

Fighting for community power

Police crack down on Panthers

From Guardian-LNS

"We will not fight capitalism with black capitalism; we will not fight imperialism with black imperialism; we will not fight racism with black racism. Rather we will take our stand against these evils with a solidarity derived from a proletarian internationalism born of socialist idealism."

Bobby Seale, Chairman,
Black Panther Party

Since May 1967 the Black Panther Party has borne the brunt of a massive U.S. government crackdown on militant black activities that has resulted in over 1,000 incidents of harassment of party members and over 20 cases of homicide.

Widespread fear and panic among U.S. political leaders and their police agents has been caused by the phenomenal growth of the party and its ability to organize the black resistance movement into a drive for community power.

Low life expectancy

One need only look at the current condition of the 22 million black people in the United States to understand why the Panthers have been so successful:

Life expectancy: For blacks in the United States, the Urban League reports that life expectancy was 63.6 years in 1968 while for white Americans, it was 70.19 years.

Infant mortality rate: Out of every 100 babies who die in infancy, 75 per cent are black babies, the National Urban League said in its 1968 annual report.

Income and poverty: In 1968 the income of black families was only 60 per cent of the median incomes of whites. The median family income of a black family in the United States was \$5,359 in 1968, while the median income for a white family according to the U.S. Department of Commerce was \$8,936. The income of a black woman is about \$1,800 less than a black male.

Unemployment: The unemployment rate among blacks was 6.5 per cent according to U.S. Labor Department figures that carry through January, 1969, a figure that runs twice that of whites.

The law: According to the Statistical Abstract of the United States for 1969, more than one-third of individuals in prison, reformatories, jails or workhouses were black in 1960.

Education: Despite the Civil Rights Act discrimination remains a blatant reality. For example, according to the government definition of racial imbalance, 99 per cent of the schools in Los Angeles are segregated.

Capitalists: Nixon's promise of creating black capitalists in the U.S. is a myth. The U.S. ruling class is virtually all white and most black-owned business depends on loans from white-controlled banks.

Housing: The U.S. Bureau of the Census says that housing which lacks basic plumbing facilities or is dilapidated does not meet specified criteria. A full 24 per cent of black and other non-white households fail to meet this specific criteria. For whites, 6 per cent of the households fall below this minimum standard.

The war in Vietnam: After all this, black Americans must fight in Vietnam against a people struggling for self determination. In 1966 and 1967, 269,000 black Americans were called for pre-induction examinations by Selective Service. During those two years alone, some 93,000 blacks were drafted.

When the first chapter of the Black Panther Party was formed in 1966, it consisted of a handful of black militants operating in the Bay Area of Oakland, California.

Within two years it had branched out into 30 major U.S. centres, and had a membership of 1,000.

The party was initially formed as a response to police oppression in the ghettos. Consequently, among the first efforts in Oakland was the formation of community police patrols.

Party founder, Huey P. Newton, an ex-law student, put his training to work and instructed all party members in the basic constitutional rights governing arrests and gun laws.

From there, the party established a system of armed car patrols, completely legal, carrying both guns and law books and followed police cars making their rounds of the ghetto.

Panther program

1. We want power to determine the destiny of our black community.
2. We want full employment or a guaranteed annual income for our people, if not through business, then through the community control of the means of production.
3. We want an end to the robbery by the capitalist of our black community.
4. We want decent housing.
5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society.
6. We want all black men to be exempt from military service.
7. We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people.
8. We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, country and city prisons and jails.
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.
10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.



Demonstrators support the Panther 21 in New York City trial.

LNS - Sid Sattler

Whenever black men or women were stopped by the police, armed Panthers would be on the scene, making sure their constitutional rights were not violated. Oakland police were outraged. But the brutality, harassment, and obscenity directed at black men and women tapered off. The program was a success and news of the party's existence spread rapidly.



"... And did you voluntarily accept a free, hot meal from known Black Panthers at nine a.m., September nine, nineteen hun'ert an' sixty-nine?"

The party, shortly after, gained added publicity and black support when 30 armed black men and women walked into the state legislature to protest a gun control bill designed as an attack on the Panthers.

Bobby Seale, the chairman of the Panthers, and several others served a six-month prison sentence as a result of the action.

The party continued to grow as Newton emphasized again and again, that the party "was the people's party" and was "like an oxen, to be ridden by the people and serve the needs of the people."

If the people wanted a traffic light, the Panthers told the police to install one immediately or the party would start directing traffic. If black children were being harassed in the schools, the Panthers organized mothers to patrol the halls while armed party members stood guard outside. Liberation schools were also set up after regular classes were over.

The Panther free breakfast for children program in dozens of black communities was a serious effort to feed

hungry children — to serve the people, or at least that small number of people who can be served within the Black Panther Party's limited resources, by providing the semblance of an adequate diet for thousands of young black children.

But as the party's successes grew, so did the intensity of police harassment. Police bulletin boards blossomed with descriptions of party members and their cars. On foot or walking around, Panthers would be stopped and arrested on charges ranging from petty traffic violations to spitting on the sidewalk.

On Oct. 28, 1967, the issue came to a head: early in the morning, a police car reported, "I have a Panther car." Several hours later, one policeman was dead and Huey Newton was under arrest with four bullet wounds in his stomach. When he recovered, he was charged with murder and locked in Alameda County jail without bail.

When the verdict came in, the political character of the trial became apparent. Newton was convicted of involuntary manslaughter, a charge of which he could not possibly have been guilty. The evidence of the trial was such that he could only be guilty or innocent of first-degree murder. The compromise verdict simply revealed the political forces at play.

Repression continues

Since then, this trend of political repression of the Panthers by the police has continued. Since May, 1967, massive government repression has resulted in over 1,000 incidents of harassment and 20 cases of homicide.

The homicides began with the finding of the body of Arthur Glenn Morris, in Los Angeles in March, 1968, with police claiming to have no information about his violent death.

The second death was the following month when Bobby Hutton was shot by police in Oakland as he surrendered with his hands in the air, unarmed.

The last homicides were in Chicago, Dec. 4, when police murdered Fred Hampton in his bed and Mark Clark in a pre-dawn raid.

Perhaps the most glaring example of actions against the Panthers is the total of 24 raids against Black Panther Party offices during the past two years. This does not include the often fatal and destructive visits by police to various Black Panther homes.

It is for this reason that the Black Panthers Party espouses a philosophy of armed struggle. As Newton put it at one rally:

"The masses of the people want peace. The masses of the people do not want war. The Black Panther Party advocates the abolition of war. But at the same time, we realize that the only way you can get rid of war, many times, is through a process of war. Therefore, the only way you can get rid of guns, is to get rid of the guns of the oppressor. The people must be able to pick up guns, to defend themselves..."

Panthers speak at York today

1 pm Winters Dining Hall

Two members of the Chicago Black Panther Party and two black Canadians from Montreal and Toronto will speak on world-wide black oppression.