

COINTELPRO

The FBI's continuing war against activism

by Ann Arbor RAIL
(Revolutionary Anti-Imperialist League)

[Editor's hint:

For a fuller RAIL experience, make these substitutions ...

- (1) For "U.S." read "u.\$."
- (2) For "America" read "Amerikkka" or "Amerika",
- (3) For "Black Panther Party" read "Maoist BPP".]

I am sorry that this court did not rule on the right side of history. But I am not surprised. Every time our nation has come to a fork in the road with regard to race, it has chosen to take the path of compromise and betrayal. On October 29th, 1998, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court committed a collective crime: it damned due process, strangled the fair trial, and raped justice.

-Mumia Abu-Jamal,

on the refusal to grant him a new trial,
SCI-Greene Prison, Waynesburg, PA 10/31/98

Mumia Abu-Jamal is on death row today, framed for killing a Philadelphia cop. Framing Mumia for this murder has been nothing more than retaliation for his revolutionary politics. Prior to his framing and imprisonment, Mumia was a member of the Maoist Black Panther Party (BPP), and then an award-winning journalist who has consistently publicized police brutality and other forms of oppression. Amerikkka desperately wants to kill Mumia not only to silence his revolutionary voice but also for the psychological warfare effect this would have on the colonized Black Nation. His case exemplifies the lengths to which the U.S. criminal justice system will go to suppress political struggle in the internal colonies.

RAIL agrees with Mumia's assessment that every time this country has come to a decision on its relations with its internal colonies, it has chosen the route of oppression over justice. The prisons system that now cages Mumia is one such example of America's dedication to oppression. In 1997, the number of Blacks in U.S. prisons and jails surpassed the number of whites. Blacks are now more than 50% of the prisons population in this country while they remain 12% of the general population.

The grossly disproportionate numbers of Blacks in prison shows that this country is happy to use prisons as a tool of group social control. For America this is preferable to building educational programs so that more people could go to college, or building jobs that are not based on militarism and exploitation. The FBI's Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), which was instrumental in framing Mumia Abu-Jamal, serves the same goals of oppression.

COINTELPRO destroying anti-imperialist struggles

COINTELPRO began in 1956 as a coordinated effort by the FBI to undermine the Communist Party USA. COINTELPRO subsequently intensified its attacks against pro-

gressive and revolutionary leaders and organizations. COINTELPRO has been used to infiltrate, split and smash various Black, Puerto Rican, Chicano, First Nation and anti-imperialist organizations. Through COINTELPRO the FBI has harassed, wrongfully arrested, framed and imprisoned leaders of the people's movements. Leaders have been murdered as a result of COINTELPRO operations. This program intensely repressed the people's movements in the 1960s and 1970s and continues today.[†]

Through COINTELPROs, the FBI has filled thick files on activists and activities of the BPP, the American Indian Movement (AIM), and the far less radical Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), to name a very select few. COINTELPROs include information gathering through wiretapping and other means of covert surveillance, and infiltration of target organizations by paid informants. COINTELPROs also include disruptive tactics, like forging inter- and intra-organizational communications.

COINTELPRO against Puerto Rican independence

During the 1980s, the Fuerza Armadas de Liberacion Nacional (FALN) and other organizations devoted to Puerto Rican independence were targeted by some of the FBI's most intense covert operations. Puerto Rican activists and the general public suffered massive raids led by the FBI. Fifteen independence movement leaders and activists accused of bogus charges of seditious conspiracy and membership in the FALN remain in prison to this day—serving sentences ranging from 35 to 105 years.

Oscar Lopez Rivera is one of these prisoners. Arrested in 1981, he is serving a 70-year sentence in U.S. prisons. He and the other movement leaders have been subjected to "psychological or physical abuse, including assault, multiple strip searches, body-cavity searches, and extended periods of isolation and sensory deprivation."²

The campaign that put Oscar, Alejandrina Torres, Ricardo Jimenez and other Puerto Rican independentistas in prison began as early as 1960. The COINTELPROs included massive surveillance and physical violence. Independentista Juan Mari Bras found that there were 75 volumes of FBI surveillance records on his activities alone. His file included FBI discussion of how to help Bras have a fatal heart attack. FBI actions on the occupied island of Puerto Rico culminated in 1985 with paramilitary actions. RAIL joins independentistas in questioning the U.S. government's authority to conduct such campaigns against activists and to occupy and control Puerto Rican territory.³

COINTELPRO against the Black Panther Party

Throughout the life of the Black Panther Party, the FBI directed COINTELPROs to discredit and disrupt the work of the BPP. In September of 1968, an FBI memo referred to the BPP as "the most violence-prone organization of all the extremist groups now operating in the United States."⁴ The so-called violence of the Black Panther Party was widely known among the Black nation then and among all students of BPP history today to include publishing an independent newspaper; serving daily free breakfasts to school children; running community medical clinics and grocery programs; and organizing and staffing freedom schools so that Black children could pursue education about their own history during the summers.

The FBI further planned to "create factionalism between not only the national leaders but also local leaders, [and to take] steps to neutralize all organizational efforts of the BPP as well as create suspicion amongst the leaders as to each others [sic] sources of finances, suspicion concerning their respective spouses and suspicion as to who may be cooperating with law enforcement."⁵ This FBI-induced factionalism was central to sending Los Angeles BPP leader Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt) to prison for 27 years. In a flagrantly illegal move, the FBI successfully encouraged the Los Angeles police to remove Geronimo as an organizing force by pinning an unsolved murder on him. ☑

RAIL organizes regular educational films, lectures and other events.

All are open to the public.

For more information:

www.etext.org/Politics/MIM/rail/rail.html

Upcoming events on the Black Panther Party and COINTELPRO:

Wednesday, January 20. 7pm

The Black Panther Party

Film showing and discussion

Michigan Union, Parker Room

Monday, January 25. 7pm

The FBI's War On Black America

Film showing and discussion

Michigan Union, Wolverine Room

REFERENCES

¹ *MIM Notes* no. 155, 2/1/98.

² National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War and Political Prisoners, prpowpp@aol.com

³ Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, pp. 364-370.

⁴ Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret War Against Dissent in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), p. 124.

⁵ *The COINTELPRO Papers*, p. 125.