

## Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention

# Huey Newton - the people must burn

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## the pig constitution

### DONALD FREED

There is going to be a revolution in America. It is going to begin, in earnest, in our time. The multitudes in Philadelphia at the Revolutionary Peoples Constitutional Convention were overwhelmingly poor and black and, most significant of all, typical; the stunning events of September, 1970, in Philadelphia could have happened anywhere in America. There were no buses of white students and peace people from outside (they will all make the most important choice of their lives by Christmas).

To have believed in a second American revolution before Philadelphia was an act of historical and existential faith; not to believe in a new world after Philadelphia is a dereliction of the human spirit. When Huey P. Newton told those forgotten thousands, simply, that he loved them and they rose up weeping like the troops from hell, time stood still and the future hove into sight. It all began the week before.

### Babylon, 1970

These creeps lurk in the dark. They should be strung up. I mean within the law. We're dealing with a group of fanatics, yellow dogs that they are. We're dealing with psychotics and we must be in a position to take them on.

Why don't they call us and tell us they want to kill us? Why don't they tell us they want/

to have it out? We'll meet them/ anytime. We'll go on their terms.

If the laws as they now exist/ are insufficient to deal with these people / (black militants and revolutionaries) then I urge that the voters elect to high office people who/ will change the laws.

We took their pants off.

If they say they'll have ten/ men, they can have anything they want with them,/ and we'll go with two. Do they have to be cowards? Aren't five to one odds good/ enough for them?

The odds at each Panther office had been 50 to one in favor of the attacking police. Police Chief Rizzo was spewing hate.

They were the cowards. Huey Newton was to say, and he dubbed Rizzo as "Bozzo". The name was permanent by nightfall, it will dog the Chief the rest of his convulsive days.

Philadelphia was in a state of emergency. Counterattack on the police. Typically, the Panther offices were visited by predawn raids, but this time the Panthers were stripped naked in the streets. "This reminds us of slavery" said a later conference speaker, and the black colony of Philadelphia in a condition of grief and rage, made a sound that must have paralyzed the undercover police agents there.

"Violence is in the hands of the police", Huey P. Newton an-

nounced when he arrived. The stage was set: a pre-revolutionary aura hung in the stifling air.

### Flags

Temple University, McGonigle Field House, Philadelphia, 1970, Revolutionary Peoples Constitutional Convention. At 9 a.m. the lines of black and brown people wait, the Quacker observers arrive. 9 a.m., the time announced, "colored peoples time", that is poor peoples time, is coming to an end.

Why did time matter now? Because there was a future. "Right On!", heard every second, means that anyway: "right on time"; right on time for revolution; that is to say for survival.

By the time the first session ended 9,000 people had washed up all the way to the speakers stand and new lines were already forming in anticipation of the coming of man of destiny, Huey P. Newton.

Outside the Stars and Stripes had been replaced by five flags in descending order: the Black Panther Party; the National Liberation Front of Vietnam (no peace rally has ever dwelled with such detail on the suffering and heroism of the Vietnamese people themselves); the green, black and red of black nationalism; the green marijuana leaf on the black ground of anarchy, the flag of Y.I.P.; and, finally, a flag of Che Guevara.

The growing number was close to 9,090 non-white; a stunning reversal of previous "Left" conferences. Black and Brown of all ages (the new chapter of the Philadelphia Young Lords was prominent), and young whites, all come, like so many fools for the revolution, to talk about a new world.

L.D.D. JULY 4, 1776.

