

Black Panthers: 'Young Revolutionaries at War'

BY EARL CALDWELL

David Parker sat on a tan, metal folding chair just inside the storefront the Black Panthers occupy on Nostrand Avenue in Brooklyn and looked out into the empty street.

"Why am I a Panther?" he asked slowly. "Well," he said, "I've been listening to Brother Malcolm's records for a long time. I know what he said and I've just been waiting for the Panthers to come here."

For David Parker, a handsome and husky 17-year-old youth who wore his hair in the African style and had a spent rifle shell on a band around his neck, that was explanation enough.

He was young and black and dissatisfied; the Panthers offered change, and that was what he wanted. "Change, change and by any means necessary," he said, quoting one of Malcolm X's favorite phrases.

It was suggested that he was rather young to hold membership in an organization that demands that its members possess arms "to protect ourselves against 'the man.'"

Bill Hampton interrupted to answer for him.

"Age is not a requirement," he snapped. "We have brothers of all ages. The only requirement in blackness."

Executive Dropout

Mr. Hampton is 27 years old, married and the father of three children. A year ago he planned to become an executive with the Olin Mathieson chemical company.

But he dropped out of the company's executive training program and is now a member of the local Panthers' policy-making staff. Mr. Hampton said that he decided to leave the company after it announced that it was shifting its operation from New York to Stamford, Conn.

"That's when I decided to return to the ghetto," he explained.

The Panthers were beginning their organizing efforts in New York City at the same time that Mr. Hampton was separating himself from Olin Mathieson.

Militant Negroes Depict Role as Protectors of Race Against the Police

They offered what he was looking for—change, by any means necessary.

He talked about the police.

"They tried to make out like we're some wild jitterbugs," he said. "But we're not and we're not a gang either. The establishment is just trying to put out a lot of propaganda, trying to turn everyone against us."

The Panthers have their own ideas about themselves.

'Young Revolutionaries'

"We're young revolutionaries," Mr. Hampton said. "We're revolutionaries and we're fighting a war." He called it a war for the survival of black people.

"You have got to understand," he continued. "We're not fooling. We are sincere about this. We are ready to die for what we believe."

Quietly, a little less than six months ago the Black Panthers began organizing chapters here. Thus far, they have been most active in Brooklyn and Harlem. But Mr. Hampton says the organizing efforts are active in all five boroughs.

"You just hear more about Brooklyn right now," he said, "because that is where the action is."

In Negro gatherings where racial matters are discussed the presence of the Panthers in their black berets, black leather jackets and black trousers has become increasingly evident.

But like many militant organizations, Panthers refuse to discuss their numbers. "Numbers," they say, "are not important."

Although the Panthers are an all-Negro organization, Mr. Hampton stoutly maintained that they are not racists.

"We're a service organization for the black community," he said. "A service organization and a black liberation army."

At present the service that the Panthers here are most in-

involved in is helping the black community become more politically aware. "People have to realize that 'the man' is not just moving on us Panthers," Mr. Hampton explained. "But is moving on all black people."

The Panthers see their role as protecting black people against the police.

Since the organization was first formed in Oakland, Calif., by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale nearly two years ago the Panthers across the country have been involved in a constant dispute with the police.

Newton is currently being tried in California on charges that he murdered a policeman about a year ago.

And although no charges have been made, the police are convinced—as is Brooklyn Assistant District Attorney John J. Meglio—that the Panthers ambushed and seriously wounded two policemen in Brooklyn several weeks ago.

Harassment Charged

Since that shooting, Panthers have repeatedly charged the police with harassment.

"They see us as a threat and realizing this the man has to put it down," Mr. Hampton said. "That's why the police run around here now trying to get something started."

Mr. Hampton sees one solution and other Panthers readily agree:

"They have got to be forced out of our communities."

Sitting in the Brooklyn storefront, Mr. Hampton described the police as "Gestapo forces that occupy the black community."

He said that the police (using the term "pig") believe that the only way to control the Negro community is with force. "And their power is on their hips. Take those guns away from those pigs and they are nobodies. The only way to counteract this power is with a gun in your hand."

Of whites who are interested in becoming Panthers, Mr. Hampton said:

"The two things they can do for us is give us some money and give us some guns."