



background

It is very difficult for white people to understand what life is like in the ghetto. Intellectual comprehension is rarely as powerful an understanding as daily experience. It is largely for this reason that there are so many misconceptions as to the nature and purpose of the Black Panther Party.

One of the most common complaints in the ghetto is police brutality and intimidation. It is no accident that the incidents which have triggered most of the ghetto uprisings around the country during the last few years were ones involving the police. Some of the more outrageous incidents have made the papers, such as the Deadwyler case in L.A.; but by and large the brutality continues unnoticed and uncorrected. The police make a conscious attempt to intimidate Black people in the ghetto. In the past, attempts at holding mass rallies in the ghetto have been thwarted by police conspicuously patrolling the area. It is undesirable to be known by the police since almost all of the protections of the law regarding police activity are systematically violated. Illegal search and seizure, petty harrassments, and brutality are common experiences for those who the police consider "trouble makers."

While this is true of most of the police in this country; the reputation of the Oakland police is among the worst. Two Black students at Merritt College in Oakland - Huey Newton and Bobby Seale - formed the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. To dramatize their determination to curb the vicious and unrestrained use of police power against Black people, the Panthers instituted armed patrols. Whenever police would arbitrarily harass ghetto residents, the Panthers would arrive at the scene bearing rifles and shotguns. Huey, Bobby and their brothers were scrupulous in their adherence to the law (for example, by remaining at least 10 feet from the police officers at the scene). On several occasions Huey, who spent a year at USF Law School, gave lessons to ignorant cops. The result of the armed patrols was a decrease in incidents of police harassment for the ghetto population at large, but an increase in incidents of harassment for the Panthers themselves. The Panthers gained tremendous and widespread respect in the ghetto.

Although defense against the police was initially the main focus of Panther activity, the Party recognized that the police do not make political decisions, but only enforce laws and policies which serve the interests of a minority Establishment. The Panthers therefore decided the basic idea of CAP should be expanded to encompass the political as well as the defensive needs of the Black community. They made a 10 point program demand:

1. We want freedom, we want power to determine the destiny of our Black community.
2. We want full employment for our people.
3. We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our Black community.
4. We want decent housing, fit for shelter for human beings.

5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society.
 6. We want all Black men to be exempt from military service.
 7. We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of Black people.
 8. We want freedom for all Black men and women held within federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.
 9. We want all Black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their Black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the U.S.
10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.

The Black Panther Party for Self Defense organized Black people around these issues, and specifically around the issue of police brutality, but the Party in turn suffered from harassment by the police. Every known Panther vehicle's license number was listed in every Bay Area patrol car and when police spotted a Panther automobile they automatically pulled the car over and harassed the driver about phony (but sometimes real, because Panthers aren't rich and don't have fancy cars) traffic violations.

Then on May 2, 1967, the Panthers became spotlighted nationally when 23 of them entered the State Capitol building bearing rifles and shotguns. They came to protest the anticipated passage of the Mulford gun bill, which would have deprived citizens - especially Black people - of the right to bear arms for self-defense (as provided for by the US Constitution). This "armed invasion" of the observers section of the Assembly resulted in no violation of any gun laws! The only thing that 8 Panthers were finally convicted of was "disruption of Assembly proceedings," and that even these charges were a travesty of justice can be inferred from the fact that there was nothing illegal about the actions of the Panthers - and if members of the Assembly want to get up tight and be "disrupted" by the appearance of armed Black men in an area of the building which is open to the general public, then it only reflects the paranoia of some Assembly members.

Following this incident, police harassment of Panthers increased to the point where Panthers could hardly go out in public without being stopped by a police car. This type of police harassment continued right up to the early morning of October 28, 1967 at which time two Oakland police officers confronted Brother Huey Newton, the Minister of Defense of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. As a result of this confrontation, one Oakland policeman is dead; another was wounded; Brother Huey was wounded; and an unidentified man who allegedly was in the car with Brother Huey escaped apprehension by the police.

