

# The Rise and Fall of THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY



## A Revolutionary Marxist Analysis

Jeffrey Blankfort

We reprint below an abridged version of a talk given at a Spartacist educational in New York City on April 10, by Spartacist League Central Committee member Don Alexander.

One of the characteristics of a fighting revolutionary vanguard party is that, through its communist program, it serves as the memory of the struggles of the working class and oppressed. In this regard, a number of the racist criminals who were involved in the bloody suppression of the Panthers are busy trying to smash working people. Imperialist criminal Richard Nixon was one of the chief architects of the bloody campaign to crush the Black Panthers. Nixon today is offering his services on behalf of the capitalist class, advising Clinton as to how best to promote vicious capitalist exploitation and social misery in the ex-USSR. Desperately seeking to find a way out of the economic blind alley of moribund U.S. imperialism, Clinton and Wall Street are further propping up Yeltsin and other bloodsucking Russian capitalist exploiters, dubbed "democrats" and "reformers."

Here at home, the empty promises of this "new Democrat," who was elected among other means by signing a death warrant that sent to his death a brain-damaged black prisoner, are also reflected by the lengthening unemployment lines, the even more savage killer cuts in social services, medical care, edu-

cation, along with racist police murder and terror, and the drive toward a racist police state, which is graphically illustrated in Los Angeles, and not only in Los Angeles, if we reflect on the preparations around the trial of the cops who beat Rodney King.

Now a number of the former Panthers have made their peace with this monstrously racist capitalist system. Former Chicago Panther Bobby Rush is now a Democrat in Congress. Bobby Seale publishes his barbecue books and sings the praises of self-help, i.e., black capitalism. Elaine Brown, Erica Huggins, Kathleen Cleaver are all reconciled to the rotting bourgeois social order. And Huey Newton, who was hounded by the police for years, ended up apolitical, a drug addict. He was gunned down on the streets of West Oakland by a drug dealer. Of course, this gladdened the hearts of the racist cops that oppress us throughout this country.

The people who remain unbowed and unbroken, like Geronimo Pratt and Mumia Abu-Jamal, are imprisoned because of their political beliefs and are the victims of ruling-class vengeance. In 1968, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover stated, "The Negro youth and moderate[s] must be made to understand that if they succumb to revolutionary teachings, they will be dead revolutionaries." And of course, during that period, the Black Panthers in particular and black radicals in general knew that you were

going to be dead. The government had their "black extremist" squads, and their U2 surveillance plans, to spy and track the civil rights protesters.

Today more than ever, radical black workers and youth especially have every reason to be communists, Trotskyists, and fight alongside white, Latino and Asian workers for the expropriation without compensation of the parasitic capitalist class. The racist capitalist system is set up to exploit and kill us. The racist bipartisan "war on drugs" ensures that, for the vast majority of black and Latino youth, "head start" means long years in prison, police clubs, police bullets and early graves.

From Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown, who has ties to the Duvaliers, to "put them to death" Virginia Democratic governor Wilder, to the nationalist demagogues Farrakhan and Al Sharpton, to Jesse Jackson and the Democratic mayors like Dinkins, a sizable number of black overseers help keep the oppressed black masses down. Echoing the racist garbage of their capitalist masters, they blame black people for their horrible oppression. This small petty-bourgeois layer represents the 20 percent of the black population that benefited from the civil rights movement. Their theme song is "We Have Overcome." When the capitalists say jump, they say, how high?

Along with the racist dogs in the Democratic and Republican parties, they

supported the white racist imperialist invasion and murder in Somalia, and supported U.S. imperialism's bloody massacre of over 100,000 Iraqis. One could safely entertain the proposition that, if they were alive at the time of the Civil War, they would have remained on the masters' plantations. I'm tired of hearing how these enemies of the black masses and working class supposedly can't be criticized, because they "inherited a mess." But there were Rodney Kings before Rodney King.

If workers were in power, if we had a workers government in America, what happened to Rodney King or Dr. Gunn, the abortion doctor recently murdered by a "Right to Life" fanatic in Pensacola, would never have happened. And if isolated instances of such madness occurred, the perpetrators would find no resting place—because the long arm of working-class justice would ensure that. We live in a class society, a capitalist society based upon the brutal exploitation of the working class by the capitalists. We don't have to go hungry and homeless—there's plenty to go around, and we have to build a fighting, racially integrated, multiracial revolutionary workers party and organize to take what's ours.

