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STRATEGIES OF REPRESSION AGAINST THE BLACK MOVEMENT

by Dhoruba Moore

The first year of the new decade drew to a close filled with dread and pregnant with hope. There is dread in the realization that white America rushes headlong toward the abyss of the reactionary right, and hope in the promise of renewed mass black action. The spectre of anxiety torments the national black community. Unemployed brothers mumble on countless ghetto stoops that things are bad for black folks once again (as if "things" have ever been otherwise) while media-hyped "black moderate leaders" wring their hands in despair afraid that the consciousness of the mythical grass roots will outstrip their opportunism.

Today, even as murderous urban police armies hold in terroristic check the seething frustration within the ghetto colonies, and spiraling inflation and unemployment force reevaluations in the political counsels of black folk, survival impels us to take a hard look at how a prior decade began and a previous era in our arduous struggle for liberation came to a close.

Many people claim that the militant struggles of the 60's ended when the more blatant symbols of racist domination crumbled under the onslaught of the civil rights movement. Still others, bitter with cynicism of unfulfilled idealism, mock the black revolutionary upsurge of the 60's and claim it died at the hands of its own rhetoric. But the truth has yet to be told. The popular struggles of black people in the 60's and early 70's did not die of their own

successes or failures. In reality these struggles were destroyed by the racist U.S. government and those in league with it—black and white.

This is not to say that within the black movement in general and the Black Panther Party (BPP) in particular, there were no ideological, social, class or personality differences. However, the focus of this article is not on these differences but on the government's repressive strategy to destroy the militant black movement.

As the 60's ended, calculated U.S. government repression of the black liberation movement reached its zenith. This vicious repression was accompanied by increased cooptation and control over "moderate black leaders" and their organizations, along with brutal murder and imprisonment of militant black nationalists. This carrot and stick approach was spelled out in an FBI memo of March 4, 1968 from the late FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover to 41 field offices expanding the government's Counter Intelligence program (COINTELPRO) against the black movement. Hoover's intent was:

To prevent the coalition of militant black nationalist groups which might be the first step toward a real mau mau in America.

and:

To prevent groups and leaders (nationalists) from gaining 'respectability' by discrediting them to the 'responsible' Negro community, to the white community and to Negro radicals...

COINTELPRO, as implemented by the

U.S. government against the black movement, was a domestic war program. Its objective was not merely the destruction of black nationalist groups as such, but the total negation of a subjugated people's historical claim to national self-determination. In this sense COINTELPRO was a domestic war of national suppression.

From the introduction of the first chattel slaves into North America until the present, American society has always had as its fundamental interest the complete negation of the historical personality of African people in North America. The strategies of repression aimed at the black liberation movement in the late 60's and early 70's were operational expressions of this reactionary interest in negating the human rights of 30 million black people.

COINTELPRO: The Carrot

The Counter Intelligence Program was shrewdly implemented in order to destroy the black movement in the U.S. It was a multi-level program of disruption, spanning the nation and reaching its nefarious tentacles into other countries in Africa, Europe and the Mid-East. One key strategy of COINTELPRO was the "carrot and stick" approach, a socio-political "Mutt and Jeff" game played upon black people in the most cynical and racist fashion imaginable.

In order for any carrot and stick strategy to work one must first have "carrots" in the form of money, notoriety and social acceptance. Next, one must have rabbits who subsist on a diet of carrots. The rabbits, of course, were so called "black moderate leaders." U.S. government's COINTELPRO operations consistently capitalized on the black bourgeois aspirations of "moderate" black leaders and their organizations in order to subvert development of mass black nationalist consciousness. Moderate groups such as the

NAACP and Urban League along with leaders such as Whitney Young, Vernon Jordan, Bayard Rustin, were consistently and covertly bolstered by the U.S. government, in preference to militant nationalist organizations, like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panther Party, which were rabidly attacked, mutilated and isolated.

Illustrative of the relationships of the times was an FBI Airtel dated September 24, 1968 from the Pittsburg field office to Bureau Headquarters regarding Whitney Young, then Executive Director of the National Urban League.² According to this Airtel, Young visited Pittsburgh on September 17, 1968 in order to press for a \$300,000 a year grant from the Mellon Foundation. This grant was purportedly for an Urban League project to "create black middle class leaders." Before approving Young's request, however, the Mellon Foundation availed themselves of FBI guidance, asking them (FBI) to advise the Foundation of Young's pedigree.

