

## An analysis

# Is there drive to 'get' Panthers?

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By L. F. Palmer Jr.

Bobby Hutton, Huey F. Newton, Eldridge Cleaver, Bobby Seale, David Hilliard.

And now Fred Hampton.

The leadership of the Black Panther Party has been steadily, and some say systematically, skinned off.

The slaying of Illinois Party Chairman Fred Hampton by police early Thursday led the Panthers to charge once more that there is a national conspiracy to destroy the revolutionary organization.

The national chairman of the Panthers, Bobby Seale, has



Cleaver



Seale



Newton



Hilliard

said that the imprisonment, exile and death of Panther chieftains "is nothing more than Richard M. Nixon attempting to destroy the national and state-level Black Panther Party leadership."

Seale, himself in prison, has said that U.S. officials are recruiting local law enforcement agencies across the nation to remove Panther leaders from the streets. They reason, Seale said, that

this will kill the movement, which FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover singled out as being "the greatest threat to the internal security of our country" among militant black groups.

Police officials deny any such plot. Yet the death of Hampton, who was being groomed for a high post in the national party, casts a spotlight on the fate of the Panther hierarchy:

- Hutton, national treasurer, was killed by police in Oakland, Calif., April 6, 1968.
- Newton, minister of defense,

is in prison, convicted of killing an Oakland policeman.

- Cleaver, minister of information and author of the best-selling "Soul on Ice," is a fugitive in exile.

• Seale, party chairman, is in prison after contempt of court charges growing out of his protests that his constitutional rights were being denied in the Conspiracy 8 (now Conspiracy 7) trial in Chicago.

- Hilliard, party chief of staff, is under arrest, accused of
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telling an antiwar rally that "we will kill Richard Nixon."

HAMPTON in the last speech he made in Chicago said:

"This system is out to kill us and we know it. Some say we are not ready to take on this monster. We say that we do not want to, but that is not the question any longer. The monster has taken us on and we have to deal with reality."

Dealing with reality, Panthers say, involves coping with an enormously complex pattern of harassment, including police raids, intimidation of Panthers selling the party newspaper, massive arrests and high bonds followed by dismissal of charges.

DONALD FREED of Beverly Hills, Calif., assistant to the provost at the California Institute of the Arts, declared:

"If what is being perpetrated against the Black Panther Party was being done to any white group, the liberal establishment would absolutely refuse to tolerate it any further."

"Just the matter of Panther arrests, with charges later

dropped, and bail in the millions, constitutes an unprecedented national scandal."

### **2 raids here called typical instances**

Two police raids on Black Panther headquarters at 2350 W. Madison are typical of what Freed describes. Charges of attempted murder were placed against six Panthers following a gun battle with police on Oct. 4.

On Nov. 10, the charges were dropped for lack of evidence.

In an earlier raid on the Panthers' headquarters, the FBI went in on a fugitive-arrest warrant, failed to find the fugitive and wrecked the office in the process.

Eight Panthers were arrested and charged with harboring a fugitive. Sixteen days later, the charges were dropped. George Sams, the fugitive sought by the FBI, was later revealed to be an informer for the FBI and police.

THE FBI or police, in rapid succession, conducted raids on Panthers across the country.

In two months, according to

Seale, more than 40 Panther leaders and more than 100 members were arrested.

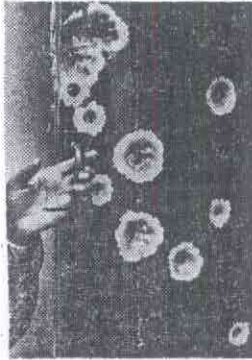
After reviewing incidents of police-Panther strife, the Task Force on Violent Aspects of Protest and Confrontation of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, concluded:

"The confrontations between the Panthers and some elements of the police has become a feud verging on open warfare. This warfare highlights the fact that for the black citizen, the policeman has ceased to be — if indeed he ever was — a neutral symbol of law and order."

The linking of Seale to the defendants in the conspiracy trial here is viewed in some legal circles as indicating similar problems within the nation's judicial system.

The Conspiracy 8 went on trial on a charge of conspiring to cross state lines to incite a riot at the Democratic National Convention.

Those close to this extraordinary chapter in American street politics know that Seale played a marginal role in the clashes.



Door of Black Panthers' headquarters at 2350 W. Madison riddled by bullets in October police raid.

JAY MILLER, director of the Illinois chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, who said he was mystified by Seale's indictment, attempted to discover the government's motive in charging him. Miller said he finally found one.

"A high ranking official in the U.S. Justice Department told me that the Panthers are a bunch of hoodlums and we

have to get this guy," Miller said.

Seale, bound and gagged after he consistently protested that his constitutional rights had been violated at the trial, was severed from the "S", imprisoned for four years for contempt and ordered tried alone at a later date.

IN ONE of the instances where charges against a Chicago Panther resulted in a conviction, Hampton earlier this year was found guilty of stealing \$71 worth of ice cream from a vendor on a Maywood playground.

He was convicted despite his testimony that he was not on the playground last April when the ice cream was stolen.

Displaying his own kind of humor, Hampton cracked: "I may be a pretty big dude, but I can't eat no 710 ice cream bars."

### **Party goal: free blacks in 'bondage'**

Seale contends the reason behind the alleged plot to destroy the Panthers is the

government's horror of socialist programs the Panthers favor.

The political nature of the party is made clear in what the Panthers refer to as their basic definition: "Black people in America are a colonized people in every sense of the term and white America is an organized imperialist force holding black people in colonial bondage."

Releasing black people from this bondage as seen by the Panthers has developed into the mission of the militant group, a mission most members recognize as suicidal.

HAMPTON WAS one of many young blacks who defected from the traditional civil rights movement after pursuing lawful, peaceful attempts to free "the colonized people."

His commitment to the revolutionary approach showed in the last speech he made in Chicago. It was on Nov. 13 at a memorial service for John and Michael Soto, two black brothers killed by police on the West Side.

On the morning of that same

day Spurgeon (Jake) Winters, a young Black Panther and a high school honor graduate, had been killed in an early morning shootout that took the lives of two policemen.

HAMPTON TALKED that day about the freedom he had sought but had never known:

"You don't try to articulate or arbitrate with anyone about what you will be or what you will do at a place that you have never been before, about a person you have never been allowed to be, about a time that you cannot set because of its own uncertainty and dependence on what you decide and do now."

Hampton declared the "only moratorium we want is a moratorium on wanton killing and oppressive tactics."

Then, with tears in his eyes and his voice choked up by emotion, Hampton voiced what turned out to be his benediction:

"I sometimes wonder what I would be doing with my life if I had been born free and had joined the movement. I think of it and I say to myself: 'We will be free.'"