# Thirteen united States of America

...people to dispute the political bonds which have connected them with another  
 ...first middle them, a doubt respect to the opinions of mankind requires  
 ...to take self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their  
 ...That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among Men, deriving  
 ...these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute  
 ...we shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, in  
 ...guarding pall oppressive both them, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, un  
 ...when along train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object  
 ...h government; and to provide new guards for their future security. — Such has  
 ...former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great  
 ...absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let facts be put in order to a candid  
 ...his good. — He has forbidden his Governors to pass laws of immediate  
 ...suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them. — He has refused to  
 ...of Representatives in the Legislature; a right inestimable to them and formidable  
 ...to from the Depository of their Public Records, for the sole purpose of detaining them out  
 ...mainly furnish his: incursions on the rights of the people. — He has refused for  
 ...inhibition, have returned to the People at large for their assent; the that remain  
 ...has endeavored to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstruct  
 ...ing the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands. — He has obstructed the  
 ...ade judges dependant on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount  
 ...to hang our people, and set out their substance — He has kept among  
 ...Military independent of and superior to the Civil power? — He has combined  
 ...to about to their State of just and equal representation: — For quartering large bodies of  
 ...they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States: — For taking of  
 ...us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by jury, — For transporting us beyond  
 ...inias, establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging it's borders  
 ...— For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and  
 ...of themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever. —  
 ...he has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives  
 ...devastation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty, perfidy  
 ...stained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high seas to bear Arms against  
 ...recited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the  
 ...of all ages, fears and conditions. — In every stage of these Oppressions We  
 ...Princes, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant's  
 ...and them from time to time of attempts by their Legislature to extend an unwarranted  
 ...appeared to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by  
 ...ad correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of  
 ...hold the rest of mankind; Crimes in War, in Peace, and  
 ...abled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the redress of our  
 ...these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, Free and Independent  
 ...and the State of Great Britain; is and ought to be totally dissolved; and  
 ...Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent  
 ...divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes

Samuel

Joseph Bartlett  
John

All children wore "Huey" buttons and babes in arms, with the gift of tongues, cried "all power to the people". The army of children were not boisterous. The children were to be fought these days like the adults, infected with a kind of mad sobriety. Later, inside, they would watch the faces of the big people contort with rage and hope. They would have more than the buttons to show for it all; the funerals and rallies were doing their work, these children had developed a spine of revolutionary grief.

They were serious as Asian children are serious in these days. The rulers of Philadelphia were enormously relieved that there was no riot, that everyone had come to hear speeches instead. Little did they guess that this was not a "peaceful" conference, it was a revolutionary conference whose constitution would be the death warrant of those who now congratulated each other on their good luck. Beware the quiet children and the poor people on time.

Babylon And Germany  
 Inside, the perfect revolutionary began his extraordinary two hour oration. Michael Tabor of "The New York 21" Panthers and former dope fiend. In magnificent periods in the language of the streets and of history, he invoked Babylon and Nazi Germany. The revolutionary fiend, in a metaphor that drove the throng wild, likened capitalism to the most devastating addiction of all — money.

The American Constitution, as practiced, was consigned to the "graveyard of human history", the crowd roared. It has always been, he said, "from git go to git go", a constitution "of the pigs, by the pigs and for the pigs". Displaying an amazing range of American history, Mr. Tabor took the document apart, article by article.

In a deep voice he conceded that in the eighteenth century the Constitution had been a brave "wolf ticket". But even then it had been designed excluding the 240,000 indentured servants 800,00 black slaves, 300,00 Indians and all women, to say nothing of the sexual minorities.

In January of 1863, the "South put fire to the North's ass", and the North found it convenient to take a moral position concerning the slaves who were already free.

### The Masses

The 188,000 slave soldiers turned the tide and for their pains got the 13th, 14th, 15th amendments which were promptly used to safeguard Northern industry.

The great collection roared again and again as black capitalism and black political representation were brushed aside. During Reconstruction the black senators from Mississippi, the judges, the congressmen and police chiefs had all been wiped out without a white murmur; they were reminded.

#### Too Late, Too Late

German fascism just "existed" one day when the quarrelling victims looked up. Could it happen here? From Asia to the barrios to the ghetto a machine had been grinding that "made Hitler look like a peace candidate." From the Alien and Sedition Acts to today's preventive detention and "no-knock" laws Babylon has been building. The warning rang out over the jammed hall that if the people did not seize the time then the "time would seize them." One day soon it will be "too late, too late, too goddamned late." There was tumult and ecstasy: the crowd roared, stood, shook fists, slapped hands, gave the fearful, wonderful high yell of the Third World. The death blow would be, must be struck here in Babylon — the audience was a storm of fists and cry of "all power to the people."

It was all so simple. To whom does the oil and the other resources of the earth belong? Terrible questions were being asked and to each the people shouted their answer — "the people". History manifested on two feet, the revolutionary fiend at the podium pushed the inexorable dialectic on and on: life or death, freedom or oppression, being a man or woman or a punk, revolution and survival or humiliation and nothingness. Simple.

