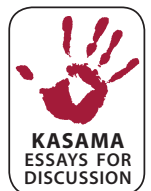


SHAPING THE
KASAMA PROJECT
CONTRIBUTING TO
REVOLUTION'S
LONG MARCH



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Contributing to Revolution's Long March is a discussion document written before Kasama's Eastern Regional Conference in February 2009. The text has been re-edited for public publication.

This is a discussion of the Kasama Project — not just of the more visible Kasama website, but the network of communist revolutionaries that has started to pull together over the last two years.

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Kasama
is a communist project that, in theory and practice,
fights for the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.

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Contributing to Revolution's Long March

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Part 1: Grabbing Pitchfork or Theoretical Knife

Overcoming Two Absences

Life on earth is wracked by contradiction. Each moment, especially in our era, throws up new and particular contradictions starkly.

In just the first year of Kasama, we've seen the rise of Obama — with all it has meant, including in the thinking of progressive people. And we are standing amid the early shockwaves of a wrenching, global economic crisis has awakened and alarmed hundreds of millions of people, and re-injected the word “socialism” into public discourse.

And meanwhile, there really is not yet any sense of a revolutionary or communist alternatives on the political radar screen. The intermediate are alarmed and panicky, while many of the most consciously progressive are (in a way never seen in our lifetime) loosely gathered around the new U.S. government.

In future moments, millions of people will organize themselves into upsurges and seek new ways to think, to live and to die. And at such moments, there may be much demanded of communists. To make revolution, large forces need to be united around programs and common visions for an alternative future — and they need to be materialist plans that have an actual hope of achieving liberation.

This world calls out for fearless actions, and the disciplined sacrifice to carry them out. Urgently. Al-

ways urgently. Answers will be needed in the midst of major social conjunctures. Lines of demarcation will need to be drawn at each point along the way.

And yet, there is: At this moment, it is not clear what revolution in the U.S. would look like, or how determined revolutionaries can help advance the conditions for revolution. And there is, at this moment, no existing revolutionary organization with prospects of developing significant roots among oppressed people and their potential allies.

These two absences — of revolutionary strategy and organization in the U.S. — have existed for a long time (despite deception and self-deception). The whole point of forming our Kasama Project is to make a common contribution to filling those voids.

A Sketch of the Kasama Project So Far

We are trying to build something new and very revolutionary from scratch — based on the “9 Letters” call for a radically different kind of communist politics, and based on the work we have done together since that call.

And we exist. That alone is remarkable. Our Kasama Project has emerged as a network of revolutionaries under some difficult conditions:

- ✦ There was not any clear split from existing revolutionary organization, that provided us with a national framework, structure, or initial organization.

- ✦ We developing within a generally non-revolutionary climate — in a year marked by all the reformist enthusiasms of Obama’s rise.
- ✦ And we have done this in a period combining war and mounting economic crisis with relative ebb in struggle — and where revolutionary and communist politics are largely off-radar, even for extremely discontent people within the U.S.

And at this point we have accomplished a few things over the last year:

- ✦ We developed an initial set of critiques aimed at a previous revolutionary trend — the Revolutionary Communist Party.
- ✦ We have started a process of organizational re-groupment by attracting a loose network of revolutionaries to our 9 Letters and our Kasama debates.
- ✦ We have consciously worked to develop a distinctive political culture. It is a culture that takes critical thinking and engagement seriously — it combines an explicit communist approach to burning matters, with a substantive engagement with opposing views. We have rejected cheap demonization of opponents — seeking debate that embraces civility but not a relativist liberalism.
- ✦ Our initial organizational life has continued a “9 Letters Style” that values mutual consultation, candid debate, horizontal discussion, and a welcoming of new ideas and new people. We have started to develop a movement with a sense of community and solidarity — in contrast to an instrumentalist approach of using and manipulating people that marks so much of the society (and the left).
- ✦ We have made some initial, tentative suggestions of how to step forward.

At our April ‘08 conference, after a day of debate, we adopted a simple statement of purpose:

“Kasama is a communist project that, in theory and practice, fights for the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.”

It is a statement of radical end goals, but not yet of methods or strategy. It is the opposite of “the move-

ment is everything, the final goal is nothing.” Here the final goal is upheld, and the forms of movement are left open.

Alain Badiou has raised the issue this way:

“The communist hypothesis remains the good one, I do not see any other. If we have to abandon this hypothesis, then it is no longer worth doing anything at all in the field of collective action.... However, to hold on to the Idea, to the existence of this hypothesis, does not mean that we should retain its first form of presentation which was centered on property and State. In fact, what is imposed on us as a task, even as a philosophical obligation, is to help a new mode of existence of the hypothesis to deploy itself.”

