Bobby Seale

February 3, 2009 By Paul Dalton

Yesterday I went to see Bobby Seale, cofounder of the Black Panther Party, speak at Berkeley City College. Bobby is in my pantheon of heroes. The Panthers helped make AIDS activism possible by putting the notion of self directed, grass roots activism in to real world action.
One of my favorite slogans comes from the revolutionary Union, the IWW- ?Direct Action Gets the Goods.? That idea- that concerted action by the people most affected by any issue come results- was a guiding principle in the earlier days of AIDS activism.

Rachel Maddow called the AIDS activist movement a great hidden success story- and she is right. AIDS activism changed the world, much more so than anyone thought is would, or even could.
Many people know the Black Panthers carried guns. Some know that they ran a nation-wide free breakfast program. Even fewer know they set up a series of community based health clinics which spearheaded the largest sickle cell anemia testing program in US history. Even fewer know they ran free ambulance services in a handful of communities.
Underlying both the Panthers and ACT UP was the idea that people can and must exercise political power, through what ever means are necessary. It was necessary for the Panthers to patrol the streets of Oakland to guard against police brutality and other official misconduct. It was necessary for AIDS activist to chain themselves to the doors of drug companies, or shut down traffic on the Golden Gate bridge. These actions made it possible for us to have a choice of over 20 HIV drugs, and to have an African American President.

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