

Joint Statement from the San Francisco 8

We, the San Francisco 8, would like to send this joint statement extending our heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to all our friends and supporters. As many of you know, this COINTELPRO persecution has been on-going for nearly 36 years. However, in the last few years, in accord with the implementation of the Patriot Act, state and federal authorities initiated plans to stifle political dissent, particularly targeting young activists. Similarly, COINTELPRO's objective was to "... expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities of Black nationalist, hate type organizations and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership, and supporters, and to counter their propensity for violence and civil disorder ..." (COINTELPRO memo of August 25, 1967).

The FBI not only targeted the Black Panther Party, but according to this COINTELPRO memo: "Intensified attention under this program should be afforded to the activities of such groups as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Revolutionary Action Movement, the Deacons for Defense and Justice, Congress of Racial Equality, and the Nation of Islam. Particular emphasis should be given to extremists who direct the activities and policies of revolutionary or militant groups such as Stokely Carmichael, H. "Rap" Brown, Elijah Muhammad, and Maxwell Stanford." By March 4, 1968, COINTELPRO was in full operation leading to directing its full attention to the Black Panther Party when it came into existence in October 1968, to prohibit the BPP from developing durable long-term political and organizational relationships with various segments of the Black community.

This case represents the continuation of that COINTELPRO objective, to further indicate how the government will persecute today's activists. The government is seeking to rewrite the history of struggle as exemplified by the BPP, venomously trying to define that legacy of struggle as a "terrorist" movement. We vehemently reject that labeling, as the government attempts to characterize the San Francisco 8 as "terrorists," "criminals," and "wanton killers." They will never say the SF8 were political activists and progressive civil/human rights organizers. They will never say they sought to relieve the community of all forms of state sponsored terrorism that is often found in Black, Asian and Latino communities today. They will never admit to the unconstitutional practices of the FBI COINTELPRO activities, despite the 1974 Senate Church Committee findings condemning those practices. Furthermore, they will never seek to establish remedies for those who are victims of the illegal FBI and local police actions under COINTELPRO, and now under the Patriot Act, if we don't demand they do so.

It is with this understanding the SF8 are issuing this joint statement, calling for friends and supporters to organize a national determination to ensure our victory. Ours will be a victory against fear and state terrorism; it will be a defeat against state torture tactics, threats and coercion. This case and our call for action will teach today's activists what to expect from the state in its efforts to suppress dissent and protest of government repression. Indeed, this task will forward a broader understanding of what happened in the Movement of the 60s and 70s, and how COINTELPRO disrupted and destroyed the most viable Black political party that emerged out of the civil rights movement.

Ultimately, what is here proposed will tell of a youth movement and how the government sought to undermine and destroy it. The proposal will expose how the government seeks to retaliate because those youth (who are now Elders) did in fact challenge the system of racist oppression. They not only challenged oppressive conditions in our collective communities, but also worked to support all oppressed peoples fighting against colonialism and imperialism at that time.

This case evolves out of a history of political struggle in this country, and it is our duty to fulfill that mission by expressing what happened then, and COINTELPRO's negative impact on today's social movements. Therefore, while we engage in a legal battle in the courtroom, it is imperative we urge our friends and supporters to extend the political front in the various communities. We must reach out to the various street organizations and youth groups, the animal and earth liberation groups, women's rights and LGBT forums, the immigration rights struggles, and the many ethnic communities who are struggling for a better life in this country.

Hence, the course of the overall struggle to win the release of the San Francisco 8 requires a broad political determination, reaching beyond the important legal issues of the case. For example, the question of torture, COINTELPRO, and matters of reconciliation are essential to this case. Therefore, a successful national campaign in support of the SF8 requires friends and supporters to achieve the following objectives:

1. Anti-Torture Legislation:

In 1909, the Niagara Movement evolved into the NAACP led by W.E.B. Dubois. The principal platform of the NAACP at that time was a struggle to forge an anti-lynching movement. Today, torture in its many forms has become a scourge in America: there is the inhumane use of restraint chairs in jails and prisons, an especially despicable device reminiscent of medieval

torture mechanisms; there has been an increase in use of the taser as a weapon to induce confessions and control prisoners, resulting in many deaths, another inhumane torture device.

