

Fascism Gonna Catch Hell

Bob Fleck

1969

Special to the Fifth Estate

OAKLAND, Calif.—1969 has been a year of increasing pig repression in all areas where the movement has been active.

The black movement has many political prisoners already sentenced and the New York 21, the New Haven 8, and other key Panthers are awaiting trials with bails for individuals set up to \$200,000 for each of the New Haven brothers and Sisters.

Panther offices in Oakland, San Francisco, Chicago, Detroit, Denver, Indianapolis, Sacramento, and other cities have been raided and wrecked by police.

In the last year and a half 15 Panthers have been killed at the hands of the police. Five students have been murdered on college campuses- in the last year by wanton police bullets.

This list is incomplete. There are thousands of political prisoners in jails across the U.S., hundreds of people have been wounded this year and thousands have been beaten. In response to this rising tide of repression the Black Panthers called for the first Conference of a United Front Against Fascism (UFAF).

Throughout the Conference two points were driven home with relentless intensity: fascism is here now and the only way to fight it is with a united movement.

Over 4,000 people representing some 300 organizations were there to listen. Groups from the Detroit area included The White Panthers, Radical Education Project and People Against Racism.

Divided into two parts, the first two half days of the July 18 through 20 meeting served as a cram course to show that the avaricious businessman, the demagogic politician and the fascist pig cops are all clear signs of the police state. Community control of police was presented as the solution to that problem.

The plan calls for a massive, nationwide petition drive in local communities that will produce amendments, such as the one printed in the last issue of the Fifth Estate to existing city charters that would put control of police in the hands of elected neighborhood commissions. These commissions would have complete disciplinary powers over their force.

At- the auditorium doors everybody was matter-of-factly shaken down (men and women separate—no nonsense) and purses searched. Later I dug the amazing assortment of edged and chemical weapons collected for return. Both inside and around the doors no pigs were visible, or at least no uniformed oinks.

Panthers stood at strategic points, friendly but firm.

With Panther Minister of Education Ray Masai's "power to the people" echoing back from a crowd of upraised fists, the conference began.

Lead-off speaker and former editor Edward Keating had just come from a meeting with jailed Panther Huey Newton bringing words of support and reports of increasing prison harassment of brother Huey.

After Keating, came historian Herbert Aptheker from the Communist Party who ran down a meticulous justification for forming an anti-fascist front. About halfway through his speech though, members of the Progressive Labor Party (recently ousted from SDS) stood, clapped, and yelled until Panther monitors quieted them.

Masai returned to the podium and warned the agitators that “We’re not here to jive or bullshit, and provocateurs will be dealt with.” (The PL people tried to stage a takeover the next day in Berkeley, bloodying the nose of SDS’s Mark Rudd in the process, but were chased half way to Oakland and out of the conference by Panthers.)

Then, barely a half hour old, the conference took an unexpected turn into Women vs. Fascism, introduced by a quote from Cleaver that the “Women are our other half,” and as the speakers repeatedly bore witness to fascism’s rise, it became evident that the sisters were chosen for their correct action, not their rhetoric.

The next two days were similar in tone, relentlessly sounding the call for a unified front.

But Sunday night the three days of talk were finally focused by Panther National Chairman Bobby Seale as he called for an American Liberation Front to combat the two heads of fascism—capitalism and racism.

“If the U.S. is a melting pot,” he warned, “we got to understand that to melt this sonnavabitch we’re going to have to put some new fire under the pot.

“And when we get down to the nitty gritty, we ain’t gonna miss no nits or grits.”

Then, Bobby’s emphasis shifted rather unexpectedly over to the need for exercising democratic rights. He pounded home repeatedly that ideology without action is just nonsense—the revolution arrives when the community unites in work, not hot air. And community control of police was layed out as the work.

The Panther move to this position reflects a change in Party attitude that was interpreted in many different ways as I rapped with different people during and after the conference. One leaflet distributor standing outside the auditorium thought that “the Panthers have taken a right zag by engaging leftish liberals.”

Another younger, freer, an-ark-ist type didn’t think that the police control idea would work in all parts of the country, “Like, in Mobile, Alabama, where the kids would get the police elected by their parents; in other words, the Klan would take over openly.”

But that ain’t the whole picture.

The Panthers have always been guided by a firm belief that any movement must constantly relate to the masses. And if the masses are at a stage of consciousness lower than the vanguard, then those in front must extend themselves to those people and find ways of relating the struggle to them. A petition is just such a means. For even though many feel that U.S. democracy is a myth, a failure with democratic means will only serve to further unite a revolution in its early stage.

Another grim reminder of fascism’s recently growing strength has been the brutal nationwide attempts by the U.S. and local pigs to eliminate the Panthers. Under the pressure that Aptheker labelled as making “1936 Germany look like Alice in Wonderland,” a united front, including all those opposed to fascism, is needed.

For, as Seale pointed out, the best way to fight fire isn’t with fire, but with water. And as Eldridge’s latest words from exile remind us:

“We must engage in “legal” struggles as petitions that strengthen the revolutionary camp and legal struggles that weaken the reactionary camp as well as armed struggles against these same forces. We, like the ruling class, must be dialectical in our mixing and combining of tactics. To be subjective is to be one-sided and superficial.”

For further information on how to join a local committee working against fascism, contact: UFAF, Black Panther Party, 3106 Shattuck, Berkeley, Calif.



Bob Fleck
Fascism Gonna Catch Hell
1969

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/85-august-7-20-1969/fascism-gonna-catch-hell>
Fifth Estate #85, August 7-20, 1969

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net