



FOOD MOVEMENTS UNITE!

...

STRATEGIES TO TRANSFORM OUR FOOD SYSTEMS

EDITED BY ERIC HOLT-GIMÉNEZ



FOOD FIRST BOOKS

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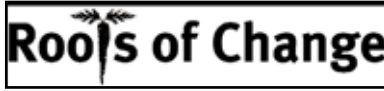
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Chapter Seven

SURVIVAL PENDING REVOLUTION: WHAT THE BLACK PANTHERS CAN TEACH THE U.S. FOOD MOVEMENT¹

By Raj Patel

OVER THE PAST DECADE, the US food movement has grown to become a potent force for social change and, precisely because of its success, the movement now is being called to shore up the status quo. Revisiting some radical roots suggests ways that the food movement can end hunger in America, rather than becoming just another impermanent band-aid for poverty.

Critical thinking about and organizing around food in the United States aren't new— Frances Moore Lappé's work gave rise to the institute publishing this book, Food First, nearly 40 years ago (Lappe 1971; Lappé and Collins 1977). Food scares and diet fads shaped US public consciousness about food through the 1980s and '90s. But I suspect it's no accident that the movement grew after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. As Michael Pollan (2010) notes in his piece "Food Movement Rising" in the *New York Review of Books*:

[It] makes sense that food and farming should become a locus of attention for Americans disenchanted with consumer capitalism. Food is the place in daily life where corporatization can be most vividly felt: think about the homogenization of taste and experience represented by fast food. By the same token, food offers us one of the shortest, most appealing paths out of the corporate labyrinth, and into the sheer diversity of local flavors, varieties, and characters on offer at the farmers' market.

¹ I've been schooled by many people in the writing of this paper, most of all by Kiilu Nyasha, Michael William Doyle, Gayatri Menon, and Eric Holt-Giménez.



To be sure, a food movement predated 9/11—the National Family Farm Coalition was founded in 1986; environmentalists had been taking on Monsanto, spurred by Rachel Carson’s 1962 *Silent Spring*; and the history of American disenchantment with capitalism is as old as the nation itself (Zinn 2003). The American Revolution wouldn’t have happened but for the actions of merchants protesting the terms of trade for tea. (Schlesinger 1917). Yet it was only with the criminalization of dissent, with the increased difficulty of confronting corporate capitalism through other politics, and with the fear coursing through the veins of the US public after 2001 that the movement’s strands were more tightly woven together. Under the Bush regime, environmentalists, social justice campaigners, anticapitalists, and organic foodies found a government, media, and general public far less responsive than a decade before. Membership of umbrella groups like the Community Food Security Coalition has swelled, with a proliferation of food organizations, consultants, academics, and activist groups throughout the US. Under these circumstances, a new generation of activists was drawn into the movement. What is particularly striking—and although I haven’t anything but anecdotal evidence to offer in support of this view, I’d be happy to bet—is the relative youth of those moving into the movement. He may blush, but Josh Viertel—president of Slow Food USA and contributor to this volume—is in his early 30s, and that’s not an accident. He’s a prodigious leader in a new generation of activists like Oakland’s Brahm Ahmadi and Nikki Henderson, who have organized and advanced food justice in the US during the first decade of the 21st century.

Part of the success of the movement has been its largely nondenominational, big-tent approach, committed to the idea that food should be a pleasure available to all, and that, above all, food is a domain in which something can and ought swiftly to be *done*.² Indeed, it’s the very success in community farms, gardens, feeding

² In part, this vision has roots that can be traced to the outsized anarcho-Marxist organizing that produced Slow Food (Andrews 2008). See also Pew Research Center (2010).

programs, kitchens, and food banks that has helped recruit more and more people to a movement that seems to offer the transcendence of “old politics” so earnestly cashed in by the Obama campaign in its first election run.

