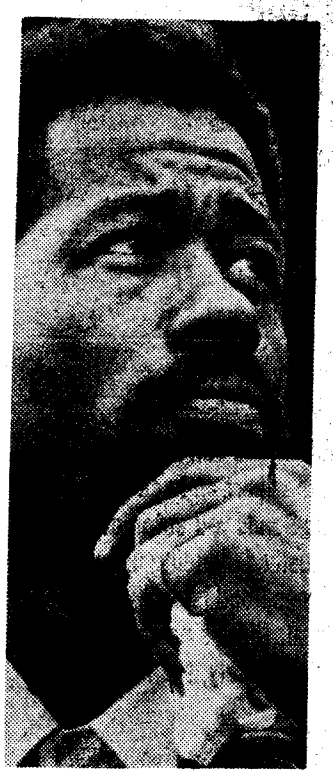

"I am . . . optimistic that the system in the United States can be changed."

Cleaver Wants to Leave Algiers, Rejoin Panther 'Struggle' in U.S.

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By Jesse W. Lewis Jr.
Washington Post Foreign Service

ALGIERS — Eldridge Cleaver, author and Black Panther-in-exile, says he wants to go home.

"My whole purpose is to actively participate in the struggle and I want to do it inside the United States," Cleaver said while sitting in a cluttered room he uses for writing in his apartment on the outskirts of Algiers.

"If I'm given my day in court and restored on bail I'd be willing to face the charges," he said. "Then I will go back openly and publicly. If, that's not possible then I'll go back the way I left."

Eldridge Cleaver, author of the best seller "Soul on Ice" and is information minister of the militant Black Panther Party, left the United States in late 1968. He is charged with violating parole in California and a warrant has been issued for his arrest.

Cleaver eluded both state and federal authorities and fled the United States. He was reported to have been living in Cuba, though he would not acknowledge that or discuss it. He has been living in Algiers for the past six months.

He lives with his wife, Kathleen, and his five-month-old son, Maceo, who was born here. They live on the top floor of a two-story building by the Mediterranean Sea about a 15-minute ride from downtown Algiers.

During the interview, which took place over four hours on New Year's Day and Jan. 2, Cleaver talked about a wide variety of topics, ranging from the recent bloody clashes between Black Panthers and police in several American cities, the Panthers revolutionary philosophy, North Korea, his writing and his son.

Kathleen Cleaver discusses women revolutionaries. *Page D1.*

"It's pretty clear what the government is doing," he said referring to the clashes between Panthers and police in Chicago and Los Angeles. "It's an attempt to eliminate the leadership of the Black Panther party and disrupt its ability to function.

"Since Richard Nixon unleashed his bulldog Hoover . . . it become a public issue because of the mounting number of incidents and the intensity of the incidents themselves."

See CLEAVER, A14, Col. 4

"The police . . . FBI . . . cannot step aside and let the Panthers exist."

CLEAVER, From A1

"Before there was relatively little outcry. Then here was the vicious murder in Chicago of Fred Hampton (head of the Illinois Panther Party) the arrest of David Hilliard (Panther chief of staff who is being held in San Francisco for threatening to kill President Nixon). It has frightened a lot of people and made them aware," he said.

Cleaver spoke with contempt about the official panel set up to investigate the actions against the panthers and called former Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg" a well-known Zionist."

"Uncle Toms"

"The power structure is trying to take control of the situation by using a well-known Zionist appointing Uncle Tom congressmen like (Democrat Charles) Diggs and (Michigan Democrat John) Conyers and two well-known and discredited Uncle Toms like Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young to erect a facade of concerned and official responsibility.

"Here comes Goldberg investigating a group that is a threat to both Uncle Toms and Zionists."

(Cleaver was referring to the unofficial citizens" "commission of inquiry" set up to investigate recent clashes between police and Panthers and an unofficial congressional hearing in Chicago held by five black congressmen on Dec. 20)

The Panthers are not concerned with the investigations," Cleaver said, gesturing with his hands. "It's absurd to have an investigation of murders when what we need is to execute the murderers."

During the interview Cleaver seemed relaxed but cautious.

He is tall, about 6-foot 3, with the build of a defensive linebacker. He wears a full goatee and moustache and looks like his photo on the cover of "Soul on Ice." He smoked occasionally. Both of us had a glass of red Algerian wine.

He said what is happening to the Panthers was an indication of what's going to happen to America. The Black Panthers, he said, want to prevent this and change America by armed revolution.

"Lashing Out"

"It's a clear sign of what we're in store for in America. A racist, fascist, imperialist power structure knows its facing a crisis and they are lashing out viciously at all manifestations of freedom of the people.

"But our people are not going to give up and the Black Panther Party is not going to change its tune. The war is going to become more and more public and more and more openly violent.

"You can see a slow tightening process. The only way for it to be stopped is to take up arms and actively oppose this process. It's not a question of will the police leave us alone, but, can they leave us alone.

"I say no, because it would deny their purpose for existence. The police . . . the FBI are a political police to safeguard the capitalist system and they cannot step aside and let the Panthers exist."

Black Capitalism

Cleaver criticized the black capitalism program of President Nixon as an "evil and insincere maneuver" in which "black faces substituted for white" but continued to oppress the black masses.

"As far as I'm concerned there's nothing the government can do that would make me want to see it go on. After a certain point you become a fulltime revolutionary. I have no other interest in life except dealing with this thing.

"I don't want to see the capitalist system in the United States try to solve its problems. I want to see it submerged in failure."

Since he has been living in Algiers, Cleaver has been identifying both himself and the Black Panther party with a number of revolutionary and leftist causes. On Dec. 28 at the First International Congress of Committees of Support for Palestine in Algiers, Cleaver shared the speakers' platform with Arab guerrilla leader Yasser Arafat and attacked "American Zionists."

'Deeply Impressed'

Cleaver said that a Black Panther delegation recently spent a month in North Korea where they were "deeply impressed." During the interview, Cleaver quoted Kim Il Sung premier of North Korea.

"We have been checking out his thought (Kim's) and reading his works and much of it is relevant and quotable," Cleaver said. A photograph of Kim was on a sideboard in the living room and a copy of his biography was on an end table.

Cleaver said he had spent a lot of his time in Algeria knitting what he called "the correct political alliances" to insure himself and his family with some security. He did not elaborate on this but said: "If you don't have stable relationships things can happen to you that you don't understand."

Recently, he said, he has spent two or three hours a day writing early in the morning. "I find it easier to write now. I know more about writing and I have more confidence in a finished product."

Novel Completed

He said he expects to have another book published this spring about his experiences since December 1966. "I have a few other things in the hopper," he said, including a draft of a novel he wrote while in prison.

Cleaver was asked whether now that he has a son, his first child, his philosophy for armed revolution in the United States changed.

"It increases my desire to help deal with the situation into which I've fathered a child because I don't want my son to be subjected to oppression and have his existence manipulated and determined by his enemies," he said. "I want my son to enjoy the fruits and benefits of a civilized existence."

Is Cleaver optimistic about the chances of his son growing up in the kind of society he envisaged?

"Optimistic"

"It goes without saying that a revolutionary is optimistic and I am thoroughly optimistic that the system in the United States can be changed," he said.

"Our people have been struggling for over 400 years and the generation that is now in America will cash in on the benefits of this struggle. You know, our slogan is 'Revolution in our lifetime.' I guess that is optimism."