The Black Panther Party represented the best of a generation of radical black youth who wanted to smash capitalism and make a revolution. They embodied the hopes and aspirations for black freedom of an entire generation which sought to strip away the sense of powerlessness and hopelessness of the long-oppressed black masses.

The FBI's J. Edgar Hoover targeted the Panthers for destruction, calling them public enemy number one, and "the greatest threat to internal security." To kill Black Panthers, the FBI revived COINTELPRO, the counterintelligence program, which was originally set up in 1956 against the Communist Party, and unleashed the most savage and systematic campaign of racist murder in modern American history. Some 233 out of 295 FBI COINTELPRO actions against black organizations were against the Panthers. At least 38 Panthers were murdered by agents of this racist capi-

Ebony

New Times



Principal leaders of Black Panther Party from left: Bobby Seale, Huey Newton, Kathleen and Eldridge Cleaver.

talist state, through the instrument of COINTELPRO.

### Robert Williams and the Deacons for Defense

Formed in 1966 by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, the Panthers considered themselves the heirs of Malcolm X, and advocated armed self-defense against racist attacks. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense had its roots in the failure of the liberal-led civil rights movement to eradicate black oppression. It is customary to regard as the pinnacle of the civil rights movement the 1963 March on Washington demonstration. This is a lie. Malcolm X rightly condemned that demonstration as a "farce on Washington," and a sellout of the black masses by the Uncle Tom black misleaders, from Martin Luther King to Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, and a victory for the hypocritical liberal Kennedy administration's token civil rights legislation.

Early on in the civil rights movement, black militants had challenged King's and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's philosophy of "turn the other cheek, love your enemy." In 1959, Robert F. Williams, an NAACP member and veteran, had formed a National Rifle Association club in Monroe, North Carolina to defend against Klan attacks on civil rights demonstrators. This led to his dismissal by the NAACP; Williams was hounded out of the country, and eventually went to Cuba after he was framed up for "kidnapping" a white couple. Another militant black self-defense organization was the Deacons for Defense and Justice in Bogalusa, Louisiana. The Deacons successfully defended blacks against Klan terror, and we assisted in that effort by raising money. This was captured in our slogan, "Every dime buys a bullet."

In Birmingham, Alabama in 1963, the black masses fought back against the Klan and Bull Connor's sadistic racist cops. During the protests in Birmingham, four black Sunday school girls were killed by a Klan bomb. The Klan also bombed the hotel where King was staying (he was absent at the time), and firebombed his brother's home. The blacks armed themselves and fought back. John F. Kennedy federalized the Alabama National Guard precisely



WV Photo

**Spartacist League spokesman Don Alexander.**

because the black masses were no longer following the nonviolent script.

In the summer of 1963, after Birmingham, street protests spread throughout the South. A Justice Department study counted 758 demonstrations in 108 cities during the ten weeks of the Birmingham crisis. In the next five years, black revolts that were spontaneous, unorganized upheavals swept city after city: Harlem in 1964, Watts in 1965, Cleveland in '66, and Detroit and Newark in '67. And when King was assassinated in '68, over a hundred cities saw black rebellions.

The civil rights movement went North in the mid-'60s, and King's SCLC organization ran into a brick wall of racist resistance. King's open housing campaign met with violent racist resistance in the racist enclave of Cicero, with

American Nazi George Lincoln Rockwell leading a pack of snarling racist dogs. SNCC, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, tried to take up the challenge, but it was clear: the racists had won, they had outmobilized the civil rights fighters on the streets while Democratic mayor Daley's cops stood by.

By 1966, SNCC and CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality) had embraced pseudo-nationalism, and the abstentionism of the fake-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, which tailed behind Martin Luther King and the Black Muslims, was a terrible crime and betrayal of the struggle for black freedom. This has cost the revolutionary movement dearly in the number of black militants who could have been won at that juncture to Trotskyism, to revolutionary internationalism, to the program of world revolution.

The Revolutionary Tendency of the Socialist Workers Party—the forerunners of the Spartacist League—fought inside the SWP to win black militants to a revolutionary working-class program and perspective, for the building of an independent Trotskyist vanguard party to lead a fight for power not only in this country, but throughout the world. The Socialist Workers Party subsequently expelled us for our revolutionary politics.

