



WORKS

nothing relevant to us today. The history of the British Black Panthers has insights for anarchists today, and our collective work in understanding them and the wider fight against overlapping oppressions has barely begun.

Many of the sources available on the Black Panthers in London are police and court documents held at the National Archives. They show the extent of the state's hostile response to the movement. In addition to some of these documents, I've made use of interviews of the activists involved in the movement – mostly carried out by an oral history project called Organised Youth. There is a great deal of source material also held by the Institute of Race Relations, the George Padmore Institute, and the Black Cultural Archive. I feel it's important to recommend them here to anyone interested in knowing more about this extremely rich history.

I'd like to turn to the story of how and why the Black Panther movement rose in Britain. Much like their counterparts in the US, the Black Panthers in Britain emerged as a response to the frustrations of black people with the failures and limitations of more moderate movements. The civil rights movement in the US was very successful in ending segregation but had made little progress in dealing with issues such as police racism. In Britain, there was immigration from countries that had recently gained independence from the British Empire. Between 1948 and the 1960s, there was a policy of open-door immigration from the Commonwealth, which began to be closed by the Conservatives in 1962 and then tightened further by Labour in 1968. Labour's Commonwealth Immigrants Act was later found to be racially discriminatory by the European Court of Human Rights. While immigration law was being tightened, efforts to lobby the Labour Party to pass legislation against racial discrimination had produced only a very timid Race Relations Act. This Act was even used to persecute anti-racist campaigners. Disillusionment with the Labour Party, the failure of much of the trade union movement to fight against racism in the workplace, the rise of the far right after Enoch Powell's rivers of blood speech, the international backdrop of the Vietnam War, and discrimination in housing, education and by the police, all contributed to a situation that called for a more radical and militant anti-racist politics

The largest moderate group, the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination, was disintegrating by 1967. Their orientation towards the Labour Party had left behind many who were looking for something more radical. This political vacuum was filled by the Black Panther movement. Their ideology Black Power, where it began in the US, was initially quite separatist and nationalist, but developed strong internationalist and revolutionary socialist strands rooted in the ideas of self-organisation and liberation.

