

Newsletter #2

Engage! Committee to Project and Protect the Voice of Bob Avakian April 2006

Greetings! Exciting news and plans:

Insight Press, the publisher of *From Ike to Mao and Beyond* has recently signed with a national distributor, Independent Publishers Group (IPG). IPG has begun to distribute Bob Avakian's memoir to bookstores and libraries far and wide across the U.S.

But though the book has gotten some rave reviews and was featured on C-SPAN's *Book TV* last year, **it is still unknown to tens of thousands more who could and should know about it today, and would really love reading it.**

Along with IPG taking up distribution over the next month or two, there will be a new round of publicity from Insight Press. For example, *Progressive* magazine will run a full-page ad this May. This kind of publicity can help introduce the memoir to tens of thousands of critical thinkers, and cause a "ripple effect" in different parts of society.

The book has already impacted some of the people who are questioning the direction that society is moving-- inspiring and compelling discussions and consideration of a markedly different alternative. The book has shown the potential to attract a diverse audience, both young and old.

For youth who are facing an increasingly mean and scary future, who are looking for a life with purpose and hope, Bob Avakian's story definitely speaks to that hope, and to them. The book is also for 60's people, historians, and for librarians who want their readers exposed to all kinds of literature and are disturbed by government attempts at censorship.

It speaks to curious readers drawn to the improbable story of someone who went from "liking Ike" to become a revolutionary communist leader. It draws in political activists who want to get the inside scoop of what makes Bob Avakian tick and people completely new to political life who want to know what the leader of the RCP has to say about his life journey.

The following excerpts of reviews give a sense of the impact the memoir has had so far on different kinds of readers and the wide range of thoughts and responses it provokes (For the complete reviews, see www.insight-press.com):

It "leaves a breathtaking impression." *S.F. Chronicle*

"Bob Avakian's new memoir is refreshing in its urging of social action. "...the book is entertaining and honest." "This journey offers the ability to compare philosophies in order to choose one's appropriate path. I laude Avakian for finding his." **Hip-Hop magazine, *Elemental***

“This memoir also provides valuable insight into what the 1960's were like from the perspective of an individual whose outlook was continually evolving while history swirled all around him. .. What stands out most is the man’s honesty and commitment. ... For activists today who know that another world is possible and are seeking a roadmap of how to get there, this memoir is a warm introduction to a thinker whose voice will, and should, be heard in that ongoing debate. Impractical? Irrelevant? Dangerous? As Avakian likes to say, wrangle with it and decide for yourself.” --**Alexander Morosin, *Occidental Weekly* Staff Writer** (for id purposes only, not published in the *Occidental Weekly*)

“I have not read many stories filled with great conflict, tragedy, and terrible frustration told in such a vibrant and joyous tone as Bob Avakian’s memoir... It is a straight narration, simple in form, and filled with humor and shocking information. ... This book comes with my highest recommendations to aspiring activists or anyone who, like Avakian, holds no respect for unearned and unwarranted authority. It’s also a wonderful memoir for anyone who enjoys reading diverse perspectives of history. Enjoy.” --***The Laney Tower*, “Before ‘Red’ meant Republican.”**

“In any case, most living Americans have never heard much of anything positive about Communism. In a sense, Avakian’s book provides a refreshing rejoinder to the overwhelmingly one-sided view many of us have taken as a given. ...Bob Avakian’s new and innovative conception of “Communism” deserves consideration.” --**From “Rethinking the ‘unthinkable’: An updated view of communism *From Ike to Mao and Beyond*,” by Tom Harker, *Free Press***

“I recommend this book to the high school student interested in joining the fight against human oppression and for anyone hoping to enlighten themselves with the life of one of the greatest civil rights leaders of our time.” --**“From I Like Ike to Fight the Power!” *The Aegis*, Oakland High School, Oakland, CA**

But, for people to actually pick up the book, there needs to be a buzz where many are saying, “Hey, I heard about that book!”

