We reprint below an abridged version of a talk given at a Spartan educational in New York City on April 10, by Spartan League Central Committee member Don Alexander.

One of the characteristics of a fighting revolutionary vanguard party is that, through its communist program, it serves as the memory of the struggles of the working class and oppressed. In this regard, a number of the racist criminals who were involved in the bloody suppression of the Panthers are busy trying to smash working people. Imperialist criminal Richard Nixon was one of the chief architects of the bloody campaign to crush the Black Panthers. Nixon today is offering his services on behalf of the capitalist class, advising Clinton as to how best to promote vicious capitalist exploitation and social misery in the ex-USSR. Desperately seeking to find a way out of the economic blind alley of moribund U.S. imperialism, Clinton and Wall Street are further prop­ping up Yeltsin and other bloodsucking Russian capitalist exploiters, dubbed "democrats" and "reformers."

Here at home, the empty promises of this "new Democrat," who was elected among other means by signing a death warrant that sent to his death a brain­damaged black prisoner, are also re­flected by the lengthening unemployment lines, the even more savage killer cuts in social services, medical care, education, along with racist police murder and terror, and the drive toward a racist police state, which is graphically illustrated in Los Angeles, and not only in Los Angeles, if we reflect on the preparations around the trial of the cops who beat Rodney King.

Now a number of the former Panthers have made their peace with this monstrous racist capitalist system. Former Chicago Panther Bobby Rush is now a Democrat in Congress. Bobby Seale publishes his barbecue books and sings the praises of self-help, i.e., black capitalism. Elaine Brown, Erica Huggins, Kathleen Cleaver are all reconciled to the rotting bourgeois social order. And Harry Newton, who was murdered by the police for years, ended up apolitical, a drug addict. He was gunned down on the streets of West Oakland by a drug dealer. Of course, this gladdened the hearts of the racist cops that oppress us throughout this country.

The people who remain unbowed and unbroken, like Geronimo Pratt and Mumia Abu-Jamal, are imprisoned because of their political beliefs and are the victims of ruling-class vengeance. In 1968, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover stated, "The Negro youth and moder­ate[s] must be made to understand that if they succumb to revolutionary teachings, they will be dead revolutionaries." And of course, during that period, the Black Panthers in particular and black radicals in general knew that you were going to be dead. The government had their "black extremist" squads, and their U2 surveillance planes, to spy and track the civil rights protesters.

Today more than ever, radical black workers and youth especially have every reason to be communists, Trotskyists, and fight alongside white, Latino and Asian workers for the expropriation without compensation of the parasitic capitalist class. The racist capitalist sys­tem is set up to exploit and kill us. The racist bipartisan "war on drugs" ensures that, for the vast majority of black and Latino youth, "head start" means long years in prison, police clubs, police bullets and early graves.

From Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown, who has ties to the Davallers, to "put them to death" Virginia Demo­cratic governor Wilder, to the national­ist demagogues Farrakhan and Al Sharpton, to Jesse Jackson and the Democratic mayors like Dinkins, a sizable number of black overseers help keep the oppressed black masses down. Keeping the racist garbage of their capitalist mas­ters, they blame black people for their horrible oppression. This small petty­bourgeois layer represents the 20 percent of the black population that benefited from the civil rights movement. Their theme song is "We Have Overcome." When the capitalists say jump, they say, how high?

Along with the racist dogs in the Demo­cratic and Republican parties, they supported the white racist imperialist invasion and murder in Somalia, and supported U.S. imperialism's bloody massacre of over 100,000 Iraqis. One could safely entertain the proposition that, if they were alive at the time of the Civil War, they would have remained on the masters' plantations. I'm tired of hearing how these enemies of the black masses and working class supposedly can't be criticized, because they "inher­ited a mess." But there were Rodney Kings before Rodney King.

If workers were in power, if we had a workers government in America, what happened to Rodney King or Dr. Gunn, the abortion doctor recently murdered by a "Right to Life" fanatic in Pensacola, would never have happened. And if isolated instances of such madness occurred, the perpetrators would find no resting place—because the long arm of working-class justice would ensure that. We live in a class society, a capitalist society based upon the brutal exploitation of the working class by the capitalists. We don't have to go hungry and home­less—there's plenty to go around, and we have to build a fighting, racially inte­grated, multinational revolutionary workers party and organize to take what's ours.

