

Power Anywhere Where There's People!

Fred Hampton et al.

- **Original Sources:**

- [Speech](#)
- [Documentary](#)

Introduction

In this session, we will be discussing “Power Anywhere Where There’s People!”, a speech delivered by Fred Hampton (Chairman of the Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Deputy Chairman of the National BPP), and *The First Rainbow Coalition*, a short documentary highlighting the radical multi-racial coalition he helped create.

Power Anywhere Where There's People!

Speech delivered by Fred Hampton at Olivet Church, 1969

Text

Power anywhere where there's people. Power anywhere where there's people. Let me give you an example of teaching people. Basically, the way they learn is observation and participation. You know a lot of us go around and joke ourselves and believe that the masses have PhD's, but that's not true. And even if they did, it wouldn't make any difference. Because with some things, you have to learn by seeing it or either participating in it. And you know yourselves that there are people walking around your community today that have all types of degrees that should be at this meeting but are not here. Right? Because you can have as many degrees as a thermometer. If you don't have any practice, then you can't walk across the street and chew gum at the same time.

Let me tell you how Huey P. Newton, the leader, the organizer, the founder, the main man of the Black Panther Party, went about it.

The community had a problem out there in California. There was an intersection, a four-way intersection; a lot of people were getting killed—cars running over them, and so the people went down and redressed their grievances to the government. You've done it before. I know you people in the community have. And they came back and the pigs said “No! You can't have any....” Oh, they don't

usually say you can't have it; they've gotten a little hipper than that now. That's what those degrees on the thermometer will get you. They tell you "Okay, we'll deal with it; why don't you come back next meeting and waste some time?"

And they get you wound up in an excursion of futility, and you be in a cycle of insaneness, and you be goin' back and goin' back, and goin' back, and goin' back so many times that you're already crazy.

So they tell you, they say, "Okay n****s, what you want?" And they you jump up and you say, "Well, it's been so long, we don't know what we want", and then you walk out of the meeting and you're gone and they say, "Well, you n****s had your chance, didn't you?"

Let me tell you what Huey P. Newton did.

Huey Newton went and got Bobby Seale, the chairman of the Black Panther Party on a national level. Bobby Seale got his 9mm—that's a pistol. Huey P. Newton got his shotgun and got some stop signs and got a hammer. Went down to the intersection, gave his shotgun to Bobby, and Bobby had his 9mm. He said, "You hold this shotgun; anybody mess with us, blow their brains out." He put those stop signs up. There were no more accidents, no more problem.

Now they had another situation. That's not that good, you see, because its two people dealing with a problem. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, no matter how bad they may be, cannot deal with the problem. But let me explain to you who the real heroes are.

Next time, there was a similar situation, another four-way corner. Huey went and got Bobby, went and got his 9mm, got his shotgun, got his hammer and got more stop signs. Placed those stop signs up, gave the shotgun to Bobby, told Bobby "If anybody mess with us while we're putting these stop signs up, protect the people and blow their brains out." What did the people do? They observed it again. They participated in it. Next time they had another four-way intersection. Problems there; they had accidents and death. This time, the people in the community went and got their shotguns, got their hammers, got their stop signs....

Now, let me show you how we're gonna try to do it in the Black Panther Party here. We just got back from the south side. We went out there—we went out there and we got to arguing with the pigs or the pigs got to arguing—he said, "Well, Chairman Fred, you supposed to be so bad, why don't you go and shoot some of those policemen? You always talking about you got your guns and got this, why don't you go shoot some of them?"

And I said, "You've just broken a rule. As a matter of fact, even though you have on a uniform it doesn't make me any difference. Because I don't care if you got on nine uniforms, and 100 badges.

When you step outside the realm of legality and into the realm of illegality, then I feel that you should be arrested.” And I told him, “You being what they call the law of entrapment, you tried to make me do something that was wrong, you encouraged me, you tried to incite me to shoot a pig. And that ain’t cool, Brother, you know the law, don’t you?”

I told that pig that, I told him “You got a gun, pig?” I told him, “You gotta get your hands up against the wall. We’re gonna do what they call a citizens’ arrest.” This fool don’t know what this is. I said, “Now you be just as calm as you can and don’t make too many quick moves, ’cause we don’t wanna have to hit you.”

And I told him like he always told us, I told him, “Well, I’m here to protect you. Don’t worry about a thing, I’m here for your benefit.” So I sent another Brother to call the pigs—you gotta do that in a citizen’s arrest. He called the pigs. Here come the pigs with carbines and shotguns, walkin’ out there. They came out there talking about how they’re gonna arrest Chairman Fred. And I said, “No fool. This is the man you got to arrest. He’s the one that broke the law.” And what did they do? They bugged their eyes, and they couldn’t stand it. You know what they did? They were so mad, they were so angry that they told me to leave.