The efforts of people working with Engage! can help to create that atmosphere of excitement and curiosity that will make Avakian’s memoir a “must-read.”

What kind of things can be done?

1) **Outreach to the Campuses:** If you are or know a professor who is planning now for Fall courses, it would be great to figure out how to include this book in the curriculum. In a letter to professors, Insight Press says, “Avakian writes not only a unique and accessible contemporary history book, but also a fascinating story of transformation.... This essential commentary on the culture, politics, history and leading figures of the 1950's through today comes highly recommended by Cornel West, Howard Zinn, the Midwest Review, the S.F. Chronicle and more.”

What a breath of fresh air it would be if professors and high school teachers all over the country assigned the memoir to their classes in History, English, Ethnic Studies, American Culture, Rhetoric, Political Science and many other classes. We should encourage teachers to order the book and talk to others who would find this a stimulating, and extremely relevant, addition to their curriculum. One professor at a major university has referred his students to this book, and speaks about Avakian's journey in his class. This same professor has helped set up a salon discussion on the book for Engage! signatories and others. **Let's all do that! Organize or participate in salons on the memoir.**

2) **Word of mouth:** We can talk it up with our colleagues, friends, and relatives. Are there newsletters or blogs where we can send announcements or comments? We can spread the word about this in conferences that we participate in. Develop your own ideas about how to get out the word and let the rest of us know. Let people know the relevance of this book for today's times and for the future. We can e-mail reviews and comments (including our own) to friends and ask them to send it out to their list-serves.

3) **More Reviews Needed:** Let's be creative! What are publications that reach new and different areas of society, where the memoir is not yet known. Pick up the pen and write a review yourself. It doesn't have to be wordy, speak from your heart. Get your review into a journal, magazine, or newspapers. Let's work together to get additional reviews.

4) **Send in comments on the book so they can be publicized.** The following are excerpts from recently received comments. The full texts of these will be sent as attachments and posted on the website as soon as it is up and running:

"The importance of critical thinking is an important theme of From Ike to Mao and Beyond. Bob Avakian's approach is something people can learn from, of not accepting whatever you're told, but questioning things. ... As a professor, I and other professors want their students to be critical thinkers. This book can open people up to an approach of how to look at things with a critical eye. During the Civil rights period, people felt deeply that there needed to be a change and they were willing to do something about it. They had to "step outside of the box" in willing to go out and dare to struggle for something different with different people. They did not know the outcome of what would happen if they did this. That is what is needed today. People need to take risks and not accept what's going on. Bob Avakian did this with his life. He was looking for the truth and he has pursued that, not knowing where that would lead him, taking risks."

--Robert Keith Collins, Ph.D., Homalusa: Center for African and Native American Research

"I enjoyed reading this book. My main interest was on reading the early part. Bob Avakian captured the experience of the 60's from a different perspective than mine. I feel strongly in the absolute right of Bob Avakian, as well as anyone, to speak out. His book is a good review of what the country was like then. It is a good example of the possibilities of what opened up. Bob was attracted to different points of view. There was a gaping open-mindedness to different points of view at that time and a lot of experimentation, curiosity, asking questions, and it was a good time to be around. The intelligence of the people then was more engaged than the rampant apathy we see today. The government at that time couldn't get away with the Vietnam War.

People were thinking and questioning their beliefs and acting on them. We called it consciousness-raising. We questioned why and how come. We need that kind of curiosity today.” --**Kathy Turner from St. Vartan Armenian Church, Oakland**

“WHO/WHAT? Communist leader in America? Yikes, that is absurd,” I thought. When I was first approached to read his memoir, FROM IKE TO MAO AND BEYOND, I was a bit skeptical at best. “Um, Communism doesn’t work, guys. I mean historically the U.S.S.R cashed in its chips, Cuba is strictly a Fidel Castro-run operation and China is looking a lot like Christmas. And not only that, people in this country, during the witch-hunt terror of McCarthy, were burned – careers ruined, lives made into spectacles, & a fear base factor was emblazoned into the minds of every American that, “Communism is evil & will ultimately take away all your freedom.” But, okay. I will read this memoir because you asked me & also because I like to think that I have an open-mind to someone, like Avakian who is offering, perhaps a fresh perspective to a tired- even incorrect version of today’s historical perspective on communism.

