

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

Box 259, 2124 Kittredge St., Berkeley, CA 94704

Newsletter # 1

February 24, 2006

The **Engage!** committee is getting off the ground! About 30 people have signed the statement so far -- mainly from New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and the S.F. Bay Area. Professors, attorneys, artists, actors, poets and more have endorsed the statement, "Dangerous times demand courageous voices. Bob Avakian is such a voice." And in discussions and meetings, people of all ages, nationalities, and diverse backgrounds are contributing their ideas, enthusiasm and creativity to develop and enrich the vision of the **Engage!** committee.

Some have said how much they appreciate the voice of someone who has remained so firm in principle through the twists and turns of hard struggle, even very hard setbacks. Others have expressed how inspired and intrigued they are by Avakian's fresh approach to Marxism.

Still others have underscored how very disturbed they are by the repressive climate today. Many share a sober understanding of how "such voices in this country are, and have been, all too frequently the objects of suppression and repression" and how much we are confronting "...a climate where, for example, radical and even liberal professors find their reputations and even their livelihoods under assault.

Out of all this a picture emerges of where we should be setting our sights.

In these times, millions of people are wondering whether the world could be a better place. Imagine these people debating and discussing the kind of world envisioned by Bob Avakian. Imagine the lid being lifted on what people can even dare think is possible for humanity.

Think of what a tremendous difference it would make for Bob Avakian's voice to become known, discussed and debated throughout society. Many people are disgusted by the lies upon lies emanating from the highest levels of government. Bob Avakian gets beneath the surface and dares to speak the truth.

What if people's thinking was not being suffocated by the limits being imposed on critical thinking? Think of what it would mean for high school and college students as they are thinking about what to do with their lives to have their eyes opened to Bob Avakian's memoir, *From Ike to Mao and Beyond*. Shouldn't his writings be a reference point in academia? There need to be panels and symposiums convened by college professors debating the merits of Avakian's analysis of the socialist experience in the Soviet Union and China -- being challenged by his assessment of both their accomplishments and weaknesses, and his views that humanity could do even better the next time around. If this were happening on campuses across the country, this would bring a breath of much-needed fresh air.

Think about people who refuse to believe that this system is the best of all possible worlds finding out about Bob Avakian's video, **"REVOLUTION, WHY IT'S NECESSARY, WHY IT'S POSSIBLE, AND WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT."** What impact would it have for people to have gatherings with their friends to debate these ideas into the late hours of the night? Think about what it would mean if millions of people come to know Bob Avakian and stand up to any and all attacks on him by the government, because they see that this courageous voice must be a vital part of the discourse and ferment in society.

These are only a few examples of how Bob Avakian's voice could become known throughout society. People's creativity, ideas, initiative, and collaboration will help make these ideas and others a reality. All of this will create a much stronger basis to protect his voice.

Right now Engage! faces two very immediate and concrete challenges:

- 1) Expanding the statement's signatories to a critical mass of 100 or more and raising the needed funds to publish the statement in one or more prominent places.
- 2) Getting a web page started. For this there are excellent ideas and proposals, but we need to enlist the help of people with technical expertise.

People have started coming together in a few cities to discuss these and other challenges. Some discussions have been lofty and far-ranging — daring to dream of what could be, aiming high, not limited to a narrow vision of "this is what is currently being done." Based on grappling with both short and long-term goals and necessities, these discussions helped envision how to solve both current and future challenges.

People grappled with the question: **How can the "Dangerous times demand courageous voices..." statement have maximal impact?** And how can it be taken up by many more people? There is no doubt that this statement, boldly published and made widely known could have a big impact, potentially stirring up enormous controversy and debate.

One great proposal that will give people a sense of the breadth of support for this effort and will help reach out even more is for a number of signatories to write short statements on how they have been provoked or challenged by Avakian's work. People should send these statements to the email address.

The comments by a young woman at one of the meetings is the kind of personal statement that could be circulated. She said that she always thought this was a system where problems could be solved in a just way, but then came 9/11 and suddenly long-held beliefs and assumptions she had were thrown up for grabs. A full-on war on the world based on lies, science thrown out the window on the question of global warming, people left to die in Katrina, a woman's basic right to an abortion threatened...she said that she felt compelled to engage with the possibility of a different world and was drawn to Avakian and his work.

