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‘Dabbling with Revolution’: Black Power Comes to Britain

The Dialectics of Liberation conference of July 1967 brought the 1960s’ counterculture to the heart of London. The 2-week conference, convened by R. D. Laing and leading figures in the anti-psychiatry movement, featured contributions from Beat Generation writers William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg; Emmett Grogan, founder of the San Francisco anarchist movement The Diggers; and the Frankfurt School neo-Marxist, Herbert Marcuse (Cooper 1968: 9). The conference practised the countercultural values that it preached, spontaneously transforming the Roundhouse and Camden’s pubs and bars into informal collegiums, the founding event of the anti-university of London (Ibid., 11). Black Power, a movement that had emerged at the cutting edge of the American Civil Rights struggle the year before, had several representatives at the conference. The headline black radical and the most controversial speaker by far was Howe’s fellow Trinidadian and childhood friend, Stokely Carmichael, now the harbinger of the Black Power revolution. The British press responded to his visit by branding him ‘an evil campaigner of hate’ and ‘the most effective preacher of racial hatred at large today’ (Humphry and Tindall 1977: 63). The British government, conscious of the uprisings in Detroit, Newark and New Jersey, was concerned that his visit might spark similar unrest in the United Kingdom. As a result, Carmichael received a visit from agents of Special Branch who ‘advised’ him to leave the country. Carmichael clearly took the warning seriously and left earlier than planned, breaking an engagement to speak at a meeting of Michael X’s Racial Adjustment Action Society (RAAS). Three days later, he was banned from returning by the Home Secretary Roy Jenkins and shortly after he was denied entry to 30 other territories of the former British Empire, including his country of birth (Ture and Thelwell 2003: 524).

Carmichael’s visit did not have the destabilizing effect the government had feared; it did, however, have a radicalizing effect on the British black

movement. Within a week of Carmichael's Roundhouse speech, the United Coloured People's Association (UCPA) had expelled its white members and adopted the ideology of Black Power; within a month, Michael X, who quickly became the media face of Black Power in Britain, was arrested for inciting racial hatred; and within a year, the British Black Panther Movement was founded. In essence, Carmichael's visit led to the formation of an indigenous Black Power movement. For Howe too, the period 1967–68 was of great importance (Bunce and Field 2010).

Black Power in Britain and the dialectics of liberation

Prior to the Roundhouse conference, there were certainly individuals who were influenced by Black Power, but there was nothing that could be described as a British movement. Obi B. Egbuna, founder of the British Black Panthers and a man who would play an important role in the first wave of the British movement, goes as far as to say that Black Power arrived in Britain following Stokely Carmichael's 'historic visit in the summer of 1967' (Egbuna 1971: 16).

Howe attended the Roundhouse conference, keen to see Carmichael speak. The two men had grown up together in the same part of Trinidad. The young Carmichael had made quite an impression on Howe. He was older by 2 years and a stylish dresser. Carmichael's cache among his peers was underlined, Howe recalls, by the fact that he was the first person in the area to own a pair of roller skates. The two lost touch just before Carmichael's 11th birthday, as Carmichael moved to America to join his parents in New York, but became reacquainted at the Congress, staying in touch until Carmichael's death in 1998.

Carmichael's address created a storm, and like many others, Howe was deeply impressed. Howe noted that, as a performer, 'he was so brilliant, the change of tone of voice, commanding the audience' (Howe 2011b). But more than that, for Howe, the crucial aspect of Carmichael's address was its clarity of thought. Howe had little time for the thoughtlessness of much of the black nationalism that was emanating from America at the time. Carmichael, by contrast, was a serious intellectual, a fact that was all the more remarkable, Howe argues, given the anti-intellectualism prevalent in black radical circles. His intellectual credentials were impressive. A Howard University philosophy graduate, Carmichael had declined the offer of a full postgraduate scholarship at Harvard to work as a civil rights organizer, before being elected chairman of the Student

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1965. Howe was also struck by Carmichael's ability to communicate directly with the black working class. His oratory mixed references to Camus and Sartre, quotations from J. S. Mill and allusions to Rousseau with street slang (Bunce and Field 2010). Howe found this combination of high culture and the vernacular very attractive. In a way it reflected two aspects of his background. Howe was, after all, as comfortable with the intellectuals at Queen's Royal College (QRC) as he was with the Renegades at East Dry River. It was a verbal style that Howe himself could pull off, and which would come to characterize his own political idiom (Howe 2011b).

