

## **Why Carl Hampton Must Be Remembered**

### **By Elbert “Big Man” Howard**

When Carl Hampton was still in his teens, he became aware of the horrific conditions that existed in the Black communities in Texas. We must remember him because he loved his people and devoted himself to changing these conditions and his young life was ended because of these facts.

On a visit to California, Carl came into contact with the Black Panther Party. He saw that the BPP had developed into a revolutionary, community-based organization. In 1969, he returned to Houston, Texas, determined to establish a Black Panther Party Chapter there. He was particularly impressed with the BPP concept of organizing coalitions across ethnic and color lines and wanted to do so with various groups in the Houston area, i.e. the Mexican American Youth organization (MAYO), the John Brown Revolutionary League, and the Young Patriots. These groups worked together to oppose police brutality in Houston.

Due to widespread media coverage, the Black Panther Party had new chapters which were located in many areas of the country. However, in 1970, no new chapters were being approved by the BPP National Office. It was during this period that Carl Hampton had started to organize, and although he could not get the BPP's approval, he continued his activities. He named his organization the People's Party II, because he recognized the Black Panther Party was the first People's Party.

People's Party II was set up on Dowling Street, located in a working-class neighborhood, which also had a number of commercial businesses as well as an illegal drug market. Carl and the People's Party II members interacted regularly with the local residents, winning their support and especially the support from many of the young people. Needless to say, this soon created ill will from pimps and drug dealers because the People's Party II's programs, ideals, and activities affected their exploitative, predatory, capitalist, and destructive businesses in the community.

In July of 1970, tension reached a high level on Dowling Street because of the People's Party II's organizing. PPII had begun working on establishing community survival programs such as free clothing and free food programs and members were selling the Black Panther Party Newspaper.

One day, a Black youth was stopped and harassed by two white cops while selling the BPP newspapers and Carl Hampton arrived and intervened on behalf of this youngster. Carl was armed with a pistol, which was legal at the time, and the cops became enraged at the sight of this young Black man with a weapon; they attempted to arrest Carl. Much like the scenes that were occurring in Oakland and other cities, guns were drawn by both the cops and People's Party II members. It became a standoff: a large crowd of Third Ward people gathered on Dowling Street. The press later reported that as many as 2000 residents moved between the police and the People's Party II's headquarters. Most of these people who had witnessed the confrontation were outraged at the Houston police response.

Many members of the crowd carried firearms as well as other weapons. As the situation escalated, the Houston police decided to withdraw and this was viewed by the crowd as a victory. As word of this incident spread, activists from across the entire city came to Dowling Street to offer their support and a number of Black youths joined the Party on the spot.

It was because of this incident and the display of community support engendered by it, that Carl Hampton became a target for the Houston Police's Hit Squad. From the moment Carl stood up for his community and showed no fear of the police, he became marked for murder by the Houston city officials. His murder was to be carried out by the city's police assassins – the Red Squad.

In true Texas fashion, on July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1970, Carl Hampton was ambushed, dry-gulched by hidden cowards who shot and killed this true revolutionary Black man. Police snipers had positioned themselves on the roof of St John's Baptist Church – they laid in wait for Carl to come in response to a message that there were white men on the roof of a Black church in the Black community. Carl and his comrades went to investigate this and as they prepared to cross Dowling Street, Carl gave the order not to fire their weapons unless they were fired upon. As they then crossed the street, a shot rang out and Carl fell to the ground. He died at 2:30 AM on the next morning. Other members were arrested and prosecuted and harassed but other young men took over and the People's Party II continued on.

In the fall of 1971, the National Office of the Black Panther Party recognized the Peoples Party II as an official chapter of the Black Panther

Party and the name was changed from People's Party II to the Houston Chapter of the Black Panther Party.

Carl Hampton's young life was taken far too soon...another soldier of the people assassinated by the oppressors of the people. His life was taken away by evil forces that have yet to be punished. Carl left us with his young life's work, dedication, and love for his people as an example and these words: "A revolution is a change. We need a revolution. Revolution is not necessarily a violent confrontation. If Black people would organize, we would become a powerful people."

Long live the revolutionary spirit of Carl B Hampton. Power to the People.

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