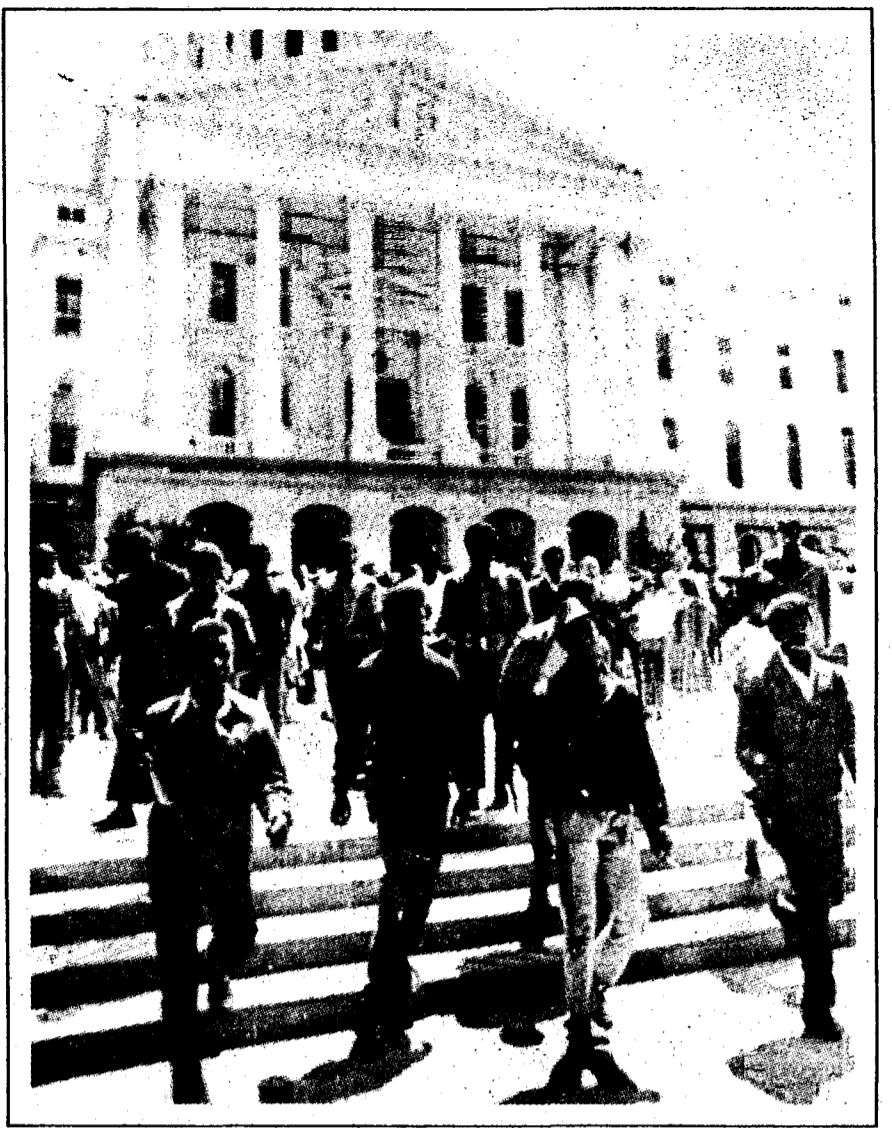
### Contradictions of "Black Power"

As a result of the futility of "bearing moral witness" by packing the jails, by relying on the racist capitalist government and its treacherous liberal front men—and most importantly, because of the passivity of the organized labor movement led by labor traitors—black militants, out of despair, turned to separatism and cried out for "Black Power." As a slogan, "Black Power" frightened the racist establishment, and liberals stopped their checks flowing into the coffers of the most militant civil rights organizations, like SNCC and CORE. We pointed out at the time that the "Black Power" slogan represented in part an attempt to fight for the interests of the black poor, but we emphasized that if the fight for black liberation was not posed in class terms it would serve as a bridge to the Democratic Party of imperialist war and racism.

In comparison to other black nationalist organizations of the '60s, the Panthers sought to organize independently of the Democrats and Republicans. As eclectic, contradictory radical nationalists, their outlook was variously influenced by the teachings of Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. Marxism became for them a kind of smorgasbord, from which one picked and chose to suit their momentary political needs. Like New Left radicals as a whole, they rejected the key Marxist contention that the working class, because of its unique relationship to the means of production, held the potential social power to smash the racist capitalist system and state.