Carmichael's message made a lot of sense to Howe, for it reflected a commonality of worldview. Howe explains Carmichael's position in terms of his Caribbean background. Nationalism goes deep in America, and therefore, Howe argues, it was no surprise that a kind of nationalism established itself in the American black movement. Carmichael as a West Indian had never imbibed American nationalism and, therefore, was able to envisage a different kind of radicalism.

In many ways, Carmichael was an inspiration. Yet, Howe did not feel that the time was right to pursue radical politics wholeheartedly. James, one of the first to address the future of Black Power in Britain, put his finger on the issue: Black Power's first great challenge was the police, the front line of the state. Howe saw this clearly. He understood that becoming an activist necessarily entailed persecution by the police. Howe had only recently become a father and therefore had no intention of courting a custodial sentence. He also had other reservations. The Black Power Movement, as it developed in Britain during the latter half of 1967 and early 1968, was yet to become a serious political force. It was a movement of dabblers dominated by nationalist rhetoric.

The first wave of Black Power in Britain was dominated by three rather idiosyncratic figures. All three had flanked Carmichael during his appearance at the Roundhouse. The men in question were Michael X, Obi Egbuna and Roy Sawh. While Howe was never allied with any of these figures, they form the context for the first phase of the development of Black Power. From 1965 to 1967, Michael X was the face of black radicalism in Britain. Christened Michael de Freitas, and later known as Michael Abdul Malik, Michael X described himself as the 'most famous black man' in the Britain. He had risen to prominence following Malcolm X's visit to Britain in 1965. Michael X made his biggest impact on the white counterculture and was regularly interviewed by magazines such as *Oz* and *IT*, where he set out his views on race, poetry, violence

and the other burning issues of the day. These utterances never amounted to a coherent political position, and in reality, his organization RAAS failed to make an impact as a grass-roots organization (Wild 2008: 85). Michael X's stature as a black radical was severely damaged by a series of revelations in the tabloid press, which included his association with the notorious landlord Peter Rachman, who was known for renting slum accommodation to black tenants at extortionate rates (Humphry and Tindall 1975: 48). By the late 1960s, most black radicals had rejected him as a serious figure. Nonetheless, his arrest and conviction for inciting racial hatred at the end of 1967 briefly revived his reputation, turning him into a martyr – the first person to be jailed under the Race Relations Act 1965 (Bunce and Field 2010). During the early 1970s, Michael X posed, mendaciously, as the head of various Black Power organizations, but made no real contribution to Black Power as a political movement.

If Michael X was the British movement's would-be-Malcolm, Egbuna was its self-styled Eldridge Cleaver. As Rosie Wild has suggested, Egbuna's book *Destroy This Temple* (1971) is highly derivative of Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (Wild 2008: 142). A Nigerian-born playwright, author of *The Anthill* (1965) and *Wind Versus Polygamy* (1966), Egbuna had been involved in anti-colonial politics since the early 1960s. He was a member of the Committee of African Organisations (CAO), the group that had organized Malcolm X's visit to Britain in 1965. He had first experienced Black Power during an educational exchange trip to America in 1966, which brought him into contact with the SNCC. Impressed with what he saw, he returned to Britain, determined to establish a Black Power group in London. However, finding little appetite for the new politics in London, he bided his time. Carmichael's visit, which Egbuna described as 'manna from heaven', led to a wave of interest in Black Power, and as a result, Egbuna was elected chairman of the United Coloured People's Association (UCPA) and tasked with producing a new manifesto. *Black Power in Britain*, which set out the UCPA's programme and position, was published on 10 September 1967, only 6 weeks after Carmichael's visit. Egbuna later split with the UCPA, founding the British Panthers. In the summer of 1968, Egbuna was arrested for conspiring to incite the murder of police officers (Bunce and Field 2010). In fact, he wrote a short piece that encouraged black people to collectively resist the police at Speakers' Corner.¹ Egbuna's arrest reflected a new and deliberate strategy on the part of Special Branch and the police to target leading figures within the Black Power Movement. The authorities were not deterred by the fact that the evidence for the charges against Black Power activists was often weak as the primary goal

was to disrupt and discredit the movement. This is evident from the surviving documentation. A memorandum from Detective Chief Inspector Kenneth Thompson commended the officers responsible for Egbuna's arrest for having 'put the [Black Panther] party in confusion' (Wild 2008: 184).

