

ASIAN-AMERICANS AND THE U.S. MOVEMENT

By Grace Lee Boggs

I was very glad to accept the invitation to speak to this Conference because I believe that the Asian-American movement is one of the most significant among the many movements that are developing today in the struggle to revolutionize America. The brother introduced me as an educator. I should add that, since I received my doctorate in philosophy in 1940--a long time ago--I have been a part of the revolutionary movement in this country. Over the years I have tried to apply Marxism and Leninism to the development of the revolutionary ideology and the revolutionary politics which are necessary to resolve the contradictions of this country.

The Asian Political Alliance in Detroit

The Asian Political Alliance (APA) in Detroit, of which I am a member, was also very anxious for me to come so that I could take back to them what I learn from you. They are paying for my fare with a showing of "The East is Red." APA has a very modest program at this moment. Our program is on three levels. Each month we show a film to which we hope the most varied types of Asians will come: Asians from overseas, Asians born here, Asians who are fearful of the threats which the Immigration Department holds over the heads of all Asians in the United States but who still care about what is going on in Asia. In the darkness of a movie hall, they break into smiles as they recognize, with curiosity, with happiness and with hope, the tremendous changes taking place in China.

Every month we also hold a workshop mostly for American-born Asians, especially the young people who during the last 25 years have been dispersed out

- 2/ of the Chinatowns and Little Tokyos and who are now trying to discover who they are, to find their identity. We are planning an Asian Identity Film Festival in the spring which, hopefully, will be organized by these young people working together with those born overseas.

Finally there is the small group of APA members, overseas-born and American-born, Japanese and Chinese, who plan these programs. In our regular weekly meetings we try to work on our programs practically and systematically, develop self-criticism unashamedly, and engage in the serious theoretical discussions that are essential to developing and internalizing a revolutionary ideology adequate to the revolution in this country.

Responsibilities of a Revolutionary

I was glad to come to this Conference even though I feel about New York much the same way that the brother from Hawaii does. "It's an insane place." In New York I see concentrated all the contradictions of this country. Since I am not prepared at this moment to live here and help to resolve these contradictions concretely and through practical struggle, I feel terribly frustrated every time I come for a visit. I wonder how many of you have given any serious thought to how you would revolutionize this city. What would you do if you had power? What vision do you have of a metropolitan area governed by those strata who have been most oppressed, for the benefit of these strata and at the same time benefiting and advancing all the people? How many of you have thought about that or about the responsibilities of power? What vision do you have for reorganizing New York and how would you mobilize people in the struggle for that vision?

Being a revolutionary involves a continuing commitment to developing and projecting a vision

- 3/ and to mobilizing people to struggle for that vision. Being a revolutionary involves being ready to assume the responsibilities of power: not just to complain, not just to agitate, not just to fight, but to keep before yourself and the people whom you are seeking to mobilize, a vision of what lies at the end of the struggle, the society for which you are ready to struggle, for which you are mobilizing others to struggle, and which you are ready to take the power to realize.

Yesterday we had the opportunity to hear Brother William Hinton (with whom I have some disagreements but whose book Fan Shen has helped me more than I can say to understand what it really means to transform people and to transform institutions at the same time). He described the very concrete problems the Chinese people faced and the solutions that the Chinese Communists proposed and the people fought for: national independence, land reform, the right of women to own property so that they would have an objective basis for freedom, the release of the stagnant productive forces. Those were the problems of China; they are not the problems of the United States. National independence? This country is the country which oppresses the whole world. We don't need to fight for national independence. Land reform? The right of women to own property? Releasing the stagnant productive forces? Those are not our problems. If we want to become revolutionists in this country, we have to be ready to analyze the concrete problems and the general and specific contradictions of this country.

