

Field Surgery: The Avakianite Organizational Line In Our Movement

By the Center for the Study of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism



The Partisan is happy to share with our readers this guest article shared by the Center for the Study of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, who tell us they are an association of circles and revolutionaries-in-information dedicated to the study of Maoism within the national conditions of the United States. We find the article useful and informative, and thus have asked to republish it on The Partisan.

Revolutionaries in our country have time and time again been lead into dead ends, having struggled to lead or generate effective and stable organizations in the mass movement for decades. In particular, the history of this failure has been marked by the lack of permanent and consistent organizations that have a true mass character and are able to effectively combat and resist imperialism. Although this is an organizational problem, fundamentally it has an ideological and political root. Much of this failure is due to the form of modern revisionism common to the US, Avakianism, which pushes to create “intermediate organizations” within the mass movement. While this may sound like an obscure theoretical problem, in actual fact Avakianism’s influence and legacy in the mass movement is something every mass activist in the United States encounters in their work, even if they don’t know it.

Avakianism takes its name from its chief architect, Bob Avakian, leader of the Revolutionary Communist Party USA (RCP-USA), which is one of the largest and only remaining organizations emerging from the New Communist Movement of the 1960s–1970s in the US, and itself has a certain degree of influence among Marxist organizations globally. Avakianism has taken certain wrong practices from the 1960s–1970s student radical movement, and certain wrong practices from the

Trotskyist movement, and melded them together, along with their own peculiar version of “Maoism,” to create a new and consequential revisionist trend in the international revolutionary movement, especially here in the United States. As one of the most formally developed and widely influential ideological deviations arising out of the US New Communist Movement, many groups in the mass movement end up applying some of its ideas, traditions, and associated methods even if they are not consciously aware of it. Although Avakianism systematically revises the basic philosophical and political economic contents of Marxism, for the aims of this article we will analyze how it has propagated a dangerous organizational line within the mass movement that isolates aspiring revolutionaries from the masses and their struggles, turning the revolutionary principle of construction on its head.

One version of how the Avakianite organizational line manifests in our movement is as follows: a group of amateurish but revolutionary-minded students create their own local “collective” that is focused on “party-building” and “cadre development.” They often don’t explicitly call themselves the “Party,” but also consider themselves something higher than a simple daily-demands-based mass struggle organization. Some hold that study and propaganda are sufficient political work; some others will engage in haphazard mass work, often marked by reformism and amateurishness, as a secondary component to their studies. Regardless, these practices are heavily influenced by the early stage of Avakianism.¹ These revolution-minded individuals unite on the narrow criterion of Marxism while simultaneously attempting to be broad mass organizations facing the “masses.”

As a circle like this continues to develop and its limitations begin to show through practice, it often moves to a different model that seems at first glance similar to an actual revolutionary Party but without changing the underlying logic. In this case, the small sect of self-proclaimed “communists” wants to organize the masses, but doesn’t have the skills or experience necessary to actually lead this mass organization either through organizational principles or through example. Alternatively, they don’t trust that they could maintain that political leadership long term, and thus lack faith that they could actually convince the masses of their political line or train them up in political theory. Because of the political conditions in the US, combined with their own amateurism, they also can’t rely on Party or underground organizations to take up the task of leadership either. Instead they take a shortcut. First, they make two mass organizations, one which is purportedly (according to themselves) more red, more advanced, and more theory-oriented, and another which is purportedly lower and more practice-oriented. Second, they name the more “red” mass organization as the leader, coordinator, or generator of the “lower” mass organizations. Both organizations are public, including often having social media accounts, but in spite of that fact the “higher” mass organization tells local people it is more “selective” and “clandestine.”

The above-outlined situation, a hallmark of Avakianite methods and practice in organizational construction of mass organizations throughout the US revolutionary movement, is a tactic imported from Trotskyism, something that should be alien to Maoism. This is a more a direct example of what

1 The legacy of Avakianism’s early stage is most notably the legacy of the Revolutionary Union and their *Red Papers* series.

