

All Charges Dismissed in Panther Case

Gov 11/17/70
Government prosecutors dismissed all charges yesterday against 19 persons who were arrested after a clash with police July 4 at a Black Panther community center in Northwest Washington.

The U.S. attorney's office at the D.C. Court of General Sessions threw out a charge of possession of a prohibited weapon against Charles Brunson, 26, while the corporation counsel's office dropped disorderly conduct charges pending against the 18 other arrested persons.

According to Acting Corporation Counsel Francis Murphy, the charges were dropped in Judge John J. Malloy's court because "the facts didn't indicate enough evidence to avoid a 'reasonable doubt' of their guilt.

He referred to the arrests as "good and valid," however, and said the police had "probable cause" to make them.

Similar comments about the decision not to prosecute were made by Luke C. Moore, head of the U.S. attorney's office at General Sessions. He said a grand jury had not indicated Brunson on a charge of assaulting a police officer and that "on through review" he had decided to drop the gun charge. Brunson was accused of possessing a semi-automatic carbine.

The July 4 incident prompted the Washington branch of the American Civil Liberties Union Fund to file a civil damage suit last week on behalf of the Panthers. It asks for more than \$1 million from the police department and the District government for damages suffered during the raid on the community center.

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PANTHERS, From C1

The suit, filed in U.S. District Court, charges that policemen violated the Panthers' civil rights when they raided the center on 1832 17th St. NW.

According to police, the incident began when the police asked a group of persons to stop singing in front of the center. Police said the group continued singing in spite of requests to quiet down and that bottles and rocks were thrown at police, injuring two policemen.

Report Gun Seizures

Subsequently, police said, they entered the building and seized five guns, which they said were unregistered. The Panthers charge that the police broke into the center and started "chasing" children, roughing up residents and damaging personal property.

Shortly after the incident, 17 of the 18 persons charged with disorderly conduct appeared at General Sessions to request a jury trial.

Their attorney, David Levy, said at the time that the 17 wanted to stand trial because they were confident of their innocence and wanted to be heard.

Levy said that the government charges a total of 19 persons, half of 19 persons, one of whom, Paul A. Pumfrey, also has filed a second separate suit seeking \$300,000 damages.

He alleges that he was beaten by police when he attempted to obtain the release of a woman arrested during the raid.