

Panther Charges Against Police Are Not Borne Out by the Facts

AT ALMOST the very moment the Black Panther Party launched its propaganda campaign charging a nationwide police plot to exterminate its members, Panthers in a large Western city were themselves plotting a late December ambush intended to assassinate three police officers.

Thanks to police intelligence work, the killings were aborted (although, to protect sources of information, no arrests were made). But that incident reflects the startling fact that the Panthers, currently the object of ill-informed sympathy from liberals, remain on the offensive in their three-year hot war with the police.

Indeed, the party's revolutionary antipolice campaign explains its immense appeal among totally alienated ghetto youth. There is deep irony, then, that the Panthers have won such sympathy from some important liberals who suspect police tactics, in one incident—the fatal shooting of two Panther leaders in the Dec. 4 Chicago police raid. Although the facts of the Chicago raid remain murky, there is clearly no evidence to support charges of a police extermination campaign against the Panthers.

Specifically, the charge by Charles Garry, a veteran white leftist lawyer who has become a major Panther spokesman, that 28 Panthers have been killed by police is an outrageous exaggeration.

One Panther whose death Garry has attributed to police, Alex Rackley, was actually killed by fellow Panthers in New Haven, Conn., last year. Suspected, unjustly, of being a police informant, tape recordings indicate Rackley was tortured (including buckets of scalding hot water poured on him) to get names of informants before he died.

Four other Panthers on Garry's list were, in fact, killed by members of US, a rival black extremist organization in Los Angeles headed by Ron Karenga. When a power struggle at UCLA's Black Student



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Union erupted into shooting on Jan. 17, 1969, between Panthers and US, two underground Panther leaders were killed. Subsequent sniping between the two organizations resulted in two more Panther deaths, on May 15 and May 25.

When carefully analyzed, Garry's list boils down to 10 Panthers killed by police. Most came in a way that cannot be interpreted as remotely resembling a police conspiracy. Typically, the Panthers opened fire first either in planned action or in a spontaneous confrontation, and, as in the shoot-outs with Karenga's men, they proved the less accurate marksmen. Such encounters can scarcely be described as police ambushes.

FOR EXAMPLE, on Aug. 5, 1968, in Los Angeles, a routine police patrol checked an auto filled with men parked in a filling station. Without warning, the men—Panthers all—opened fire. The police returned the fire. When the smoke cleared, two policemen were wounded (one severely in the chest) and three Panthers were dead.

The Panthers' usual role of aggressors in these shoot-outs follows stated party policy. Exiled chieftain Eldridge Cleaver in November exhorted his followers: "We must accelerate the slaughter of the pigs (police)." In the Jan. 3 edition of the weekly party newspaper, "The Black Panther," leader David Hilliard declares:

"We cannot waste time talking about community review boards because a community review board will not act as a shield for a .357

magnum bullet. We know that the only way to stop these-----is by picking up guns and killing those-----before they get a chance to kill us."

Unlike Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) leaders a few years ago, the Panthers have as much bite as bark. Weapon procurement is a principal party activity, and they aren't procured for range shooting. One particularly audacious example was the Panther ambush of a police car in Los Angeles last Oct. 18.

Over all, the Panthers have taken a toll. The claim by the current edition of "Black Panther" that "last year (1969) 167 pigs were thinned out by liberation fighters and this year looks as though it will surpass last year" is considerably overblown. But the accurate toll is grim enough: In eleven cities, 5 dead and 42 wounded in 26 months, including 4 dead and 23 wounded the last six months.

The Panthers are now trying to polish their reputations (with such gimmicks as breakfast for ghetto children) while underplaying their extraordinary use of violence in contacts with the outside world (which seldom sees "The Black Panther"). But it is precisely their wild abandon in challenging the police, unmatched by Karenga's US or any other black group, that explains the Panthers' magnetic impact on ghetto youth.

Now that Mao Tse-tung's red book of sayings (whose soporific effect discouraged these youths) is no longer required reading, the party's growth potential is unlimited. While generous donations from liberals aroused by the Chicago raid pour in as a protest against alleged police "genocide," this Panther pugnacity—as represented by last month's aborted police ambush plot—guarantees that Panther esteem in the ghetto will continue to rise.

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