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Anarcho-Pantherista

Ashanti Omowali

1995

In the Black Panther Party, when someone said, “Power to the People!” the response would be “ALL Power to the People!” After many years of political imprisonment, employing the easy-to-use Malcolm-Eldridge Educational Supercharger, that call/response would take on more anarchistic meaning. This is about my experience in the now as an anarchist (a baby one) within a generally hierarchical Panther formation.

It was just this year, Jan. 1995, that I decided to publicly identify myself as anarchist. In playing around I came up with a term to identify me fully: @narcho-pantherista (thinking about the word Sandinista, ha!). Though, just in fun, I decided to keep it. It’s me. Silly, anarchistic, for real.

As a politically active teen in the ‘60s, making it through that magnificent and turbulent time, I was ready when me and my Comrade (Jihad Abdul Mumit, now a POW in Lewisburg Stalag, Penn.) were first attracted to that image of Huey and Bobby. Black-bereted, black-jacketed, black on down to the boots. And strapped! Panthers. Yeah, let’s check them out.

Our nationalist and rebel politics began to evolve into something more revolutionary and focused. We learned ideology, organization, preparation, comradeship, daring. Once I began

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to get the picture, I was convinced: Panther revolution, lumpen-proletariat, urban guerrilla warfare, Serve the People survival programs, *Wretched of the Earth*, "L'il Red Book," Panther sistas in leading functions, Victory...

In short, the Panthers helped me into "the process of becoming," as to what a revolutionary dedicated to freedom, freedom, and more freedom was all about. One must never stop learning and growing and working for the People.

My 12+ years on the Malcolm-Eldridge Supercharger led me, in prison, to further my learning and understanding of so many things: Wilhelm Reich and the Frankfurt School of psychology, various schools of radical feminist thought and critique, and Paulo Freire's methodology of community education and empowerment. And James Boggs kept me grounded in the power of the Black underclass in Babylon. In all, I was not only learning some heavy shit, but I was being challenged to give up certain old ways, beliefs, and mind-sets that were backwards and anti-revolutionary.

At some point, while in the Marion stalag, a Panther and a stone-cold Sicilian revolutionary threw some anarchist literature on me. Got to tell the truth though, my Marxist-Leninist-Maoist teachings had already biased me against the shit. So I was quite reluctant to really check it out. But it helped that I loved them Brothers. Funny thing is, when you locked down in segregation for months and done read every muthafuckin' thing else, you get bored. After a while, you'll pick up and read toilet paper! What happened was that I did read the shit and regardless of what my Marxist-Leninist-Maoist authorities had said against it, this anarchism was raising some good points.

As I relaxed my mind-set, I learned more. Combined with the insights of the more progressive and radical psychologies and feminist critiques, things that I had experienced in the past and my understanding of movement history began to look different. Structure, sexism, authoritarian peer pressure against individuality, spontaneity, cre- ativity and love. Come to find out that

theirs. The People are their own leaders, their own Liberators. I see myself as participant-facilitator. @narcho-pantherista, the highest stage of pantherism.

ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE!

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normal stuff in any grouping. I think that the BPC who are young-in-experience understand at this point that frustration and anger are part of the process. As we'd say in the Party, "It's a good thing not a bad thing." It's the only way we can pull a diverse group of people together. As one BPNC member said in referring to the Collective, "They are a bunch of crazy-ass muthafuckas," the kind of good human beings who make Revolution.

It's hard to feel comfortable if you truly believe that you see internal dangers in your group. I am one person. I guess I believe like anybody else that my critique is on-point, that my warning-signs should be heeded. But this is a body of people and though it may not be anarchist, it's democratic enough for me to feel that my 2 cents is valued.

My collective knows that I raise my voice against sexism. I talk revolutionary sexuality and lay out condoms on meeting tables. I'm always bringing reading material because I believe we must be encouraged to read, read, read. But I don't want to just get stuck off into Marxist stuff—"Lil' Red Book," etc. No matter how valuable they are. I've shared Lorenzo Komboa Ervin's (Black anarchist, former Black Panther, and now member of the Federation of Black Community Partisans) writings with them. Exposure to diverse views and critiques is what is needed. I am one of these diverse "elders," as they call us of BPNC. As the @nacho-pantherista I can only be me and give my best and hope that others see that my main concern is Revolution, ALL Power to the People, and victory over all our enemies, from people who oppose freedom to mind-sets that continue to hold on to anti-freedom, anti-revolutionary ideas.

The BPC is a spirited group of hard-ass revolutionaries. Already, on their own, tired of waiting for us (the leadership), they put a food program into motion on 116th St, and Adam Clayton Powell Blvd. in Harlem, the capital of this "captive nation" (I'm a revolutionary intercommunalist, personally, to add fuel to the fire). I say Right On! It's about initiative and I like

this guy named Bakunin had some valid criticisms of the god Marx, and Kropotkin was deep in Lenin's shit and Marxist revolution wasn't the only way to go.