Revolution, For What Purpose

What are the goals of a revolution in the United States? What are your goals? Where have you talked and written about them? What would a revolutionary government do in the United States? A revolutionist

4/ doesn't seek power just for the sake of power. A revolutionist doesn't seek power just to do what the liberals have failed to do. Most of you say that you want to "change the system." What do you mean by "the system"? Do you just mean changing property relationships or do you mean something more than that? Is your aim to create more appropriate, more human relationships between people? How would you develop those concretely? Revolution is not just rebellion, not just revolt, not just insurrection, not just a coup d'etat. All of these may be involved in the process of a developing revolution, but together they do not add up to a revolution.

A revolution is for the purpose of bringing about an accelerated development in the evolution of Man, a more rapid development in the evolution of all Mankind, an evolution that has been going on now for at least 50,000 years and which is far from over. A revolution is for the purpose of creating a "New Man," new people, new men, women and children. Man is not just an economic being or a materialistic being, not just a producer nor just a consumer. Human beings have been seeking the values by which they can govern themselves and establish more human relationships among themselves for approximately 10,000 years. A revolution is not just a spontaneous event. It is a struggle by great masses of people seeking to make real, i.e. to translate into reality, new, more advanced concepts of themselves as human beings. A revolution is led by committed people who are constantly clarifying the goals that the society must achieve if it is to advance rather than retard the evolution of Humanity.

The Role of Asian-Americans

Where do we stand as Asian-Americans in relationship to the development of a revolution in the United States? First of all, who are we? We are the first generation of Asian-Americans who are resisting assimilation into the American Way of Life. Our

5/ grandparents, our parents didn't have the opportunity to resist assimilation. They were rejected. We are the first ones who can choose to resist assimilation. My parents and your parents did not have this choice. We have this choice today only because in 1943 the American Establishment--in order to show unity with Chiang Kai-shek and in order to cut Japanese-Americans off from the land of their forefathers--began opening up all sorts of doors to Chinese and Japanese. Now, nearly thirty years later, having seen what is behind these doors, we are repelled by the United States way of life. The Vietnam war has given us a glimpse into its biocidal and genocidal character. The Black revolt has given us an idea of the dehumanizing principles by which it operates.

Our parents felt that for the sake of material progress and in the pursuit of material happiness, it was worthwhile seeking assimilation into this society, even though some of them recognized its barbarian nature. Most of them, simply in order to survive, felt they had to pursue the American way of life. They also had no other civilization to which they could refer. All they could see in China was banditry, illiteracy, opium addiction, poverty, floods and famines, the oppression of women, warlords, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism. Here, at any rate, it seemed as if they could build a new life for their families and themselves. It was the same for the Japanese. Even if, like the Chinese, they could only get low-paying, servile, dehumanizing jobs, they felt that, by working hard and acquiring material goods, they could make it possible for their children to live in greater dignity. The alternative in Japan was militarism, feudal social relations, and imperialist expansion into all of Asia.

Today, however, all of Asia is in revolutionary ferment. We now have another reference point. In China, in Vietnam, in North Korea, we can see a new society being built, a new world being built, a "New

6/ Man" coming into being. A new way of life is emerging in Asia which is as inspiring to the people of the whole world as, two hundred years ago, the "New Land" and the "New Man" of the "New Continent" of America were inspiring to the people of Europe. In the process of trying to destroy this new world, the United States--which was actually never much of a melting pot--is becoming unstuck. All sorts of centrifugal forces are developing within the country. All over the world, as well as here in the United States, all sorts of people are feeling the attraction of the new world being born in Asia. All sorts of people are being moved by the emergence of this new world to ask themselves fundamental questions about how people should live if they are to realize their nature as human beings. We, as Asians, are part of that movement.

Most of us here, particularly the younger ones among us, are of petty-bourgeois origin, petty-bourgeois in the sense that our fathers are shopkeepers, or professionals (engineers, doctors, teachers). That is nothing to be ashamed of. Mao, Castro, Lenin, Marx, all were of petty-bourgeois or middle class origin. What determines whether or not you are a "petty-bourgeois intellectual" is not your social origin but the seriousness with which you take your ideas, your readiness (or lack of readiness) to develop them in a continuing relationship "from the masses, to the masses," your willingness to learn from the masses as well as to teach them.