Yet it’s the movement’s practical success that puts it in a precarious position today. At the time of this writing, hunger is its highest levels in a generation (Nord et al. 2010)—50.2 million Americans are food insecure, and one-third of female-headed households are food insecure. At the same time, food prices are rising, unemployment remains stubbornly high, and a Republican Congress has ambitions to amputate social programs from the body of government in the name of fighting inflation (Patel 2011). In the resulting vacuum, community organizations have been pressed, much to government’s approval, into the business of service provision. As Suzi Leather remarked of a similar period in the UK government’s history:

It is easy to see the appeal of the community development approach for the present administration: it smacks of the self-help ethos, involves vanishingly small resources and can be encouraged without at the same time having to admit to the existence of poverty. (Leather 1996, 47–48)

To inoculate ourselves against the dangers of being co-opted into the very food system we have spent a decade criticizing, we need politics. Two instant caveats, though. First, merely talking about the politics of the modern food system isn’t sufficient to prevent the movement’s energy from being dissipated while dealing with the “dignified emergency”³ of increasing hunger. History is littered with all-night activist conversations about the root causes of hunger, with little change to believe in the morning after. Second, a call to talk about capitalism in the food system isn’t a call for a single totalitarian politics to which all must subscribe. Every US social movement, from abolition to the Tea Party, has drawn on an assortment of sometimes contradictory political positions.

³. This is a phrase I have learned, and embrace, from Nick Saul’s work at The Stop. For an example of how this thinking informs community organizing in dignified emergency here, see Scharf, Levkoe, and Saul (2010).

The problem is that the food movement's ideological pantry is rarely raided, and despite a rich history, there's not nearly enough talk about it. By food politics, I don't just mean the kinds of interaction between state and private sector presented by Marion Nestle in her fine dissection of the food industrial complex (Nestle 2002). I'm referring to politics as an ideology, as a positive system of beliefs, analytical principles, and values that informs practice (Badiou 2005; Hall 1996; Rancière 2007). And of these systems of politics, there seems insufficient praxis. Perhaps the origins of the food movement, in politically embattled times, is to blame for a certain ideological quietism. But whatever the food movement's genealogy, its future needn't be hostage to the past.

Activist Anim Steele's (2010) work, drawing on the civil rights movement, dips into movement history a little, but it's worth remembering that the civil rights movement itself was hardly homogenous. Its demands for political and civic rights were nested in further demands for economic and social rights—a recognition that Martin Luther King (1967) himself made explicit toward the end of his life:

One day we must ask the question, "Why are there forty million poor people in America?" And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising questions about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy. And I'm simply saying that more and more, we've got to begin to ask questions about the whole society. We are called upon to help the discouraged beggars in life's market place. But one day we must come to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. It means that questions must be raised. You see, my friends, when you deal with this, you begin to ask the question, "Who owns the oil?" You begin to ask the question, "Who owns the iron ore?" You begin to ask the question, "Why is it that people have to pay water bills in a world that is two-thirds water?" These are questions that must be asked.

King moved through a wide field of politics, in which talk about the failures of capitalism was part of popular discourse, and which King himself began to embrace more fully toward the end of this life. Certainly, the civil rights movement addressed issues of hunger. The day after King's assassination, the NAACP subverted a USDA press conference at the USDA, announcing their intention to sue the government for its failure to bring school lunches into compliance with civil rights legislation (Levine 2008, 136). But it's another movement from which I'd like to learn, one that both thrived and was destroyed because it addressed issues around food, and that offers something surprising and powerful for our political imaginations today.