This New Left impressionism was exploded by the powerful May-June 1968 French general strike, which was betrayed by the Stalinists. This was the largest general strike in the history of capitalism, and had the French working class taken power under the leadership of a Leninist vanguard party, the face of the world could have been changed. As nationalists, the Panthers looked to the lumpenproletariat—the brothers on the block, the ex-pimps, the hustlers—as the vanguard of black liberation, who, in Fanon's words, represented the "wretched of the earth." Fanon was a West Indian intellectual and champion of the Algerian independence struggle. Fanon's book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, was a political fad in radical circles.

Fanon's emphasis on the cathartic role of violence became for the Panthers the basis for their talk of urban guerrilla warfare. As a ghetto-based revolutionary nationalist organization, the Panthers



AP  
**May 1967: Armed Panthers at Sacramento State Capitol protest racist gun control bill.**

believed that the most oppressed were the most revolutionary, that social revolution would happen as a result of radicalized peasants in the countryside encircling the white European nations, whose proletarians were "bought off" and incapable of making a revolution. So the task, simply put, was to "pick up the gun" to electrify the internal "black colony" in the U.S. They hawked copies of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, and they had a song that they sang a lot, "There's a pig upon the hill, if you don't get him, the Panthers will." They had a lot of "off the pig" rhetoric.

The Panthers self-consciously regarded themselves as a vanguard party. But they were not a vanguard party. They were New Left sectoralists. That is, their program was that blacks would liberate blacks, Hispanics would liberate Hispanics, and so on. A sectoralist program, which is a strategy for dividing the ranks of the future proletarian army fighting for state power.

A Leninist vanguard party, that is, a tribune of the people, fights against all aspects of social oppression on the basis of an internationalist revolutionary program. We in the International Commu-

nist League are fighting to build that party, like Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevik Party that in 1917 led the multinational working class to a victorious socialist revolution. Our fighting program of revolutionary integrationism shows the road forward to the assimilation of black people in an egalitarian socialist society.

We believe that the fight against racial oppression is key, strategic for a workers revolution, and without militant, united, integrated class struggle against all wings of the capitalist exploiters, the proletariat cannot seize political power. The American workers revolution needs black leadership. Black workers are crucial components of the multiracial American working class, and can lead a fight on behalf of all of the oppressed and exploited for workers revolution, and for smashing imperialist domination from Puerto Rico to Latin America and Africa.

### Against the Cultural Nationalists

Now, the fight against racist cop terror and murder provided the impetus for the Panthers' initial organization of the black  
*continued on page 10*

#### Partial contents:

- Malcolm X: What's Missing from Spike Lee's Movie
- Activists Remember the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Era
- Imperialism Starves Africa
- U.S. Global Cops Out of Somalia!
- Vancouver: 3,000 Drive Off Fascist Skinheads
- Georgia: Down With the Flag of Slavery
- Drywallers Strike Settled, Fight for Solid Union Goes On
- Moscow: African Student Murdered by Yeltsin's Cops

**\$1** (48 pages)

Order from:  
Spartacist Pub. Co.  
Box 1377 GPO  
New York, NY 10116

A Spartacist Pamphlet \$1

**Black History and the Class Struggle**  
No. 10

**Malcolm X: The Man, the Myth, the Struggle**

What's Missing from Spike Lee's Movie  
Activists Remember the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Era

"New World Order" Neocolonialism in Africa

February 1993 Spartacist Publishing Co. Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116

# Panthers...

(continued from page 9)

masses. Newton and Seale also had to settle their accounts with the "pork chop" cultural nationalists, who argued that black people should spend their time rediscovering their African roots by donning dashikis, selling African artifacts and sitting around cussing out white people. The Panthers had to contend with other black nationalist organizations contesting for hegemony of radical black youth.

The FBI and the L.A. police would eventually find a very useful role for the cultural nationalists against the Black Panthers. In 1969, the L.A.-based organization of US (United Slaves) of Ron Karenga killed L.A. Panther leaders Bunchy Carter and John Huggins on the UCLA campus. The FBI was heavily involved in those murders, like they were heavily involved in the murders of Panthers in San Diego—in fact, more than in L.A., Panthers were killed by US members, with FBI involvement.

The cultural nationalists posed as militants. And some youth today may think that the so-called militant talk about "Afrocentricity," and voluntary self-segregation as a means of eradicating racism, is something new—it isn't. If one examines the politics of Karenga and Imamu Baraka, who was his ally



AP photos  
December 1969: LAPD assaults Panther headquarters. Geronimo Pratt, in jail for the last 20 years, was targeted for "neutralization."



italism—that's what *they* meant by "Black Power." And various cultural nationalists run around today, like Spike Lee—that's what *they* mean by "Black Power." This meant concretely that Karenga allied himself with militant-talking pro-capitalist hustlers, backed by white capitalists.