And what happened? All those people were out there on 63rd Street. What did they do? They were around there laughing and talking with me while I was making the arrest. They looked at me while I was rapping and heard me while I was rapping. So the next time that the pig comes on 63rd Street, because of the thing that our Minister of Defense calls observation and participation, that pig might be arrested by anybody!

So what did we do? We were out there educating the people. How did we educate them? Basically, the way people learn, by observation and participation. And that’s what we’re trying to do. That’s what we got to do here in this community. And a lot of people don’t understand, but there’s three basic things that you got to do anytime you intend to have yourself a successful revolution.

A lot of people get the word “revolution” mixed up and they think revolution’s a bad word. Revolution is nothing but like having a sore on your body and then you put something on that sore to cure that infection. And I’m telling you that were living in an infectious society right now. I’m telling you that were living in a sick society. We’re involved in a society that produces criminals, thieves and robbers and rapers. Whenever you are in a society like that, that is a sick society. And anybody that endorses integrating into this sick society before it’s cleaned up is a man who’s committing a crime against the people.

If you walk past a hospital room and see a sign that says “Contaminated” and then you try to lead people into that room, either those people are mighty dumb—you understand me, cause if they

weren't, they'd tell you that you are an unfair, unjust leader that does not have your followers' interests in mind. And what we're saying is simply that leaders have got to become—we've got to start making them accountable for what they do. They're goin' around talking about so-and-so's an Uncle Tom so we're gonna open up a cultural center and teach him what blackness is. And this n***** is more aware than you and me and Malcolm and Martin Luther King and everybody else put together. That's right. They're the ones that are most aware. They're most aware, cause they're the ones that are gonna open up the center. They're gonna tell you where bones come from in Africa that you can't even pronounce the names. That's right. They'll be telling you about Chaka, the leader of the Bantu freedom fighters, and Jomo Kenyatta, those dingo-dingas. They'll be running all of that down to you. They know about it all. But the point is they do what they're doing because it is beneficial and it is profitable for them.

You see, people get involved in a lot of things that's profitable to them, and we've got to make it less profitable. We've got to make it less beneficial. I'm saying that any program that's brought into our community should be analyzed by the people of that community. It should be analyzed to see that it meets the relevant needs of that community. We don't need no n*****s coming into our community to be having no company to open business for the n*****s. There's too many n*****s in our community that can't get crackers out of the business that they're gonna open.

We got to face some facts. That the masses are poor, that the masses belong to what you call the lower class, and when I talk about the masses, I'm talking about the white masses, I'm talking about the black masses, and the brown masses, and the yellow masses, too. We've got to face the fact that some people say you fight fire best with fire, but we say you put fire out best with water. We say you don't fight racism with racism—we're gonna fight racism with solidarity. We say you don't fight capitalism with no black capitalism; you fight capitalism with socialism.

We ain't gonna fight no reactionary pigs who run up and down the street being reactionary; we're gonna organize and dedicate ourselves to revolutionary political power and teach ourselves the specific needs of resisting the power structure, arm ourselves, and we're gonna fight reactionary pigs with INTERNATIONAL PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION. That's what it has to be. The people have to have the power—it belongs to the people.

We have to understand very clearly that there's a man in our community called a capitalist. Sometimes he's black and sometimes he's white. But that man has to be driven out of our community, because anybody who comes into the community to make profit off the people by exploiting them can be defined as a capitalist. And we don't care how many programs they have, how long a dashiki they have. Because political power does not flow from the sleeve of a dashiki; political power flows from the barrel of a gun—it flows from the barrel of a gun!

A lot of us running around talking about politics don't even know what politics is. Did you ever see something and pull it and you take it as far as you can and it almost outstretches itself and it goes into

something else? If you take it so far that it is two things? As a matter of fact, some things if you stretch it so far, it'll be another thing. Did you ever cook something so long that it turns into something else? Ain't that right? That's what we were talking about with politics.

That politics ain't nothing, but if you stretch it so long that it can't go no further, then you know what you got on your hands? You got an antagonistic contradiction. And when you take that contradiction to the highest level and stretch it as far as you can stretch it, you got what you call war. Politics is war without bloodshed, and war is politics with bloodshed. If you don't understand that, you can be a Democrat, Republican, you can be Independent, you can be anything you want to, you ain't nothing.

We don't want any of those n****s and any of these hunkies and nobody else, radicals or nobody talking about, "I'm on the Independence ticket." That don't mean nothing. Democrat means you sell out the Democrats; Republican means you sell out the republicans; Independent means you're out for graft and you'll sell out to the highest bidder. You understand?