Emergence of an Asian Movement in the U.S.

The Asian movement in this country is very new, but it is developing very rapidly. Last summer, at a conference in Chicago, we heard reports of 50-70 groups. They are springing up all over the place, on university campuses, in communities with a significant concentration of Asians (such as Little Tokyo

7/ in Los Angeles or Chinatown in San Francisco and New York), and even in places like Detroit where we have no Asian community at all.

In a sense the Asian movement is just coming out of the ground, spontaneously, as the result of the changing objective situation. There is nothing wrong with this. But in the course of spontaneous development you are bound to make some mistakes. The point is to learn from those mistakes. In this connection I would suggest that you all read Mao's On Practice. In that lecture, which was made to the cadres in Yenan in 1937, Mao points out the mistakes that were made in the First Revolutionary Civil War during the 1920's. But he doesn't blame those mistakes on somebody else. He says that in the process of changing reality, certain ideas, theories, programs are bound to be partially or even entirely incorrect. Nevertheless we have to develop our ideas, put them into practice, and then, if necessary, be ready to revise them drastically.

There is nothing wrong with making mistakes. It is only wrong if you don't learn from your mistakes. Often it is very painful to learn from your mistakes. But, as I remind myself again and again, there is only one thing that is more painful than learning from experience, and that is not learning from experience.

I have made a lot of mistakes. You cannot be in the movement for as long as I have been without making them. One of the occupational hazards of someone like myself is that people discover 15 or 20 years later the ideas which you have since tested and revised. Often they are very put out when you tell them that you have changed your ideas because the situation has changed or because the ideas didn't work out in practice. In the last many years I have in a sense been wearing a borrowed identity because, being married to a black

8/ man, I have lived in the black world and functioned as part of the black community. If, during those years I have been able to make some contribution to the movement, it is chiefly because my continuous involvement has enabled me to understand that practice should be an expression of theory (and not a proof of one's personal militancy) and that theory must be revised in the light of practice.

Mistakes to be Avoided

What are some of the mistakes that we are likely to make, that anybody in this situation might make?

First of all, there is the tendency just to borrow ideas, methods, slogans, tactics from other revolutions. It is difficult not to do that because a revolution is the greatest thing that ever happens to great numbers of people. Listen to Brother Alex Hing who has seen a revolution in life and in action, in China, in Vietnam, in North Korea. The Russian Revolution and the Chinese Revolution have made the same kind of impact on Brother Hinton. People who have been to Cuba come back similarly moved. It is not just the vinylon which Brother Alex described so glowingly. It is not just the new products, the new things that are being produced. It is seeing people on the move and realizing how politically conscious, how socially responsible, how independently creative and how unashamedly self-critical human beings can be. Brother Alex has seen new people. Having seen them, it is difficult not to think that all we have to do is just take this or that idea or program and apply it here. But it can't be done that way because that is an artificial, an external way. It is an attempt to impose ideas and programs from without, instead of developing them from the contradictions within, which is the dialectical way.

9/ Under the impact of a successful revolution, it is also easy to confuse a pre-revolutionary period, which is what we are in today in the United States, with a post-revolutionary period which is what we see in China. You begin to think that you can do here, today, what they are doing in another country where the revolutionary forces are in power. You get all sorts of democratic illusions. For example, you think you can carry arms here because the people in Cuba or in China carry arms to defend their revolutionary governments. I am not saying that people in this country should not own weapons. But what you do with these weapons and how you go about developing an armed wing for the revolutionary movement in this country is a much more complicated question. It cannot be answered without a much more profound conception of the counter-revolutionary character of the U. S. government--the most powerful, the most corrupting, the most sophisticated counter-revolutionary government that the world has ever known, and one that is going to get worse, not better.

