

An Open Letter from Raymond Lotta to Roderick MacFarquhar: “I Challenge You to Debate the Truth of Communism, And to Defend Your Distortions About the Cultural Revolution, Before the Harvard Community.”

I invite members of the Harvard community to a talk I will be giving on April 14 at 7:00 p.m. at Emerson Hall, Room 105. The talk is titled **“Everything You’ve Been Told About Communism Is Wrong: Capitalism Is A Failure, Revolution Is The Solution.”**

The stakes of discussion and debate about the truth of communist revolution are very high. The world is a horror for the great majority of humanity—from food crises and wars of empire, to environmental devastation and the degradation that women face everywhere. This is a world that cries out for radical change, for revolution.

But people have been systematically lied to about the real history and actual promise of communism. They have been told that communism is a nightmare and failure. This spurious verdict constrains critical thinking and exploration. Indeed, the “official verdict” on communism reinforces the oppressive status quo.

On my national campus speaking tour, I am challenging and, with facts and substance, refuting this “conventional wisdom.” I am cracking open a debate about communism. The issue is nothing less than historical truth and human possibility.

I address this letter to Harvard Professor Roderick MacFarquhar because his writings on the Chinese Cultural Revolution of 1966-76 concentrate and put a scholarly gloss on the “official narrative” on the Cultural Revolution as chaos and killing. It is a bogus narrative that not only perpetuates ignorance about the real aims, real experience, and real results of the Cultural Revolution--but one that also contributes to the grave constriction of critical thinking and critical inquiry about whether a radically different and emancipating world is possible.

So I also invite Roderick MacFarquhar to attend and respond to my April 14th lecture. **I am prepared to dispense with my talk altogether and turn it into a public debate with Professor MacFarquhar.** The decision is Professor MacFarquhar’s.

Historical Truth or Anticomunist Distortions

Roderick MacFarquhar’s book *Mao’s Last Revolution* (co-authored by Michael Schoenhals) has been described by Harvard University Press as “the most authoritative and compelling study to date” of the Cultural Revolution. In point of fact, this “study” is standard issue anticommunism shot through with shoddy scholarship and blatant distortions.

EXHIBIT 1: Professor MacFarquhar charges that the Cultural Revolution was “the disastrous enactment of [Mao Zedong’s] utopian fantasies” (p. 459). But far from being a “utopian fantasy,” the Cultural Revolution had very concrete and historically grounded objectives. It was a society-wide struggle launched by Mao to prevent the quite real danger of the revolution being turned back to capitalism. It sought to promote values of

social cooperation. The real “disaster” is the China of today: the sweatshop for world capitalism and society of obscene inequality.

EXHIBIT 2: Professor MacFarquhar presents a fairy-tale account of Mao the monster. It is a Mao who allegedly admires Hitler and who, according to MacFarquhar, declares as an ideological benchmark of success in the Cultural Revolution: “the more people you kill, the more revolutionary you are” (p. 102). And what is Professor MacFarquhar’s authentication of this rather chilling statement? Here is his endnote: “From a very reliable source seen by one of the authors” (note 2, p. 515)! This level of proof would be laughed out of the academy were it any subject other than communism.

EXHIBIT 3: Professor MacFarquhar cavalierly asserts: “All available data suggest...that the Cultural Revolution failed miserably to benefit those for whom it was supposedly launched.” This is an easily refutable claim. One illustrative fact: middle school enrollment rose from some 9 million in 1966 to almost 68 million in 1977. In my talk, I will present data and analysis about other extraordinary changes benefiting basic people: health care availability in the countryside; the creation of new base-level institutions of popular management and governance; the attention the Cultural Revolution gave to issues of gender equality.

To Roderick MacFarquhar, my message is this: **you are wrong about the Cultural Revolution...you are spreading lies... and you are causing great harm.**

Because This Matters A Great Deal

In my talk, I will show how the received wisdom about communism is built on lies and misrepresentations. I will show that in the first wave of communist revolutions—the Soviet Union (1917-1956) and China (1949-1976)—humanity made unprecedented leaps in moving beyond the “long dark night” of exploitative and class-divided society.

But my talk will not confine itself to a defense of the past. I will be discussing the new synthesis of communism of Bob Avakian. He has been summing up the great achievements as well as the shortcomings and problems of the first wave of socialist revolutions. Avakian has brought forward **a vision of socialism that is as determined to forge a society in which intellectual and cultural ferment will flourish on a scale unseen in human history...as it is committed to solving the most pressing material problems confronting humanity.**

To those concerned about the state of the world...you need to come to my talk and bring your toughest questions.

To those who want to dedicate their lives in one form or another to the betterment of humanity but who have never heard a coherent and spirited defense of communism...you need to come too.

To those who want to defend this system...you need to be there too, because I am taking on all comers.