It was noteworthy that the ruling-class co-optation of these phony militants was

the racist oppressors, who immediately smell incipient insurrection. The bourgeoisie fights to keep a monopoly of force to prevent the destruction of their system of democracy for the rich. Clinton and the Democrats are furiously pushing gun control legislation—the better to keep us down. From Robert F. Williams to Malcolm X and the Panthers, historically gun control laws have been used to disarm blacks and the working class. We say that gun control kills blacks! We call on class-conscious workers and fighters for the liberation of the oppressed to defend the right to bear arms, to defend the Second Amendment, to defend ourselves against the murderous ruling class and their bloody hyenas and shock troops—the cops, the Klan, the Nazis, the skinheads and the anti-abortion terrorists.

## Murderous State Repression

Very early on, the racist capitalist state mobilized to disarm the Panthers. In 1968, the California legislature held hearings on the Mulford Bill—a gun control bill pushed by a California assemblyman in the Oakland-Berkeley area. His bill was known in the press as the "Panther Bill," and would have made it illegal to carry unconcealed weapons. The Panthers fought back—they appeared in Sacramento armed and wearing their black berets, black leather jackets, powder blue shirts and black boots—to challenge this assault on democratic rights. While they were marching on the Capitol grounds to the floor of the assembly, they ran into Ronald Reagan, the California governor, who was talking to schoolchildren. Reagan saw the Panthers coming around the corner, stopped talking, and reportedly started running!

Now the Black Panther Party defied the racist rulers by expressing solidarity with the Vietnamese and Cuban revolutions. The Panthers offered to send troops to fight alongside the Vietnamese against bloody U.S. imperialism. At their height, according to David Hilliard in his recent autobiography, *This Side of Glory* (Little, Brown, 1993), they had 4,000 members and 35 chapters. Imme-

diately the bourgeoisie geared up for their destruction. Nixon, J. Edgar Hoover and the bourgeois establishment put together a program for a nationwide search-and-destroy mission. Hoover's directive was to prevent the rise of a black "messiah," and the recruitment of black youth.

The Panther leadership was decimated: Huey Newton was shot, framed up for murdering a cop, and imprisoned for almost two years on that alone. Bobby Seale was jailed for his role in the Sacramento events, and was framed, along with seven others, in the aftermath of the cop riot at the Democratic Party convention in Chicago in 1968. He was also jailed for the murder of a Panther in New Haven, and that era evoked the image of Seale being bound and gagged in court. In West Oakland, 17-year-old Bobby Hutton, the Panther treasurer, was the first Panther killed—he was shot in the back by the cops. Eldridge Cleaver, who was with Hutton, barely survived. Cleaver was jailed, released and forced into exile.

Panther offices were raided and shot up in several cities. In Chicago, as I mentioned earlier, on December 4, 1969, in a predawn raid, Panther leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were killed in their beds while they slept. Police agent William O'Neill, who was Hampton's bodyguard, provided the floor plans to Hampton's apartment. The FBI orchestrated and the Chicago police carried out this massacre.

Two days after the police killed Hampton and Clark, the L.A. SWAT squad attacked the Panthers' office, and for five hours subjected them to thousands of rounds of ammunition. The cops especially wanted to kill Geronimo Pratt, and Pratt's military knowledge saved his life and his comrades. Virtually the entire New York Panther leadership was held for nearly two years in jail, on the ludicrous charge that they had plotted to blow up, among other things, the Bronx Botanical Gardens. It really clearly underscores that fact that the courts haven't much changed since *Dred Scott*, the black slave who sued for his freedom in 1857, in which it was stated, to paraphrase, that black people have no rights that the white man is bound to respect. The white ruling class in this country, and its capitalist courts, have no justice for working people and oppressed minorities.

How did the Panthers fight this? Who did they turn to? Who did they consider their allies? Certainly not the working class, the integrated labor movement—though the basis existed, because briefly, in 1969, the Panthers formed a caucus at the Fremont, California GM auto plant. Hilliard had been a longshoreman for a while; his brother June, a party member, was a city bus driver. And the Panthers knew that there were white workers at a union oil facility, whose heads were being beaten by the scabberding cops, who took up the Panthers' characterization of the cops as "pigs." There was a basis that existed, to link the ghetto to the factories, which required a class-struggle leadership of the labor movement to wage a militant fight against the killer cops,



Chicago Tribune  
1969: Chicago police/FBI murdered Panther leaders Fred Hampton (right) and Mark Clark in their beds.