It is very easy to apply correct principles mechanically and hence incorrectly. Here I want to criticize the brother who heckled the speaker who was proposing that we form a "Back-to-China" movement. To justify his action, this brother took out his little Red Book and showed me the passage in which "to hear incorrect views without rebutting them" is given as an example of liberalism. I tried to explain to him that there is a time and place for everything. If I am in the APA, the committed group that is working on programs and I don't speak up when I see or hear something going wrong, then that is a form of liberalism. But if I am with a group of people who are trying to find their way at a conference and I don't give everybody a chance to speak, even if they are saying wrong things, then I am behaving incorrectly.

10/ There is also a lot of talk about "power to the people" and "arming the people." Which people? Nixon is also part of "the people," if we are just talking about people. There are a lot of reactionary and dangerous elements among the people. So we can't talk about the people in general. We must see people in their structural relationship to the development of this society and in their relationship to the creation of a new society. That doesn't mean that everybody who is not on the revolutionary side is going to be put into concentration camps after the revolutionary forces come to power. By no means. After revolutionary power is established, everybody gets a chance at a fresh start. But, as my husband likes to say, if the counter-revolutionaries get out of line then, you have to shoot them. The purpose of a revolution is to benefit the whole society. But before the revolution especially, you have to be very much aware of the contradictory and the antagonistic forces within the society.

Another mistake that it is easy to slip into is the mistake of imitating or trying to imitate other sections of the movement, and particularly the black movement. We must understand that the black movement has many tendencies within it just as the Asian movement, as it grows, will develop many tendencies within it. The various tendencies may be able to get together in a United Front on a particular issue or in relation to a specific program, e.g. for the reorganization of education under Community Control. But if you are trying to determine the direction of a movement--which is the task of the vanguard--then you have to be inside the community for which you are trying to create this direction. Since Asians, for the most part, are not going to be living in the black community, they should not imitate movements that originate within the black community. The black movement is today

11/ trying to find its way. For 10-15 years it was moving forward. Now it is going every which way. The black movement will not resume its place at the head of the American movement (which I believe it can and should) until the various tendencies within it, which are trying to divert blacks from their historic task of leading the total revolutionizing of U.S. society, have run their course.

The Mistake in Thinking Like Most Americans

The most serious mistake that we can make is to think the way that most Americans think. Americans think empirically, Americans think quantitatively. Americans think individualistically. They lack that sense of a continuing history which helps you to think dialectically. Because of the peculiar way in which this country was built up, Americans are always destroying or abandoning the past. They do not stop to reflect on how the present has developed out of the past.

Therefore most Americans have little or no sense of the public "I," the social and historical "I" that must go along with the private "I" in order for a human being to be complete. Every individual needs a conception of himself in relation to a social whole and a continuing humanity in terms of which he can judge his actions. This conception is obviously not the same for all times and all places. But the two poles--the private and the public consciousness--and a certain tension between them, must exist in order for a person to be confident of his identity as human. Because the historical, the public "I" scarcely exists in this country, Americans tend to think of themselves in biological categories, in terms of age, of race, of sex. Or they judge everything according to quantitative and technical standards, in terms of Gross National Product and the mechanical efficiency of instruments and weapons. That is why they can boast that the recent raid on the POW camp in North Vietnam was successful even though it obviously failed.

- 12/ You heard them. "It all went off as planned. We didn't do a single thing wrong." Americans have know-how but no know-why.

Americans also have a public relations attitude towards truth. They "sell" ideas or think of them as slogans which you get people to adopt. They have no conception of how ideas are developed through struggles to achieve human goals and in the course of reflection upon these struggles.

We have to be on guard against all these ways of thinking because we live in America too. We are Asian-Americans. Therefore we haven't been able to resist many of these ways of thinking. But we can resist them if we are conscious of them and of the political traps into which they can lead us. Take, for example, the American habit of judging everything in terms of quantity, i.e. playing the numbers game. In the movement this often takes the form of flooding the people with figures of casualties and horror stories to the point that they are unable to think. They have been stunned into insensitivity.