Roy Sawh co-founded RAAS with Michael X and was appointed Egbuna's deputy at the UCPA. Divisions between Egbuna and Sawh emerged almost immediately. As a result, the organization split and Sawh established the Universal Coloured People and Arab Association (UCPAA) in September 1967. His flamboyant style, bellicose rhetoric and wish to attract sensational media attention made long-term collaborations difficult. He founded a series of groups, many of which would eventually expel him (Wild 2008: 135).

While Howe was impressed by Carmichael, he had no time for the would-be leaders of the British movement. As a result, Howe did not involve himself in any of the emerging Black Power groups until the summer of 1968.

'L'ennui est contrerévolutionnaire' – Paris, 1968

Speaking at the Dialectics of Liberation conference in 1967, Frankfurt School Marxist Herbert Marcuse had comprehensively written off the working class as an agent of social change. For Marcuse, modern capitalism had made humanity anew. Humanity had been squashed, flattened, and the new 'one-dimensional man' was no longer capable of revolution. Less than a year later, the students and workers of Paris proved him wrong, and Howe was there to witness it.

Howe's path to Paris started in Notting Hill, which became a hot spot for revolutionaries and radicals from across Europe. European radicals, particularly from Germany and France, eager to learn about Black Power, descended on Notting Hill to spend time with black radicals, share ideas and learn from the new movement. This opened up the possibility of a warm welcome on the continent. Howe took the opportunity to travel to France. It was a period, Howe recalls, when all Europe was ablaze, and radicals talked openly about seizing power.

First and foremost, Howe went to France because of the revolutionary situation. The army had intervened, and the French president, Charles De Gaulle, had gone into hiding at the end of May. This was a real revolution, and Howe was unable to resist. Howe was also keen to travel to France as he had learnt about French colonialism through the writings of Franz Fanon and Aimé Césaire and was keen to see the French metropolis for himself. Finally, he wanted to meet the

people who were making the revolution and steep himself in the atmosphere of freedom (Howe 2011b).

Howe recalls that while he was there, the students of the Sorbonne were hugely exercised by the question of power. Howe argued vigorously for the overthrow of the government against others who urged caution. But there was a counter-revolutionary edge to the student radicalism. Some of the students, under the influence of New Left and Situationists, had broken so completely with the old left that they had wholly rejected the progressive potential of the French working class (Caute 1988). As a result, they did not wish to collaborate with the 9 million workers engaged in a general strike in defiance of De Gaulle's government.

Howe found the vast majority of the students preoccupied with philosophy, endlessly quoting Camus. The few students who did venture into the factories, such as the Trotskyists, did so didactically, as revolutionary missionaries eager to teach but unwilling to learn. Even so, Howe was moved by what he saw. Nine months later, he wrote about his experience in the pages of *Black Dimension*, situating the events of May '68 within a wider historical context.

It was the view of Lenin that world revolution had begun with the Russian Revolution of October 1917. A revolution means a total change in all the normal relations of society. We have been watching such changes over the last fifty years and one of them which has appeared in its full and complete manifestation only in the last few years, [is] the entry of students into revolutionary politics. They have already entered twice within the last year in a manner that signifies that a new force has entered into the revolutionary politics of the day. The students, concentrated in Paris, fought and defeated De Gaulle's special police, thereby initiating the most tremendous movement that Europe or any part of the world has known. Ten million workers on strike (whatever their demands) are a political manifestation of the first importance. And this tremendous revolt we owe directly and entirely to the fact that the students fought the police and made the workers aware that the regime was vulnerable.