The Black Panthers Feed the World

Although poverty had been worse in the late 1960s, and although poverty would worsen again, African Americans were as disproportionately represented among the hungry as they had ever been. One of the constants of post-World War II US life has been that African American income has consistently stayed at around 60% of white household income (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2009). The federal government's persistent refusal to address poverty in African American communities was compounded in the 1960s by an ongoing criminalization of poor, urban African Americans by local and state police, with attendant and systematic police violence against black men. It was the encounter with this "police logic" that spurred two students at Merritt College in Oakland, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, to launch the Black Panther Party for Self Defense—later shortened to the Black Panther Party (BPP) (Clever and Katsiaficas 2001; Hilliard and Cole 1993; Rancière 1998; Seale 1970; Singh 1998). The party initially organized and armed themselves to monitor the Oakland police in December 1966, opening their office in Oakland in January 1967 (Seale 1970).

The party soon expanded its ambit beyond police surveillance, dropping "for Self Defense" from its name and, through dialogue

with community members, setting up a range of community service programs. By 1968, the most successful of these, the Breakfast for Children Program, was up and running in the Bay Area and Seattle (Abron 1998; Newton, Hilliard, and Weise 2002, 15).

**Youth and Food Justice:
Lessons from the Civil Rights Movement**

By Anim Steel

Improving the health of our youth will require a transformation of our food system. This in turn will require strong social movements capable of creating the political will to truly transform how we grow, buy, prepare, and eat food. Lessons from the civil rights era of the 1960s suggest a way that today's food justice movement can organize. In particular, a new, youth-led, multiracial coalition could unleash the voice and energy of those with the most to gain from transforming the food system—young people.

The political disenfranchisement addressed by the civil rights movement in the 1960s, and the cheap, unhealthy food plaguing our underserved communities both reflect structural inequities that marginalize people of color. We can't change the food system by simply changing the tastes and attitudes of regular people any more than the civil rights movement could end segregation without the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Beyond the personal, these transformations require political, economic, and cultural changes. Just as with the civil rights movement, transformation needs to be local, national, and international. Social movements will play a deciding role in creating the political will for change just as they did with civil rights.

To become a strong national force, the food justice movement needs a youth-led organization that unifies and amplifies these disparate efforts—a modern-day food justice version of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Campaign (SNCC). Such an organization should celebrate and encourage the diversity of local work; the best local solutions come from local communities. But it should do what local organizations often have a harder time doing: focus the national spotlight, spread innovation, involve masses of people, and harness our collective political and economic power. Such an organization should prioritize the voices of those most hurt by the system, even as it welcomes the contributions of all who care.

Youth Food Movements Unite!

Full Article at: <http://www.foodmovementsunite.com/addenda/steele>

The origins of the program aren't clear. In some Panther writings, it appears as an endogenously chosen, natural outcome of a commitment to "serve the people" (Seale 1970). Bobby Seale also suggested that he arrived at the idea through conversations with local teachers, and needed to persuade Eldridge Cleaver, the Panther's minister for information, who thought that free breakfasts were a "sissy program," but was eventually won over (Rhodes 2007, 251).

This isn't the breakfast program's only creation story, though. In his memoir, David Hilliard, the Panther's chief of staff (Hilliard and Cole 1993), recalls a donation of food given by Emmett Grogan, an activist with the Diggers in San Francisco (Grogan 2008, 475). The Diggers, a breakaway group from the San Francisco Mime Troupe performing arts group, traced their name and, in part, their politics to the 17th-century movement resisting enclosure in England (Gurney 1994). The original Diggers were stout defenders of communitarian property and collective self-government of agricultural land. The modern Diggers blended situationist⁴ performance with their predecessors' agrarian communism through "events" like giving away free food. Grogan describes how the free-food giveaways in San Francisco's Panhandle district involved stepping through a bright-orange window frame called the Free Frame of Reference, so that when the hungry emerged on the other side, their frame of reference had been changed (Grogan 2008, 250). Note, incidentally, that after an initial attempt at cooking the food himself, Grogan passed on responsibility for doing it to "a half-dozen young women, a few of whom were dropouts from Antioch College, shared a large pad together on Clayton Street and volunteered to take over the cooking indefinitely" (248).