Black people in Oakland believe that the cops shot Huey and then someone else shot the cops. This is consistent with the Grand Jury evidence. The succeeding attacks on the Panther leadership (Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver, the murder of Bobby Hutton and the wholesale arrests) are damning evidence that the metropolitan police are determined to smash the Panthers. Their escalating attacks show that they are running scared.

arguments against

ARGUMENT ONE — TO SAY "FREE HUEY" IMPLIES THAT WE ADVOCATE GOING OUTSIDE THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND FREEING HUEY BY FORCE.

This argument shows a failure to understand the intrinsic unfairness of our racist judicial system and the impossibility of Huey Newton getting a fair trial. The U.S. Constitution guarantees an accused person a trial by a jury of his peers. It is safe to say that no jury of Huey's peers has ever been empaneled in this country. The grand jury which indicted him was white (with the exception of a Negro matron), was over the age of 50, and was composed of affluent people. And Huey can expect little better of his trial jury. Also, we must recognize that our court system is weighted against a political defendant. "Fair trial for Huey Newton" is, in these circumstances, no demand at all.

"Free Huey" does not mean that we intend to storm the jail with machine guns. It does mean that we believe Huey Newton is illegitimately imprisoned for political activity and for exercising his Constitutionally protected right of self-defense; that he will not receive a fair trial in Oakland; and that our desire is the immediate liberation of Huey and all other political prisoners (Spock, Coffin, the Oakland Seven, the Fairmont Nine, Rap Brown, LeRoi Jones, etc).

ARGUMENT TWO — THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY IS A VIOLENT GROUP.

This argument ignores the fact that the American government at all levels is, and always has been, violent in the expression of its desire for power; and that in particular this violence has long been directed against Black people and other minority groups. The same day Huey was wounded and Officer Frey was killed, another incident took place in East Palo Alto. An unarmed 70 year-old Black man was shot from behind and killed by police. Here was a respected and law-abiding citizen, murdered for doing nothing but being 'suspicious' in the mind of the policeman. It was precisely to put a stop to this kind of terrorism that Huey organized the Panthers -- around the issue of self-defense! If the Panther Party was out to 'kill cops' then they have passed thousands of opportunities. But they were not out to kill police -- their entire thrust has been to educate ghetto residents to the need for self-defense -- to prevent cops from killing them!

ARGUMENT THREE — IT WILL ALIENATE POTENTIAL PEACE AND FREEDOM MOVEMENT MEMBERS.

This argument would be more appropriate in the Dem/Rep Party, where patterns of compromise with basic principals have led directly to their present moral bankruptcy. The Peace and Freedom Movement is committed to establishing new patterns of political discourse and above all to taking honest, forthright positions based upon our commitment to peace, freedom and social justice.

This argument also reveals a defensiveness about our ability to build a mass movement for social change. We will build the movement not by dodging the issues but by confronting them directly, and by educating people to the long-disguised realities of American life. We have a choice: either we cop out and cash in our principals for temporary (and probably negligible) political advantage or, we go to work educating a brainwashed public about the inequities resulting from our economic imperialism abroad and our racism at home. Playing for a few thousand more votes, or for a few hundred more registrants, is no way to build a mass political movement. But educating people to strong, principled and well-argued political positions is a way to build a meaningful mass movement.

We must not assume that people who have been mis-educated to believe in racist or war-hawkish positions can never be changed. In fact, the premise upon which the Peace and Freedom Party was founded is that many people will come over to our side once they have the opportunity to understand our positions. Without that premise political activity is meaningless.

ARGUMENT FOUR — WE SHOULD FOCUS ALL OUR ENERGIES ON THE VIETNAM ISSUE.