(GPI JOU 35/2, 5)

The Black Eagles

In August 1968, Howe became involved in the British Black Power Movement. A plethora of Black Power organizations formed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Significantly, Howe joined none of them. As already noted, he did not feel an affinity with the cultural nationalism that pervaded the bigger groups at

the time. Rather, Howe formed his own group, the Black Eagles. The group was short-lived, and Howe's leadership of the group was interrupted by his travels to Canada and America. Initially based in London's Notting Hill, they had a lifespan of around 5 months. Turning racial stereotypes on their head, Howe argued that the Eagles were in Britain on a civilizing mission. This mission took the form of campaigns against institutionalized savagery in the form of police brutality and a commitment to redefining black identity. In spite of the brevity of their existence, the Eagles are not entirely forgotten. Nobel laureate V. S. Naipaul's *The Writer and the World* describes them derisively as a 'Negro fantasy outfit'; America had Malcolm X and the Black Panthers; the British equivalents, Michael X and the Black Eagles were little more than a second-rate copy (Naipaul 2004: 165). But there is good reason to reject Naipaul's assertion, for while there is no denying that black radicals in Britain learnt a great deal from their American counterparts, Howe's version of Black Power went far beyond simple mimesis. Fleeting though they were, the Black Eagles played a significant part in the development of Black Power in Britain. Specifically, the Eagles were the first Black Power group to turn their back on Michael X. Moreover, they set out a legal strategy for dealing with prosecution that would later be employed in the Mangrove trial.

The Eagles were launched during a turbulent period in the history of Black Power in Britain. Egbuna had recently been arrested. Denied bail, he languished for 6 months in Brixton Prison. In response, a benefit evening was organized at the Roundhouse. *IT* carried the following advert for the evening:

BENEFIT: Third World Benefit for three black playwrights. Obi Egbuna, Leroi Jones, Wole Seyinka. Programme includes plays by Jones & Ed Bullins, Sammy Davis Jr. & Michael X, among others.

(*IT*, 1968: 38, 8)

The evening was covered by *Hustler*, a community newspaper, edited by Courtney Tulloch at Frank Crichlow's restaurant in Notting Hill. The benefit took place at Camden's Roundhouse on 25 August 1968, and according to *Hustler*, it attracted around 1,000 people. The line-up included Sammy Davis Jr, Willie Johnson – better known as Minister Rico of the Chicago Black P. Stones – Michael X, steel bands and readings from the works of the three playwrights. It was Howe's first major speech as a Black Power radical, as well as the launch of the Black Eagles.

The Eagles' first campaign was launched in mid-August. It involved setting up street patrols 'WITH THE AIM OF POLICING THE POLICE' in Notting

Hill (GPI JOU 35/5). According to the *International Times*, the patrols 'work in pairs in 12 hour shifts to observe how the police execute their duty' (IT 40, 1968: 19). Although they did not carry weapons, the patrols were inspired by and modelled on the armed patrols organized by the American Black Panther Party. The Black Panther Party's (BPP) aim was to advise those who were the victims of police harassment and persecution, while at the same time, in Eldridge Cleaver's words, creating 'a community structure' where 'the people had control of all local institutions, including law enforcement, instead of being the victims of all local institutions, most visibly the police' (Baldwin 2006: 81).

The campaign led to the arrest of Michael Lee and Robert 'Sammy' Hoyt on Portobello Road on 8 September 1968.² Subsequently, the Eagles called a press conference announcing the arrest, which was reported in *Hustler* on 18 September. The *Black Eagle* and *IT* reported that the police had beaten the two activists following their arrest. Lee and Hoyt appeared before Marylebone Magistrates' court on four occasions between 17 September and 14 October (LMA PS MAR/A2/25, PS MAR/A2/26, PS MAR/A3/23). They were found guilty and remanded in custody pending an appearance at the Old Bailey to determine their punishment.³ According to Special Branch, who took a keen interest in the group's activities, the street patrols soon died out (NA HO 376/00154).

In addition to the patrols, the Eagles published a newsletter, three issues of which appeared from October 1968 through to January 1969.⁴ Farrukh Dhondy recalls buying a copy from Howe in the late 1960s:

I first met Darcus on a tube train when he tried to sell me a newspaper called the *Black Eagle*. It was not much of a paper, more of an agitational rag. My companions and I were on the way back from a demonstration against the Vietnam War . . . when he accosted us. We bought a paper. He tried to sell us another copy.

(Dhondy 2001: xiii)

The magazine was also available through the radical publishing house New Beacon Books. Like many other radicals associated with Black Power, Howe adopted a new name reflecting his African heritage. Howe wrote under the name Darcus Owusu, a homage to Owusu Sadaukai, formally Howard Fuller, who had been closely associated with SNCC and Carmichael in the late 1960s (Woodard 1999: 173). For Howe, Owusu was an attractive figure as he represented a 'thoughtful' brand of black radicalism. Howe used the name from time to time until the early 1973. He claims that he dropped Owusu not for political reasons, but rather due to the protests of his mother (Howe 2011b).

