

12 Panthers on Coast Acquitted In Plotting Murder and Assault

LOS ANGELES, DEC. 23 (UPI) —A jury today acquitted Elmer Pratt, a leader of the Black Panther party in California, and 11 other defendants on charges of conspiracy to commit murder and assault with deadly weapons upon police officers.

The jury found Pratt and eight other Panthers guilty of conspiracy to possess illegal weapons, including a machine gun and fire bombs.

The seven-month trial grew out of a four-hour gun battle between policemen and Panthers at the party headquarters in Los Angeles on Dec. 8, 1969. Three policemen and six Panthers were wounded in the fight.

Three of the defendants were acquitted of all charges.

Wife Found Slain

The defense had argued that the gun battle was a result of provocation by policemen when they tried to enter the building, occupied by the Panthers, before dawn and then opened a massive barrage when shots were fired from inside.

Pratt, 26 years old, who was Deputy Defense Minister of the Panthers, is a follower of the Eldridge Cleaver faction of the party. His wife, Sandra, 23, who was also a defendant, was

found murdered in early November.

Security in the courtroom exceeded that at the trials of Sirhan B. Sirhan and Charles M. Manson. All spectators were searched and plainclothes men were scattered throughout the courtroom.

The verdict was received by the 10 men and two women defendants.

A riot erupted in the courtroom three days after Mrs. Pratt's body was found in a gutter, with Pratt and his closest followers swinging and kicking at other defendants considered to be supporters of Huey P. Newton, leader of another Panther faction.

Pratt and five other men have been held without bail on charges of conspiracy to murder policemen, but now that they have been found guilty only of the far lesser charge it was expected that their attorneys would shortly move for their release on bond.

Superior Court Judge George M. Dell set Jan. 13 for a hearing on the bail matter and other motions.

There were eight men and four women on the jury. Five were Negroes.