PROMOTING ENDURING PEACE
P. O. Box 103 - Woodmont, Conn. 06460

Additional copies FREE except for postage.

Promoting Enduring Peace does not advocate nor express opinions on legislative matters. The responsibility for statements of fact and opinion in the publications or material distributed by it rests solely with the author.

No. 153

OUT TO GET THE PANTHERS

Reprinted by permission from THE NATION *July 28, 1969*

L. F. PALMER, JR.
Mr. Palmer is a reporter and columnist for the Chicago Daily News, *and a special correspondent for the Newspaper Enterprise Association.*

A few minutes before dawn on June 4, Merlin Nygren, Assistant Deputy Superintendent of Chicago police and the officer in charge that morning, got the word from his dispatcher: "The FBI has informed us they are going to raid the Black Panther headquarters on Madison Street. They request that all Chicago police cars stay out of the area." The message came through loud and clear; this was going to be a performance by the Feds.

The first thing they did was to seal off the area surrounding the ghetto building at 2350 W. Madison Street, nestled solidly in the heart of the riot-ravaged West Side. One police car swooped down on the intersection of Madison and Western to reroute traffic. An FBI car did the same thing a block away. By sunrise, the operation was under way.

FBI cars with revolving red Mars lights blinking moved in on Panther headquarters and disgorged an array of agents. On their left arms, they had safety-pinned white armbands with red letters: "U.S. Department of Justice." Across their chests, they wore light olive-green bullet-proof vests, harbingers of an expected shoot-out.

Marlin Johnson, special agent in charge of the Chicago FBI office, came dressed in a dark brown suit, white shirt and a wide-brimmed hat, like a businessman. His business was to lead a raid on the black revolutionary organization which is developing a nasty habit of unsettling local, state and national defenders of the *status quo.*

Several G-men quickly clambered up a fire escape of the building next to the Panthers', jumped to the roof of the headquarters, spread out for escape attempts and in perfect gun position for any action that might occur on Madison Street. Down in the street, more agents took cover behind cars and glued their eyes to the doorway leading to the second- and third-floor offices of the Panthers. Their weaponry included heavy firearms, machine guns, shotguns and tear gas.

When efforts to coax the Panthers out of their offices failed, the G-men took the sledge-hammer route, rushed the headquarters and took into custody—without resistance—eight Black Panthers, two of them female. By the time the G-men left, revolutionary posters had been torn from the walls, lists of names of Panther lawyers, contributors and other supporters had been confiscated. Office equipment and some weapons were carted out and petitions with more than 9,000 signatures seeking an appeal bond for jailed Illinois Panther leader Fred Hampton had disappeared. Cash—something more than $1,700—was taken. Food for the Panthers' breakfast for poor children program had been trampled and slung around the office. At this writing, only the money had been returned. The FBI raided the Panther headquarters without a search warrant. They carried only an arrest warrant for George Sams, Jr., whom they described as a Panther wanted for murder in New Haven.

Sams was nowhere to be found in the Chicago Black Panther headquarters. But the eight Panthers arrested were charged with harboring a fugitive. Sixteen days later, the charges against the eight were dismissed.

After the Chicago raid, the FBI or police conducted in rapid succession raids on Panthers in Des Moines, Indianapolis and Denver. Panthers have been arrested in Seattle, Eugene, Ore., New York City, Newark, Baltimore, Salt Lake City, numerous California cities, to mention a few incidents of recent weeks.

The nation-wide harassment of Black Panthers, which includes extraordinary means of trying to keep the Black Panther newspaper from being distributed, has reached such proportions that the Panthers scheduled a Revolutionary Conference for a United Front against Fascism in Oakland, Calif. on July 18-21. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, were to gather for what could be one of the decade's most influential meetings.

On the day after the Chicago raid, Black Panther Party chairman, Bobby Seale, said that more than forty Panther leaders and more than 100 members had been arrested across the country in two months. In Seale's words, the arrests are "nothing more than Richard M. Nixon's operations of attempting to destroy the national and state level Black Panther Party leaderships." Describing the G-men as "Fascist FBI pigs," Seale said the reason behind the alleged plot to destroy the Panthers is the federal government's horror of Socialist programs, which the Panthers advocate. He said U.S. officials are employing local law-enforcement agencies in their conspiracy to remove Panther leaders from the streets and thereby kill off the movement. In his annual report, released July 15, J. Edgar Hoover singled out the Panthers as being, among Negro militant groups, the "greatest threat to the internal security of the country."