To safeguard myself against this mistake, I try to bear in mind something that Lenin said in 1915 during the First World War, a war which, for that time, was a war of atrocities. In his dispute with some comrades who were ready to renounce support for the self-determination of nations, Lenin pointed out how reason itself can be intimidated or suppressed by the monstrous crimes of imperialist war. Today in Indochina the people are able to put the horrible crimes of U.S. imperialism into some place within their minds because they have built organs of struggle to combat U.S. imperialism and also because they have a vision of the new society which they will be able to build when they have forced the U.S. to withdraw.

- 13/ So their power to think and to hope has not been destroyed by the horrors of the war. In this country we have not given enough thought to the question of how we should deal with these atrocities in our propaganda, how we should tell people about them, whether we are giving people an idea of what they can do, creating means by which they can act, so that they are not stunned into insensitivity or into the refusal to think by the sheer magnitude of the atrocities.

Understanding the Dialectical Development of the Enemy

Another thing we have to remember is that it isn't only the revolutionary movement that develops dialectically. Over the last hundred years we have witnessed a dialectical development from Marx to Mao which represents a very important development in the history of thought, of all thinking and not just of revolutionary thinking. But we must never forget that there has been a dialectical development on the other side also. Capitalism has developed into imperialism, and imperialism has assumed new forms of neo-colonialism and multi-national corporations. As capitalism has developed, it has also been able to coopt into its structure different sections of the population. Lenin's contribution to the analysis of imperialism was not his economic analysis. Hobson and others had done most of the economic analysis already. Lenin's contribution was his recognition of the fact that imperialism had been able to incorporate a section of the working population, the labor aristocracy, so that the enemy was no longer just an isolated handful of monopoly or finance capitalists. You can only understand the nature of the enemy if you understand the dialectical development of the enemy.

Asian Heritage, Identity, Community and the American Movement

It is in this sphere of dialectical, of historical

14/ thinking that I believe Asian-Americans can make their greatest contribution to the American movement. My greatest disappointment was that we were unable to hold the scheduled workshops on Chinese and Japanese history. Bill Hinton and I agreed that it was a mistake for him to have conducted that workshop. I believe Hinton's book Fan Shen is one of the most important sourcebooks of revolutionary development that has ever been written and that it will be read as long as human beings read and think and aspire. But when I find myself disagreeing with Bill Hinton, it is usually because his thinking seems to begin with Marxism and the Russian Revolution. To me the Russian Revolution took place only 50 years ago. Marxism itself is only 100 years old, while Marx himself was trying to solve the problems of the French Revolution which is less than 200 years old. Two hundred years is a very short period in the history of the development of Mankind. In Asia they have been trying for at least 2000 years to discover what are the appropriate relations between human beings. Mao is not only trying to resolve contemporary problems. Shaping his theory and his practice are contradictions which have remained unresolved for thousands of years. For example, there is the ages-old philosophical conflict between Taoism and Confucianism, between the Taoist concept that if you move forward in history you are moving towards disintegration, and the Confucian concept that the intellectual should act politically to shape and change society. Mao was able to break loose from this dilemma by appropriating and enriching the dialectical concept with which all Marxist politics begins; viz. that historical progress takes place through the development of internal contradictions. The Chinese are also very conscious of the need to abolish the division of labor between the Chinese intellectuals who have traditionally been responsible for laying down axioms of social behavior, and the Chinese masses whose role has merely been to act out these axioms ritualistically. People in the

15/ West find it hard to understand the Chinese Communists' insistence that intellectuals and experts do their share of manual work when there is such a shortage in China of highly educated people. The Chinese reply--that the shortage of highly educated people is temporary, while the tendency on the part of the educated class to bureaucratism is permanent--sums up the sense of history with which the Chinese approach contemporary problems.