We want people who want to run on the People's Party, because the people are gonna run it whether they like it or not. The people have proved that they can run it. They run it in China, they're gonna run it right here. They can call it what they want to, they can talk about it. They can call it communism, and think that that's gonna scare somebody, but it ain't gonna scare nobody.

We had the same thing happen out on 37th Road. They came out to 37th road where our Breakfast for Children program is, and started gettin' those women who were kind of older, around 58—that's, you know, I call that older cause I'm young. I ain't 20—right, right, right! But you see, they're gonna get them and brainwash them. And you ain't seen nothin' till you see one of them beautiful Sisters with their hair kinda startin' gettin' grey, and they ain't got many teeth, and they were tearin' them policemen up! They were tearin' em up! The pigs would come up to them and say "You like communism?"

The pigs would come up to them and say, "You scared of communism?" And the Sisters would say, "No—scared of it, I ain't never heard of it."

"You like socialism?"

"No, I ain't never heard of it."

The pigs, they be crackin' up, because they enjoyed seeing these people frightened of these words.

"You like capitalism?"

"Yeah, well, that's what I live with—I like it."

"You like the Breakfast For Children program, n****?"

“Yeah, I like it.”

And the pigs say, “Oh-oh.” The pigs say, “Well, the Breakfast For Children program is a socialistic program. Its a communistic program.”

And the women said, “Well, I tell you what, boy. I’ve been knowing you since you were knee-high to a grasshopper, n****. And I don’t know if I like communism and I don’t know if I like socialism. But I know that that Breakfast For Children program feeds my kids, n****. And if you put your hands on that Breakfast For Children program, I’m gonna come off this can and I’m gonna beat your ass like a....”

That’s what they be saying. That’s what they be saying, and it is a beautiful thing. And that’s what the Breakfast For Children program is. A lot of people think it is charity, but what does it do? It takes the people from a stage to another stage. Any program that’s revolutionary is an advancing program. Revolution is change. Honey, if you just keep on changing, before you know it—in fact, not even knowing what socialism is—you don’t have to know what it is—they’re endorsing it, they’re participating in it, and they’re supporting socialism.

And a lot of people will tell you, way, “Well, the people don’t have any theory, they need some theory. They need some theory even if they don’t have any practice. And the Black Panther Party tells you that if a man tells you that he’s the type of man who has you buying candy bars and eating the wrapping and throwing the candy away. He’d have you walking East when you’re supposed to be walking West. Its true. If you listen to what the pig says, you be walkin’ outside when the sun is shining with your umbrella over your head. And when it’s raining you’ll be goin’ outside leaving your umbrella inside. That’s right. You gotta get it together. I’m saying that’s what they have you doing.

Now, what do WE do? We say that the Breakfast For Children program is a socialistic program. It teaches the people basically that—by practice, we thought up and let them practice that theory and inspect that theory. What’s more important? You learn something just like everybody else. Let me try to break it down to you.

You say this Brother here goes to school 8 years to be an auto mechanic. And that teacher who used to be an auto mechanic, he tells him, “Well, n****, you gotta go on what we call on-the-job-training.” And he says, “Damn, with all this theory I got, I gotta go to on-the-job-training? What for?”

He said, “On on-the-job-training he works with me. I’ve been here for 20 years; when I started work, they didn’t even have auto mechanics. I ain’t got no theory, I just got a whole bunch of practice.”

What happened? A car came in making a whole lot of funny noise. This Brother here go get his book. He on page one, he ain’t got to page 200. I’m sitting here listening to the car. He says, “What do you think it is?”

I say, "I think its the carburetor."

He says, "No I don't see anywhere in here where it says a carburetor make no noise like that." And he says, "How do you know its the carburetor?"

I said, "Well, n****, with all them degrees—as many as a thermometer—around 20 years ago, 19 to be exact, I was listening to the same kind of noise. And what I did was I took apart the voltage regulator and it wasn't that. Then I took apart the alternator and it wasn't that. I took apart the generator brushes and it wasn't that. I took apart the generator and it wasn't that. After I took apart all that I finally got to the carburetor and when I got to the carburetor I found that that's what it was. And I told myself that—fool, next time you hear this sound you better take apart the carburetor first."

How did he learn? He learned through practice.

I don't care how much theory you got, if it don't have any practice applied to it, then that theory happens to be irrelevant. Right? Any theory you get, practice it. And when you practice it you make some mistakes. When you make a mistake, you correct that theory, and then it will be corrected theory that will be able to be applied and used in any situation. That's what we've got to be able to do.