The *Black Eagle* remains a very distinctive publication; it immediately stands out from *Black Power Speaks*, *Grassroots* or other radical magazines of the period due to the artwork, which was produced by Una Howe, Howe's first wife. The first issue, published in late October 1968, comprises a mere eight pages, containing two untitled essays, news about the arrests of Lee and Hoit and quotes from Maulana Karenga (GPI JOURNAL 35/5). The second and third issues are much more substantial. The second issue, which came out in early December, is notable for its coverage of Michael X, including excerpts from his poetry and an account of his arrest on drug charges (IRR 01/04.04/01/04/01/03). Further evidence of his involvement can be found in the two contact addresses that appeared for the first time in the December issue. Both residences were outposts of the counterculture, frequented by friends of Michael X (GPI JOURNAL 35/4). The first was the *Ambiance*, in Queensway, a small theatre founded by the American radical Ed Berman. *Ambiance*, which was a lunchtime theatre project, was designed to 'cut across the accepted dichotomy between work and play, by offering entertainment during the working day' (Turner 1997: 221–2). The *Eagles* could also be reached through the Arts Lab on Drury Lane. The Arts Lab was no less experimental than the *Ambiance*. It ran for 2 years from 1967 to 1969. The Arts Lab was the centre of many hippy happenings and was regularly featured in magazines such as *Oz*, *IT*, *SUCK* and *Rolling Stone*. The association of these two centres of the white counterculture is an indication of Michael X's influence rather than Howe's. Importantly, Howe was out of the country during its production, and although the reading list and the programme reflect Howe's input, much of the rest of the magazine reflects the work of others.

Howe spent some time with Michael X in late 1968, largely through economic necessity. He was unemployed and Michael X offered him a place to stay (Phillips and Phillips 1999: 241). Michael X set out his reasons for associating himself with the *Eagles* in an interview published in *Oz* magazine:

... I ran across a group in London, a very small group which was called the Black Eagles and a very young fellow called Dakus Absou [Howe], who is very nice I was very pleased to meet him. He was in Trinidad where he got into trouble constantly, being arrested every so often, so he came to England to do something serious, like study law which he thought would be the right thing to do, in order to understand law somewhat. Studied and qualified as a barrister, then started lecturing at a couple of Universities. In York where I first ran into him, he began to use his energies and his talents towards people inside the ghettos ... This was a few months ago when he was getting these brothers together and talking to them and they had the group called the Black Eagles. I started spending a lot of time

with them. Then Dakus offered me a job, he asked me to be Minister without Portfolio and relate with him about my experiences in organising. This I did and I still serve as Minister without Portfolio in the Eagles. My latest job with them was to work out a 5-year economic plan.

(Oz, 1969: [18] 19)

Despite a series of exaggerations, the interview contains a kernel of truth. Howe had trained as a barrister, although he had not qualified, and he had indeed gone to the University of York, although as an interviewee rather than as an academic. In essence, Howe's credentials as an intellectual are at the heart of the interview. This is no accident. Michael X knew that in order to be taken seriously as a Black Power leader, he needed to be able to present himself as a thinker. At the same time, he was aware of the limitations of his formal education. With this in mind, he sought out intellectuals in order to learn from them. Robert Lamb, author, playwright and future professor of political science at Columbia University recalled that Michael X 'pumped him for details and quotations of what Black Muslim leaders had said'. He also picked up Lamb's insights and arguments and 'passed them off as his own' (Humphry and Tindall 1977: 94–5). It seems reasonable to assume that Michael X gravitated to Howe for similar reasons. Howe, on the other hand, had little time for Michael X. For Howe, Michael X was essentially a hustler and Black Power was just one more scam.