No matter who did the cooking, it's clear that these events were a well-publicized part of the 1960s Bay Area counterculture, and it's

⁴ Situationism offers a critique of the mass media under capitalism. The French intellectual Guy Debord wrote situationism's classic book, *The Society of the Spectacle* (2002), in which he argued that "[a]ll that was once directly lived has become mere representation."

more likely that the Panthers knew of them than not (Doyle 2011). Grogan writes of a meeting following the 1968 killing of Black Panther activist Bobby Hutton, in which Grogan, together with “Black Panther Party Chairman Bobby Seale, and Chief of Staff David Hilliard . . . began discussing a plan they had to start a Free Breakfast for Children program that would put some nourishment into the normally empty bellies of black kids before they went to school” (Grogan 2008, 474–75). It’d be tempting to chalk this tale to Grogan’s literary bravura—his autobiography often plays fast and loose with the truth—but David Hilliard’s discussion of Grogan corroborates some of the facts, and is worth quoting at length:

Emmett Grogan sticks his head in the office. Emmett is the founder of the Diggers, a tribe—that’s what some radicals call their groups—who organize the “street people” of the Haight into revolutionary activity. A few weeks ago, Emmett left off some bags of food his group distributes to the runaways, draft resisters and freaks who have flocked to Berkeley, turning the town into the nation’s counterculture capital. We told him to put the stuff outside the office: in a few minutes people were flocking by, stocking up on onions and potatoes. Now Emmett donates the food regularly. Like the newspaper, the food serves a double purpose, providing sustenance but also functioning as an organizing tool: people enter the office when they come by, take some leaflets, sit in on an elementary PE [political education] class, talk to cadre, and exchange ideas, all part of the revolutionary ferment I have imagined when listening to Huey describe Fidel and Che in Cuba. (Hilliard and Cole 1993, 158)

What’s nice about this story is, first, the piercing of racial boundaries traditionally associated with the Panthers. It turns out that—surprise!—there were interactions between different radical groups within the Bay Area, and that they learned from one another. What’s also nice about it is the ability to trace the genealogy of the

free breakfast programs back to radical movements to defend the commons. Finally, of course, what matters here is not just that the food was distributed—even the federal government was doing that, very poorly, as part of the school breakfast program in the 1966 Child Nutrition Act. What distinguished the Black Panther Party's food distribution was its part in a far wider vision for social change.

Part of the mechanisms of the Black Panther Party's self-defense were programs for survival, ranging from the provision of free shoes and education to land banking and the school breakfast program (Huey P. Newton Foundation and Hilliard 2008). In the provision of these services, Newton understood the ambiguities and contradictions within the programs:

All these programs satisfy the deep needs of the community but they are not solutions to our problems. That is why we call them survival programs, meaning survival pending revolution. We say that the survival program of the Black Panther Party is like the survival kit of a sailor stranded on a raft. It helps him to sustain himself until he can get completely out of that situation. So the survival programs are not answers or solutions, but they will help us to organize the community around a true analysis and understanding of their situation. When consciousness and understanding is raised to a high level then the community will seize the time and deliver themselves from the boot of their oppressors. (Huey P. Newton Foundation and Hilliard 2008, 4)

The breakfast program itself served a shifting menu, with varying degrees of success, numbers served, and outreach in the 45 different branches nationwide.⁵ New York's chapters fed numbers in the hundreds, California's in the thousands. Nonetheless, the universal aspiration was for a balanced diet of fresh fruit twice a week, and always a starch of toast or grits, protein of sausage, bacon, or eggs, and a beverage of milk, juice, or hot chocolate (Huey P. Newton Foundation and Hilliard 2008, 31). In practice, the breakfasts were

⁵ Heynen (2009) cites his interview with Bobby Seale, in which the figure of 45 branches and 4,000 members was presented.

constrained by funds and in-kind donations. The FBI was keen to prove that these donations were extorted from local businesses, but despite considerable effort, failed to do so (Newton, Hilliard, and Weise 2002, 340). Meanwhile, there is now a wide consensus that, for many children, the meals were the only source of nutrition in a child's day.