The Black Panther Party represented the best of a generation of radical black youth who wanted to smash capitalism and make a revolution. They embodied the hopes and aspirations for black free­dom of an entire generation which sought to strip away the sense of pow­erlessness and hopelessness of the long­oppressed black masses.

The FBI's J. Edgar Hoover targeted the Panthers for destruction, calling them public enemy number one, and "the greatest threat to internal security." To kill Black Panthers, the FBI revived COINTELPRO, the counterintelligence program, which was originally set up in 1956 against the Communist Party, and unleashed the most savage and systematic campaign of murder in modern American history. Some 233 out of 295 FBI COINTELPRO actions against black organizations were against the Panthers. At least 38 Panthers were murdered by agents of this racist capi­
Robert Williams and the Deacons for Defense

Formed in 1966 by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, the Panthers considered themselves the heirs of Malcolm X, and advocated armed self-defense against racist attacks. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense had its roots in the failure of the liberal-led civil rights movement to eradicate systemic racism. It was customary to regard as the pinnacle of Robert Williams' conflictalist state, through the instrument of racist attacks. The Black Panther Party advocated armed self-defense against COINTELPRO, which it considered to be the pinnacle of the racist capitalist system and state.

By 1966, SNCC and CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality) had embraced pseudo-nationalism, and the abstention of the fake Trotskyist Socialists Workers Party, which bailed out Martin Luther King and the Black Muslims, was a terrible crime and betrayal of the struggle for black freedom. This has cost the revolutionary movement dearly in the number of black militants who could have been won at that juncture to Trotskyism, to revolutionary internationalism, to the program of world revolution. The Revolutionary Tendency of the Socialist Workers Party—the forerunners of the Spartacist League—fought inside the SWP to win black militants to a revolutionary working-class program and perspective, for the building of an independent Trotskyist vanguard party to lead a fight for power not only in this country, but throughout the world. The Socialist Workers Party subsequently expelled us for our revolutionary politics.

Contradictions of "Black Power"

As a result of the futility of "bearing moral witness" by packing the jails, by relying on the racist capitalist government rather than its traditional black front—men—and most importantly, because of the passivity of the organized labor movement led by the traipsing black militants, out of despair, turned to separatism and cried out for "Black Power." As a slogan, "Black Power" was a product of the racist establishment, and liberals stopped their checks flowing into the coffers of the more respectable organizations, like SNCC and CORE. We pointed out at the time that the "Black Power" slogan was not an attempt to fight for the interests of the black poor, but we emphasized that the fight for black liberation was not posed in class terms it would serve as a bridge to the Democratic Party of imperialism.

In comparison to other black nationalist organizations of the '60s, the Panthers sought to organize independently of the Democrats and Republicans. As ecletic, contradictory radical nationalists, their outlook was variously influenced by the teachings of Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. Marxist became for a kind of mongrel socialism, from which one picked and chose to suit their momentary political needs. Like New Left radicals as a whole, they rejected the key Marxist contention that the working class, because of its unique relationship to the means of production, held the potential social power to smash the racist capitalist state and system. This New Left manoeuvering was exploded by the powerful May-June 1968 French general strike, which was betrayed by the Socialists. This was the largest general strike in the history of capitalism, and had the French working class taken power under the leadership of a Leninist vanguard party, the face of the world could have been changed. As nationalists, the Panthers looked to the lumpenproletariat—the brothers on the block, the ex-pimps, the hustlers—as the vanguard of black liberation. In Fanon's words, represented the "wretched of the earth." Fanon was a West Indian imperial national and Up of Algeria, independence struggle. Fanon's book, The Wretched of the Earth, was a political fad in radical circles.