Howe's return from America at the end of 1968 allowed him to take editorial control of *The Black Eagle* and make changes. Quotes from the nationalist Karenga no longer featured in the magazine. Secondly, and more importantly, all references to Michael X were expunged. James had advised Howe to have nothing more to do with Michael X (Howe 2011b), and therefore, the criticism of Michael X's suffering at the hands of the state was removed from the six demands that prefaced every issue. His autobiography was dropped from the reading list. Expunging references to Michael X from the pages of *The Black Eagle* may seem like a small thing, but the etiquette of the time dictated that black radicals did not criticize each other publically. Dropping the references to Michael X was an important move in the context of the late 1960s. In mid-1968, Michael X still had considerable authority within black radical circles.⁵

The fall of Egbuna

Howe's writings also played a part in Egbuna's eclipse. Early in 1968, Britain's embryonic Black Power Movement began to metamorphosize. The UCPA, which

had already suffered one split, split again. Egbuna refused re-election as chair, resigned and, turning his back on the group, set up the Black Panthers. This was quite an innovation, as it was the first Panther group to be set up outside the United States. At last, Egbuna had a vehicle for his vision of Black Power. Under Egbuna, the group was, in theory at least, the epitome of the Leninist vanguard; a secretive and hierarchical brotherhood united by a common ideology. There was talk of paramilitary training, of policing the police and of reaching out to the London ghetto – although how popular outreach could be squared with Egbuna's vanguardism was never made clear. But these activities remained in the realms of theory. From Howe's perspective, Egbuna was a 'Hyde Park revolutionary' (Howe 2010) – his activities largely restricted to giving bellicose lectures at Speakers' Corner. Even this was too much for Special Branch, who, along with zealots in the Metropolitan police, made it their business to nip the British Black Power Movement in the bud. Egbuna, aware of the official displeasure, set out his plans for a fightback in an article entitled 'WHAT TO DO WHEN THE COPS LAY THEIR HANDS ON A BLACK MAN AT THE SPEAKERS CORNER' (NA CRIM 1 4962), a document that he would later describe, rather sensationally, as the 'Murder Document' (Egbuna 1971: 127). 'WHAT TO DO,' which remains unpublished, advised Panthers to deal with police interference thus:

The moment the cops lay their hands on a black brother, it is the duty of the black brother nearest to the spot to call the attention of the other brothers to what is happening at once, and the news must spread like wild fire in the park.

The black crowd must surge forward like one big black steam-roller to catch up with the cops . . . The cops must be overcome and beaten till the arrested brother is rescued, freed, and made to flee at once.

(NA CRIM 1 4962/1)

'WHAT TO DO' was due to be published in the fourth issue of *Black Power Speaks*, Egbuna's magazine. However, having read the piece, Egbuna's printer got cold feet and contacted the police. As a result, the Panthers were raided, Egbuna was imprisoned and three of the Panthers were charged, implausibly, with conspiring to murder police officers.

Egbuna's response to his arrest was of great importance for the British Black Power Movement and for Howe himself. The police had acted entirely predictably and yet, faced with a trial, Egbuna had no strategy for dealing with this situation. More precisely, Egbuna's initial strategy of trenchant resistance gave way to a second strategy which contradicted his earlier utterances. Egbuna, the black nationalist, an outspoken critic of white power, the founder of the

Panthers who sanctioned no collaboration with white sympathizers, entrusted his defence to white lawyers and took their advice to play a passive role in court. Egbuna set out his thinking for this astonishing volte-face in an open letter that was circulated at the Seminar on the Realities of Black Power held at the Union of West Indian Students' Centre Earls Court in August 1968. For the sake of his younger co-defendants, Egbuna explained, he would seek a traditional defence:

You all know that, right from the beginning, my attitude is that, in case of arrest, I will refuse to offer any formal defence in court. Instead, to stand up in court and spit at their white justice, [sic] their white legality, their white judges, the lot – and expose their hypoorisy [sic] to the world. But with young Peter and Gideon right there in the dock, I had to think twice about this line of action. All day in the police cell, I was thinking hard on this question. The police had nothing really on Peter and Gideon. They should not be here. And I know that if my cause is ably defended and whittled down a bit the two boys will get off scot free, or maybe get away with just fines . . .

