

An Interview with Huey P. Newton

Karen Wald

1968

Editor's Note: Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense of the Black Panther Party and Peace and Freedom Party candidate for Congress is currently standing trial at the Alameda County Courthouse in Oakland, California. Newton is charged with the murder, last October 28, of Patrolman John Frey of the Oakland Police Department. During the two weeks spent selecting a jury for the trial, the bias of the court has been apparent. Any possibility of Newton getting a fair trial disappeared with the selection of the jury. Of the 100 potential jurors questioned, working class blacks, and blacks and whites opposed to capital punishment were systematically excluded by District Attorney Lowell Jensen and Judge Monroe Friedman. The *Fifth Estate* will continue to provide up-to-date coverage of the Newton trial in future issues.

The "straight" reporter was trying to find the "real" Huey to present to his readers.

"When you're alone and wondering: about things," he asked, "what's your most fervent wish?"

Huey answered without hesitation: "Complete destruction of this decadent system."

Failing to understand that this was the real Huey, the reporter pressed on: "But what do you wish for yourself?"

"Well, that will be for myself," replied Huey, startled that this had to be explained. "You see, in the first place," he went on, "this feeling of individuality is strictly a Western thing. It's one of the most corrupt things on the face of the earth, where one person has no identification with another. It's inhumane. This is one of the causes of a whole people being enslaved and treated like cattle and brutalized to the utmost.

"I think that with the revolutionary movement, we're wiping out this feeling of individuality; the feeling that what is mine is mine, and what is yours is mine. We feel that we have to share with any person who is born on the face of the earth. As Che says: Individuality should be expressed in a collective spirit. Every man has a right to live, a right to survive, a right to an equal share of the wealth."

The reporter never really did grasp that Huey, being a political man, and a revolutionary, was truthfully unfolding his feelings. So the article that appeared in the local press told of Huey's childhood in Louisiana and Oakland, of living in dirt-floored houses; growing up among pimps, prostitutes and hustlers; of how Huey related to his schoolteacher brother. But all the revolutionary passages were omitted.

Over a period of weeks, I spent many hours in the interview cell with Huey P. Newton, minister of defense of the Black Panther party. Following are excerpts from the dialogue that went on in that cell of the Alameda County Jail in Oakland.

Q: Aren't you inviting yourself to be used to further the goals of the black people?

A: The Black Panther party is a vanguard group leading the revolutionary struggle. This is a world revolution: all colonized people are now resisting. To work as one of the administrators of this revolutionary action, you have to view yourself as an oxen to be ridden by the people. This is what the Black Panther party teaches—that we should all carry the weight, and those who have extreme abilities will have to carry extremely heavy loads. This is the only way the movement will survive, that those with some resources contribute them to the people, and the people in turn will contribute their strength to the movement.

Q: What about charges that other groups, especially white groups, are using the Black Panther party for their own end?

A: We have a program which we intend to carry out, and we welcome anyone who identifies with our program. In fact, the revolutionary students have in many cases identified with our movement. They have realized this is a police state and that they have no control, no freedom of expression. They found that they have nothing to say about controlling their destiny, and now they're identifying with the colonized people throughout the world.

I think this would be like asking, "Do you think the white revolutionary students are using the Vietcong? Are they using the National Liberation Front? And I would answer, probably not. I think that Ho Chi Minh is intelligent enough to structure his own moves and not be used by anyone. But I think that at the same time he wants support from all revolutionary people throughout the world who identify with all revolutionaries against the imperialist aggressor.

Q: Senator McCarthy said in a speech, "Black power is good power" which he supports, and he speaks of the black colony in America. Do you think he's getting some education?

A: I'm sure that everyone throughout America and around the world is becoming educated to the black liberation movement. People are educated by black people and colonized people rebelling throughout the world.

And I'm sure that some education is coming home now to white radicals. They're learning that to be revolutionaries they're going to have to identify with revolutionary people and act in accordance with the philosophy of revolutionary people.

We have a suggestion for the white radicals, if they really want to be radical. We view the police as an occupying army who are in our community to contain us. The police are the gun in the racist administration's hands. They are there to enforce the racist political situation, the racist laws of the Establishment. The police are concentrated in the black colony. So we say to the white revolutionaries who are becoming activists now that if they really want to be activists, then every time we're ambushed by the police inside the colony, they're going to have to attack the police in their community. And it doesn't matter whether they're on good terms with their police or not. You'll notice that the good terms the Berkeley radicals had with the Berkeley police some time ago has deteriorated now because the Berkeley radicals are moving from just theory and going into practice.

