

“They planned to have no one come out alive”

Jon Wiener

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LOS ANGELES (LNS)—Over 5,000 people massed at Los Angeles City Hall on Thursday, Dec. 11 to protest the Dec. 8 attack on the Black Panther Party headquarters here in which 13 Panthers held off 300 police for close to five hours.

Speakers at the City Hall rally included representatives of NAACP and the Urban League as well as the Panthers.

The night before, 50 helmeted, club-swinging police attacked 250 people demonstrating support for the Panthers in front of their bullet riddled office.

Thirty people were injured in the attack including State Senator Mervyn Dymally and UCLA Communist philosophy professor Angela Davis. Both are black.

At the City Hall rally the Rev. H.H. Brooking said, “The Black Panther Party is the bulls-eye and the black community is the target.”

Panther Joan Kelly told the crowd, “We don’t want war, but we’ve been pushed into a corner and viciously attacked. The police claimed they needed 300 men with M-16 rifles, tanks, helicopters, and dynamite to serve a warrant. The truth is they planned to have no one come out of the building alive.”

Angela Davis quoted the assistant chief of police who said, “Revolutionaries don’t have the same rights as other people.”

“This is fascism,” Miss Davis said. “It’s here and it’s happening now.” She spoke of “genocide—a systematic attempt to exterminate people.”

Richard Bass, of the usually moderate NAACP, also charged, “Genocide is being committed through a conspiracy to destroy any aggressive black leadership.”

After Monday’s gun battle, the city condemned the Panther office and barricaded it. But Monday night Panther Michael Pennywell kicked the barricades aside and led community people in to clean and reoccupy the office.

Police have threatened a new attack if the building is not vacated, but the Panthers have no intention of leaving.

“I don’t want you to be afraid to come in,” Pennywell said. “This building belongs to the people, not to the pigs.”

Some details of the Dec. 8 attack have become available. Assistant police chief Daryl Gates told reporters that the raid had been planned for two weeks and that police strategy had been to avoid a big shootout by surprising the Panthers while they were asleep.

This suggests that the Los Angeles Police Force (LAPD) hoped to successfully imitate the Chicago police who killed Panther Fred Hampton in his sleep on Dec. 4.

The Panthers have charged that the illegal guns that the police claim they found in the Panther office were brought in from police vehicles parked behind the office after the Panthers surrendered. They said witnesses from the community are willing to testify to this in court.

The American Civil Liberties Union has charged that the search and arrest warrants the police were supposedly serving were legally defective and should not have been issued.

The Panthers' strategy in holding off the police from 5:30 am until almost 10:30 am was to allow time for the community and the media to gather at the battle site. They hoped that the presence of reporters and community people would deter the police from killing the 8 men and 5 women when they surrendered.

Father Blaise Bonpane, a radical priest who was trying to persuade officials to allow the Panthers to surrender instead of killing them, said that "only fear of another Watts" kept police from unleashing a helicopter and tank assault on the building.

"Reports were coming in of disturbances all around the battle site," the priest said. "The police were afraid they were surrounded. At that point they allowed the Panthers to surrender."

The police attack was the first appearance of a new super elite counter-insurgency unit of the LAPD, the "SWAT SQUAD," which stands for "special weapons and tactics." It is one step above the elite "Metropolitan squad," a unit of specially trained volunteers set up after the Watts uprising.

SWAT SQUAD members are dressed in black from head to toe, carry advanced weapons like the high velocity, rapid-fire M-16, and can be moved rapidly in cases of "urban unrest."

SWAT actually rehearsed the Dec. 8 attack on Nov. 28, when they surrounded the Panther headquarters and shouted, "We know you have guns in there, niggers—why don't you use them?"

The 19 Panthers arrested in Monday's police raid have been charged with a variety of felonies, some carrying the death penalty. Twelve are being held without bail—the remaining seven have bail set at from \$15,000 to \$100,000.

Contributions for bail, legal defense and rebuilding the headquarters should be sent to: Black Panther Party, P.O. Box 57126, Los Angeles, Calif.

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