

On the Black Panther Party anniversary, MIM asks: Huey Newton: North Amerikan of the Century?

by MC5

October 15, 1999 marks the 33rd anniversary of the foundation of the most successful communist organization in U.S. history, the Black Panther Party. We would like to use this anniversary date to poll our readers on who the North Amerikan persyn of the century should be.

We exclude Mexico when we say "North Amerika," because "k" stands for the decadence of imperialism. Yes, we lump Quebec, Anglo-Kanada and U.S. Amerika together as one imperialist entity. We also exclude the indigenous peoples who are not benefiting from U.S. minimum wage laws and the welfare state.

Some aspects of Black Panther Party founder Huey Newton's success and failure are public knowledge. Through widespread television and newspaper coverage, the plurality of Black people came to see the Black Panthers as the leaders of the future. When he died, many gathered that Newton had already suffered a severe drug problem in the last decade of life or more. He admitted to no longer being a political force. The persyn of the century probably needs to have had a full life devoted to revolutionary struggle, or led a successful revolution. No doubt he cannot be regarded as "persyn of the century," but his weaknesses are also North Amerika's weaknesses. There has been no successful revolution here and our "great" establishment political leaders are leaders of oppression.

Huey Newton reflected the promise and degeneracy of the U.S. lumpenproletariat. On the up side, he not only inspired millions of white students, Blacks and other oppressed nationals, but also he made unprecedented organizational advances. Although he received widespread bourgeois media attention, he did not rely on it, and he organized Eldridge Cleaver and others to work for a newspaper that had a circulation of 100,000. Yet, he did not stop there. He organized a party along the lines of democratic-centralism in a country with little knowledge of what it was -- a country that just lived through its infamous 1950s decade of sterility in culture and communist regression. Taking the BPP farther than any organization before, he also managed to build an armed organization under the discipline of the party and experimented in how that organization should relate to the community.

It was Huey Newton's relationship to the gun that earned him the attention of the media and the people. He demonstrated leadership energy and courage by getting into shoot-outs with police who were harassing the Black community.

Adding to the greatness of what he did is that he did it with law book in hand, and a knowledge of California law without having been certified a lawyer. He taught the oppressed that law does not mean whatever the oppressor says goes or waiting for experts. The enemy will use the law to its advantage, but there are many ways the people can use it, too. And the people need to build their own powerful institutions to challenge and eventually overthrow that hegemony.

This sense of what was needed on the street also led Huey Newton to develop and apply Maoism for North Amerikan conditions. His emphasis on "self-defense" was the missing piece to bring revitalization to the U.S. communist movement. Of course, North Amerikans have that wild frontier history with settlers and their own guns. Taking up arms is not a problem for the average persyn in North Amerika. The goals of armed activity are the problem for people in North Amerika.

The oppressed's right to self-defense is the foundation of any North Amerikan communist movement. The people here had no idea about why "dictatorship of the proletariat" or "class struggle" were necessary. They have a real difficulty envisioning what a class even is. Yet Newton made it clear how foolish it is for the oppressed to think that their survival rights can be negotiated or voted away. There is nothing to be "reasonable" about when it comes to one's survival rights. They are non-negotiable -- the rights to food, shelter, clothing, a non-toxic environment, not serving in imperialist wars and not dying at the hands of occupier police. Because those rights are non-negotiable there must be organized force against those who would deny them, or a country and community will suffer in moral bankruptcy and violence. Internationally, the communists call that organized force "dictatorship

of the proletariat," but Newton made it as real as could be for North Amerikans. Although Newton did not win in an overall sense, he did bring the class struggle up a notch. No longer can oppressor nation police assume they can occupy a community and act with impunity. The arming of oppressed nationalities in the urban areas changed all that.

Newton also drew the link to the international situation like Malcolm X did and pointed out that Uncle Sam was trying to pick the governments of people all around the world, but the white man was a tiny minority of the global population. So much for the white man's bogus and hypocritical ideas of majority rule and democracy. What the white man really means is that the majority of white people should rule the world majority through the Pentagon, NATO, the CIA etc.

Huey Newton was able to lead the most advanced communist movement in U.S. history because he did not kow-tow to the petty-bourgeoisie. He did not wait for the white middle-classes, a.k.a. "the workers" to get on with it. No, the passivity of the communists was at fault, and the basic oppressed peoples did not have their vanguard party yet, so of course it was foolish to be thinking of swaying the middle classes over to the proletarian side before there was a proletarian side to be reckoned with. Reckoned with, Huey Newton was. The state killed and imprisoned his followers. True to the weaknesses of our society infected with parasitism and all sorts of degeneracy, Huey Newton himself was not able to "keep his shit together." Yet, he can only be evaluated relative to the rest of us this century, and it is not a matter of moral purity. There have been many people who never succumbed to drugs. Others never had to figure out the proper way to command a military force and never made those kinds of mistakes either. Yet, who contributed what Newton did?

Another way of evaluating what a persyn contributed is what happened after he was gone. When Newton lost his ideological usefulness to the proletariat, the Black Panther Party went down the drain. The U.S. communist movement suffered a massive setback; anarchists came out of the woodwork to attack his military discipline; Eldridge Cleaver became a born-again Christian; Bobby Seale made a joke of himself; pseudo-feminists and psychiatrists started sniping and publishing books and social workers went on their liberal ways with no revolutionary spirit. Huey Newton had managed to keep the lid on all these petty-bourgeois, gender aristocracy and imperialist influences, because he led a true proletarian pole with material force worth reckoning with. Had Stalin lived another 30 years with a modicum of his people's support, it seems unlikely U.S. imperialism would have survived Huey Newton and Mao Zedong.

Many times an impatient activist will give short shrift to theory. Newton not only founded his own theories for U.S. conditions, but he made sure that the movement he led delved into philosophy. He expressed his impatience with cheering throngs who only wanted short and loud speeches. Sensing in the air what is called post-modernism today, Huey Newton laid it down raw, that even a KKK-type persyn might have scientific ideas that advance all of society, so attacking the speaker is no substitute for scientific struggle and advance. Newton was the greatest North Amerikan combination of theoretical consistency, courage and action this century, in this writer's view. It was not just energy, physical courage or community connection -- Newton had a scientific plan for society.

Other people who come to mind for North Amerikan of the century include Albert Einstein, Charles Lindbergh, W.E.B. DuBois, the environmentalist Rachel Carson and President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Many liberals and so-called "Communist Party"-USA members will choose FDR for leading the United States in four presidential terms, winning World War II and implementing several points of the Communist Manifesto's minimum program. We at MIM do not concur, because FDR only accomplished such by taking profits from the Third World section of workers and giving them to the U.S. section of workers. Send us your own opinions on North Amerikan of the century and the Central Committee will make its decision. (*Edited by MC12*)