is called the “intermediate organization” model of construction.² To fully understand the root of the issue, we need to first discuss the concept of the three instruments of revolution. According to the rich experience of the Russian, Chinese, and other revolutions across the world, the various organizations and bodies of a revolutionary movement can be delineated into three broad categories, or instruments, as they relate to the process of growing the revolution with the organized detachment of Communists at its helm known as the Communist Party. Chairman Mao all the way in 1949 summed up importance of the three instruments as follows: “A well-disciplined Party armed with the theory of Marxism-Leninism, using the method of self-criticism and linked with the masses of the people, an army under the leadership of such a Party; a united front of all revolutionary classes and all revolutionary groups under the leadership of such a Party – these are the three main weapons with which we have defeated the enemy.”³

Speaking at the most general level, we can see here that each instrument answers a particular question in the process of the revolution, and each (from third to first) gets more and more restrictive in its basis of unity while also being more politically advanced. The Party is made up of the “best children of the class,” the best “fighters and administrators” emerging and proven in the crucible of class struggle—it is the vanguard detachment that leads the creation of a new society. The Army is the main instrument in the revolution, because it is tasked with the highest form and main form of class struggle which is able to destroy the old relations of production and construct a new one. And finally, the United Front is an alliance between Communists and the masses, both within the working class and other classes, in the fight for their demands and a new society.

How do these instruments relate to each other in a revolution? The third instrument, the United Front, serves as the basis for building the New State under socialism. It is comprised of the broadest masses and their organizations. Specifically, organizations of the masses have the task of politicizing, mobilizing, and organizing the masses in different fronts of their daily life, serving as the closest link to the masses, linking and raising their day-to-day struggles to the revolution that resolves their fundamental problems and therefore aligns with their interest. The second instrument, as the “main form of organization,” is the revolutionary army. It has a higher basis of unity than the third instrument, comprised of masses trained into clandestine and armed revolutionary fighters, who carry out the struggle to destroy and disarticulate the old social and productive relations, providing

2 The term “intermediate organization” itself comes from the RCP-USA’s 1975 founding programme and constitution, and most directly in describing their campaign to develop “intermediate workers organizations” (IWOs), found on page 109 of their 1975 *Programme and Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party USA*:

These workers’ organizations are intermediate between the Party and the trade unions (and other similar mass organizations of workers). They are not a substitute for the Party or the trade unions. Building these organizations does not conflict with but contributes to building the Party, and to building the struggle of the rank and file to defeat the treachery of the top union officials.

These organizations act as conveyor belts linking the Party with the class as a whole. They are one important organizational form in which communists can unite with advanced workers to build the united front against imperialism under proletarian leadership and develop into communists the advanced workers who continually come forward in struggle

3 Mao Zedong, *On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship*, Mao Zedong Selected Works Vol. 4 (1961), page 411.

leadership for the mass movement and serving as its most reliable defense. As such, they must be clandestine in nature. And finally, the Party, being the ideological-political leader of the revolution, lays down the path forward and leads other two instruments as its two powerful weapons. Under this framework, broad-based alliance-type organizations, known as “mass organizations,” are part of the United Front, as they are led by the Party for its work among the masses. Chairman Gonzalo, leader of the Communist Party of Peru and the Peruvian Revolution, succinctly summarized this method of construction using the formulation: **“taking the Party as the axis of everything, build the Army around it and with these instruments, with the masses in the People’s War, build the new State around both.”**⁴ This method is also referred to in the ideology of the proletariat as the “concentric construction of the three instruments” because the Party is at the center, with the Army built around it, and the United front in turn built around the Party.

Going back to the question of intermediate organizations and Avakianism, the Communist Party of Brazil identifies Avakianism as negating this correct form of construction, and in particular attacking the role of the second instrument, that is, the underground organizations and the Army:⁵

Where does the *new revisionism* point as the central question of the party? Where do Avakian and Prachanda-Bathhatarai and ROL-MOVADEF in Peru concentrate their attacks? Against the theory and practice of the militarized party and concentric construction of the instruments of revolution. In politics, Avakian separates and denies the military line as the center of the general political line, and soon wants to deny the party as the axis of everything, as the axis of the revolutionary army and the new state, against which he theorizes its “solid nuclei with much elasticity”. The same as the renegade and traitor Prachanda with his “fusion theory,” “multi-party competition,” and “socialism of the twenty-first century.”