In the last two years, since we started the Asian Political Alliance in Detroit, I have learned so much from the other members of APA about myself, about human beings, about the development of Mankind. I have come to understand my father better.

My father came here--as many of your grandparents did--to work on the railroads. Then he became a small businessman, a laundryman and, later, a restaurant man. Like many other small shopkeepers in the early years of this century, he supported Sun Yat-sen. After Chiang Kai-shek took over from Sun Yat-sen, he thought I should marry a Kuomintang man. He was unsuccessful because I could see how Kuomintang men treated ordinary people and particularly women. My father supported the Kuomintang. Yet, before he died, five years ago in Detroit at the age of 95, he was saying that Mao had achieved for his village in Toisan the dream of a public school which he had been carrying around all these years.

So when I think of my father, I think of the different stages he had to go through and of the different stages that China has had to go through to solve its problems. I think not only of the many times that we differed and clashed with one another but of the things that I learned from him and of the things that he came to understand about Mao. Recently something that he never tired of repeating has been coming

16/back to me. 好不好問八个人 In English it means "Good or bad, ask eight men." Every time he or we had a problem, he would say that. It took me years to ask myself, why eight men? Why an even number? What it means to me now is that you can't just count noses. You consult others but in the end it is up to you to decide, to choose the right course.

This is the sort of thing that has begun to come into focus for me as I have been discovering my identity as an Asian in America. Apparently, also, I could not really internalize or make creative use of the many important truths that I have learned from non-Asians, black and white, until I was clear about my own identity as an Asian-American.

I would like to recommend to you the writings of Han Suyin. Born shortly after the first Chinese Revolution to a Chinese father and a Belgian mother living in China, her personal life has taken shape against the background of a nation struggling to create its own revolutionary identity. Many of us will be going through the kinds of experiences which she went through in her search for identity and which are described in her historical autobiography in three volumes: A Crippled Tree, A Mortal Flower, and Birdless Summer. A doctor of medicine who is best known for her novel, Love is a Many Splendored Thing, she has returned again and again to China in recent years, and in her little book Asia Today has summed up the significance of the Chinese Revolution as the simultaneous transformation of people and of institutions.

We need to know more about Japanese history. Recently when the famous Japanese writer, Mishima, committed hari kiri after attempting some kind of a coup d'etat, it apparently shook up the Japanese

17/people as they have not been shaken up since the defeat of World War II. Meanwhile the Komeito Party, a Buddhist Party, has been growing at a phenomenal rate. What do these developments mean? Ever since the U.S. defeated Japan, she has been trying to de-culturize the Japanese people as she has tried to de-culturize every other people whom she has controlled, particularly black people but also Asians and others when they came to this country. Is it possible that the Japanese people are today trying to find ways to come to grips with their past? Some of these ways may be very reactionary, but possibly they gain such a mass response because Japanese revolutionaries have failed to meet this need on the part of the people in Japan and those of Japanese descent elsewhere. There is a great deal more about the historical development of Japan that we need to find out and reflect on. It is unfortunate that there are not more Japanese-Americans in this meeting.

What Can Be Done in The Community

We need to go to the people in our communities--where there are communities--and learn from them. Not as social workers or as agitators but to find out what it is that they are looking for. We have to concentrate on the institutions in which they feel their future involved, such as the schools to which their children go, and be able to offer some answers and to help build some new infra-structures, some parallel institutions. For a number of years now some of us in the black movement have been working on a new concept of "EDUCATION TO GOVERN,"* to replace the prevailing but outmoded concept of education only for the purpose of increased earnings. I believe that

*The All-African Peoples Union has published a pamphlet EDUCATION TO GOVERN: A PHILOSOPHY AND PROGRAM FOR LEARNING NOW, P.O. Box 3309, Jefferson Station, Detroit, Michigan 48214, 50¢.