The Panther party's top leadership has already been skimmed off, each with a different kind of spoon. Minister of defense Huey P. Newton is in prison, convicted of killing an Oakland, Calif., policeman. Panthers view him as a political prisoner. Bobby Hutton, the party's treasurer, was killed by police a little more than a year ago. The Black Panther newspaper declares that "from that point on there have been some twenty Panthers murdered by the nation's pigs and their running dogs."

Eldridge Cleaver, whose best-selling *Soul on Ice* has made him the party's most widely known member, is in exile. About to be returned to jail on a charge of probation violation, Cleaver vowed he would never go back behind bars and disappeared from sight. He is reported to be living in Cuba.

Seale himself is under federal indictment on charges growing out of the Democratic National Convention disturbances in Chicago last summer. Those close to that extraordinary chapter in American malfeasance know that Seale played only a marginal role in the clashes. Indeed, Jay Miller, director of the Illinois chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, while searching for a motive for the Seale indictment, was told by a high-ranking official in the Justice Department that "the Panthers are a bunch of hoodlums and we have to get this guy." It is, then, entirely reasonable to come to the conclusion that it is only a matter of time before Seale joins Newton, Hutton and Cleaver in America's peculiar and chilling version of Siberia.

With these formidable national leaders out of action, it appears that many local and federal officials are almost paranoid in their determination that the Panthers shall not continue to ride herd on what they call the "oppressive capitalistic system."

As Donald Freed, assistant to the provost of the California Institute of the Arts, put it: "If what is being perpetrated against the Black Panther Party was being done to any white group, including the Nazi Party, the liberal establishment—from the ACLU to *The New York Times* —would absolutely refuse to tolerate it further. Since the party began its hot breakfast for children project (now feeding 5,000 a day, which is, in the words of California's Jesse Unruh, 'more than the government feeds'), Panther arrests with charges later dropped, and bail in the millions, constitute an unprecedented national scandal which beggars the fifties." Freed sees official action against the Panthers as "a growing conspiracy which would have the most awful climax this ominous summer."

What has been happening to the Panthers in Chicago provides as good a spectacle as any for Americans who may want to make a serious examination of Bobby Seale's charge that a national campaign is in full swing against the group which calls itself the "vanguard party" of the revolution. The experiences of the Illinois Panthers vary little, if any, from those of the group that founded the party in California and from those of the others that now seek to carry out its aims across the country.

After a few months of underground organizing, the Illinois Black Panther Party emerged in December 1968. Many of its members had attended college and labored in the nonviolent civil rights movement. At that time, few members had criminal records of any consequence. Now the charges against them run into three figures, including one of stealing a garbage can.

Only two convictions stand against the record of the Illinois Black Panthers. Significantly, they are both against the party's top two leaders. Bobby Rush, deputy minister of defense, was convicted in a Champaign (Ill.) circuit court of illegal possession of a weapon, following a visit of Panthers to the University of Illinois. Rush—a husband, father of two and an army veteran—has appealed the conviction. Fred Hampton, the Illinois party's deputy chairman, was convicted of robbing an ice-cream truck driver of $71 worth of ice cream and is serving two to five years in the Menard Penitentiary. Hampton is an ex-Roosevelt University student and former head of the Maywood (Ill.) NAACP Youth Council.

Hampton's conviction came despite his testimony that he was not on the Maywood school playground last April when the ice cream was stolen. In an out-of-court statement, Hampton told reporters: "I may be a pretty big mother, but I can't eat no 710 ice-cream bars." However, the words which attracted the attention of Panther watchers were those of the judge who refused to set an appeal bond for Hampton, dooming him to immediate incarceration: "This defendant admits to me that he advocates armed revolution," said circuit court Judge Sidney A. Jones, a Chicago Negro. "I cannot take the responsibility of allowing him to remain at large."