UPI

during that period, the reactionary role of the cultural nationalists, of these Panther-killers, emerges as nothing more than militant-talking pro-police thugs. Ronald Reagan met with Karenga in 1968, and praised him. The *Wall Street Journal* described this meeting, remarking that Karenga is "typical of many militants who talk looting and burning but actually are eager to gather influence for quiet bargaining with the predominantly white power structure."

Following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Karenga met secretly with Los Angeles police chief Thomas Reddin and played an important part in preventing an outbreak of riots in L.A. Many years ago, revolutionary nationalists (myself included then) used to wonder why we'd always hear about the Panther 4 or 7 or 21 on trial, but never the US organization. Dashikis never stopped bullets—why were they so immune to this?

What they were saying was that the first task was to liberate your mind, then fight for revolution—the main problem was that black people suffered from a lack of culture, that culture takes precedence over everything else, that racist *minds* created racist institutions, and that one fought racist ideas, *not* racist institutions. This is a profoundly idealist mystical conception, and it ignores the material economic roots and basis of racism. It had a purpose. The cultural nationalists were advocates of black cap-

very direct and forthcoming: in 1969, the head of the Clairol company gave a nod of approval to a "Black Power" conference in Philadelphia at which Karenga was present. He told his audience that at first the term "Black Power" "very frankly filled me with dread," but it was no longer the case, because he understood "Black Power" to mean "equity," and "empowerment"—that is, "ownership of apartments, ownership of homes, ownership of businesses, as well as equitable treatment for all people."

In a partial fashion, the Panthers fought the cultural nationalists' cynical withdrawal from struggle and their anti-militant program of cultural nationalism. Huey Newton, in a famous prison interview, noted some of the aspects of cultural nationalism.

"The cultural nationalists are concerned with returning to the old African culture and thereby regaining their identity and freedom. In other words, they feel that the African culture will automatically bring political freedom. Many times cultural nationalists fall into line as reactionary nationalists. 'Papa Doc' in Haiti is an excellent example of reactionary nationalism. He oppresses the people but he does promote the African culture. He is against anything other than black, which on the surface seems very good, but to him it is only to mislead the people. He merely kicked out the racists and replaced them with himself as the oppressor. Many of the nationalists in this country seem to desire the same ends."

Since slavery, armed blacks have always struck fear in the hearts of



Life

Waaser/Newsweek



J. Edgar Hoover and Nixon launched murderous COINTELPRO campaign, enlisting cultural nationalist hustlers like Ron Karenga (right) against the Panthers.

who are armed bodies of men defending capitalist property.

### "UFAF": CP-Style Popular Frontism

But instead the Panthers established alliances with the petty-bourgeois Peace and Freedom Party, who ran Cleaver for president in 1968. This party was a pressure group on the Democratic Party. In the face of fierce, unrelenting ruling-class repression, the Panthers didn't turn to the integrated labor movement—the only social force with the power and interest to fight racist police terror—but clinked glasses with composers like Leonard Bernstein and actors like Marlon Brando, who participated in one of their police patrols. In Berkeley, they backed the formation of a self-flagellating white guilt group called "Honkeys for Huey" to fight for Newton's freedom. The Panthers were trying to augment their forces, and held negotiations with top leaders of SNCC, and briefly Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown and James Forman entered their ranks. This was a very short-lived fusion, because it exploded as Carmichael pressed them to break their ties with all whites, and this led Bobby Seale to publicly denounce Carmichael for playing the Ku Klux Klan game.

In 1969, as the bourgeois repression escalated, the Panthers organized the so-called "United Front Against Fascism" conference, in which the reformist Communist Party played a prominent role. The Panthers discovered the virtues of the counterrevolutionary refor-



James/Philadelphia Inquirer

1969: Mumia Abu-Jamal, then Minister of Information for Philadelphia Black Panthers, is today on Pennsylvania death row, on frame-up murder charges.