18/ the concept of "EDUCATION TO GOVERN" will find a response in the Little Tokyos and Chinatowns, and that through such a concept and a program to correspond we will be able to work with young people, with their parents, and with some of their teachers in a revolutionary way. We have to take advantage of the fact that one of the deepest, most insoluble crises of this society is in its educational institutions.

Revolutionary Students and Revolutionary Struggle

Revolutionary struggle involves taking advantage of the contradictions and the weaknesses of your enemy. Revolutionary struggle involves being able to use your political strength, the strength of your political ideas. If you have the correct political ideas, you can develop your strength among the people even when the physical apparatus opposed to you is very powerful. That is what Mao understood when he offered a United Front to Chiang Kai-shek to fight Japanese imperialism. Similarly the Vietnamese have taken advantage of the contradictions within U.S. advanced technology to create a people's war.

In one of the workshops I heard a young brother say some very important things. Speaking to the other Asians, he said, "Now you know you have to come to grips with the West. You have to create a new conception of Man, not to recreate the old Chinaman. Our forefathers had to become renegades from China in order to survive and to prosper. Our purpose now must be to use our heritage to deal with Western industrialism and Western capitalism." "A gun isn't going to give you pride," he continued. "It's only through struggle that you, as students, can become a community."

Revolutionary students have played and continue to play a key role in the development of the Asian

19/ revolutions. Revolutionary students are those who have the courage to develop and to internalize revolutionary ideas and to relate these ideas to the people in the community, to learn from them as well as to teach them. By learning from the community, I do not mean that you do exactly what community people tell you to do. I would never have married a black man if I had done what my father and mother told me to do. As this same brother put it, "Being proud does not mean being proud of what your forefathers did or of what Confucius said, but rather of what you have done and are going to do with your life."

Vision for Revolutionary Power in the U.S.

What is the vision that we have for revolutionary power in the United States? Socialism? Communism? We must remember that Capitalism has existed for only a few hundred years and that Socialism and Communism have been revolutionary goals for only a hundred or so years. This is a very brief period of time. This morning I overheard two sisters discussing China. One said that she had difficulty discussing China with other people because they immediately called it "Communist," to which the other replied, "But China isn't Communist, it's Socialist." In this country we usually use the word "Socialism" not in its scientific sense but to avoid using the word "Communism." We are afraid of the word "Communism" and we think that "Socialism" is more palatable, more acceptable. If I were going to be for either Socialism or Communism in this country, I would be for Communism. Because Communism, scientifically speaking, means a classless society in which everybody has according to his needs and gives according to his abilities. I am not afraid of being called "a Communist" but at the same time I am very much aware of the scientific and historical meanings of Capitalism, Socialism and Communism.

To me, Marxian dialectics means being scrupulously scientific about your concepts, taking care

20/ to relate them to very specific stages of historical development, to the specific contradictions of a given society. Marx envisaged "Socialism" as the political and economic stage after Capitalism because he was convinced that Capitalism would not be able to develop the productive forces sufficiently for a Communist or classless society. Only Socialism, or a workers government, could introduce the planning required to bring about sufficiently rapid development of the productive forces.

The U.S., A Politically Backward Country

In this country, however, our chief problem is not rapid development of the productive forces. We are not living in 19th century Europe nor in any of the Third World countries where economic underdevelopment has been systematically maintained in order to advance the economic development of the Western imperialist powers. The United States is not an economically undeveloped country. It is the economically and technologically most advanced country in the world. In fact, the basic contradiction of the United States stems from the incompatibility of its advanced technology with its political backwardness. This country is politically undeveloped in the sense that it has evaded, since its inception, all the crucial questions of socially responsible relations between ethnic groupings and between individuals. It is politically undeveloped in the sense that the only politics of which most Americans have any idea or any experience is going to the polls every two years and ritualistically dropping some pieces of paper into ballot boxes. What do most Americans mean when they say that people in the Third World are "not ready for democracy"? That they are not satisfied with the meaningless ritual of dropping some piece of paper into a ballot box? That they get excited and aroused by who does what in the

21/ government? That they are likely to go out in the streets at any time and make their presence and their views felt about government policy or absence of policy? This is what most people in the United States mean when they say that people in Asia, in Africa, and in Latin America are "not ready for democracy." The phrase itself indicates how backward American democracy is, how politically undeveloped this country is.

