



WORKS

Why I Am an Anarchist **Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin** *(1979)*

(Extract from a 1993 Edition of Anarchism and the Black Revolution)

In the 1960s I was part of a number of Black revolutionary movements, including the Black Panther Party, which I feel partially failed because of the authoritarian leadership style of Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale and others on the Central Committee. This is not a recrimination against those individuals, but many errors were made because the national leadership was too divorced from the chapters in cities all over the country, and therefore engaged in “commandism” or forced work dictated by leaders. But many contradictions were also set up because of the structure of the organization as a Marxist-Leninist group. There was not a lot of inner-party democracy, and when contradictions came up, it was the leaders who decided on their resolution, not the members. Purges became commonplace, and many good people were expelled from the group simply because they disagreed with the leadership.

Because of the over-importance of central leadership, the national organisation was ultimately liquidated entirely, packed up and shipped back to Oakland, California. Of course, many errors were made because the BPP was a young organisation and was under intense attack by the state. I do not want to imply that the internal errors were the primary contradictions that destroyed the BPP. The police attacks on it did that, but, if it were better and more democratically organized, it may have weathered the storm. So this is no mindless criticism or backstabbing attack. I loved the party. And, anyway, not myself or anyone else who critique the party with hindsight, will ever take away from the tremendous role that the BPP played in the Black Liberation movement of the 1960s. But we must look at a full picture of our organizations from that period, so that we do not repeat the same errors.

I think my brief period in the Panthers was very important because it taught me about the limits of – and even the bankruptcy of – leadership in a revolutionary movement. It was not a question of a personality defect on behalf of particular leader, but rather a realization that many times leaders have one agenda, followers have another.