In the case of the SF8, law enforcement officers employed similar torture techniques, including those used in Vietnam and in Abu Ghraib by U.S. military personnel. The use of torture permeates all facets of the so-called “criminal justice system.” Obviously, like the old anti-lynching platform of the NAACP, the San Francisco 8 call for a national campaign demanding anti-torture legislation on local levels (city councils and state legislatures). The SF8 hold that any form of interrogation that employs the use of water boarding, simulated drowning techniques, cattle prods, tasers, restraint chairs, physical beatings, sensory and sleep deprivation, and psychological coercion must be deemed inhumane and criminal. Therefore, the San Francisco 8 call for all progressive and peace loving people to join in a national campaign on city, state and congressional levels for proclamations and legislation outlawing all forms of torture.

2. Reopen COINTELPRO Hearings:

It is well known that the FBI targeted the Black Panther Party for annihilation under the secret counter-intelligence program (COINTELPRO). The FBI COINTELPRO effort resulted in the assassination, criminalization, vilification, and the splitting of the BPP leading to its destruction, with many BPP members today languishing in prisons. The FBI COINTELPRO actions worked in alliance with police departments across the country, and today, the Patriot Act has legalized much of what were illegal COINTELPRO practices.

In 1974, the Senate Church Committee investigating the illegal FBI COINTELPRO activities declared such practices unconstitutional. However, the Senate Church Committee failed to create remedies for those who suffered from the unconstitutional practices of the FBI and police departments. Subject to that reality, the San Francisco 8 hereby call for a national movement for the reopening of COINTELPRO hearings. We, the SF8, urge friends and supporters to phone/fax/write to John Conyers, Chair of the Judiciary Committee in Congress, and appeal for him to conduct public hearings on why victims of COINTELPRO languish in prison over 30 years after it was declared unconstitutional.

We, the SF8, ask friends and supporters to contact your congressional representative, Congressional Black Caucus members and other elected officials urging them to enable John Conyers to reopen COINTELPRO hearings.

3. Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

At the conclusion of hostilities in the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa, many progressive forces took a path to resolve potential antagonisms subject to racial, socio-economic and political strife during the decades of apartheid. That path led to the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, principally led by the Honorable Bishop Desmond Tutu.

In the United States, people of Afrikan descent suffered the trauma of chattel slavery, Black Codes, Jim Crow segregation laws, political repression and state terrorism under the auspices of COINTELPRO. However, unlike South Africa, at no time has there been a national determination to resolve political, social or economic antagonisms born out of centuries/decades of racial strife.

In recent years, as a result of the reparations movement, some corporations, cities and states have issued apologies for having been involved in the Atlantic slave trade. Despite these apologies, the systemic inequities prevail with devastating consequences on every vestige of life confronting the majority of people of Afrikan descent in America.

The San Francisco 8 understand that these historic dynamics perpetuate social-cultural determinants that inhibit the necessary psychological inducements towards self-reliance and self-determination. Therefore, we are calling for progressive peoples to open dialogue and begin the process towards organizing a national Truth and Reconciliation Commission to address these inequities. We believe such a Commission could serve as a catalyst to forge substantial resolutions to heal America's racial trauma.

In conclusion, it is these three areas of concern we jointly agree will empower a national campaign to virtually expose the negative impact of both COINTELPRO and the Patriot Act. We call for all progressive peoples in support of the San Francisco 8 and all U.S. political prisoners to find the means to organize committees and coalitions to implement this proposal on local and national levels.

Again, we, the San Francisco 8, extend our heartfelt appreciation for your solidarity and support. Let us, together, build a sustainable and durable initiative that redresses civil and human rights violations, as we organize to win the freedom of the San Francisco 8.

Free All U.S. Political Prisoners!

The San Francisco 8

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