

Actions in Panther cases

By Rod Such

Under pressure from mounting public criticism of the recent murders of Black Panther party members and nationwide harassment against the militant black organization, the Justice Department last week was obliged to deny the existence of a government conspiracy to smash the Panther party.

"For the Black Panthers to say there is a conspiracy to shoot them all is just Black Panther propaganda," said U.S. Deputy Attorney General Richard Kleindienst in a Washington interview. "I don't regard the Black Panthers as a menace to the internal security of the United States."

In taking this stand, the Justice Department official put himself on record—in public, at least—as opposed to the position of FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, who recently stated the Panthers were, indeed, a menace to American security.

Kleindienst's denial came the same week that Richard Salant, president of the CBS news department, revealed the Secret Service had subpoenaed unused film footage of a Jan. 6 TV program on the Panthers for presentation before a San Francisco federal grand jury, investigating the national Black Panther party.

This investigation, directed by a special team of Justice Department attorneys superseding the authority of local U.S. Attorney Cecil F. Poole, a black man, is a clear indication the federal government is directly involved in prosecuting the Panther party as a national political organization.

Evidence has been presented to the jury which reportedly concerns possible violations of the federal anti-riot act, the conspiracy law under which the Chicago 8 were indicted; the Smith Act, prohibiting advocacy of armed revolution and the Internal Revenue Service act. The grand jury has already indicted David Hilliard, Panther chief of staff, for threatening the life of President Nixon.

The Secret Service subpoena handed to CBS was also based on an alleged threat made against Nixon's life. The "threat" was heard when Mike Wallace, a CBS reporter for the television series "60 Minutes," interviewed Eldridge Cleaver, the Panther's minister of information, in exile in Algeria. Cleaver had said, metaphorically, that he would like to see Nixon's head on a platter along with that of U.S. Senator John McClellan (D-Ark.).

There is good reason to believe that the television footage and other records subpoenaed will be used in a much wider fashion than has been indicated. A second subpoena was issued last week for a complete record, from mid-1968 to 1970, of all correspondence, memoranda, notes and telephone calls made by CBS reporters in arranging for the TV report.

In a related development the Cook county (Ill.) grand jury in Chicago indicted the seven Black Panthers who survived the police raid Dec. 4 in which Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were murdered. The charges were attempted murder and armed violence. The grand jury, convened by the state attorney's office—which authorized the police raid—handed down its indictments Jan. 30 against Brenda Harris, Verlina Brewer, Blair Anderson,

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Panther support protest in New York last week.

Ronald Satchell, Harold Bell, Deborah Johnson and Louis True-lock. They are scheduled to appear for arraignment Feb. 6.

The "justifiable homicide" verdict announced two weeks ago by the Chicago coroner's inquest into the Hampton and Clark killings was criticized last week by Jay Miller, Illinois director of the ACLU. Miller said since the jury heard numerous contradictions in police testimony and was presented only the police version of the shooting, it should have made an "inconclusive" verdict.

The independent inquiries begun by seven black congressmen and a national panel, headed by Arthur Goldberg and Roy Wilkins, are uncompleted. A national conference to defend the Panthers from government repression will convene in Chicago, March 6-8. The conference will bring together a number of persons and groups from the black, peace and labor movement.

Prior to the opening of the Panther 21 trial in New York, which was to begin Feb. 2, police said three undercover policemen who infiltrated the Panthers in August 1968 had been placed in protective custody. Their testimony is expected to play a major role in the government's attempt to prove the Panther 21, actually 22, conspired to bomb police precincts and other public places.

Gerald Lefcourt, a New York attorney for the Panthers, said the existence of three full-time police infiltrators "indicates clearly that the government wanted to try to set up the party from the beginning and to control its course." The policemen were reportedly Panther "members" until April 1969 when the grand jury indictments were handed down.

One of the 16 Panthers who have been imprisoned the past 10 months was released Jan. 30 after five New York churches raised money for her bail, set at \$100,000. Afeni Shakur, who was arrested April 2 along with her husband, Lumumba Shakur, was finally able to walk out of the Manhattan Women's House of Detention last week.

Nearly 1500 supporters of the Panther 21 marched last Monday in protest against the excessively high bails at the Manhattan Criminal Courts building, 100 Centre St., where the trial is being held.

A motion to have state supreme court justice John M. Murtagh removed as trial judge was rejected by the court's appellate division, in a 4-to-0 decision Jan. 28. Lefcourt indicated the decision would be appealed in federal court.

Contributions for the Panther's defense may be sent to the Committee to Defend the Panther 21, 37 Union Square West, New York, N.Y. 10003.