Subsequently, the FBI noted on October 23, 1968 that not only had the Bureau previously used the Mellon Foundation in a successful COINTELPRO operation which resulted in denial of a \$150,000 grant to a black nationalist group (believed by this writer to be SNCC), but that Whitney Young was an FBI "liaison source and very freindly toward the Bureau."³ The October 23, 1968 memo went on to state the true aim of the FBI:

If this grant goes to a moderate group such as the Urban League, the moderate groups influence will be boosted in the Negro Community to the detriment of extremist groups.

Then on October 24, 1968 Bureau headquarters granted permission to the Pittsburgh field office to advise its "confidential source" within the Mellon Foundation that Young was a safe bet stating that "no information has been received that Whitney Young is involved in black

nationalist extremist activities.” Additionally, Bureau headquarters instructed its field office to...“be alert to the possibility of expanding this operation through any contacts your source has with other foundations. Possibly your source could be used to insure black nationalist extremist groups in other cities are not funded by charitable foundations.”⁴

Due to the historical nature of black oppression and domination in America, black “leadership” has traditionally been vulnerable to racist control and manipulation as utilized under COINTELPRO. By no means were the Urban League and Whitney Young the sole culprits engaging in neo-colonial activities. It must be stressed that “moderate” leaders like Whitney Young, Vernon Jordan, Benjamin Hooks, Jesse Jackson and Bayard Rustin and the organizations they represented derived their influence from their liaison to reactionary ruling circles and the major political parties. As a result such “leaders” are objectively in a very precarious position, one that forces them to wittingly or unwittingly play the role of neo-colonial critic and apologist for the system.

An additional aspect of the COINTELPRO strategy of repression was the wide spread government manipulation and utilization of the mass media. COINTELPRO used the mass media to simultaneously bolster “moderate” black leaders and their programs while publicly portraying black nationalist leaders, their groups and ideology as white-hating and violent.

A small, but insightful example of COINTELPRO manipulation of both the black media and “moderate” groups was the government’s anonymous circulation of an NAACP editorial which appeared in that organization’s publication, *The Crisis*. This editorial condemned black militancy and black nationalists. Realizing the disruptive potential of such a criticism, the

FBI on January 7, 1969, sent copies of the NAACP’s sanctimonious denunciations to at least 21 cities for distribution to “responsible” black leaders and the black press.⁵ These types of COINTELPRO activities occurred daily on a multitude of levels and in every major city with a resident black population. Their cumulative effect upon the black movement was stultifying, driving insurmountable fears between the militant wing and the reformist wing of the black movement, rendering both ineffective. These fears and divisions exist to this very day.

Nor was the U.S. government reluctant to employ its disruptive techniques and media manipulation to cover vicious police attacks upon the black movement. On September 30, 1968 FBI headquarters instructed its field offices to step up their counter-intelligence operations aimed at destroying the Black Panther Party.⁶ By early 1969, the Black Panther Party was the primary target of U.S. government COINTELPRO repression accounting for fully 80 percent of the disruptive operations aimed at the black movement.

In April of 1969 the main leadership of the New York Black Panther Party was arrested on absurd bomb conspiracy charges. That following month the Chairman of the Black Panther Party, Bobby Seale, was arrested and indicted for the murder of a police informant in New Haven. During the same summer several Black Panther Party offices in various cities were attacked by police armies. In Los Angeles the L.A. police laid siege to the local Black Panther Party (BPP) headquarters in a foiled attempt to murder local BPP leadership. Then on December 4, 1969, the Chicago police, upon FBI instigation, raided a Panther apartment during the pre-dawn hours, killing the Chicago BPP leader, Fred Hampton, in his sleep and BPP captain, Mark Clark.

The FBI intensified its COINTELPRO

manipulation of the media in an effort to justify the vicious police attacks on the BPP and to further isolate the black nationalist movement.⁷ The FBI supplied its media sources with the “criminal” records of BPP members victimized by local police repression. At every turn the FBI planted derogatory stories about the BPP in particular and black nationalists in general. These covert actions resulted in black middle class fears of the BPP.

The complete effect of COINTELPRO’s disruptive propaganda upon the nationalist movement may never be known. What is known, however, is that for the most part, the black middle class and “moderate” black leaders and groups failed to support those militant nationalist groups repressed by the U.S. government. This failure was manifest in the courtrooms of political trials where black lawyers were conspicuously absent in the defense of black nationalist political prisoners. The divisive effect of COINTELPRO was also evident in the streets where so-called “black moderate groups” absented themselves from support work around the repression of the BPP.

To this very day the successes of COINTELPRO are blatantly in evidence. Many black political prisoners languish in prison with little or no support from so-called “moderate” black groups and leaders. The black middle class interests and its often myopic politics that COINTELPRO capitalized on to divide the black movement haunt black people today in the form of incorrect strategies and social practices.

