

REPORT ON ISC AND THE PANTHER CONFERENCE

Friday night about 15 ISCers went to the Panther Conference. We set up our table and distributed the IS supplement. After listening to several boring speeches and booing Aptheker, about half the comrades left while the other half stayed to hear him speak. Before the conference began and during the speeches, members of RYM SDS went around pointing out PL and WSA people who had managed to get through the Panther security at the door. The justification that the RYM leaders had for this was that the Panthers (who had decided before the conference began that PL and WSA were not welcome) had asked them to. Aptheker continued to speak on and on. During that time, a group of Panthers began to look at the literature on the various tables. The Spartacist table was picked up, and the literature and two Spartacists were thrown out, because they had been distributing a leaflet critical of the United Front. The Panthers then looked at the ISC table. They looked at the IS supplement and the program in brief on the back and banned its distribution at the conference. Then they looked at Two Souls of Socialism and banned that. Then they told us to remove the table and the literature from the conference.

The Friday night session was scheduled to have a few speeches and then a panel on Women versus Fascism and then a talk by Aptheker. However, Aptheker went before the panel and gave a very long, dull speech. This prompted many women and men to get up and demand that Aptheker stop and let the women's panel start. The response by the Panthers to this was to call these people pigs and provocateurs. Many women, therefore, attended a special workshop on Saturday to discuss what had happened the night before. When it became clear that a majority of women there wanted to issue a leaflet about women's liberation, a few women connected with the RYM SDS NO effectively disrupted the meeting by resorting to chanting and yelling. The majority of women then had to move away in order to continue the discussion. A leaflet drafting committee was set up, but it could not agree among itself and so no leaflet was put out.

Saturday morning and afternoon a few comrades attended the sessions. During that time a leaflet was written entitled "What's Wrong with This Conference?" The leaflet was distributed at the evening session outside the auditorium. After 20 minutes or so, a group of Panthers emerged from the building. They reacted differently to different people passing out the leaflet. One comrade was shoved down the short flight of stairs and then pushed out of the parking lot in front of the auditorium. Most of the others were either pushed out or told to leave. Then the Panthers moved over to a park right across from the auditorium where PL was distributing a leaflet. The Panthers pushed the PLers away. When the Panthers began to move back in, a fight developed between the Panther sycophants and PL, which was winning even though outnumbered. (Jeff Jones, inter-organizational secretary of RYM SDS: "The one thing I like about PL

is that they are willing to fight.") The Panthers moved between the two groups and PL left. Most people went back inside, and our comrades began distributing the leaflets outside again. Two Panthers outside got more Panthers and pushed us out again. After a few minutes we went back to distribute more. The same two Panthers started pointing us out to people but didn't do anything. Then all of a sudden a couple hundred people poured out of the auditorium. RYM SDS, twenty minutes after PL had left, came outside to fight them. Discovering that the Plers were nowhere to be found, the RYM people set up a security force all around the building to make sure PL didn't get in. Inside the convention hall up to Sunday night there was no participation from the floor except the spontaneous demonstration Friday night.

Sunday afternoon, about 15 comrades went to the park where that session was being held and distributed the IS, the first leaflet, and a second leaflet about the Womens Caucus that was held and the treatment of the women question by the conference in general. We spread out all over the park and passed them out for about twenty minutes before one of us was grabbed by the Panthers. After making some attempts to resist, the comrade was carried off by five Panthers. A second comrade was also taken. They were brought outside the park to a playground and searched. After the Panthers had gone through everything in their pockets, a Panther leader (probably Masai) came and said that the line was that the ISC could distribute its literature. He added that it was obvious that "the people were not reacting favorably towards it." Which was not exactly the case as almost everyone did respond favorably to it. There was no more trouble in the afternoon.