(UW MSS 149/2/2/15)

Howe was present at the seminar and followed Egbuna's case. It was in this context that he made his most important contribution to the British Black Power Movement prior to the Mangrove campaign. In response to Egbuna's compromise, Howe formulated an approach that synthesized the experience of black radicals in Britain, the programme of the American Panthers, his legal training and the woeful example of Egbuna. With explicit reference to Egbuna's trial, Howe set out his reasoning in three demands that prefaced the second issue of the *Black Eagle*:

3. WE DEMAND AN END TO POLICE BRUTALITY AND THE PERSECUTION OF OUR LEADERS. WE KNOW THAT BROTHERS MICHAEL, OBI, GIDEON AND PETER MARTIN, HAVE BEEN IMPRISONED BECAUSE THEY DARED TO SPEAK OUT FOR FREEDOM.

4. WE DEMAND FREEDOM OF ALL BLACK PEOPLE IN PRISON. WE KNOW THAT OUR BROTHERS HAVE NOT BEEN GIVEN FAIR TRIALS BECAUSE OF THE VERY NATURE OF THE JURY SYSTEM.

5. WE DEMAND THAT ALL BLACK PEOPLE BE TRIED BY THEIR OWN PEER GROUP AS IS WRITTEN IN THE MAGNA CARTA. WE KNOW THAT WHITE JURY MEN AND WOMEN ARE IGNORANT OF THE VARIOUS DIALECTS OF THE BLACK PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY. HOW COULD A BLACK MAN HAVE A FAIR TRIAL IF MEMBERS OF THE JURY CANNOT UNDERSTAND HIS MEANS OF EXPRESSION?

(IRR 01/04/03/02/031 [1])

Howe's response was double-edged. On the one hand, demands 3 and 4 clearly call for an end to Egbuna's persecution and his immediate release from prison. However, demand 5 sets out a legal strategy more radical than the one chosen by Egbuna. Notably, these demands were published for the first time in early December and, therefore, appeared just days after the beginning of Egbuna's Old Bailey trial on 26 November. As the trial began, it became clear that the three Panthers were defended by a legal team headed by Rt Hon Sir Dingle Foot QC MP, a privy councillor who sat in Parliament on the government benches (NA CRIM 1 4962/1).

Central to Howe's defensive strategy was the demand for an all-black jury. At first sight, this seems to be a simple repetition of the American Panthers. Under closer scrutiny, it is clear that Howe was being far more creative. The American Panthers had formulated their demand in the following way:

9. We Want All Black People When Brought To Trial To Be Tried In Court By A Jury Of Their Peer Group Or People From Their Black Communities, As Defined By The Constitution Of The United States.

We believe that the courts should follow the United States Constitution so that Black people will receive fair trials. The Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution gives a man a right to be tried by his peer group . . . To do this the court will be forced to select a jury from the Black community from which the Black defendant came. We have been, and are being, tried by all-White juries that have no understanding of the "average reasoning man" of the Black community.

(Newton 2011: 56)

There are several important differences between Howe's formulation of the demand for a black jury and the demand as it was originally set out by the American Panthers. First, the Panthers' claim is rooted in the American Constitution, whereas Howe appeals to Clause 39 of the *Magna Carta* which guarantees the right to 'trial by peers'. In this sense, Howe took the American demand and rooted it in British law. This was an important move, and Ian Macdonald's research 4 years later during the Mangrove case revealed just how much mileage there was in appealing to the British legal tradition. More interesting still is the justification for the demand; Howe argued that it was a question of language. A white jury, however fair-minded, could not be expected to understand the Caribbean vernacular. This argument directly reflected the experience of the British movement. Specifically, it was the argument that Michael X had used when defending himself at his Reading trial when accused of inciting racial hatred. His defence, simply put, was that he was speaking a

language that white people could not understand. Thus, a speech that sounded provocative to white people was nothing of the sort to a black audience. In support of his argument, Michael X announced that the novelists William Burroughs and Alexander Trocchi, acquaintances from the Dialectics of Liberation conference, would act as his interpreters during the trial (Williams 2008: 158), although neither were in England by the time of the trial. The October edition of *Oz* contains a partial transcript of Michael X's cross-examination of the *Daily Express* journalist Brian Park during his pre-trial in September 1967:

Malik: Do you understand black people when they talk.

Park: Yes, just as I hope they understand me.

Malik: Are you mamma-guy?

Park: I beg your pardon. I do not understand you.

After a fruitless quarrel between the Court and the defendant, Malik sighed: "We are not speaking [sic] the same language. We are on a different wave length".

Magistrate: No. We are speaking basic English.