Without endorsing all of Badiou’s views, we too should unite around our communist end-goals — and not be collectively bound by their earlier forms of presentations.

The current basis of unity defines our project: This Kasama Project is not animated by a movementist impulse. We are not just “revolutionary socialists” seeking some welfare state by militant means.

And that sketches where we are.

Now “we must ourselves decide our duty, we must decide and do it well.”

Many different Kasama Projects are possible — with very different results. And we have to push forward with a mix of care and urgency to rebuild a revolutionary movement. The following document is an attempt to put some ideas on the table for discussion, to provide something to bounce off of.

Pitchforks or Theoretical Knife

In the 1960s, the world was wracked with revolution and huge upsurges of the people. New communists and revolutionaries were emerging in large numbers — certainly in the hundreds of thousands. And the times demanded immediate engagement. Young communists rushed off to political battlefronts (as they themselves said at the time) “like peasants going to war.” They grabbed up whatever theory and politics was lying around — like a village of peasants might grab their pitchforks or flails or axes — and waded into the fray.

And probably, they couldn't have done any different.

Out of that experience, a new communist movement developed a rather rich experience with political work in the U.S. (not just the more radical work of the RCP, but also including the attempts at third party and left democrat electoral work, the Panther-style serve the people programs, and the attempts to build a socialist movement out of "rank and file unionism.")

One way to understand the Kasama Project is to sketch two other alternatives:

- We could rush off again, like peasants to war, disperse ourselves deeply among the people and "just do it" — wielding the political understandings we have at this moment, take up urgent struggles and expect to develop new strategy and theory from that process.
- Or we could rush to encapsulate ourselves as a new little political sect — carve quick lines of demarcation, proclaim strategy and theory based on the political understandings we have at the moment, and rush out to proclaim it to the world.

These two alternatives both assume that we have, in our hands ("there for the taking") sufficient summation to simply dig in and take off. If we could quickly determine (based on what we already know) where to make a few, quick "structural reforms" to our inherited theory... then we should make those changes, and throw ourselves back into practical work on that basis.

But a basic assessment of the Kasama project is that we have a need and an opportunity to do something very different. And that requires a break — both with Avakian's claims, but also with a deeper component of existing Maoism.

The two absences are the outgrowth of objective conditions (non-revolutionary decades, relative stability of U.S. imperialism) and some significant failures of previous revolutionary attempts here in the U.S., including in the forms of Marxism that they adopted and popularized.

If there were somewhere (in the world, in some classics or in the past) an adequate form of pre-existing Marxism — then we could just seek it out and move (relatively quickly) toward applying it.

The *9 Letters to Our Comrades* makes a different and controversial assessment. After saying "There is real glory and continuing value to Maoism, as a body of thought and as a movement for liberation," Letter 4 writes:

"But since Mao died in 1976, this Maoist movement has not been a fertile nursery of daring analyses and concepts. A mud streak has run through it. Even its best forces often cling to legitimizing orthodoxies, icons, and formulations. The popularization of largely-correct verdicts often replaces the high road of scientific theory — allowing Marxism itself to appear pat, simple and complete. Dogmatic thinking nurtures both self-delusion and triumphalism. In the name of taking established truths to the people, revolutionary communists have often cut themselves off from the new facts and creative thinking of our times."

Letter 9 says communism "needs to clean its Augean stables— uprooting this legacy of dogmatism, deepening its struggle against various forms of capitulation, and tackling long-standing philosophical and strategic problems that stand as real obstacles to communist revolution."

This is an argument that we can't just make a few quick adjustments to our inherited theory and then get back to some previous political routine.

Letter 9 argues, that it is not a matter of dumping Avakian's worst idealism, and just returning to a model and plan similar to the RCP:

"We don't need a remake of the RCP, but better. The theoretical knife must cut deeper than that. There needs to be negation, affirmation, and then a real leap beyond what has gone before. We need a movement of all-the-way revolutionaries that lives in this 21st century. Not some reshuffling of old cadre, but the beginning reshuffling of a whole society."

"*The theoretical knife has to cut deeper than that.*" That is a basic assessment. And it impacts how we proceed.

Digging into “Reconceive as We Regroup”

We need to break down our slogan “Reconceive as We Regroup.”

First it states an intention to be part of regrouping: that conscious revolutionary forces need to come together, engage each other, develop common understandings, and (through inevitable struggle and demarcation) form organizational forms of common revolutionary work.

Part of the assumption here is that the forms of regroupment (and communist organization generally) are themselves problematized. (Problematize means to treat a subject as a problem for solution, not as a settled question.)