In what other ways can we reach others who are deeply troubled by these and similar questions?

There is a great deal of interest in salons or discussions on different topics that Avakian has written on -- urgent questions of the day like the threat of religious fundamentalism and theocracy, the juggernaut of war, *Democracy Can't We do Better Than That?* or his essays on "... morality but not traditional morality. Let's start some of these debates and discussions now and introduce new people to Avakian's voice, while we ourselves engage with his work in new and different ways.

Developing the website:

The discussions underscored this as a crucial way to develop **Engage!** into a vibrant network of people who share experiences, develop projects, and learn from each other. There was quite a bit of dreaming about different ways that a website could really impact boldly and very broadly. How do you reach different kinds of audiences?

One professor who's been studying and following Avakian's work on epistemology, and democracy and dictatorship in the socialist transition period, expressed how he really wants to see people who are experts in various fields, like urban planning, science, history, political science, political economy debating Avakian's provocative work. He envisions these kinds of exchanges on Avakian's work among these and other critical thinkers.

Advisory Board

We need a advisory board – people who will be part of a group that takes collective responsibility to oversee the development of the **Engage!** project. We need volunteers! All of us are very busy, but this is one of the very important ways that people can contribute without it taking up an enormous amount of time.

Urgently needed funds!!

Everyone who signs the statement should contribute funds generously. It's going to take money to publish the statement in a major newspaper or a periodical. If everyone contributes generously we can do this. But this only scratches the surface of what kinds of things can be done if funds are raised for them.

And how can we have fun and interchanges while raising money? One idea is to have fund-raising parties where sections from the *"Revolution..."* DVD could be shown, or there could be book discussion parties on *From Ike to Mao and Beyond*, or a get together to listen to some of Michael Slate's radio interviews with Avakian.

If you haven't already donated, send a check payable to: "Engage!" Box 259, 2124 Kittredge St., Berkeley, CA 94704.

Also, if you know any potential big donors, we could work together to figure out how to best approach them.

Let us know about events and happenings that people should know about. For example, on February 19th, the Pan African Film Festival in Los Angeles showed a segment from Avakian's talk, *"Revolution. Why it's necessary. Why it's possible. What it's all about"*.

Well, that's it for now. Please correspond and send comments and reports about how you can help with any of these projects and pass on your ideas about how to further develop the committee. Please write to: engagewbobavakian@yahoo.com.

You can also call Heriberto Ocasio at 415-902-7936. We have attached a copy of the signatories to the **Engage!** Statement.

Signatories for Engage! Statement

Aladdin, Actor and Comedian

Robert Bloom, Attorney, Oakland, California

Rev. Richard Meri Ka Ra Byrd, KRST Center of African Spirituality, Los Angeles

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

Joe Fortunato, Attorney and New Jersey Green Party*

reg e. gaines, Director

Danny Hoch, Actor and Playwright

Dr. Tony Jackson, Psychologist, Professor, Artist, Activist; Oakland

Rev. Earl Kooperkamp, St. Mary's Episcopal Church,* Harlem, New York

Paul Kangas, Vice President, Veterans for Peace, San Francisco Chapter*

Yuri Kochiyama, Civil Rights Activist, Oakland

Mike Ladd, Writer and Producer

Aron Laub, Attorney at Law, Los Angeles

Brian Lloyd, University of California, Riverside*

Lucia Marano, Actor and Writer, Los Angeles

Alan Miller, Berkeley High School English Teacher

Susan Nussbaum, Actress

Heriberto Ocasio, Jr., MD, San Francisco

Jose Palafox, Dept. of Ethnic Studies, University of California Berkeley,* Instructor

Martha Quetzal Ceja, Managing Editor, Insight Press*

Wilson Riles Jr., Former Oakland City Councilman

Victoria Robinson, University of California Berkeley,* Lecturer

C. Zadik Shapiro, Attorney at Law, San Francisco

Ula Taylor, Associate Professor, University of California Berkeley*

Daniel Tsang, KUCI "Subversity" Show

Katherine Turner, St. Vartan Armenian Church, University of California Berkeley*

David Zeiger, Filmmaker, *Sir, No Sir!*

* organizations listed for identification purposes only