Beyond the success in feeding, there was a political component to the program. The *New York Times* (Caldwell 1969) represented the breakfasts as austere “diets of food and politics” at which children recited the dour mantras of the movement: “I am a revolutionary; I love Huey P. Newton; I love Eldridge Cleaver; I love Bobby Seale; I love being a revolutionary; I feel good; off the pigs; power to the people.”

In some cases, the police and FBI were successful in casting the breakfasts as not only doctrinaire, but as dangerous, with rumors circulating that the Panthers were serving poisoned food, and would rape girls if they could (Abron 1998). In one case, the Chicago police allegedly broke into a Panther feeding facility and urinated on the children's food the night before it was to be served (Heynen 2009, 414). In some places, particularly New York, those rumors took hold, and parents kept their children away from the programs. Yet a recording made at the New York breakfast program suggests that the brainwashing wasn't always successful—when a 12-year-old boy starts calling for “Fewey Hewton” to be freed, everyone felt safe enough to laugh along (KPFA and Kamen 1970, 15:30).

A more subtle understanding of the program's politics, one repeated by activists in print and interviews, is that the breakfasts were explicitly geared toward demonstrating what socialism might look like (Hilliard 2007; KPFA and Kamen 1970). In a touching moment in one testimony, a woman recalls a child's transformation, after being found filling his pockets with food and hearing that he wasn't stealing but that the food was his and would he like a bag. As Joan Kelley, national coordinator of the Black Panther Breakfast Program said, “We try to teach children not so much

through indoctrination but through our practice and example about sharing and socialism” (KPFA and Kamen 1970, 6:14). By bursting the idea of food as a charity bestowed by rich to poor, setting in its place the notion that food is a right—and the suggestion that an order might be composed without private property—the act of feeding children was transformed from pacifying to revolutionary, without a single “Free Huey” passing anyone’s lips.

The breakfast program was part of a suite of survival programs with explicit goals of transforming relations around private property—the vision of a land bank, for instance, called for the creations of trusts that would suspend the profit motive from land tenure, making other arrangements possible (Davis 2010). Land reform was, in turn, part of a broader political strategy, enshrined in the Panthers’ Ten Point Plan, which featured “power to determine the destiny of our black and oppressed communities,” “full employment,” “an end to . . . robbery by the capitalists,” “decent housing,” “decent education,” “completely free health care,” and an end to war, militarism, police brutality, and, in the final point, “land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, peace and people’s community control of modern technology.” It’s hard to argue that this longer vision, the goal of emancipation postponed, didn’t infuse the feeding programs with a political momentum missing from common philanthropy’s food banks. It was the political vision, the possibility of a different tomorrow after surviving today, that transformed the Panthers’ feeding into radical social work (Bailey and Brake 1976).

Effect and Aftermath

Jesse Jackson called the breakfast program “creative and revolutionary” (Levine 2008, 139), and insofar as it survived the direct assaults on participation, and also survived the indirect weakening of the movement, it thrived. People across the country copied it. In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Pastor Joseph Ellwanger of the Cross Lutheran Church formed the Citizens for Central City School Breakfast Program (which later became the Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee) after refusing to let the breakfast program

use his church (White 1988, 90).⁶ The Young Lords, a Puerto Rican youth organization, set up similar feeding programs in Chicago and New York (Judson 2003). In Austin, Texas, two African Americans started up a feeding program without the Panther's politics, but sending reports back to Panther headquarters from time to time (KPFA and Kamen 1970). At a national level, the breakfast program stoked grassroots pressure that eventually led to increase in funding for kids' food (Levine 2008, 140).

