited. Note the need that Marx identified for the "individual" to "[recognize] and [organize] his own powers as social powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as *political* power," something quite different from simply removing the "mask" of false "equality" from the condition of the "dispossessed" in "bourgeois democracy." Where does the RCP's perspective of revolutionary politics originate? This is made apparent in the central section of their critique of Badiou over the interpretation of the Shanghai Commune, an event in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) in China

#### La Commune

The GPCR is dear to both Badiou and the RCP. This was the greatest event in the history of Marxism to take place in the era of the 1960s-70s New Left, and it exerted a profound attraction and influence over many at the time. The RCP is a direct product of its broad international impact. It seemed to justify Mao's claim to be the leading international (and not merely Chinese) opponent of "revisionism," i.e. of the abdication of proletarian socialist revolution in favor of reformism. Apart from factual questions about what really happened during the Cultural Revolution and the substance of Mao's own politics, both in China and internationally (thoughtful Maoists do not deny the distortion of Mao's politics by nationalism, but they tend to gloss over the intrabureaucratic aspects of the GPCR), the issue of what the Cultural Revolution and Maoism more generally might mean to people, both then and now, is of more pressing concern. After all, the two most forthright arguments in favor of "communism" today are made by Maoists, Badiou and the RCP. It is also significant that both favor the appellation of "communist" over "Marxist," which both do on the grounds of their understanding of the Cultural Revolution.

The Cultural Revolution is the basis for regarding Mao as making a unique and indispensable contribution to communism. What the Cultural Revolution means to Maoists is fundamentally informed by their conception of capitalism. So, rather than taking sides in or analyzing the social and political phenomenon of the Cultural Revolution *per se*, it is necessary to examine what has been taken to be its significance. The Chinese Cultural Revolution is perhaps the most significant recent "Jacobin" moment in the history of Marxism, raising again, in the latter part of the 20th century, long-standing questions about the relation between socialism and democracy—the issue of "communism," in the strict sense.

The significance of the Shanghai Commune of 1967 is contested by Badiou and the RCP. For Badiou it was a model akin to the 1792–94 radical Jacobin period of the French Revolution. In the Shanghai Commune radicalized students ("Red Guards") overthrew the local Communist Party apparatus, spreading into a workers' revolt. While initially enthusiastic about this spontaneous "anti-revisionist" upsurge against conservative elements in the CP, Mao and his followers ultimately rejected the Shanghai Commune as a model. They advocated instead the "revolutionary committee" in which the Maoist Communist Party cadres' paramount leading political character could be preserved. Badiou criticizes this straitjacketing of communism in the "party-state," whereas the RCP defends Mao's politics of rejuvenating the Party and purging it of "capitalist roaders" as the necessary and sole revolutionary path.

Badiou, by contrast, sees Mao's eventual rejection of the Shanghai Commune as a betrayal of "egalitarianism." For him, the "party-state" is a brake on the radical "democratic" egalitarianism that characterizes "communism" as a historically recurrent political phenomenon. The RCP critiques this conception of "equality" and "direct democracy" as "concealing class interests" and thus being unable to "rise above particular interests." For instance, according to the RCP, as long as there remains a distinction between "intellectual and manual labor," intellectuals can come to dominate the social process, even under socialism, thus reproducing a dynamic constantly giving rise to the possible return to capitalism, which is understood primarily as a matter of social and political hierarchy. To the RCP, Badiou is thus prematurely egalitarian.

Badiou conceives of the relation between freedom and equality as an ontological one, in the mathematical terms of set theory, transhistoricizing it. The RCP, while recognizing the historically specific nature of capitalist class struggle, conceives of the role of the revolutionary proletarian party as the political means for *suppressing* tendencies towards social inequality. In either case, neither Badiou nor the RCP conceives of the transformation of the capitalist mode of production that would allow for overcoming the socially pernicious aspects of specifically capitalist forms of inequality, the dangers of which are understood by Badiou and the RCP rather atavistically. Marx, by contrast, looked for the potential for overcom-

ing the conditions of possibility of the reproduction of capitalist class dynamics in the mode of production itself: capital's overcoming of the need to accumulate the value of surplus labor-time. Marx saw the historical potential to overcome this socially mediating aspect of labor in automated machine production. However, Marx also foresaw that, short of socialism, the drive to accumulate surplus-value results in producing a surplus population, an "industrial reserve army" of potential "workers" who thus remain vulnerable to exploitation. A politics based only in their "democratic" discontents can result, not in the overcoming of the social need for labor, but in the (capitalist) demand for more labor. Or, as Max Horkheimer, director of the Marxist Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, put it, machines "have made not work but the workers superfluous."17