Aside from the fact that advocacy of armed revolution is scarcely relevant to a charge of stealing ice cream,

the U.S. Supreme Court on June 9 outlawed Ohio's syndicalism law. This statute, passed by several states during the "Red scare" after World War I, makes it unlawful "to advocate or teach the duty, necessity, or propriety of crime, sabotage, violence or unlawful methods of terrorism as a means of accomplishing industrial or political reform."

The Supreme Court ruling made it clear that convictions cannot be upheld against persons who simply advocate the necessity of overthrowing the government. Under the High Court decision, it is imperative that the advocate actually intends lawless action that would produce violence. If such a judicial opinion holds on a conviction, it would seem that it would be equally applicable to the granting of an appeal bond.

Bobby Rush expressed this same sentiment in somewhat different language: "Cloaked in the black robe that surely smells of the mire that he lives in, pig Jones, black puppet manipulated by the pig power puppeteers of Chicago, has carried out this system's policy of legal and sanctioned persecution. The State's attorneys' every effort was not to show that Fred was a thief, which is what they called him, but it was to show that Fred's political ideas are in direct opposition to his and all others who embrace injustice."

Kermit Coleman, head of the ACLU's ghetto project in Chicago, who has handled many cases of accused Panthers, provides insights into the attitudes of officials who find themselves in confrontation with revolutionary blacks. One assistant State's attorney, says Coleman, opens his prosecutions of Black Panthers by saying: "This is a Black Panther case, your Honor."

Among the cases for which Coleman has handled the defense have been that of two Panthers charged with violating a city ordinance on the use of public ways by selling the Black Panther newspaper. The charges were dropped. In another, two Panthers were arrested for handing out leaflets. The charges were dropped. Other cases involved charges of aggravated battery, disorderly conduct, resisting arrest and a variety of weapons charges. These, too, were dismissed.

"It would seem to me," Coleman says, "that it would be irrational to assume that the Black Panther Party and each of its members is deliberately setting out to get arrested. And yet it seems that every member has been arrested, with the leaders being arrested many times. This raises in my mind a belief that there is a concerted effort among law-enforcement agencies and political forces in this city and throughout the nation to wipe out the Panthers."

Coleman explains why: "They see the political nature of the Black Panther Party as being a danger to entrenched political and economic interests. These are young black people who cannot be bought off with a loaf of bread and the promise of pie in the sky. A great many of their members have come out of the traditional movement after seeing that this kind of protest is not effective."

Coleman expressed what many people, no doubt, have been thinking: "You'll notice that other black groups that are just as active in the community are not getting busted

"The Cops Don' Bother To Wear The White Hats. . . . All They Needs Is The White Faces."

because they are talking about opting for black capitalism. As long as you talk about black capitalism, you don't go to jail. But when one comes out of a revolutionary bag that does not encompass the present political and economic structure, that's when the powers of repression are brought to bear."

That they are being brought to bear was made abundantly clear in this remark by a veteran Chicago police reporter who is about as well informed on such matters as any person in the city: "I can't remember in my entire career witnessing the quantity nor the quality of repressive force unleashed against the Black Panthers. I don't think it is all a matter of a national conspiracy, though I believe this is certainly a part of it. I think this massive repression also results from the naked fear many policemen have of the Panthers. They want to do them in as a kind of self-defense measure."

Repression takes many forms and it certainly is no coincidence that there is a striking similarity between the Washington hearings into Black Panther activities and the probe of Chicago's Blackstone Rangers by the same

agency, the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigation. While the Rangers are not considered to be revolutionaries, this former street gang, now known as the Black P. Stone Nation, is—like the Panthers—decidedly at odds with the political ruling elite.

The direction of the McClellan committee's hearings on the Rangers discounted any efforts these black youths were making toward constructive community programming. It also pulled the financial rug out from under an Office of Economic Opportunity project designed to experiment with means of rehabilitating black street gangs. A major performance before the McClellan committee came from a former Ranger who "told all" and who, informed sources insist, was taken off the hook of a criminal charge in exchange for his "exposé."