During this time the Radical Student Union at Berkeley held several caucuses. In these the ISC members of the RSU fought for 1) Opposition to PL's exclusion as well as the censorship of both the ISC and the Spartacists; 2) Condemning the NO goons for their role in keeping PL out and fingering Plers; 3) Criticizing the political direction of the conference; 4) Rejection of the bullshit about white skin privileges (the NO people had argued against community control of the police in the white working-class communities. Robert Avakian: "People in the oppressor nation don't have the right to fight for democratic rights."); 5) Criticizing the NO women for disrupting the women's caucus and the Panthers for intimidating women Friday night; and 6) passing out a leaflet at the RYM SDS meeting and the conference. We lost the first by one vote, the next three we won, and lost the last two by a wide majority. The leaflet was handed out at the RYM caucus Sunday afternoon.

The RYM meeting that afternoon was supposed to decide what the SDS position would be towards the Community Control petition. At this meeting the NO leadership was smashed. Time after time people from either the ISC or the RSU or others disenchanted with the RYM NO spoke. People were won over to the fact that community control in the white working class was not racist although most did not support it for various other reasons, to criticizing the Panthers for their handling of us and the Spartacists and

the Women's Panel, and criticizing the actions of the NO people in forming the defense squad to keep out PL. However the national officers decided that this was an illegitimate body. Therefore a decision couldn't be reached. But by the end of the meeting the ISC speakers were getting well over half of the applause.

Sunday night was the only session which allowed for discussion from the floor. After speeches by Bobby Seale and Peter Franck, questions were taken from the body. These were the sharp ideological questions like "Why will there be 15 commissioners in a section instead of a different number?"

--Bill Parker

WOMEN AND THE CONFERENCE

*Reprint of leaflet distributed at the United Front conference
by the Bay Area ISC Women's Caucus*

On Friday night the Panther Conference scheduled a panel on Women vs. Fascism. This was supposed to be held after the introductory speakers and before Herbert Aptheker spoke. However, Aptheker's speech preceded the women's panel demonstrating that the conference leadership felt that its male speaker was more important than women speaking on their own behalf. It became apparent during his speech that the panel might not be held at all. Several people, women and men, stood up and verbally protested, saying "We want to hear the women!" The Panthers approached these people, called them "pigs and provocateurs" and threatened to throw them out of the auditorium if they did not cease their protest. The women made it clear that they felt they were entitled to make a protest against the male chauvinism and the rigid format of the conference. A group of women remained standing during the speech, and were surrounded by "security officers" to assure they would not be "disruptive". A single woman in the balcony was bodily removed from the auditorium.

If the leadership had been really responsive to the wishes of the thousands of people attending this Conference, they would have readjusted the schedule without attempting to cut off the women from any participation (for example, they could have shortened the previous presentations rather than asking the women to sacrifice nearly all their allotted time.).

Unfortunately, it seems that the events of Friday night were not simply an oversight on the part of the leadership; throughout this conference both the Panthers and certain white groups have tried to run this conference like Daley and Company did at the Democratic convention in Chicago last year. They are determined to see that no independent action or initiative is taken by the participants in the conference. There are no workshops scheduled, no opportunity for floor discussion, and no voting on crucial issues at this conference. If the people Friday night had felt that it was possible to vote to change the agenda, they would not have had to resort to protest. The top down nature of the conference, however, means that the only way to be heard is through demonstrations and protest.

The growing repression in this country has made it necessary for groups on the left to come together to defend themselves. In particular, the Panthers, who have borne the brunt of this repression, are the logical initiators of a common defense organization. However, if we hope to be at all effective in building a strong united organization, we have to make it clear from the very beginning that participating groups and individuals really control their own movement.

For a full statement of our views on the repression and the conference see the special issue of the IS which the Panthers have banned from the conference.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS CONFERENCE?

*reprint of leaflet handed out at the United Front conference
by the Berkeley ISC*

By their practice the Black Panther Party has earned the respect of the entire left. The Panthers demonstrated the necessity of armed self defense to protect the black community. Their ten point program deals not only with the surface and legal manifestations of racism but with the basic oppression and exploitation. The Panthers projected on a national scale that even in the fight for black liberation, politics rather than skin color is primary. This provided the basis for Third-World people to work together and with whites in coalitions based on mutual respect and struggle against the common enemy. Specifically rejected was the subordination of one people to another as in the old civil rights and trade union movements (whites dominating blacks) or the sycophancy and tail-ending of whites in the early black power movement.