In addition to playing upon existing class antagonisms, the harassment, covert actions and deceptions COINTELPRO unleashed upon the black movement poisoned the atmosphere of the black community and its perception of the issues, creating a negative climate that affected the attitudes of even progressive groups.

An example that comes to mind is a petition submitted by the National Conference of Black Lawyers and a coalition of church and anti-racist groups to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, dated December 11, 1978. The petition’s listing of Political Prisoners mainly dealt with “safe” cases of political repression, that is, with those cases of essentially passive victimization or spontaneous reaction to incidents of blatant racism or sexism. Even ones that would not normally fall into this “Scottsboro Boys Syndrome” are handled in such a way as to rob the political prisoner of his or her nationalist politics.

On a more pragmatic level the above mentioned petition blindly ignored the work of political prisoners like Anthony Jalil Bottoms who, two years prior to the NCBL petition, called for a National Campaign to place the plight of U.S. political prisoners before the U.N. Jalil Bottoms was not even mentioned in the NCBL petition, nor were any of his 25 Black Liberation Army comrades presently languishing in prison, with the exception of Assata Shakur (Joanne Chesimard). This is typical of the often blatant disregard practiced by so-called “moderate groups” towards past victims of COINTELPRO who were active in the militant wing of the black movement. Hence, the vicious repression of the 60’s remain to haunt us to this day.

COINTELPRO: THE STICK

A fundamental contradiction within the black movement of the 60’s was the question of armed self-defense and armed struggle versus passive resistance and non-violence in the process of black liberation. COINTELPRO found fertile ground for divisiveness in this question, and their carrot and stick strategy fitted perfectly into the debate over “violence or non-violence” as a tactic of black liberation.

Basically, those groups who advocated self-defense and armed resistance to tyran-

ny received the “stick” end of COINTELPRO, while those who advocated non-violence and collaboration with oppression were fed the “carrot” of COINTELPRO cooptation. While it is not the intention of this writer to debate the merits of armed resistance to tyranny versus non-violence, it is of the utmost importance that the reader grasp the essential fact that white status quo power has always had an interest in discrediting the idea of black organized force coupled with independent black power. It should come as little surprise, therefore, that today’s political prisoners come from the ranks of the black movement that were administered the “stick” of government repression; conversely, those coopted by the carrots of COINTELPRO have a vested interest in maintaining the isolation of most black political prisoners who have advocated organized armed force as an essential ingredient in the black liberation process.

When the government’s COINTELPRO operations were publicly exposed in 1971* a more vicious campaign was initiated against the militant wing of the black movement. This new campaign was necessitated by not only the public exposure of COINTELPRO, but also by COINTELPRO’s success in dividing the Black Movement and especially the Black Panther Party. The new campaign was titled “NEWKILL” and assumed the guise of an intense nationwide investigation into the shooting of policemen in major urban areas.

It is important at this point to note that not all covert repressive actions carried out by the U.S. government against the black

movement came under a COINTELPRO caption. The Senate Select Committee on Government operations, which investigated the activities of the U.S. intelligence community, emphasized in its report that there exists a large grey area between “counter-intelligence” and “aggressive investigation”. Referring to the alleged termination of COINTELPRO in April of 1971, the Senate Committee stated:

aggressive investigation continues, and may be even more disruptive than covert action. An anonymous letter (COINTELPRO) can be ignored as a crank; an overt approach by the Bureau (FBI investigation) is not so easily dismissed.

The FBI’s “NEWKILL” investigation falls within this “grey area” despite the Bureau’s classification of it as a “criminal” investigation. NEWKILL began where COINTELPRO left off.

Another point to emphasize is the use of the courts and prosecutorial agencies of the state for political repressive purposes under the guise of criminal prosecution. Practically every political trial in the U.S. was essentially propagated by the U.S. government or state governments as mere “criminal” trials. The criminalization of cases involving black political prisoners is the U.S. government’s way of avoiding the ramifications of political suppression of black people’s national rights. It also is a trick designed to isolate those placed on trial from widespread public support. NEWKILL was the public criminalization of the black resistance movement and could not have succeeded if COINTELPRO had failed to divide the black movement.

The increasingly militant mass struggles of the late 60’s and 1970 were being met by increased levels of police violence against the black community by 1971. Scores of black people were still being beaten, brutalized and murdered by vicious police armies despite the civil rights gains of the black movement.