The time was at hand. The plenary session of the Revolutionary Peoples Constitutional Convention was directed to reconvene in groups:

1. Third World Peoples
2. Women
3. G.I.'s
4. College Students
5. High School Students
6. Workers
7. Lesbians
8. Male Homosexuals
9. Welfare People
10. Street People
11. Head Workers — People's technicians, doctors, lawyers, scientists, clergy
12. Political Prisoners, Prisoners of War

There were 10,000 people in the hall and that many outside. At last the real people. The overflow was so great that hundreds streamed to the nearest church. It was a scene out of the Gospel according to St. Mark: men, women and children everywhere "waiting for Huey" to come to the hall, to the streets, to the church. When he spoke he told them simply that it was time to change the system and thereby their lives and that he loved them. He began with America:

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's god entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government.

Laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes: and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future society.

The train of logic was inexorable. After a generation of media heroes the man who had looked out at them from posters for so long spoke without any rhetoric at all. He seemed almost boyish but powerfully built and wonderfully handsome. The press was dumb-founded they were left out and the people were everywhere. Priorities were already being rearranged, the press had to take their chances. They, the press, were disappointed because the speech was so short and unadorned.

Friends and comrades throughout the United States and throughout the world, we gather here in peace and friendship to claim our inalienable rights, to claim the rights bestowed upon us by an unbroken train of abuses and usurpations, and to perform the duty which is thus required of us: Our sufferance has been long and patient, our prudence has stayed this final hour, but our human dignity and strength requires that we still the voice of prudence with the cries of our sufferance. Thus we gather in the spirit of revolutionary love and friendship for all oppressed people of the world regardless of their race or of the race and doctrine of their oppressors. We gather to proclaim to the world that for 200 years we have suffered this long train of abuses and usurpations while holding to the hope that this would pass. We recognize however, that it has not passed and we are a people who enjoy no equal protection of the law, no due process of law, and our future action must be guided by our sufferance, not by our prudence.

He was teaching now as no one had since Malcolm X. The huge numbers were rapt.

The United States of America was born at a time when the nation covered relatively little land, a narrow strip of political divisions of the Eastern seaboard. The United States of America was born at a time when the population was small and fairly homogenous both racially and culturally. Thus the people called Americans were a different people in a different place. Furthermore they had a different economic system. The small population and the fertile land available meant that with the agricultural emphasis of the economy, people were able to advance according to their motivation and ability. It was an agricultural economy and with the circumstances surrounding it, Democratic Capitalism flourished in the new nation.

Mr. Newton was on his obsession now: colonialism and imperialism.

The metaphor of colony and mother country sank into the listening. The new nation acquired a population to fill this newly acquired land. This population was drawn from the continents of Africa, Asia, Europe and South America. Thus a nation conceived by a homogenous people of a small number and in a small area grew into a nation of a heterogeneous people, comprising a large number, and spread across an entire continent. This change in the fundamental characteristics of the nation

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tion and its people substantially changed the nature of American society. Furthermore, the social changes were marked by economic changes. A rural and agricultural economy became an urban and industrialized economy, as farming was replaced by manufacturing. The Democratic Capitalism of our early days became caught up in a relentless drive to obtain profits and more profits until the selfish motivation for profit eclipsed the unselfish principles of democracy. Thus 200 years later we have an overdeveloped economy which is so infused with the need for profit that we have replaced Democratic Capitalism with Bureaucratic Capitalism. The free opportunity of all men to pursue their economic ends has been replaced by constraints placed upon Americans by the large corporations which control and direct our economy. They have sought to increase their profits at the expense of the people, and particularly at the expense of the racial and ethnic minorities.

Modern times and the period we had all lived through and the images and figures, now dead and gone, were the collective thinking and memory of the convention.