In other words, how we regroup, how and when we form more highly disciplined organizations or parties, is part of what we are working to creatively uncover.

There is no given, universal formula for how to form revolutionary organization that we simply need to uncover and apply. Form follows function, not form follows formula.

Every real revolution has (inevitably) had different forms of revolutionary organization for all different stages of their process (initiation, revolutionary preparation, revolutionary collisions leading the people, seizure of power, creation of new forms of power, new eruptions of continuing revolution).

This discussion of revolutionary organization is one example of the reasons we have conceived of Kasama as a communist project defined in many ways by questions — not by a pre-existing, elaborate set of answers.

There is a contradiction here: On one hand we have an initial basis of unity. There are things we know and believe. But, at the same time: There are things that we don't yet know. There are things we believe as individuals, but that are not yet our “common property” as a new political trend. And, there are things that each of us currently believe that we will discover are, in fact, wrong.

We are envisioning a process of creative transformation from which all of us, and our Project, emerges changed. And we intend to train ourselves to listen and think critically — as a precondition for creation. We

are giving ourselves permission to mentally let the crayola drift outside previous lines — to see what kinds of new art is possible.

As we said in “Come Walk the Revolutionary Road With Us”

“We are open to learning, unafraid to admit our own uncertainties. At the same time, we will not shrink from what we do know: the solutions cannot be found within the current world order or the choices it provides. We are for revolution. We seek to find the forms of organization and action for the people most dispossessed by this system to free themselves and all humanity.”

Within the RCP, questions about the party's views were considered “agnosticism.” And opposition to the party's views was considered “revisionism.” Not surprisingly, the Kasama conception here has (as is well known) been labeled agnosticism and revisionism. It is neither. It is a necessary and difficult work we have been handed.

Our “presumptuous work” does not (of course) start from nowhere. And we are not alone in taking it on. We have a number of things to draw on:

- ✦ The rich experience of over a century of communist theory and socialist revolution — with Marxism in its complex development as a powerful basis for critical and materialist analysis.
- ✦ Decades of experimental attempts to gain a revolutionary foothold in the U.S.
- ✦ Current revolutionary movements internationally are there — to be critically studied for their theoretical insights and example.
- ✦ The work of others in the U.S. who — despite many disagreements we may ultimately have — are exploring important questions in provocative ways.
- ✦ The insights we will gain from our own emerging revolutionary practice.

Stages Ahead of Us

Our conception is to form a communist project that does not rush, prematurely, to mark lines of de-

marcation or to prematurely establish rigid structures. Instead the idea has been to initiate both practice and theoretical work with an aim of discovering and inventing a new revolutionary road for the U.S.

This assumes that the process of building a new revolutionary movement will have stages — and that our current Kasama Project has specific characteristics that flow from this early stage.

At this point, given the two absences, the process of reconception has a defining impact on how we are currently regrouping. This flows from our basic assessment of how deep the theoretical knife needs to go.

In Maoist terms: Reconception is the principal aspect of the contradiction. The demands of the process of reconception (its investigation, debate, creations and initial demarcations) is shaping how we are regrouping.

There will be other stages, where other aspects come to the fore and define our work and structure: Without making assumptions now about those stages, we can foresee, for example, that there will be future moments where we help transform crisis into revolution, and where the revolution demands hardened forms of organization capable of acting and leading in great storms. And then where the organization of communists participates in the creation of new power relations within a new society.

But this current moment of “reconception and regroupment” has its particularities: distinctive forms of organization that serve its function, standards of membership and engagement that are different than they will probably be later.

We intend to create and keep a culture of lively debate and fresh thinking. We intend to always encourage people to speak their minds, and pose raw questions. Our sense of discipline will never coincide with notions of conformity. This must always be true — but it must also be especially true now, as we problematize a number of key issues, and develop the basis for new unity.

We need a communist, revolutionary tent now, but it needs to be a broad one — and we need to welcome it when camels stick their noses into that tent.

Part 2: Revolutionary Work and the Pull of the Sect

Revolutionary Practice and Experiment

What is the relationship of theory and practice in our current moment?

Kasama has been formed out of an impatience to develop real roots for the revolutionary movement among the people. We need (as the *9 Letters* said) a culture of organizing. Reconception is not a call for some new encapsulated bubble.

We need to develop communist practical work, now, among the people. It is one of the challenges that confront us in our second year.

Leading up to this conference a number of new suggestions have been raised. In some quarters such ideas would quickly be dismissed as social democratic or social work— including among people trained by the RCP in a negative summation of the Panthers “Serve the People” programs.

Or, another example: There has been a movement to form workers centers of diverse kinds — often centered on organizing undocumented immigrant workers. Some people have simply dismissed that work as economist — without even bothering to learn from the different strategies at play.