The Panthers had a ten-point program, which was a program of mildly liberal reforms. They'd call on the government for reparations, they wanted land. Some of their demands would sound familiar today: they wanted the universities to teach the "true history" of black people and oppressed people in this country, etc. But basically it was a program to reform capitalism, a system based on the bourgeoisie striving for maximum profit, which can't be reformed. We Trotskyists put forth a revolutionary pro-

the basis of hero worship and glorification of a street-gang mentality. Hilliard admits as much today, that they consciously built up a cult of personality around Newton. He admits that their glorification of lumpenism caused them a number of problems, and here's one graphic example:

"We send some Panthers in our Panther truck—a contribution from a support group, it has a picture of a springing black panther and the words 'The Black Panther' painted on the side—to San Francisco on a distribution run. Couple of hours later we get a telephone call. Our Panther truck is in a shoot-out. The driver pulls up at a gas station. One guy—Bill Brent—goes to the john while the others gas up. Some time passes. The tank is full, still no Bill Brent. The members look around. Where's Bill? Oh, there's Bill: he's robbing the attendant. The guys in the truck are amazed. They don't know what to do, get him or leave? At that moment the third party arrives: some police drive by, see Bill with the gun, set off their sirens. Freaked, Bill forgets about the attendant and fires on the cops. The rest is pandemonium. Finally, a bullet grazes Brent and everyone's arrested; the Panther truck is seized. Next thing we know, the five o'clock news claims the Party has tried robbing a gas station in broad daylight for the grand sum of seventy-five dollars."

So it's not an abstract question when we insist upon the centrality of the proletariat in fighting to abolish the racist capitalist system.

In 1971, the Panthers suffered a split between the more overtly reformist, pro-Democratic majority Newton wing, and the urban guerrilla warfare Cleaver wing—a split characterized by murderous internal factionalism, and inflamed by COINTELPRO provocations. The corruption of top Panther leaders nailed down their destruction, like Newton's

luxurious Oakland penthouse overlooking Lake Merritt. Both of the factions sent their factional members onto the streets to murder each other. By 1973, Bobby Seale in Oakland was running as a Democrat in the city elections.

In her autobiography, *A Taste of Power* (Random House, 1993), Elaine Brown is ecstatic on the role of the Panthers in organizing the black vote for ex-judge Democrat Lionel Wilson, the city's first black mayor. Brown talks about the role they played in Jerry Brown's campaign in 1976 for president, and she tells how the Panthers degenerated into criminal thugs holding up after-hour bars and pushing dope.

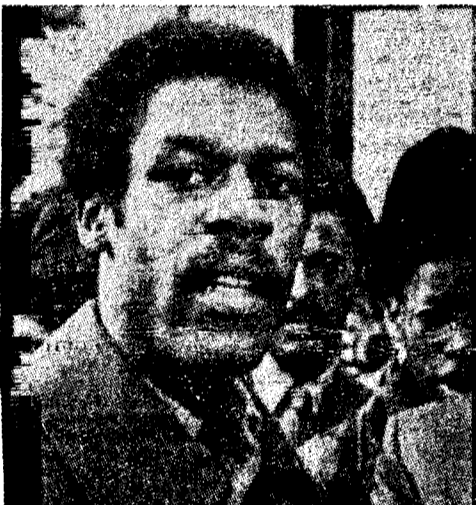
The physical assaults on Panther women are laid bare in all of their sickening, raw, brutal, bloody and frightening forms. Brown ends her book literally running to the airport in fear for her life. She makes this characterization of her experiences in the black power movement:

"A woman in the Black Power movement was considered, at best, irrelevant. A woman asserting herself was a pariah. A woman attempting the role of leadership was, to my proud black Brothers, making an alliance with the 'counterrevolutionary, man-hating, lesbian, feminist white bitches.' It was a violation of some Black Power principle that was left undefined. If a black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was said to be eroding black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the black race. She was an enemy of black people."<sup>1</sup>

From Stokely Carmichael's (Kwame Ture) statement that the position of women in the movement is "prone," to Eldridge Cleaver's "pussy power" chauvinist filth, to Farrakhan's Nation of Islam segregation of women, the nationalists seek to keep women in their place as baby factories, opposing birth control and abortion as genocide, and women's equality as "the devil's concept"—those are Karenga's words.

From Harriet Tubman in the Civil War to courageous Fannie Lou Hamer, who fought the rabid segregationists in Mississippi, to many women in the Panthers, black women have been in the forefront of the fight for black freedom. Revolutionary black women belong in our party, and we say to any of you who want to put an end to racial, sexual and class oppression by fighting for international workers revolution: you should join the Spartacist League, which has no interests separate from those of the working class and oppressed. ■

<sup>1</sup>Editor's note: To her credit, while denouncing the rampant male chauvinism in the BPP, Elaine Brown defends the Panthers against the vile attack by black liberal feminist Alice Walker, who dismisses revolutionary struggle in favor of "self" and gay-baits the Panthers as nothing but macho "punks" (see "Black Panthers or Black Punks," *New York Times*, 5 May).