Fanon's emphasis on the cathartic role of violence came to be a useful basis for their talk of urban guerrilla warfare. As a ghetto-based revolutionary nationalist organization, the Panthers believed that the oppressed were the most revolutionary, that social revolution would happen as a result of radicalized peasants in the countryside encircling the white European nations, whose proletarians were "bought off" and incapable of making a revolution. So the task, simply put, was to "pick up the gun" to electrify the internal "black colony" in the U.S. They hawked copies of Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung, and they had a song that they sang a lot, "There's a pig upon the hill, if you don't get him, the Panthers will." They had a lot of "off the pig" rhetoric.

The Panthers self-consciously regarded themselves as a vanguard party. But they were not a vanguard party. They were New Left sectoralists. That is, their program was that blacks would liberate blacks, Hispanics would liberate Hispanics, and so on. A sectoralist program, which is a strategy for dividing the ranks of the future proletarian army fighting for state power.

A Leninist vanguard party, that is, a tribune of the people, fights against all types of social oppression and organizes the basic masses for an internationalist revolutionary program. We in the International Communist League are fighting to build that party, like Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevist Party that in 1917 led the multi-ethnic working class to a victorious socialist revolution. Our fighting program of revolutionary internationalism shows the road forward to the assimilation of black people in an egalitarian socialist society.

We believe that the fight against racial oppression is key, strategic for a workers revolution, and without militant, united, integrated class struggle against all wings of the capitalist exploiters, the proletariat cannot seize political power. The American workers revolution needs black leadership. Black workers are crucial components of the multi-racial American working class, and can lead a fight on behalf of all of the oppressed and exploited for workers revolution, and for smashing imperialist domination from Puerto Rico to Latin America and Africa.

Against the Cultural Nationalists

Now, the fight against racist cop terror and murder provided the impetus for the Panthers' initial organization of the black continued on page 10

Partial contents:
- Malcolm X's Wit's Missing from Spike Lee's Movie
- Activists Remember the Chained and the Black Power Era
- Imperialism Starves Africa
- Neocolonial Global Coup Out of Somalia
- Vancouver: 3,000 Drive Off Fascist Skinheads
- Goerge: Down With The Flag of Slavery
- Druykers Strike Settled, Fight for Solid Union Gains
- Moscow: African Student Murdered by Yeltsin's Cops

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Spartacist League spokesman Don Alexander.

May 1967: Armed Panthers at Sacramento State Capitol protest racist gun control bill.

because the black masses were no longer following the nonviolent script.

During the protests in Birmingham, four black Sunday school girls were killed by a Klan bomb. The Klan also went after John F. Kennedy, who was hounded out of the country, and another militant black self-defense group was the Deacons for Defense and Justice in Bogalusa, Louisiana. The Deacons successfully defended blacks against Klan terror, and we assisted in that effort by raising money. This was captured in our slogan, "Every town, every school, every church.

In Birmingham, Alabama in 1963, the black masses fought back against the Klan and Bull Conner's racist police force. After the protests in Birmingham, the black masses armed themselves and fought back. John F. Kennedy federalized the Alabama National Guard precisely because the black masses were no longer following the nonviolent script.

The civil rights movement went North in the mid-'60s, and King's SCLC organization was driven out by racist resistance. King's open housing campaign met with violent racist resistance in the racist enclave of Cicero, with
mases. Newson and Seale also had to settle their accounts with the "pork chop" cultural nationalists, who argued that black people should spend their time rediscovering their African roots by donning dashikis, selling African artifacts and sitting around curening out white people. The Panthers had to contend with other black nationalist organizations contesting for hegemony of radical black youth.

The FBI and the L.A. police would eventually find a very useful role for the cultural nationalists against the Black Panthers. In 1969, the L.A.-based organization of US (Unified Slaves) of Ron Karenga killed L.A. Panther leaders Bunchy Hungin and John Huggins on the UCLA campus. The FBI was heavily involved in those murders, like they were heavily involved in the murders of Panther leaders who were killed by US members in L.A., Panthers were killed by US members, with FBI involvement.