Because they measured people by their relationship to oppression rather than by their skin color or rhetoric, the Panthers openly opposed self-seeking Negroes who served the ruling class, even if they wore naturals or used the language of nationalism. The Panthers opposed Black Capitalism and Negro Democratic Party politicians, just as it opposed the white servants of the ruling class.

The Panthers have led the way in pointing out that ultimately, the liberation struggle of black people was inseparable from that of all people. Without subordination to the conservative consciousness of the white working class, the Panthers have worked toward alliances with whites for destruction of capitalism and the building of a new nonexploitative society.

But the Panthers are not superhuman. Despite their many advances, they are still capable of making mistakes and moving in the wrong direction in response to changing conditions. Muting criticism in the name of support to the Panthers does no service to the Panthers and the black liberation struggle. If there can be no debate and criticism in the left, the result will not be united action, but ossification and ultimately decay. A left which lacks respect for its own ideas and programs and cannot stand internal debate, cannot possibly hope to win the support of the masses. It is within this context of fraternal support that we make our criticism of this conference.

We believe that both the structure and direction of this conference point in an extremely dangerous direction for the left. The so-called "United Front" seems to be turning into an excuse for conservative alliances, a unity based not on common political struggle but artificially constructed by top down control and the exclusion of unpopular left-wing groups from the movement.

People are lectured, like sheep in a class room. Discussion and debate are ruled out. We are supposed to "get down to

business" and not ask any questions about what business we are getting down to. We find the conservative, corrupt and discredited Communist Party and its establishment liberal allies elevated to share the platform with the Black Panther Party as the leadership of our movement.

At the same time, left organizations are told they cannot present their points of view. While millionaire liberal dillitantes like Edward Keating and discredited Communist Party liberals like Herbert Aptheker drone on from the podium, groups in the lobby (including the Independent Socialist Club and the Spartacists) had their literature consored by Panther ideologists and then banned on various excuses. Progressive Labor Party and individuals (fingered by so-called "white radicals") supposedly friendly to PL were banned from attending the conference. This is nothing more than the methodology of red-baiting.

We fundamentally oppose PL's views on nationalism and most other questions. But PL at least demands that Huey be set free. Willy Brown, who is scheduled to speak from the podium is a Democratic Party politician who refused to support the demand that Huey be set free. What is the political meaning of a "United Front" which excludes or silences left groups but invites "Democrats, Republicans, the NAACP, black police organizations, etc." If we are to measure groups by their practice, why isn't the demand to free Huey, or the willingness to attack the repression in practice the "test" rather than "anti-facist" lip-service and rhetoric.

One of the signs of the disastrous direction the movement has taken is the attitude that any criticism of the Panthers is to be interpreted as opposition. Just to make our position explicit, we are supporters of the Panthers. The ISC was one of the first groups to publicly support the Panthers following their arrests in Sacramento in 1966. When the Panthers were still a small Oakland-based organization, we were actively defending them and explaining them while most liberals and the left were hostile to armed self defense or were looking to SNCC and Stokely Carmichael as the leadership of the black movement. We continue to support them today, but like yesterday when no one else was around, this does not mean that we hide our differences.

Because of their leadership role, the Panthers have earned respect on the left and repression from the police and courts. In this sense, the Black Panther Party is a vanguard. But there is a difference between providing leadership in the form of ideas and action (the true role of a vanguard), and stifling a movement by insisting that it conform to the direction of one organization.

The best support for the Panthers, the best way to defend them from the vicious repression coming down, is not by merely attending support rallies or organizing others to attend support rallies. Ultimately, the only way to end the repression is to end the social system whose periodic crises produces that repression. This will require continuation of the open debate and discussion that has been one of the healthiest aspects of the new radicalism.