We did not recognize, however, that any attempt to complete the promise of an 18th Century Revolution in the framework of a 20th Century government, economy and society was doomed to failure. The descendants of that small company of original settlers of this land are not among the common people of today, they have become a small ruling class in control of a worldwide economic system. The constitution set up by their ancestors to serve the people no longer serves the people, for the people have changed. The people of the 18th Century have become the ruling class of the 20th Century, and the people of the 20th Century are the descendants of the slaves and dispossessed of the 18th Century now serves the ruling class of the 20th Century, and the people of today stand wanting for a foundation for their own life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. The Civil Rights Movement has not produced this foundation, and it cannot produce this foundation because of the nature of the United States society and economy. The vision of the Civil Rights Movement is to achieve goals which have been altered by 200 years of change. Thus the Civil Rights Movement and similar movements have produced no foundation for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They have produced humiliating programs of welfare and unemployment compensation, programs with sufficient form to deceive the people, but with insufficient substance to change the fundamental distribution of power and resources in this country.

The simple general demands were spelled out. As simple as "Land, Bread and Peace" and to the media as deceptive.

We gather here to let it be

known at home and abroad that a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness has in its maturity become an imperialist power dedicated to death, oppression and the pursuit of profits. We will not be deceived by so many of our fellow men, we will not be blinded by small changes in form which lack any change in the substance of imperialist expansion. Our suffering has been too long, our sacrifices have been too great, and our human dignity is too strong for us to be prudent any longer.

The Black Panther Party calls for FREEDOM and the POWER to determine our destiny.

The Black Panther Party calls for full employment for all our people.

The Black Panther Party calls for an end to the capitalist exploitation of our community.

The Black Panther Party calls for decent housing for all our people.

The Black Panther Party calls for a true education for our people.

The Black Panther Party calls for exemption from military services.

The Black Panther Party calls for an end to police brutality.

The Black Panther Party calls for freedom for all political prisoners.

The Black Panther Party calls for fair trials for all men by a jury of their peers.

The Black Panther Party calls for a United Nations plebiscite to determine the will of black people as to their national destiny.

In summary, the victims of the eighteenth century, a small homogeneous group, had become the ruling class of the twentieth century. In practice, it is their Declaration and Constitution. Malcolm X had hinted or "signified" at what was coming. Huey Newton spelled it out: A new American Declaration-Constitution.

The security tightened around him. The short remarks were near an end, the mass bent into the love.

The sacredness of man and of the human spirit requires that

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human dignity and integrity ought to be always respected by every other man. We will settle for nothing less, for at this point in history anything less is but a living death. WE WILL BE FREE and we are here to ordain a new constitution which will ensure our freedom by enshrining the dignity of the human spirit.

Surrounded by guards, Huey P. Newton moved out quickly. Everyone knew there had been death threats all day, a final warning had been issued to provocateurs, and two grenades had been discovered before the meeting. As the guard, perhaps with a decoy now, flashed past the entrances the crowd turned and cheered and wept. The last phrase had produced an uproar, "a slave who dies a natural death will not balance two flies on the scales of history."

Missing had been the nation's number one political prisoner, Bobby Seale. How happy that greatest of organizers would have been to see his beloved Huey, radiant before the masses. Only a few of the Panther iron cadre — Masai, Big Man, Jolly, Zayd Shakur — were left to see it, to follow and to lead.

Ahead was all the detailed work but it all came down to what had been intoned earlier, "Give me liberty or give me death"; when Patrick Henry had been equaled with Jonathan Jackson who entered the courtroom in California "with freedom on his mind."

Outside the little food trucks selling Soul Food made do for loaves and fishes, and the word "revolution" chattered through the cooling night like a bird or a machine gun.

#### The Heat Wave Breaks

The speech, on radio and tape recorder, was on an endless loop all night in the seething and terrific North Philadelphia streets. The light voice on every block saying that America must have some socialism; in the press next day readers instead of seeing "off the pig" horror stories saw their own life described.

The corners, afterwards, were like the decks of ships tilting under the weight of the standing thousands. As sensational as the St. Petersburg Haymarket an age ago, and Panthers were everywhere talking the putative peoples' army out of a premature confrontation.

The streets enormous respect for the Panthers turned the tide even though thousands had been kept standing for hours with no information and it had hurt deeply not to "see Huey". They went home and they came back to work on the new constitution the next morning.

The next morning the heat wave had broken, breeze and blue sky and the people waiting patiently at all the churches to begin the work shops. The irony was enormous: the pre-literate black masses and some few saved post-literate students were going to,

finally, write the new constitution that the middle class intellectuals had been calling for since their birth. The aristocratic students led by the women, and the street bloods, they were going to do the writing.