UPI

Elaine Brown

Former BPP leaders David Hilliard and Elaine Brown have recently published autobiographical accounts of the Panthers.

mist popular-front program: a class-collaborationist trap which has historically tied the workers to the "progressive wing" of the capitalist exploiters, and which paved the way for the bloody defeats of the working class from China in 1927, to Chile in 1973, and to the horrible bloodbath of the Maoist-influenced Indonesian Communist Party, which left over 500,000 workers and peasants dead in 1965. It also means today in South Africa that the African National Congress program of "power sharing" and a government of "national unity" paves the way for the bloody defeat of the working class. An expression of that, of course, is the assassination that we heard of today, of Chris Hani, the general secretary of the South African Communist Party. There is no possibility of appeasing imperialism anywhere.

The popular-front reformist program meant in this country that during World War II—which was an inter-imperialist war, and not a "war for democracy against fascism"—the Stalinists supported Roosevelt, backed the internment of Japanese Americans, defended the A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, opposed the struggle for black rights, and broke strikes to preserve their alliance with the Democratic Roosevelt regime. At this United Front Against Fascism conference, the Panthers' program was a reformist one, "community control of the police." Today it's dressed up as "community policing," and behind it is the deadly reformist illusion that the capitalist state can be pressured into reforming itself, into dismantling its repressive state apparatus.

gram, the Transitional Program, which is based upon fighting for the immediate, burning needs of the masses for jobs for all, for decent education, free medical care, etc. And all of these elementary transitional demands immediately pose the question of fighting for power, of linking the struggle around these immediate needs to the struggle to smash capitalism.

The Panthers used gangster tactics to silence their leftist critics, which we vigorously denounced at the time. There were Maoists in the Students for a Democratic Society, and other fake-leftists, who uncritically tailed behind the Panthers and their nationalism—they were vicarious cheerleaders. We fought against their nationalist program, explaining that blacks are not a nation, but an oppressed color-caste forcibly segregated, in this racist capitalist society, at the bottom, although integrated into the political economy. Historically, blacks formed a significant component of the reserve army of labor. Increasingly that's not even the case today, because of the deindustrialization of this country by the rapacious capitalists.

### Glorification of Lumpenism, Male Chauvinism

It is tragic that the Panthers were destroyed by bloody state repression, and there was not the communist intervention of a revolutionary party sizable enough to win the best of these radical black youth. With their military posturing, the Panthers were easy pickings for the mass murderers of U.S. imperialism. You can't build a revolutionary party on

## SPARTACIST LEAGUE/U.S. LOCAL DIRECTORY

National Office: Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116 • (212) 732-7860

<b>Atlanta</b> Box 4012 Atlanta, GA 30302	<b>Detroit</b> Box 441043 Detroit, MI 48244	<b>Norfolk</b> Box 1972, Main PO Norfolk, VA 23501
<b>Boston</b> Box 390840, Central Sta. Cambridge, MA 02139 (617) 492-3928	<b>Los Angeles</b> Box 29574, Los Feliz Sta. Los Angeles, CA 90029 (213) 380-8239	<b>Oakland</b> Box 29497 Oakland, CA 94604 (510) 839-0851
<b>Chicago</b> Box 6441, Main PO Chicago, IL 60680 (312) 663-0715	<b>Madison</b> Box 1492 Madison, WI 53701	<b>San Francisco</b> Box 77494 San Francisco, CA 94107 (415) 777-9367
<b>Cleveland</b> Box 91037 Cleveland, OH 44101	<b>New York</b> Box 444, Canal St. Sta. New York, NY 10013 (212) 267-1025	<b>Washington, D.C.</b> Box 75073 Washington, D.C. 20013 (202) 872-8240

## TROTSKYIST LEAGUE OF CANADA/LIGUE TROTSKYSTE DU CANADA

<b>Toronto</b> Box 7198, Station A Toronto, ON M5W 1X8 (416) 593-4138	<b>Montréal</b> C.P. Les Atriums, B.P. 32066 Montréal, QC H2L 4V5 (514) 849-6540	<b>Vancouver</b> Box 2717, Main P.O. Vancouver, BC V6B 3X2 (604) 687-0353
--	--	--