However, these acts of brutal repression

*In March of 1971, a group of white radicals broke into the FBI offices at Media Pennsylvania seizing documents titled, “COINTELPRO, Racial Matters”. These documents were subsequently leaked to the press.

were beginning to be met by armed resistance in the black community, both organized and unorganized. More police were killed or wounded nationwide in the years 1970 and 1971 than in all the years since the 1940s. By June 6, 1971, a total of 51 policemen had been killed during that year alone.

On May 19, 1971, two New York City policemen were machine-gunned. On May 21, 1971 two more New York policemen were shot and killed in Harlem. These assaults on police in New York and other major cities were the initiating cases of NEWKILL.

The NEWKILL investigation was launched at a White House meeting on May 28, 1971, attended by President Richard M. Nixon; Chief of Domestic Security, Robert Mardian; Attorney General, John Mitchell, FBI Director, J. Edgar Hoover and representatives of the New York and Washington police departments. At this meeting Nixon personally ordered that a "no punches pulled" investigation be launched to capture and imprison those individuals thought to be responsible for black resistance to police terror. The minutes of this meeting were reportedly "lost".⁹

Quickly the FBI coordinated and organized an anti-urban guerilla task force consisting of state and federal police agencies in order to hunt down and destroy the black militants believed to be responsible for shooting police. Under the guise of this "criminal investigation" black revolutionaries were hunted, murdered, tortured and falsely prosecuted and imprisoned.

Several days prior to the White House meeting on May 24, 1971, following the acquittal of the N.Y. Panther 21, FBI Headquarters sent a memo to the New York and Washington, D.C. field offices and elsewhere ordering intensification of efforts to neutralize the Black Panther Par-

ty.⁹ However, the counter intelligence procedures employed by the federal and local law enforcement agencies were a crucial factor in dividing the BPP into two factions. NEWKILL focused the full might of the government on the faction believed to be the most vulnerable, the so called "Cleaver faction" of the BPP. It was this "faction" that supported the black underground known as the Black Liberation Army. As a result, almost all black militants killed under the NEWKILL program by police/FBI task forces were Panthers of this faction.¹⁰

Black freedom fighters such as Twyman Meyers, Frank Fields, Zayd Malik Shakur, Harold Russell, Anthony Kimu White and Woody Green were gunned down in the gutters of anonymous ghetto streets. Others such as Assata Shakur, Sundiata Acoli, Herman Bell, Albert Washington, Anthony Jalil Bottoms, Robert Hayes, Dhoruba Moore, Bernice Jones and many, many more were wounded and captured.

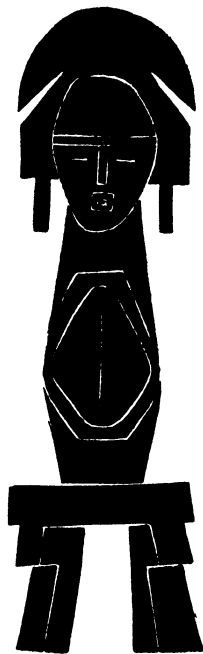
It is these political prisoners that are ignored today by a movement that does not wish to confront its history and, in ignoring its history, runs the risk of repeating its mistakes in this decade full of dread and promise.

The 80's will test our collective will. It will test our capacity to break with the mistakes of the past and forge a new history of struggle and create our own victories. The U.S. government will continue to negate our historical right to national liberation and repress all attempts at black independent power. But if we have learned the lessons so dearly paid for in blood and pain we will triumph. We cannot undo the past, but we can begin to undo its pernicious effects in the present by building a national movement to Free All Black Political Prisoners. This is but one step in a

journey of a thousand miles towards national liberation.

FOOTNOTES

1. FBI memo to SAC Albany from FBI Director, March 4, 1968. See also FBI memo to Albany office dated August 25, 1967.
2. Memo to Director, FBI from SAC, Pittsburg, September 24, 1968.
3. U.S. Government Memorandum to W.C. Sullivan from G.C. Moore, October 23, 1968.
4. Memo to SAC, Pittsburg from FBI Director, October 1968.
5. Memo to SAC, Albany from FBI Director, January 7, 1969. Also see *Crisis* November 1968.
6. Memo to San Francisco from FBI Director, September 30, 1968.
7. U.S. Government Memorandum to FBI Director from SAC New York, October 10, 1968.
8. U.S. Government Memorandum to Mr. A. Rosen from E.S. Miller, November 23, 1977, also see the *New York Times*, June 22, 1971.
9. Memo to SAC, New York from FBI Director, May 24, 1971.
10. Memo to FBI Director from SAC New York, April 5, 1971.



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