So there were the first tentative meetings, led brilliantly by "armed intellectuals" from the Panthers. And, as always in revolution, it came down to right and wrong, moral imperatives.

The failed aristocratic students at the end of history and the Third World cadres, lumpen, and workers at the beginning have certain things in common: a religious moral passion that defies the technocratic rational tradition of the Enlightenment, an overarching and absurd hope in the transcendent nature of man in the material, existential world, and the yearning for engagement in the work or play of history-destiny. In the schools and churches — the rational structures of the past — the subversive workshops of the future met to ventilate the private obsessions of the intellectual aristocrats and the mad hopes of the damned.

The people were not playing anymore; the Panthers had to go flat out to keep up with them.

#### Seize The Time

The press, ordered to choose a pool of ten from their number, exhibited signs of disorientation. But the "story" was outside. Unbelievably, thousands jammed the streets again for the reading of the constitutional workshops. No charismatic leader was promised.

Somehow the rejection of time and discipline by the upper middle class students and the poor people had ended and it was clear that the convention could have gone on for a month. In place of the individual rebellions of the '60s was a collective attack on time itself and its abstractions.

A Declaration-Constitution that the great crowds would have to fight for; this they were told for three days.

They listened joyfully to the fruit of their hard labor in the workshops. People with pencils had shown up at 8 a.m. and worked without let up until dark. They were high and could not be turned off:

1. Self-Determination for National Minorities
2. Self-Determination for Women
3. Self-Determination for Street People
4. The Family & the Rights of Children
5. Sexual Self-Determination
6. Control & Use of Military
7. Control & Use of Means of Production
8. Control & Use of Educational System
9. Revolutionary Artists
10. Control & Use of Legal System
11. Political Prisoners of War
12. Control & Use of Land
13. Distribution of Political Power
14. Internationalism, relations with liberation struggles around the world
15. Religious Oppression/New Humanism
16. Drugs
17. Health

These had been confronted by groups, some numbering as high as 500!

Ecology, too, was now a revolutionary issue. They would fight and die, they roared, for the biosphere: "revolution is the only solution."

Seize the space: all State and municipal boundaries to be abolished; access to all information; community control of everything, on and on it went, and, finally, a deep roar when the mass was told that America would be free at

last but relatively poor after the tenacles of United States imperialism had been chopped off. Almost shocking altruism; that, the end of hard drugs and over and over again the destruction of "the pig".

And once the suspense became unbearable until it was affirmed that "grass and psychedelic drugs are necessary for the revolutionary consciousness of the people (though afterwards perhaps a burden)." Then they danced and sang in the vaulted gymnasium and when the pimps and hustlers were drummed out, old women stood and beat their breasts.

All demands from "grass", to revolutionary tribunals, to essential sharing, to counter-intelligence, to parks to land to medicine to police to those who control the police to women to sexual freedom, to exploitive action or lack of action to peoples courts to a new religion of humanism to God in Man, to peace, to human survival. Abstractions, high and low. It was all there.

*To Relieve Pain Speak Pain*

Dazed with fatigue, ready to go on, the people crowded into the Church of the Advocate for the parting words. The Panthers opened the microphone for criticism; it came. They made notes.

Somehow an old woman got the speaker and told a long, disjointed story of the death of her two year grandchild. It was boring, embarrassing, appalling: that woman with her crazy word salad of grief and remorse, standing by the altar in the huge church was the final sign and significance of the plenary convention and the raw heart of the future constitution.

Philadelphia had been transformed for the second time. Now the call of the South would be answered, the Revolutionary Constitutional Convention, itself, would be held in Washington, D.C., on November 4th, election day. From the prisons, campus, military base, barrio, ghetto, church, underground, Third World, factory, they would come to run it down in the Capitol — the "city of lies".

The Panthers, who worked through all the nights, handed out the plain spoken position papers and it was over. People stood in knots to say goodbye; a breeze began to blow through the blasted streets. Would a wind be far behind?

The man known as Malcolm X had seen it all: had seen Huey P. Newton coming with his love and his gun; had seen Babylon and the chickens coming home to roost.