It is clear that the fundamental error of Avakianism is the liquidating of the second instrument—the clandestine Revolutionary Army—and in its place creating a set of “intermediate” organizations which simultaneously mix aspects of all three instruments according to what the minuscule local sect leaders think is best at the moment. This typically results in purported mass organizations that also try to take up tasks, forms of leadership, or unity of a Party type organization, whether by calling themselves a “collective,” a “cadre org,” a “pre-party org,” an “incubator,” a “revolutionary mass organization,” etc. This is a simple solution to a complex problem, the lack of correct organizational structures and the forces to make them up: it is a solution that sacrifices principles for convenience. After all, to be able to truly build a Party or a Revolutionary Army would require giving up the petty-bourgeois way of life that many activists have been used to. A real Party organization would be that “axis of everything” where the few, the true Communists proven in practice, converge to unite and lead at the highest level for the most serious task: the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie and its Old State, and the establishment of socialism. This is not something to be done in the open nor by anyone not tested in years of harsh class struggle and two-line struggle. And it goes without saying that it cannot be done on the phone or in public mass organizations. Doing so will lead to a failure to

4 Communist Party of Peru, “Line of Building the Three Instruments of the Revolution,” in the *General Political Line* (Germinal Publications, 2022), pages 92–93.

5 Communist Party of Brazil – Red Fraction, *Lenin and the Militarized Communist Party*, *El Maoísta* #2 (October 2018): 74.

weather repression when (not if) the State decides it wishes to focus itself so; in the heart of imperialism in its general decomposition that launches attacks on the workers and people of the world like a rabid dog for its self-preservation, any amateurish mistake, even coming from a place of good intentions, will cost the people unnecessary sacrifices.

In practice, an intermediate organization destroys the basis for democratic centralism in mass organizations generally, as such an organization sees itself as the highest form of class leadership. Thus, rather than seeing real broad mass organizations as their equals, they see them as organizations to be entered into as if they were members of a Party. Yet they are not: membership in such an intermediate organization is more often than not based on how someone is versed in a given revolutionary ideology,⁶ rather than any actual class criteria tested in the fire of class struggle and proven by concrete victories against the class enemy. What this means is that members of an intermediate organization practice a form of parasitic or parallel democratic centralism whereby they form an unprincipled faction within a real mass organization, against those “unenlightened masses,” who despite maybe having more experience in their own day-to-day struggle, are not self-identified Marxists like those intermediate organization members. The most important part must be emphasized: as these intermediate organizations are based on subjective criteria, they are categorically isolated from the working class and its struggle. Not only will they fail to generate revolutionaries and Communists, they will quickly lose the however few advanced working class masses they gained in one way or another, and return to being a part of the “activist scene” that exists divorced from the masses.

Again, while this might seem very abstract or obscure, it is something even the newest activists among us will have noticed on their own, or by observing the broader local or regional revolutionary movement. Intermediate organizations are a widespread phenomenon around the country and are one of the major products of the failure to build the mass movement in the last five decades. There are scores of petty-bourgeois activists who put this line into practice day in and day out, and continue to not only fail to attract the masses to their organizations, but also drive the masses away from them. Despite supposedly being more advanced, these “Marxist” cliques and their leaders always end up being the main source of the local misleaders, sex pests, and unreliable but self-important so-called leaders who cause endless crises, splits, and issues for our work and organizations. In this model there is no solid Party organization to apply a class criteria to them, no underground organizations to test them, and as a result the leadership of the proletariat is functionally liquidated and the petty-bourgeois intellectuals are allowed to run rampant. Such trends or methods existed, prior to the establishment of Avakianism, typically in the Trotskyist movement, but Avakian’s RCP-USA and the New Communist Movement which birthed them, have elevated them into a formal ideological trend and spread their influence.

These methods also serve to destroy the correct basis of unity of mass organizations. By acting as if they were operating under the basis of unity of a Party, they switch out the broad sectoral class-

6 Which in reality usually means how much Marxist ideological content they have read or watched online, and self-report as being experts in.

struggle-based unity of a mass organization for a high-level unity along general Ideological-Political grounds. Thus, to join an intermediate organization one generally does not have to simply unite to engage in principled class struggle in a particular sector, but rather must unite with a stale ideological line divorced from concrete practice. Such an organization is at a low level of development and eschews political struggle. To unite on ideas alone, and operate under subjective criteria as we have seen intermediate organizations do time and time again, is the principal error resulting from this Avakianite line of building organizations. Time and time again practitioners of this line will turn their backs on social practice, uphold abstract study as primary, and build organizations that self-assuredly and subjectively deem themselves to be Communists. It is one thing to think, but it is another thing to act, and even more so to act correctly in carrying out Marxist principles in practical application and with an objective and all-round focus. Intermediate organizations will never be able to carry such a thing out in practice.