The fundamental contradiction of the United States is the contradiction between its tremendous technological overdevelopment, its tremendous know-how, and its equally tremendous political underdevelopment, its absence of know-why. Many millions of lives have been sacrificed to make possible this technological overdevelopment. Our responsibility, as well as our opportunity, is to use this technological development to initiate a new stage in the development of Mankind, to begin the creation of politically-conscious, socially-responsible, independently creative, and unashamedly self-critical men and women.

Goal of a Revolution in the U.S.

This, as I see it, is the goal of the revolution in the United States: to transform ("fan shen") people so that they can struggle for this goal; to transform institutions so that they can make this goal more capable of realization; to transform people and institutions together, in order to make creative and critical political activity the socially-necessary activity of every man, woman and child.

In the protracted struggle necessary to bring about this revolutionary transformation of people and of institutions in this country, the potentially most revolutionary social force is black people. Black people can play this leading role, not because

22/of their color but because the historical development of this country has concentrated them into strategic urban areas and has forced them at the same time to center their concrete struggles around such fundamental questions as "What is a Man?" What would be appropriate human relations between people in this day and age? How can these relations be made the prevailing social relations of our society?"

After the blacks, we Asians may be the ones who have the most to contribute to the struggle. In certain sections of the country we also have heavy concentrations of people in strategic areas--as in San Francisco--but the great majority of Asian-Americans are no longer concentrated in such areas. Nevertheless, I believe we have something very important to contribute in the form of a historical perspective and in the concept of the human contradictions that have to be recognized and resolved and which we can see being tackled in Asia.

The concept of humanism has come up several times in this conference. When most Americans talk of humanism, they talk about it within the same empirical, psychological, behavioral science framework as they talk about almost everything human. To them it seems to mean encounter therapy, sensitivity training, and all that sort of thing. As Asian-Americans we should be able to understand that humanism is only revolutionary if it is Dialectical Humanism, only if it is viewed as a continuation of the struggle which the human species has been carrying on over many thousands of years to achieve appropriate human relations between people, a struggle which must be waged against both the enemy within and the enemy without, and for the revolutionary transformation not only of social institutions but of oneself.

23/ In Detroit the APA is making a modest beginning in the kinds of organizational activities which may enable us to become part of the general social movement towards that goal. We see ourselves, first, as a small circle of Asians who are committed to revolutionary struggle and to a program of self-criticism and of theoretical development. This small circle, in turn, has taken responsibility for relating itself to and encouraging a larger circle of Asians who are consciously seeking to discover and to create their identity. And finally, we are discovering ways and means to relate to an even larger circle of Asians who are not yet even conscious that they need a new identity but who are curious about what is going on in Asia and who feel a growing suspicion that the old ways by which Chinese and Japanese in America resolved their contradictions, i.e. by becoming technicians of various kinds and thereby avoiding humanistic questions, will no longer work.

Organizing yourselves in this way or in some variation thereon may enable you to find out through practice a great many things about yourselves and about other Asian-Americans. What you will discover is that what matters is not the Gross National Product or what percentage of the U.S. population consists of Asians. Rather what matters is the depths of our commitment, the soundness of our vision, and our readiness and ability to organize ourselves in such a way that we can begin to move others in struggle towards that vision, beginning with those groups of people who relate to us and with whom we can move. Any United Front which does not have at its core some committed people who have a revolutionary vision of where they are going is just people coming together adhoc and breaking up just as haphazardly. To make a revolution it is going to take much more than that. What it takes we as Asian-Americans can play an important part in creating.

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