Every time I speak in a church I always try to say something, you know, about Martin Luther King. I have a lot of respect for Martin Luther King. I think he was one of the greatest orators that the country ever produced. And I listened to anyone who speaks well, because I like to listen to that. Martin Luther King said that it might look dark sometime, and it might look dark over here on the North Side. Maybe you thought the room was going to be packed with people and maybe you thought you might have to turn some people away and you might not have enough people here. Maybe some of the people you think should be here are not here and you think that, well if they're not here then it won't be as good as we thought it could have been. And maybe you thought that you need more people here than you have here. Maybe you think that the pigs are going to be able to pressure you and put enough pressure to squash your movement even before it starts. But Martin Luther King said that he heard somewhere that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. And we're not worried about it being dark. He said that the arm of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward heaven.

We got Huey P. Newton in jail, and Eldridge Cleaver underground. And Alprentice Bunchy Carter has been murdered; Bobby Hutton and John Huggins been murdered. And a lot of people think that the Black Panther Party in a sense is giving up. But let us say this: That we've made the kind of commitment to the people that hardly anyone else has ever made.

We have decided that although some of us come from what some of you would call petty-bourgeois families, though some of us even one day aspired to be petty-bourgeois, some of us could be in a sense on what you call the mountain top. We could be integrated into the society working with people that we may never have a chance to work with. Maybe we could be on the mountaintop and maybe we

wouldn't have to be hidin' when we go to speak places like this. Maybe we wouldn't have to worry about court cases and going to jail and being sick. We say that even though all of those luxuries exist on the mountaintop, we understand that you people and your problems are right here in the valley.

We in the Black Panther Party, because of our dedication and understanding, went into the valley knowing that the people are in the valley, knowing that our plight is the same plight as the people in the valley, knowing that our enemies are on the mountain top—our friends are in the valley, and even though it's nice to be on the mountain top, we're going back to the valley. Because we understand that there's work to be done in the valley, and when we get through with this work in the valley, then we got to go to the mountain top. We're not going to the mountaintop because there's capitalism on the mountain top. We're going to the mountain top because there's a motherfucker on the mountain top that's playing King, and he's been bullshitting us. And we've got to go up on the mountain top not for the purpose of living his life style and living like he lives. We've got to go up on the mountain top to make this motherfucker understand, goddamnit, that we are coming from the valley!

Discussion Questions

- 1) *What does the anecdote Hampton opens with (about Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and the stop sign) and his discussion of the Black Panther Party's Children's Breakfast Program tell us about the role of mutual aid in advancing the socialist project?
 - a) What is the difference between charity and mutual aid? Why is this distinction so important to socialists?
- 2) In what ways does Hampton's speech allude to Mao's writings and theories? To Lenin's?
- 3) Hampton states that "a lot of people get the word 'revolution' mixed up and they think revolution's a bad word." In what ways does this sentiment persist today?
 - a) How can we combat the pervading notion that reform is "more pragmatic" or otherwise preferable to revolution?
- 4) Hampton states that "we're involved in a society that produces criminals, thieves and robbers and rapers. Whenever you are in a society like that, that is a sick society." What aspects of our society might Hampton be referring to, and how do they produce crime?
 - a) How does this quote connect to ongoing debates around abolishing vs. reforming the police and prisons?
- 5) Internationalism is a key aspect of socialism, but how does it actually show up in practice? In other words, what does practicing international solidarity look like?
 - a) How is DSA doing in this domain? How can we become more integrated with international struggles?

The First Rainbow Coalition

Independent Lens ([video](#), 56m 5s)

Discussion Questions

- 1) In what ways have you seen race be used to sow seeds of division and / or suppress class consciousness within the masses?
 - a) How can we push back against the liberal tendency to frame our principal contradiction as one rooted in race instead of class?
- 2) *What populations currently underrepresented within DSA do you think are most ripe for radicalization / have the most revolutionary potential at this time? Why?
 - a) How should DSA be engaging with these populations? More specifically, how should we balance, on the one hand, recruiting from these populations and, on the other, building alliances with existing radical organizations comprising these populations?
- 3) *Although labor organizing is one of the primary strategies for many socialists, it is really only accessible to the subset of the proletariat that is employed — the “working class”. As we saw in the film, other segments of the proletariat who are unemployed — the “lumpenproletariat” — have only interstitial and insurrectionary forms of struggle at their disposal. (Interstitial action refers to building democratic institutions outside of establishment institutions, such as mutual aid networks.) How should the DSA — which is more “working class” than “lumpen” — engage with insurrectionary strategies (e.g., riots and sit-ins)?
 - a) What should the DSA be doing to organize the lumpenproletariat and become more integrated with their particular struggles?
- 4) What internal and external conditions contributed to the dissolution of the Black Panther Party and the liberal co-opting of the Rainbow Coalition, and what can DSA as an organization learn from this?