

# The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

FRIDAY, AUGUST 27, 1971

PAGE A24

## The Chicago Indictment and the Panthers

The implications of the indictment of Chicago's chief prosecutor, State's Attorney Edward V. Hanrahan, and 13 other law enforcement officials run far beyond the question of their guilt or innocence. The squabbling that preceded its formal presentation raises questions about the integrity of the judicial system in Chicago and that, along with the substance of the indictment, may well have a substantial impact on the political effectiveness of Mayor Daley's organization, an impact that could be important in the 1972 presidential election. On the other hand, the fact that the indictment was returned by a grand jury and, despite monumental obstacles, survived to see the light of day provides another example of the weakness of the claim on which the Black Panthers staked so much—the claim that only a revolution would make the system of justice responsive to their complaints.

We do not know, of course, whether Mr. Hanrahan and the others are guilty of the charges made against them. Such a judgment must wait on the evidence adduced at trial and the decision of a jury. The basic charge is a serious one, that they conspired to obstruct justice in the investigation which followed a police raid on a Black Panther headquarters in Chicago, a raid in which two Panther leaders were killed. The specifics of the indictment allege that crucial evidence about the conduct of that raid was destroyed, disguised, concealed and manufactured in an effort to cover up police wrongdoing.

The political implications of the situation arise from the full support Mr. Hanrahan has enjoyed both in the past and in recent months from Mayor Daley. He had been groomed carefully for political success and had been the most important candidate on the ballot in 1968 as far as the Daley forces were concerned. His efforts to suppress this indictment had originally been sustained

These factors will undoubtedly be emphasized, fairly or unfairly, by the mayor's opponents in an effort to woo away the black voters who have provided substantial support in the past for Chicago Democrats as well as to persuade other voters that misgovernment is rampant in the city.

It is those same factors, of course, that help to undermine further the argument of the Black Panthers. The indictment itself does lend credence to their charge that some prosecutors and policemen are out to eliminate them—legally if possible, illegally if not. But if their propaganda about systematic official oppression had been valid, a federal grand jury would never have looked into this incident, the special state grand jury that returned the indictment would never have been called or, if it had been, would never have voted the indictment—and the judicial system would have suppressed permanently any indictment that happened by some fluke to emerge from a grand jury. Earlier this year, the dismissal of criminal charges against Panther leader Bobby Seale in Connecticut and the acquittal of a dozen Panthers by a jury in New York City provided other evidence of the dubiety of the Panther claim.

Elsewhere on this page today, we publish the summation, written by Rep. Richardson Preyer of North Carolina, of a study conducted by the House Internal Security Committee of the Panther movement. We do not agree with or support all that Mr. Preyer has to say nor, for that matter, do we support the continued existence of the committee on which he serves. But we think he is right in saying that the Panthers have destroyed themselves through their own excesses and that the operation of the nation's judicial system has done much to destroy their myth of systematic official oppression. The indictment in Chicago has helped the latter process along and we hope those charged with a crime by their