Our Kasama approach needs to be an openness to experimentation and fresh thinking. We should look again a forms of developing contact, politicization and alternative institutions among the people — and think afresh about ways such activities can contribute to revolutionary movement.

Quick, knee-jerk dismissal runs against what we need to be doing. It runs against the need to do deep investigation It runs against the need for a new generation of revolutionaries to learn from their own experience (as well as from summations of previous experience).

The Kasama Project will pursue a relatively small number of specific work areas. But we also need to leave the door open for local and personal projects, for experimentation, for new ideas, for welcoming people

with other priorities — and for learning from a wide range of radical efforts.

Regroupment needs to take place in the context of reconception. But these priorities could change quickly: Crucial events and struggles may suddenly demand our attentions.

We may find “our Mississippi.” (The Mississippi Freedom Summer attracted the most courageous early activists of a generation, radicalized them, and shook the country.) By “find our Mississippi” we don’t mean just becoming activists in the next mass movement to arise. We are talking about being alert to an event or stormcenter that could suddenly start galvanizing a generation and shape how this ugly society is perceived and challenged.

If such a moment comes (this year, next, or whenever) it must not find us groggy or scholastic. We need to make sure we are flexible enough to change plans.

Our work of reconception needs to help develop the mental flexibility to perceive and participate in creative new processes happening around us. We need the ability to be transformed without abandoning our defining communist nature and analysis. We need to be “Traveling Light and Coming From Within.”

The Pull of the Sect

There is a well-worn path that we need to avoid (and it won’t be easy).

Here is the method: You gather like-minded people. You document the things you already agree on. You adopt your agreements as a basis of unity. And your new grouping rushes out into the world to proclaim your politics and put them into practice. Drawing lines of demarcation is key — and that is done on the basis of the politics you walked in with.

For people trained in revolutionary communist politics, we could complete all of this in one or two afternoons of relatively easy work — declaring our loyalty to well-known ideas associated with communism (democratic centralism, dictatorship of the proletariat, vanguard party, materialist dialectics, and so on). We could demarcate our view from others — and assign them the label revisionist. We could then rush out into the world to proclaim our politics.

Kasama has opposed forming itself as such a new little sect — but the temptation keeps popping up because of training and concerns that pull on us all:

1. We have often been taught to assume some of those things we should now problematize.
2. The suffering of the people and the press of events gives us all a powerful sense of urgency. And around the RCP, a deliberate training has hyped that sense of urgency — in moralist and anti-theoretical ways.
3. It is sometimes said that perhaps doing anything is better than “doing nothing.” And the creative work of reconception can be portrayed as “doing nothing.”
4. There is an assumption that the theory we need can emerge from the summation of our own direct political practice — and so the initiation of practice (almost any practice) is the prerequisite for sound theoretical work.
5. Sometimes the very idea of creating a new theoretical framework and then a political program is alien territory. If your training is in the narrow routines of mass work, then our “presumptuous work” requires a real break (including personal transformation).
6. There is a dogmatic legacy that says the problems of revolution have been solved by existing MLM. The logic says that solutions arise from deeper grasp of orthodoxies and from the repeated criticism of any departures from orthodoxy. The very idea of creative reconception sometimes triggers fear of sliding into an abyss.
7. It is not easy to fully confront the implications of the two absences — special theoretical and practical tasks that fall on communists when they don’t have a party.
8. There is often not an understanding that there is both major line struggle raging among the world’s communists and major gaps in communist understanding — all of which needs attention and resolution by appropriate methods.

We should not form a little group that play-acts as the seed of a future party. The process we foresee will be far more contradictory than that. Most initiating projects sprout several trends (or none at all).

We will not arrive on the scene like some magical galvanizing thunderburst to tell everyone else what to think and do. Let's have some scientific non-messianic modesty and not perpetuate Avakian-style grandiosity. We will strain to make real contributions. There may be contributions that only we can make. And that matters. But we expect much from many other people.

Forming a new sect would be not breaking with the errors that brought us here. The theoretical knife has to cut deeper.

Other pamphlets available at kasamaproject.org:

Kasama Articles: On the Maobadi and the Crisis in Nepal

Two Lines Over Maoist Revolution in Nepal
Five Letters from the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
and the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA

Avakian's Assessment of Thomas Jefferson:
A Critical Reading
By Pavel Andreyev

Avakian's Away With all Gods!:
Critiquing Religion Without Understanding It
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9 Letters to Our Comrades:
Getting Beyond Avakian's New Synthesis
by Mike Ely

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"Time Bombs," Anarchy, Guns and the New Depression
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