As the same committee "digs" into the workings of the Black Panthers, it is no surprise that they have come up with a former Panther whose stories of sexual, criminal and exploitative activities are remarkably parallel to those credited to the Blackstone Rangers. Panther leaders, including Seale and Chief of Staff David Hilliard, insist that ex-Panther Larry Clayton Powell was telling the story the committee wanted to hear and that he did so to gain clemency on robbery charges.

The committee has made much of a Panther coloring book which allegedly was distributed to boys and girls at their free breakfasts. The book depicts youths attacking police and the legend under one reads: "The only good pig is a dead pig." Seale told newsmen that the book was "rejected" by the Panther leadership because it is "racist." He said it was never distributed. The McClellan committee, which encouraged the impression that the book received wide dissemination, took absolutely no notice of the fact that for many years a popular slogan declared, "The only good Indian is a dead Indian." After the Indians were all but dead, the slogan was revised to "The only good nigger is a dead nigger."

Out of the Oakland conference may come solid and ominous documentation of America's frightening drift away from a democracy which it has always mouthed but never practiced, toward a version of fascism which it has never mouthed but is practicing with a creeping zeal. I attended the National Black Economic Development Conference in Detroit at which James Forman introduced and gained approval for the Black Manifesto, demanding $500 million in reparations from white churches and synagogues. Shortly thereafter, a federal grand jury was impaneled in Detroit and began to subpoena witnesses for an investigation into the circumstances of the Manifesto.

I received a short time ago a communication from the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization, which sponsored the conference. The letter, addressed to all who had attended the three-day meeting, said in part:

> Within the last four weeks, the FBI has been systematically contacting persons attending the National Black Economic Development Conference. The agents have represented the investigation as being ordered by the United States Attorney General, supposedly in regard to possible extortion charges against James Forman. We are advised by attorneys that this is a preposterous notion. Although presumably the investigation is on the extortion issue, there is apparent interest in other individuals' roles in the conference, including that of Lucius Walker, Jr. [IFCO's Executive Director].
>
> If the indications we have received are true, there is no legal basis for such a charge, if the purpose of this is intimidation to drive the movement back into the wall, it leads one to believe this is just another effort to hold back the thrust for black liberation. If enough people can be frightened by the massive use of agents across the country, that might be more effective than an actual case. We shouldn't be duped by this kind of strategy.

Nor should white Americans be duped into thinking that the kind of official repression which has been described in this article is limited to Black Panthers, Blackstone Rangers, or other minority organizations and individuals who are aggressive in their challenge of the *status quo*. As violence breeds violence, so does repression breed repression. Whites can feel the sting, too.

An extraordinary incident which happened in Chicago recently bears this out, and at the same time provides a bizarre commentary on the American racial circus. The Better Government Association, a prestigious civic organization, had planned a meeting with representatives of the ghetto, including several gang leaders. The purpose was to open a dialogue which might reduce dangerous tensions. The meeting was set for the Inland Steel Building in the Loop and was to be a luncheon.

But members of the police department's gang intelligence unit (which was prominent in the Blackstone Rangers hearing before the McClellan committee and which, some believe, promoted the investigation) demanded invitations to the meeting and upbraided the hosts for not telling the unit's head, Capt. Edward Buckney, what they were doing.

Gang intelligence police swarmed over the building, staked out in the lobby, and started shooting pictures of everybody who entered. When the gang leaders arrived and found the fuzz all over the place, they "split the scene," rendering the meeting impotent. Chicago *Daily News* columnist Mike Royko, who broke the story, described one of the intimidated hosts of the meeting: "Robert Gaylord Donnelley—Credentials: A member of the wealthy family that controls R. R. Donnelley and Sons Company, the giant printing firm (*Red Book*); Yale '60 and Harvard Business School '63; executive of the First National Bank of Chicago; Social Register, society pages and civic leader. In other words, a top-drawer, white member of the Establishment."

Said the startled Donnelley, after he had recovered from the shock of his introduction to intimidation and repression, American style: "I had never believed most of the things I read about the tactics the police use. Most of the people I know still don't believe it. If this is an example of the type of thing that is happening to black people, then I can appreciate their feelings and their reactions."

The irony is that Captain Buckney is a Negro.