And this is not because the program had a "radical flank effect" (Haines 1984), in which organizations making infinite demands of capitalism create space for more accommodating organizations to achieve their aims (Critchley 2007). The breakfast program actually fed children. In a Senate hearing George McGovern asked the school lunch program administrator, Rodney Leonard, "whether the Panthers fed more poor children than did the state of California . . . Leonard admitted that it was 'probably true.' [Senate Select Committee, Part 11, July 9–11, 1969, 3478]" (Levine 2008, 139).

The Panthers' success in providing food also intensified the efforts to crush them. The FBI was, through its COINTELPRO program, trying to destroy the Panthers. The government found it much harder to summon popular support for its work when the Panthers were engaged in radical social work. As Ward Churchill observed, "[FBI director J. Edgar] Hoover was quite aware that it would be impossible to cast the party as merely 'a group of thugs' so long as it was meeting the daily nutritional requirements of an estimated 50,000 grade-schoolers in forty-five inner cities across the country. Rather than arguing that the government itself should deliver such a program, however, he targeted the Panthers' efforts for destruction" (Churchill 2001, 87).

Squeezed by the actions of the state, but also torn by serious internal political divisions, the Panthers buckled. Some insisted on

⁶ Though he earned himself the Panthers' derision in their newspaper, the *Black Panther* (July 5, 1969, 5), where he was referred to as "a punk, racist, fascist pig preacher."

the vision of survival pending revolution, maintaining a fidelity to the principles that founded the party. Others, particularly senior leaders, found that the state might provide an avenue for political work. So, as Nikhil Pal Singh notes:

By the early 1970s, Panther Party leaders Bobby Seale and Elaine Brown sought effective black public input into metropolitan resource distribution in a credible, grassroots political campaign for Oakland City Council. Once again, even in its most self-consciously revolutionary idiom, black power unfolded both within and against the American grain. (Singh 2004, 210). The breakfast program, like the party itself,⁷ began to fade, with activists burning out, selling out, dropping out, and being assassinated. Indeed, the breakfast program was part of the split in the party. After a fake letter was sent by the FBI in 1971 to Eldridge Cleaver, who was then in exile in Algiers, Cleaver attacked the Panthers' central committee, arguing that the breakfast program was reformist (Newton, Hilliard, and Weise 2002, 358).

But the program has an important legacy. Not only was it responsible for creating what today might be called a “temporary autonomous zone” (Bey 2003), for instigating real “school meal revolutions” (as opposed to the kind shown on today’s TV), and for embarrassing the federal government into taking child nutrition seriously, but—at least in some cases—it involved a transformation within the domain in which the Panthers have consistently been considered remiss: gender.

⁷ The most obtuse explanation for the movement’s demise comes from the world of political science. David O’Brien (1975), using Mancur Olsen’s (1971) logic of collective action, explains the BPP breakfast program’s decline, thus: “The key mistake in the breakfast program was that BPP failed to realize that by opening participation to anyone who wanted to come, they would encourage free riders, who duly turned up, causing them to lose revenue and, ultimately, fail.” Even more important are the explanations that look into the political and cultural shifts of the 1970s and the party’s own political mistakes (see Booker 1998; Johnson 1998).

In an important and thoughtful paper, geographer Nik Heynen (2009) presents a series of interviews with women who were part of the BPP's feeding programs in the 1970s. One activist cited by Heynen⁸ spoke, like many others, of the lengthy discussions and dialogues around gender, and the lengths to which the Panthers earnestly but inconsequentially paid lip service to questions of gender equality⁹ and then said:

You could have a thousand dialogues on gender issues and you would have never gotten that result faster than you did by saying look, if you love these children, if you love your people, you better get your ass up and start working in that breakfast program. (413)

It was the active participation in the program that transformed gender relations, not merely the talking about it.

