December 1969: The FBI Assassination of Fred Hampton

“I AM... A REVOLUTIONARY!”

December 4, 1969—40 years ago this week: Chicago police led by Cook County prosecutor Edward Hanrahan as part of an FBI Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) operation stormed into Illinois Black Panther Party Chairman Fred Hampton’s apartment. Armed with shotguns, handguns, and a 45-caliber machine gun, and guided by a floor plan of the apartment provided by an informant, the police killed Mark Clark and critically injured four other Panthers. They gunned their way through the apartment into Fred Hampton’s bedroom. There he lay sleeping, having been drugged earlier by an FBI informant. As he lay there, the cops stood over him and put two bullets in his brain, at close range. Following this murderous attack—where the police fired nearly 100 rounds in the house and were completely uninvolved themselves—Hanrahan brazenly lied that the police were under heavy fire from the Panthers.

Among all the many thousands and thousands of actions that show why the Black Panther Party correctly dubbed the police “pigs,” few compare to the viciousness and lies surrounding the assassination of Fred Hampton. The media took up and spread these lies from the authoritarians as if they were the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But the Panthers in Chicago—still shocked and grieving from the terrible loss of their key leader, and with many of their core members now in jail—refused to give up. Instead, they turned to the people and mounted a defiant political counter-offensive. The Panthers organized “people’s tours” of the apartment. Thousands came, first from the ghetto and then more broadly. Film crews and reporters were brought in. People saw with their own eyes. And the evidence was clear: All the bullet holes were coming in. The famous picture supplied by the authorities and run in the Chicago Tribune at the time, of a door supposedly riddled with bullets coming from the Panthers, was shown to be a door with nail holes. Even mainstream commentators felt compelled to speak out. Hanrahan had claimed that it was only through the “grace of God” that his men escaped with scratches. Mike Royko, then a columnist at the Chicago Daily News—and no Panther supporter—wrote in response, “Indeed it does appear that miracles occurred. The Panthers’ bullets must have dissolved into the air before they hit anybody or anything. Either that or the Panthers were shooting in the wrong direction—namely, at themselves.” (Cited in The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and the Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther, page 102, by Jeffrey Haas, Lawrence Hill Books)

Fred Hampton was a 21-year-old leader of the Panthers. He called “a Black messiah”—that is, he focused on taking out the “beast of U.S. imperialism as well as around the world, is greatly heightened because of the leadership of Bob Avakian and the RCP. Humanity still rises for the revolution that Fred Hampton devoted his life to. As the Constitution of the RCP says “The emancipation of all humanity: this, and nothing less than this, is our goal. There is no greater cause, no greater purpose to which to dedicate our lives.”

...