And so off I went reeling back into the time of a young man’s life growing up in the 50’s – a seemingly normal suburban, white-bred, middle class life. And then the 60’s - coming more to age of enlightenment & beginning to examine & question the “establishment.” And the 70’s bringing him into his manhood, securely fastened on a road that would lead to many twists, turns & adventures from a radical to a revolutionary to a communist. The 80’s saw a consistency of integrity, principle & high ideals. There was no turning back even with the many hardships along the way – including years in exile. But it is through his life journey & experiences that continued to propel him forward.

His life unfolds, as does his mind, his theories deepen and his keen perspective of communism unearths past truths that have been misguided, but yet are still ripe for society’s benefit. He begins to apply his journey, reflections & profound beliefs into a core stem of his re-envisioned understanding of communism. He insists that Marxism is not dogma, but rather a “scientific approach to reality.” That Mao insisted that “Marxism embraces & does not replace the arts & sciences.” He re-visits Lenin’s notion of “revolutionary conjunctures, when all the contradictions of the system are heightened & come together in a concentrated way, & a revolutionary crisis develops.” He recognizes the broad inconsistencies & mistakes of the international communist movement. But I suppose what has attracted me a great deal is his commitment to critical thinking, self-examination, higher education, travel & expansion of the arts in his re-envisioning of the communist agenda. He invites a worldwide dialogue...

This present day [is a] political cocktail of deception, Christian zealots, environmental & wildlife decay, war, and divided countrymen & women... Well, can I – can we- collectively tackle these issues? Can I –can we-- collectively strive for a rich understanding of yesterday, a better today, & an even greater tomorrow. The voice of Avakian says, yes, WE CAN. I urge you to take that leap of faith. Take a chance on yourself. Open your heart & mind—not just for today, but everyday. Avakian says he has committed to a better way of life. Okay. I am willing to listen. I am willing to be engaged.” --**Actress and Writer, Lucia Marano**

5) **Advertising:** While Insight Press takes out ads in major press with a national audience, people can place ads in smaller papers: reaching people in different groupings, including

colleges and high schools, but also union newsletters and church bulletins. Send in your ideas, think out-of-the-box on how to raise funds to do an innovative and effective promotion. And, of course, we all can donate funds to help sponsor an ad? **Checks for this can be mailed to Engage!**

New Materials to Check Out :

In an exciting new development, **you can now hear Bob Avakian speaking in his own voice reading Chapter 1 and 2 from his memoir** at www.bobavakian.net. Download and listen to this with your friends. Spread the word that this is now available.

In the midst of the heated and controversial societal debate about immigration and the unprecedented massive immigrant protests, **Bob Avakian speaks to this question in, “Why Do People Come Here From All Over the World.”** Download this as a free audio track at www.revcom.us or www.bobavakian.net. This track is from the DVD, *“Revolution: Why It’s Necessary, Why It’s Possible, What It’s All About,”* available through threeQvideo.com.

There is also **a series of articles now running in the Revolution newspaper by Bob Avakian from the work called, “Views of Socialism and Communism: A radically New Kind of State, A Radically Different and Far Greater Vision of Freedom.”** It can also be viewed at revcom.us.

Website for Engage!

A volunteer has stepped forward to design our website and we hope to have it up and running soon!

Write to the Engage! Newsletter and website: Send in your comments about the memoir, your ideas on what you would like to do to take this up, and any comments or suggestions you have for projects or commentary for future issues.

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