Years before (before my kapture in '74), another Panther, Frankie Ziths had given me a mimeographed thing on the anarchist Makhno and his forces and their foul treatment by the Bolsheviks. Couldn't handle it then, but now 15 years later I read it again and again. Frankie was like that—very, very critical thinker. No respecter of titles. Practice counts. My Comrade passed before I could say thanks.

Anarchism came to mean the same long-range objective held by my revolutionary nationalist movement and the general radical movement as far as evolving or creating a communist society. The anarchist differed in terms of *how* to do it. Anarchism said, "Let's promote the People's self-directing and self-governing capacities now." Don't need no authoritarian political parties acting like parental control-freaks. People got brains. Remember, that's where we come from. "Have Faith in the People, Have Faith in the Party," say the Marxist-Leninist-Maoists. No! "Have Faith in the People" and let it stand. If any individual or group got something to offer from their experiences, expertise or "higher" learnings, then let the relationship to the People in struggle be one of facilitation, and not this arrogant leadership.

Mind-set from the old school is a muthafucka. There are times when new knowledge can be so powerful that the learner experiences a sense of being overwhelmed. How do I convey all this so that it can be of help to others individually and organizationally. My concern? We gotta win. But only the People's full participation can bring true victory. And the People are real individual human beings, like me—with brains, desires, fears, angers, dreams, etc. Before coming out of prison in '85 I made a personal vow to never ignore this. I was coming out bringing my learnings in psychology, feminism, and anarchism. They were now a part of me.

The Black Panther Collective was formed about a year ago as a result of people in the slave quarters seeing the Black Panther newspaper. Many expressed an interest in the activities of the Black Panther Newspaper Committee, a formation of former members of the BPP. These mainly young brothas and sistas expressed a desire to wanna work Revolution in their respective slave quarters and do it in the spirit of the Panther as they understood it. So, BPNC/NY decided to call up them numbers and set the process going. I am proud to say that most of the ones who first stepped forward are still with the process. They're baaad and are revolutionaries after our own hearts, as indicated by the fact that we fight all the time (because they got minds of their own!). They wanted two things from us: (1) to be involved in community work, including political prisoner work, and (2) P.E., political education, including BP history and style of practice. We were more than happy to provide both. But this was, and still is, no easy process, because they demanded Leadership! Anarchism has taught me to pay particular attention to this concept and its political dangers to individuality, spontaneity, creativity, and the overall health and welfare of the Revolution for a truly free society.

Revolution is learning how to bring a large variety of personalities together into a powerful harmony. This harmony must lay down some general direction and get work done. It's never easy. It's struggle. It takes a lot of skill. The BP Collective was gonna learn this. We started off without a formal structure. We just called it and got it together. The Old Guard of BPNC too already had responsibilities to put out the newspaper and work to raise consciousness of our comrades who are STILL political prisoners. An informal structure, more or less leaderless, developed around this work with the BPNC encouraging others to join in. And they did!

The initial crew was baaad! Yeah. Sold the Black Panther like they owned it, and with spirit. Wasn't afraid to talk with people and engage them. Or challenge them for that matter. "Well,

why don't you wanna buy the paper? It's for you, Sista. Don't be afraid, Brotha. Don't wait for them to kick down your door..." Mm-m. Panther spirit.

So much work to be done. "There's a Political Prisoner meeting on blah-blah, at 7:00 PM. Those of you who are interested in working..." That's all. They were there. You should see them now with the FREE MUMIA work! We worked so much that we never got around to structure or structuring our activities and decision and direction-making processes. It was gonna cost us, and it did. But it had to happen.

Revolution, after defeat and years gone by, is as much psychological as it is formally political. Panthers, automatic members of the BPNC, came together after years in the absence of the intense, disciplined struggle that we once knew. We been through changes. We were still trying to gel our different personalities. But now it's structure time. The Collective is calling for leadership. It is time for the essential struggle to begin: one for clarity, uniformity of will, formal organization of BPC with ideology, a chain of command and rules. Oh god!

In the Collective, everyone is encouraged to speak one's mind. In the BPP, we practiced Mao's Combat Liberalism as best we could. It is still a good thing and not a bad thing. As an anarchist now, with other groundings in psychology and Feminism, I offer, when appropriate, my 2 cents on matters of structure, taking initiative to do things on one's own, and against sexism. A big part of the difficulty I have working my 2 cents is that People raised on hierarchy, authoritarian beliefs truly see such as natural. There's always gotta be leadership. I say why? Who says? What kind? Why assume that there's only one form of organizational structure? And what does it mean when our structure resembles the enemy's? As a member of this Collective body, I accept its general direction even if I am the minority member in my views. Because it is democratic enough to allow input, I can still raise my views, as can anyone. Oh yeah, I get frustrated and angry. But that's