

RU Speech at NY May Day

Working Class Is Freedom

(The following is a speech by Bob Avakian of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Union given at the New York City May Day rally on May 3rd.—Ed.)

It's a great honor to be here to speak today at this beautiful May Day rally. I think we have to ask what is the importance of this event?

All of our lives, and I'm sure this is everybody's experience, they tried to make us ashamed of our class. Tried to make our kids ashamed of the fact that their parents are workers who work with their hands. They tried to tell us to be anything, but don't be a worker and if you are, don't ever say so.

And what we're here today to do is to say we've had enough of that, we're standing up proudly and proclaiming our class—the working class.

We don't give a damn what they put on the television, we don't give a damn what they say and that's the importance of this event—that we're getting our class together. That's the thing that they fear the most, when we begin to recognize who we are and who they are. That we're the working class that does all the work, makes everything go, makes everything run, produces everything. And they're the capitalist class that produces nothing but decadence. They're the enemy and all of our struggles are more and more aimed directly and squarely at them, as this rally shows.

The importance of this rally is not the fact that there are people here speaking about the working class, though that's important. If we were up here speaking at 12 midnight, everybody'd say we were a bunch of kooks, and they'd be right. And it's not simply the fact that we have a crowd here. That doesn't scare them either. And that doesn't show our strength, 'cause there's lots of crowds every day, getting on the subway going to work.

But when we put the two together—when we put the ideas that we're uniting around and the demands that we're raising together with our numbers and our strength—that's what scares the hell out of them. And that's what gives us inspiration as we're getting here today.

There's been a lot of speeches made, and I think they all come down to one thing. We're tired of this whole set-up where a few people like Rockefeller and all the rest of those chumps sit and do nothing while we live only by working for them and are able to work for them only if we make them rich. Like the song says, the old workers song, "We've fed you all for a thousand years; and here we are still unfed."

Who the hell needs it? That's what we're proclaiming today and at all the dozens of May Days, with the thousands of workers gathering all across the country.

We are the working class. We're the class that produces everything useful in society. We are truly the most powerful class in the history of the world. You look around at everything here—the pavement you're standing on, the clothes that you're wearing, the cars that are going by—everything was made by the working class. Not a damn bit of it was made by Rockefeller! And if we can make the country run, then I got one question: *Why the hell can't we run the country?*

Now they tell us, "Oh, you can't do that." They tell us that workers will never get together, that it's just a dream. Well—take notice of what we're doing here. We're beginning to get together.

Workers can go out 6,000 strong in Ohio to protect a few jobs. Why did they do that? Why did those work-

ers care about those few jobs? It was just a few so why not just forget it? Go on about your business and don't pay no attention. That's what the bosses and that's what their flunkies in the union leadership try to put over to us. But we know that in those few jobs also lies our jobs and our future. That's the importance of those workers fighting for those few jobs.

If we can do that, and if we can stick together, and if we can make sacrifices in these battles, even lose our homes to win something bigger—why the hell can't we stick together and take the whole deal once and for all?

We're damned sick and tired of these people sitting up like gods, deciding whether or not we're going to have a job, whether we're going to live, whether our kids are going to starve or not, we were down at the unemployment office handing out leaflets for this rally, and there was a guy that came by. He said that they had held back his unemployment check for 12 weeks. And then they turned around and told him, "because you ain't got no money we're taking your kids away." We're tired of that. They ain't taking our kids away. They ain't taking nothing more away. We've given them everything and we ain't got nothing more to give them except our fists—and more. And that's what we say now!

I'll tell you something else about this May Day. Another worker down at the unemployment office, we handed him a leaflet and he said, "May Day? Oh, is that the day we get to kick the mayor's ass?" Excuse my language, but that's what he said. And that's sure a hell of a lot of what May Day is about. But we can't stop at the mayor because he's just one man. We have to deal with the whole class of exploiters that the mayor represents and the whole system of exploitation that he's there serving, and the next one behind him will be serving until we get rid of it.

They Fear Our Unity

They're always trying to divide us because they fear our unity and they fear our understanding of who we are and who they are. They try to divide us nationality against nationality, race against race, foreign born against American born, men against women, this industry and that union against each other and so on. But as this May Day shows, we're breaking through all that. We don't care what kinds of nuts and provocateurs they send around to our rallies to try to distract us. We're here to express our unity and nothing can break it up.

So they come around, and you notice how sweet they're talking these days? You notice how humble pie they're acting these days? They come around and they say, "We're all in this together. Now it's time for us all to pull together. We all have to make sacrifices together to get out of these hard times." And we got one answer for them when they come around saying that—we say go straight to hell!

When it comes to doing all the work. When it comes to having to live in the neighborhoods we have to live in. When it comes to having to have our kids go to the schools they have to go to. When it comes to having to go be butchered in the hospitals they'll let us go to. When it comes to fighting the wars. When it comes to all that—they don't want to talk about how we're



May Day demonstration in Cleveland.

all in it together. They don't want to share none of that with us.

Well, that's fine. We don't want to share with them either. We want to get rid of them. All they do is lay up and live off of our sweat and our aches and dictate to us every day of our lives.

They don't even want us to talk to each other on the job because they're afraid we might say "There they are, let's get them." Every day and every way, every time we turn around they take another hunk out of us, and they dictate to us every day of our lives no matter how much they come across with this bull about freedom and democracy.

"You can have a Democrat or Republican. You can die by hanging or we'll chop your neck off. Which 'freedom' do you prefer?"

We Need Revolution in This Country

We're seeing through all that. It comes down to one thing. We need revolution in this country. We have to fight for everything we can today and in the battles ahead. We have to fight to win every battle and build our strength and organization. But why do we want to have to keep fighting just to beat back their attacks? This May Day that we're celebrating began almost 100 years ago when workers walked out for the eight hour day. And we're still fighting for the eight hour day today because we still live under the same capitalist system. We have to fight for those things, and we will and we are, but let's sweep it clean and let's get rid of it.

Sometimes they try to scare us and they say revolution is a bad thing that is against the people. But other times they have to let a little bit of what revolution is all about slip through. The fact is that change, progress, and revolution is the order of the day. It's the way the world goes. You can't stand still and hold back history. You can't hold back the tide of the people. And the people in this country, especially the working class, are going to rise up in its millions and nothing they can do can stop it.

Even they have to recognize a little bit of that. They come around and they try to pervert revolution because they know that we aspire towards change and toward revolution. So they get on TV and they say "Here's a revolutionary razor blade," or "Here's a revolutionary new coffee maker." Has anybody ever heard them advertise a *reactionary* razor blade? Has anybody ever heard them advertise a liberal razor blade or a conservative razor blade? No. It's always



May Day demonstration in Dayton.