A recent example of intermediate organizations in practice is in the *Tribune of the People* support committees (which are now succeeded by those of *The Worker*) whereby all mass contacts and mass activists were prohibited from sectoral mass work and direct practical intervention in the class struggle. Rather than organize class struggle, they turn their paper(s) into pithy bases of study, ideological unity, and theoretical production purposefully isolated from practice. This was a continuation of a newspaper-oriented form of intermediate organizations pioneered by the RCP-USA itself, which in its own words claimed that: “[c]entering the Party’s work now around its newspaper is not mere paperwork or aimless educational activity, it is the most concrete and practical plan for accumulating revolutionary strength—political, ideological and organizational—for the onslaught.”⁷ In both cases, this is in actual fact a smuggling of the organizational line of Trotskyism into our movement under the banner of a false “Maoism,” waving the red flag to oppose the red flag. They thought very highly of their newspaper, seeing it as a collective organizer as Lenin had described in *What Is To Be Done*. Yet this is a clear misapplication of what Lenin had outlined, holding that the main pathway to building those three instruments was mainly through work in an open publication. In reality, it is clear even from the historical facts of the Russian revolution that the “all-Russia newspaper” was not the principal method of achieving victory.⁸ Thus we can see how this specific form of an intermediate organization, of the newspaper-first method, is a clear revision of Marxist principles. While a newspaper can and should serve as an ideological leader and provide guidance, mass work is primarily done by mass organizations, practice is primary, and the readers and people who support such a newspaper are *already* doing work among the class, not working separate from it.

In a similar case of intermediate organizations applying subjective criteria and pushing for ideology over practice, the Revolutionary Study Groups and Revolutionary Maoist Coalition also suffered from the same issue until they themselves quite recently rectified. They previously upheld an intermediate-organization-type practice of uniting on ideas alone, although neither fell into the trap

7 Revolutionary Communist Party, *New Programme and New Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*, May 1, 1981, pages 42–44.

8 *Lenin and the Militarized Communist Party*, pages 67–68.

of upholding a newspaper as principal. These groups have now rectified themselves towards upholding correct principles of mass organizations and towards building up the movement of the masses in various sites of struggle.⁹ It is now and will continue to be apparent that those who continue to uphold and practice the various Avakianite methods of intermediate organizations will not be able to mobilize the masses, to build up organizations in the mass movement, and will ultimately fail time and time again.

At this point readers can surely see what is so damaging about the method of constructing intermediate organizations: they attack the Party and its reconstitution process, they attack the second instrument and the principle of clandestinity, and they attack our ability to construct effective organizations of struggle in the mass movement, organizations with a real mass character and which are deeply embedded as part of the class. As a result, they apply subjective criteria, self-declare themselves as advanced as they think themselves to be, and uphold ideas over practice in the political struggle. Their organizations reject correct democratic centralism and leadership, and become parasites on real organizations of the masses. Their muddling of correct organizational construction leaves them at risk of failing to weather repression.

This is a line that must be resolutely struggled against, as it is a firm necessity to struggle against revisionism. It is abundantly clear that even today we continue to face the issues of Avakianite revisionism, in particular its line of construction, as practiced through intermediate organizations. Revolutionaries-in-information must break with erroneous methods originating in Trotskyism and the 1960s–1970s student movement, deepen and broaden the two-line struggle against them, and rectify their organizations towards transforming them into ones intimately linked to the masses in the various sectors and fronts of class struggle. This is the only way we can course correct and begin the arduous but necessary work of building up a powerful mass movement based on correct principles, remolding and rectifying from the petty-bourgeois style of work and life, practicing the “three withs” of living with, working with, and struggling with the masses, as the basis of our development as revolutionaries and all of our studies. Every day lost to revisionism is a day lost to the class enemy, and thus every day we do not rectify is a day we waste as revolutionaries-in-information. As we devote ourselves into revolutionary social practice, remolding ourselves and transforming the world through class struggle, we must push for this to be the beginning of a new chapter for the US revolutionary movement!

9 People’s Defense Committee, “Statement on the Formation of the People’s Defense Committee,” *The Partisan*, May 1, 2025.