The Vietnam war, in several ways, is intimately linked to oppression of Black people at home. First, is the racist character of this war against an Asian people. Second, the lack of education and job opportunities for Black youth leads them to enlist in the armed forces -- the ratio of Black to white combat troops in Vietnam is more than twice what it is for the American population as a whole. Third, the very economic forces which permit economic exploitation and mass unemployment among Black people encouraged the U.S. to move into Vietnam in the first place -- in the belief that a communist victory there would lead to diminuation of the expanding market and investments in Asia.

Tactically, the support of the Black liberation struggle is another weapon with which we can force U.S. withdrawal from Asia. Clearly, Washington cannot even begin to solve urban problems as long as the war continues. And, conversely, if we allow movements for self-determination to be crushed at home it will only strengthen the hand of those committed to crushing them abroad.

arguments for

ARGUMENT ONE - WHICH SIDE ARE WE ON?

In any confrontation between a freedom fighter and an oppressor there should be no question about which side we line up on. We must ask ourselves: if Huey had been killed defending himself, would the cop go on trial? Of course not - we all know that the game is rigged ("justifiable homicide"). In many respects, the U.S. occupation of Vietnam resembles police occupation of Black and Mexican-American ghettos. In both cases the authority of the occupying power is not recognized as legitimate by the people in the occupied territory. In both cases the people living there have moved to resist the occupying forces and to achieve self-determination and self-rule. The Peace and Freedom Movement must be unwavering in its support of self-determination struggles everywhere - whether that means the struggle of the Vietnamese Nation or the Black Nation here at home. At the present political juncture, this means taking a "FREE HUEY" position.

ARGUMENT TWO - AN ATTACK ON ONE IS AN ATTACK ON ALL.

Huey Newton is a political prisoner, not a common criminal. He was stopped and threatened by police and is now imprisoned without bail on capital charges - because he is a political leader. In the same way, the indictments of Dr. Spock, Rev. Coffin, the seven Stop the Draft Week leaders, the Fairmont demonstrators and many others are the direct result of their political activities. We should also keep in mind the cases of Tom Mooney and Sacco and Vanzetti, not to mention the Rosenbergs and Sobel. In all these cases the court system of America was used to stifle political activity.

Anti-war leaders have been arrested because they protest murder abroad. Huey Newton was arrested because he led the fight against police murder and brutality here at home. We must unite and support all these victims of political repression. Each of us working for a truly free and democratic society needs the unequivocal support of all the rest of us. Fair weather friends are not friends at all.

ARGUMENT THREE - A MEANINGFUL POLITICAL COALITION.

It is crucial that the predominantly white Peace and Freedom Movement, which professes support for the Black liberation struggle, put an end to its present isolation from the most vital anti-establishment force in America. We must face the truth about ourselves - that we are presently a predominantly white movement, however actively we seek to recruit others to our banner. So we must go on from this beginning and make meaningful moves to implement our commitment to support Black liberation. In practical terms, this means coalition with Black and Mexican-American groups which share our basic values and objectives. What is important here is our program and our actions, for by our actions and our publicly declared intentions the world will know if we intend to seriously strive to combat the effects of and exterminate racism...or if we are in fact just another white liberal group.

Stokely Carmichael, SNCC and the Black Panther Party are the leaders most responsive to the aspirations of the Black ghetto poor in this nation, and in turn they command the most grassroots allegiance. Carmichael, SNCC and the Panthers are also the militant Black leadership most cognizant of the functional necessity of forming political alliances with white groups. We need their support if we hope to build a mass, grassroots political movement in California and across the nation. We must join them in demanding, FREE HUEY NEWTON, a demand we know is the only morally right position to take, and then go on to build—together—a significant grassroots movement for change.

FREE HUEY

FREE ELDRIDGE

This pamphlet was published and distributed by the FREE HUEY Committee of the San Mateo County Peace and Freedom Movement. It is an updated condensation of a pamphlet originally published by the Educational Caucus of San Francisco County Peace and Freedom Movement.

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