This vision of gender transformation isn't, however, widely shared. When I asked one activist whose work was based in New Haven about Heynen's ideas, she was unimpressed. She wasn't alone—many of the women who were part of the Panthers engaged not because of the enlightened gender praxis, but despite it (LeBlanc-Ernest 1998; Matthews 1998; Nyasha 1990). Indeed, the only way in which many women were taken seriously within the movement was not because of equality over the cooking range, but because they were armed. For some women within the Black Panther Party, power grew out of the barrel of a gun.

But it's not inconceivable that, among the dozens of Panther chapters, even if women have reported the persistence of patriarchy, this sexist bubble might also have been punctured by moving men into kitchens and onto serving lines for children.

⁸ Heynen unfortunately omits details of the specific program with which the woman was associated.

⁹ Abu-Jamal (2001), for instance, observes the lengthy debates. But the debates are entirely compatible with the persistence of sexism in the day-to-day operation of the organization, as witnessed by women within the party.

Conclusion

The Black Panthers' vision for radical change is one from which the food movement today might benefit. The Panthers understood that while the needs of the hungry were real, and deserved immediate attention, those needs could only ultimately be banished by a far more radical transformation than the government was ready to provide. Political education was, the Panthers knew, vital to understanding the reasons behind their hunger. So they read Mao, Frantz Fanon, and Marx. They also knew that the combination of political education and effective action made them dangerous, turning them into enemies of a status quo that produced hunger. Hence the massive government-sponsored attempts to murder their example, and parade its body as a warning to those whose hearts might harbor similar hopes.

Yet the Panthers' example remains important for today's food movement. Clearly, it's difficult to balance the desire to recruit a broad movement under a single banner, and the need to broach the potentially divisive subject of capitalism. You can find this tension within the notion of "food sovereignty" that guides the international peasant movement, La Via Campesina. Their definition of "food sovereignty" has changed over time (Patel, 2010), though it is at heart a call for political equality at every level of the food system, so that decisions about the food system might be made democratically.

With an organizational structure as diverse as La Via Campesina's, vagueness is politically expedient. In a movement peopled with landed peasants and landless workers, any talk about "the means of production" is fractious—some folk in La Via Campesina have land and are reluctant to talk about giving it up—even if talking about all of this might provide more political focus. Food sovereignty is, from the outset, an idea built on postponing certain difficult political discussions to another day—just as long as everyone gets a say in what a new food system might look like.

Precisely because equality in political participation has to come first, the one conversation that can't be avoided or postponed is

the one about gender. Although questions about unequal ownership may be punted to tomorrow, the consequences of gender inequality need to be addressed today. Hence a recently launched campaign confronting violence against women, which itself is the product of hard conversations, and concerted organizing by women within La Via Campesina (2011). The campaign stretches not only to domestic violence, but the structural violence of poverty, i.e., to those inequities magnified by capitalism.

For La Via Campesina, some of the most powerfully transformative and practical parts of a theory about global change in the food system come from actual gendered fights for the future of food. The Black Panthers' struggles for survival may not yet have brought the revolution, but at least they saw the scale of change needed so that hunger might finally be banished in our communities. And in the US today, the group most likely to be food insecure are households headed by women. It's possible to explain why this is so—why women are paid less than men, why hunger flourishes among the poor, and why capitalism will not willingly provide food to those unable to afford it.

In providing these explanations, and organizing effective actions to address inequity, we will make the food movement more threatening to the powerful. That sounds frightening, but every movement that has ever accomplished social change—whether the civil rights movement, the Indian independence movement, or indeed the global justice movement—has put the demands of justice ahead of the need to accommodate oppressive thinking. Instead, such movements have been armed with radical ideas for a better future, in which all people are possessed of dignity, and able to govern themselves. The Black Panther Party's vision of a world where all children are fed, where food, healthcare, education, access to land, and housing and clothes are rights and not privileges is a vision that can and should spark the food movement today. Inspired by their example, and learning the lessons from their experience, we can dream beyond the limitations imposed by capitalism, of a world in which hunger is, for the first time, a specter of the past.

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