For the RCP, Mao in the Cultural Revolution addressed in new and effective ways problems of the "transition to socialism" never attempted under Stalin. The RCP criticizes Stalin for his failed "methods" in advancing the transition to socialism, a failure Mao overcame in the Cultural Revolution in China 1966–76. The RCP celebrates the egalitarian-emancipatory impulse of the Cultural Revolution while also praising Mao's guidance and political leadership of the process by which the "capitalist" road to China's development was politically overcome and avoided. This struggle ended, according to the RCP, with Mao's death and the subsequent purging of his followers, known as the "Gang of Four," in 1976, embarking China upon its capitalist development up to the present.

Badiou explicitly attacks the limitations of Marxism in general, and not merely the "party-state" form of political rule (for which he holds Marxism responsible), for failing to recognize how the emancipatory striving of "equality" goes "beyond class." This is why he favors the designation "communism" to "Marxism." The RCP (rightly) smells a rat in this attempt by Badiou to take communism "beyond" anti-capitalist class-struggle politics. But in so doing they do not pause to reflect on the subordinate position of class struggle in Marx's own conception of the possibility of overcoming capital.

For Marx, the political-economic struggle of the specifically modern classes of capitalists and workers is a projection of the contradiction of capital. The RCP, by contrast, regards the class struggle as constituting the social contradiction in capital. This flows from their understanding of the contradiction of capital as existing between the socialized forces of production and the privatized and hence capitalist relations of production. Privileged empowerment, whether in the form of capitalist private property or in more developed intellectual capacities, is the source rather than the result of the contradiction of capital in the RCP's traditional "Marxist" view. For the RCP, Badiou's perspective of radical democratic "equality" does not address such inherent social advantage that intellectuals would enjoy even under socialism, presenting the constant threat of defeating the struggle for socialism. 18

But the RCP does not stop at upholding Mao in the Cultural Revolution as a model for revolutionary politics. Rather, they attempt a "new synthesis" in which the relation of Marx, Lenin and Mao as historical figures is reformulated to provide for a 21st century socialist politics that could still learn from but overcome the limitations of the 20th century experience of the Russian and Chinese Revolutions.

# The "new synthesis"

According to a traditional Maoist view, the RCP considers the historical trajectory from Marx through Lenin to Mao as a progress in the theory and practice of the struggle for socialism. But they also detect distinct limitations among all three historical figures and so regard them as importantly complementary rather than successive. For the RCP's "new synthesis," Marx and Lenin can still address the shortcomings of Mao, rather than the latter simply building upon the former. How so?

It is important first to consider the significance of this change in the RCP's thinking from traditional Maoism. The RCP's "new synthesis" was the cause of a split in the RCP, with some, including Mike Ely, going on to form the Kasama Project. The RCP replies to criticism of their current articulations of the limitations of the Russian and Chinese Revolutions with reference to earlier criticism of the RCP, over the course of the past three decades, for reducing Communism to a "tattered flag" in their reconsideration of this history. But the RCP should be commended for taking this risk.

The RCP struggles in explaining and relating the limitations of the three principal thinkers in the tradition they look towards for "communism." With Marx, there is the limitation of relatively lacking historical experience of socialist revolution. Only the Paris Commune figures for this history. With Lenin, the limitations of the Bolshevik Revolution are displaced in the RCP's evaluation of, not Lenin, but Stalin's attempt to build "socialism" in the 1920s–30s. Like the disastrous Great Leap Forward in China (1958–61), the first Five-Year Plan in the Soviet Union (1928–33), a period of "revolutionary" militancy in the history of Stalin's rule, is glossed over by the RCP in evaluating the Russian and Chinese 20th century experi-

For the RCP, Mao represents a breakthrough. Through his leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the limitations of the experience of Stalinism in the Soviet Union were overcome, in the Cultural Revolution in China of the 1960s–70s. But none of these are examples of success—socialism, let alone communism, has not yet been achieved—and they do not exactly add up, but rather require a "synthesis."

ences of attempts to "build socialism." 19

Mao provides a salutary contribution only the degree to which the Cultural Revolution overcame the problem

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