(*Oz*, [7] October 1969: 17)⁶

Whatever were Howe's misgivings about Michael X, he was at the very least persuaded of the language gap that he had identified and saw its implications as far as justice for black people was concerned.

Howe returned to Egbuna's case in the editorial to the third and final issue of *The Black Eagle*, which was published shortly after Egbuna's conviction. Again, he expressed solidarity with Egbuna's cause while criticizing his legal strategy:

Brother Obi Egbuna, leader of the U.C.P.A. people's movement, was finally released last week, after having spent 5 months in solitary confinement in Britain's official concentration camp – Brixton jail house. . . . We black people must understand the case history of these Brothers and learn not to repeat it. It must be perpetually stressed that we HAVE THE RIGHT TO DEMAND to be tried by our own PEER group, if ever the need arises for us to do so.

(GPI JOU 35/4)

Egbuna's conviction brought the first phase of the British Black Power Movement to an end. Having been imprisoned for 6 months, Egbuna received a 3-year suspended sentence. He escaped a custodial sentence, but the threat of incarceration and the changes in the Panthers that had occurred during his enforced absence led to Egbuna's exile from the movement.

Notes

- 1 The unpublished manuscript 'WHAT TO DO WHEN COPS LAY THEIR HANDS ON A BLACK MAN AT SPEAKERS CORNER' is preserved among police files in the National Archives. See: NA CRIM 1 4962/2.
- 2 *IT* states that the pair was arrested on 7 September 1968, but the Marylebone Magistrate's Court register clearly states that the arrest took place at 5 a.m. on 8 September. (LMA PS MAR/A2/25) *Hustler's* account also indicates that the arrest happened early in the morning, rather than late at night as suggested by *IT*; see *Hustler*, 18 September 3.
- 3 The committal to the Central Criminal Court was reported in *Hustler*, 14 November 1968, 4. Sadly the court registers for 1968 and 1969 have been lost so it is impossible to determine their sentences.
- 4 Partial sets of the *Black Eagle* can be found at the George Padmore Institute and the Institute for Race Relations, both of which are located in London. The sequence of the three issues can be gleaned from the typography. Based on the content of the three issues, it seems that they came out in late October, early December and early January, respectively. The first issue has eight pages and only discusses two events. The first is the arrest of Richard 'Sammy' Hoyt and Michael Lee, which took place on 8 September 1968. The second is their court hearing, at which two new charges were brought against the pair, and at which they were committed to the Central Criminal Court (GPI JOU 35/5 (4)). The court appearance in question took place at Marylebone Magistrate's Court on 14 October 1968, (LMA PS MAR/A2/26) and therefore, it seems that the first issue appeared in late October. The second issue refers to several contemporary events that took place between 4 November and the first week in December 1968. The latest event the petrol bombing of 'George Brown's home, in Colfe Road, Lewisham' (IRR 01/04/03/02/031, 13) took place on 25 November (*Lewisham Borough News*, 28 November 1968, 1), and the article clearly refers to the incident as happening 'On Monday last . . .' which suggests that the second issue of the *Eagles* was published in early December. The final issue discusses current events that took place between the release of Egbuna on 11 December 1968 and the beating of a group of young black people on 2 and 3 January 1969 at Notting Hill Gate police station (GPI JOU 35/4, (2)r and (8)v). Therefore, the final issue of The *Black Eagles* seems to have been issued in early January 1969. The *Black Eagle* was superseded by *Black Dimension*, which was first issued in February 1969 (see: GPI JOU 35/1).
- 5 See for example 'Black Power Michael', an article that appeared in a June 1968 issue of *Hustler*, described him as the man who 'broke the chains here in England in the heart of the ghetto' (*Hustler*, 2 June 1968, 3). Equally, Kwame Nkrumah's

pamphlet 'Message to the black people of Britain', which Egbuna edited, presents Michael X and the RAAS in almost identical terms (Nkrumah 1968, [4]).

- 6 Michael X returned to this argument at the beginning of his autobiography:

People the world over have always assumed that the English language of the black and the English language of the white is one and the same. This is a false assumption. There is a difference of both thought and expression which makes communication difficult. At one extreme some words used by whites will be found highly insulting by black people and doubtless some words used by blacks are offensive to white ears.

(Malik 1968: 5)