18 Black Panthers Go on Trial Here Tomorrow

By EDITH EVANS ASBURY

Sixteen Black Panthers are scheduled to go on trial tomorrow on charges of conspiring to bomb Manhattan department stores, the Bronx Botanical Gardens, police stations, subway switching-rooms and railroad tracks.

They are also accused of possessing and carrying dangerous weapons, including guns, rifles, pistols, bombs and "explosive substances."

The trial will be held before State Supreme Court Justice John M. Murtagh in the New York County Court house, 100 Centre Street. During numerous protrial hearings in the building, as lawyers for the defendants argued for the reduction of what they called "excessive bail" of $100,000 each, Panther party members demonstrated outside the building. They are expected to be there again tomorrow, and extra policemen have been assigned to guard the building.

Frame-up Is Charged

Panther supporters, including clergymen who posted bail Thursday to free one of the two women held in jail since April 2, contend that the defendants are really being tried for their political beliefs and that the indictments were a result of a police frame-up.

In addition to the two women, 11 other defendants have been held in jail in lieu of bail since April. Two others have been held in no bail since their arrest Nov. 15.

Bail for the 1 of those originally arrested was at first set at $100,000 each, and remained at that figure except for two who obtained reductions to $50,000 each, and one whose bail was reduced to $25,000.

The 16th defendant, 17-year-old Lonnie Epps, who voluntarily surrendered himself for arrest, was freed in bail of $10,000 and permitted to return to Long Island City High School, where he was a junior. He has since been promoted to the senior class, according to defense lawyers.

Mrs. Afeni Shakur, also known as Alice Williams, 22-year-old wife of another defendant, was selected by the National Panther party office at Oakland, Calif., to be the one freed Friday by the bail raised by clergymen. She had been held since in $100,000 and party members posted $61,070 in cash collateral and loans to obtain her release.

Dr. Robert P. Johnson, General Presbyter of the Presbytery of New York, said the loans came from Episcopal and Presbyterian churches. Their help had been requested, he said, because it was prejudicial to the rights of the Panthers, and amounted to "preventive detention," to hold them in jail for 10 months before their trial."

Nursing Student Involved

The other woman held in jail since last April is Joan Bird, a 20-year-old nursing student at Bronx Community College who was also working as a kindergarten teaching assistant at the time of her arrest.

Two other high school students, in addition to Lonnie Epps, are among the defendants.

The other students are 17 year-old Eddie Josephs, who was a student at Evander Childs High School at the time of his arrest, held in jail in $25,000 bail since April, and Alex McKiever, 19, a student at Benjamin Franklin High School and president of its Afro-American History Club. He has been held since April in bail of $100,000.

The two defendants whose bail was reduced to $50,000 are computer operator, and Michael Clark Squires, a 32-year-old Tabor, a 22-year-old employe of the Panther party.

Originally, 21 Panthers were indicted, and the group has been referred to as the "Panther 21" by groups that have protested their arrest. Two of those originally indicted are in jail in Newark on bank robbery charges and three are still at large. The two in jail in Newark are Donald Weems, also known as Kwesi Balagoon, and Richard Harris.

The three whose whereabouts are unknown are Nathaniel Burns, also known as Nathaniel Williams; Larry Mack and Thomas Berry.

Lee Berry, a brother of Thomas, has been the subject of numerous legal moves and much publicly expressed indignation by Panther supporters.

They allege that he suffers from epilepsy that developed while he was in the armed forces in Vietnam, and that his physical condition has been aggravated by rough handling in prison, where he was confined in $100,000 bail atfer being arrested in the Veterans Administration Hospital in Manhattan last April 3. He was transferred to Bellevue prison ward No. 24.

A 22d defendant and additional charges against te original 21 were added in a 30-count indictment handed up against the Panthers last Nov. 17, which superseded the previous, 12-count indictment.

The new defendant was Fred Richardson, 27, of 870 Nostrand Avenue, identified by Assistant District Attorney Joseph A. Phillips as the party's minister of information here. Attorneys for the other defendants disavow Mr. Richardson, asserting that he had been expelled from the party more than a year ago.

Mr. Ferguson was released in $25,000 bail, which Justice Murtagh declared forfeited a month after his arrest when he failed to appear as required at a pretrial hearing.

The other defendants are Curtis Powell, 33, research biochemist and Korean War veteran; Richard Moore, 24-year-old self-employed painter; Lamumba Abdul Shakur, 26, husband of the woman whose bail was supplied by clergymen Friday, and former employe of the Harlem Community Housing Council; John J. Casson, 31, an organizer for the party; Walter Johnson, 24, a grocery clerk.

Also indicted was Robert Collier, 32-year-old former staff director of the Tompkins Square Community Center. He held this position after serving 21 months of a five-year sentence pronounced after he was convicted June 15, 1965 of conspiring with others to blow up national monuments, including the Statue of Liberty, and of smuggling dynamite from Canada.