The government and school administrators have been opposing their political theories, but when they start putting their theories into action, the police start coming down on their heads. The police are the armed, strong-arm men of the administration. To get our freedom we have to first deal with the protectors of the racist establishment. We have to drive the police out of our community by any means necessary, and the white radicals are going to have to drive the police out of their community, because these police are all members of one fraternity.

The police all act in accordance with the rules they get from the administration, which now happens to be the Johnson administration, and we're going to have to deal with the police across the country first before we can deal with the other political brutalities, such as poor housing and inadequate food.

Q: Hasn't carrying guns caused you a lot of problems and brought on a lot of criticism?

A: Say that black people had another avenue, to get the leverage we need, to get power. For us to seize power in any way is forbidden fruit. If we had seized that power, in whatever way, we would have been criticized, brutalized and killed for it, because the power structure does not want to give up any of its power.

Q: Would you say there was no other alternative?

A: No, there's no alternative. That's one of the things that America is so guilty of—forcing its oppressed people to the position that we're in, so that the only way for us is to arm ourselves and thereby become a political body.

Remember, black people weren't focused upon the way we are now until we started resisting. Now we're focused upon throughout the world. So much so that a president would spend a million dollars on a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, because we are having an effect on their order, which was a slave order. Before the rebellions, before the gun, there was no need for them to concern themselves with us.

Q: ...and especially the closeness brought on by events such as Stop The Draft Week in Oakland and the battle of Columbia?

A: First, I think it's very true that the black revolutionaries were observing the white radicals. We realized that some of the white radicals were very articulate and their ideology was pretty uptight. But we were questioning

whether they were really ready to put these ideas into action, to be activists. This is what the black revolutionaries really understand—putting theory and practice together.

I know I was very impressed with the attempt of the white revolutionaries to close down the [Oakland] draft induction center, and I wasn't very impressed with them in '65 when they stopped in the face of the police. I was down there, and I watched, and I watched a couple of Hell's Angels go up and pop a couple of people in the mouth. It was all very sickening to me, because here were thousands and thousands of people, who could have just walked right over the police if they really had the gall to, and they didn't. And I said, "Oh, yeah. They were just demonstrators, who weren't ready to"—but then, down at the induction center, where they came down with crash helmets and shields and sticks, I was very impressed.

Q: Does this indicate a meaningful development in the role of white radicals?

A: Yes, I think this is happening now. It's sort of a prelude to white radicals becoming revolutionaries. As a matter of fact, the Black Panther party advocates that the white revolutionaries arm themselves and that this will spur a revolution in the mother country while the battle for liberation goes on in the colony. And whenever we're attacked in the colony—ambushed like we were on April 6—the white revolutionaries should attack the police in their communities, because the police are all the same, wherever they are. They're protecting the Establishment, the status quo, and we're going to have to deal with them if we're going to have any change. The position that the white radicals are in now is a no-man's land, because they're attempting to put pressure on the Establishment. Every time they do so, the police come in to suppress their resistance and their will to change the power structure. I think this is the next step that the white revolutionaries are going to have to take to keep in unity with the colony. When this happens, we will then emerge as a strong political bloc. Some change will come about.

Like the white revolutionaries of today, Huey cites Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, and the writings of Malcolm X, Che, and Debray as the books that have influenced and impressed him. Yet until he was 16, Huey couldn't read. He came from the ghetto school system that passes children each year just to get them out of there. When he did decide he wanted to read, he picked up *The Republic* of Plato and read it over and over until he could understand it.

Several years later, Black Panthers were standing on Oakland street corners, educating those same pimps and prostitutes about their rights, reading from a criminal law procedure book they always carried in their hip pockets. Strapped to their sides were .45s, and cradled in one arm, a shot-gun. The black community soon learned that the Black Panther party was there to look out after their rights, and the Oakland police felt less free to persecute and harass the black people on the streets. This is one aspect of the Black Panther party.

Getting street lights on a dangerous intersection is another.

Huey went on to attend Merritt College, where his reading and his instincts led to the formulation, along with his close friend Bobby Seale, of the Panther's Ten Point Program. Huey and Seale were unsuccessful in attempting to get established black groups to adopt and begin implementing the program, so they set up their own organization—The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense.

The seventh point on the program urges black people to make use of their constitutional right to arm themselves for self-defense. It has been clearly the most controversial point of the program. Numerous questions have been thrown at Huey by both establishment reporters and movement activists concerning this point.

Further Editor's Note: The Huey Newton Defense Fund is in urgent need of money. Contributions which will be used only for expenses related to Newton's defense, should be sent to: Huey Newton Defense Fund, Black Panther Party, 4421 Grove Street, Oakland, California.



Karen Wald
An Interview with Huey P. Newton
1968

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/60-august-15-september-4-1968/an-interview-with-huey-p-newton>
Fifth Estate #60, August 15-September 4, 1968

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net