The cultural nationalists posed as militants. And some youth today may think that the so-called militant talk about "Afrocentrity," and voluntary self-segregation as a means of eradicating racism, is something new—it isn't. If one reads the politics of Karenga and Imamu Baraka, who was his ally-itself—what they mean by "Black Power." And various cultural nationalists run around today, like Spike Lee—that's what they mean by "Black Power." This meant concretely that Karenga allied himself with militant-talking pro-capitalist hustlers, backed by white capitalists.

It was noteworthy that the ruling-class co-optation of these phony militants was the racist oppressors, who immediately smelt incipient insurrection. The bourgeoisie fights to keep a monopoly of force to prevent the destruction of their system of democracy for the rich. Clinton and the Democrats are furiously pushing gun control legislation—the better to keep us down. From Robert F. Willims to Malcolm X and the Panther historically gun control laws have been used to disarm blacks and the working class. We say that gun control kills black! We call on class-conscious workers and fighters for the liberation of the oppressed to defend the right to bear arms, to defend the Second Amendment, to defend ourselves against the murderer ruling class and their bloody lynaxes and shock troops—the cops, the Klu Klux, the Nazis, the skinheads and the anti-abortarion terrorists.

MURDERER STATE REPRESSON

Very early on, the racist capitalist state mobilized to disarm the Panthers. In 1968, the California legislature held hearings on the Malford Bill—a gun control bill pushed by a California assemblyman in the Oakland-Berkeley area. His bill was known in the press as the "Panther Bill," and would have made it illegal to carry concealed weapons. The Panthers fought back—they appeared in Sacramento armed and wearing their black berets, black leather jackets, powder blue shirts and black boots—to call this assault on democratic rights. While they were marching on the Capitol grounds to the floor of the Assembly, they ran into Ronald Reagan, the California governor, who was talking to schoolchildren. Reagan saw the Panthers coming around the corner, stopped talking, and reportedly started running!

Now the Black Panther Party defended the racist rulers by expressing solidarity with the Vietnamese and Cuban revolutions. The Panthers offered to send troops to fight alongside the Vietnamese against bloody U.S. imperialism. As a result, according to David Hilberman in his recent autobiography, This Side of Glory (Little, Brown, 1993), they had 4,000 members and 35 chapters. Imme-

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In a partial fashion, the Panthers fought the cultural nationalists' cynical withdrawal from struggle and their anti­militant program of cultural nationalism. Huey Newton, in a famous prison interview, noted some of the aspects of cul­

December 1969: LAPD assaults Panther head­quarters, Geronimo Pratt, in jail the last 20 years, was targeted for "neutralization.

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who are armed bodies of men defending capitalist property.

"UFA": CP-Style Popular Frontism

But instead the Panthers established alliances with the petty-bourgeois Peace and Freedom Party, who ran Cleaver for president in 1968. This party was a pressure group that tilted the integrated labor movement—the only social force with the power and interest to fight racist police terror—but clinked glasses with composers like Leonard Bernstein and actors like Marlon Brando, who participated in one of their police patrols. In Berkeley, they backed the formation of a self-flagellating white guilt group called "the assassins of the 900 Club" to fight for Newton's freedom. The Panthers were trying to augment their forces, and held negotiations with Trotskyists, with the PRC, and briefly Stokely Carmichael. H. Rap Brown and James Forman entered their ranks. This was a very short-lived fusion, because it exploded as Carmichael pressed them to break their ties with all black power organizations.

In 1969, as the bourgeoisie regression escalated, the Panthers organized the so-called "United Front Against Fascism" conference, in which the reformed Communist Party played a prominent role. The Panthers discovered the virtues of the counterrevolutionary reformist-popular-front program: a class-collaborationist trap which has historically tied the workers to the "progressive" wing of the capitalist exploiters, and which paved the way for the bloody defeats of the working class from China 1949 to Chile 1973. In Chile, Roosevelt influence bolstered the integrated labor movement, and the terrible bloodbath of the Maoist-influenced Indonesian Communist Party, which left over 500,000 workers and peasants dead in 1965. It also means today in South Africa that the African National Congress program of "power sharing" and a "government of national unity" pays the way for the bloody defeating of the working class. An expression of that, of course, is the American policy of "peaceful coexistence" with the bloody regime of Fascism in Brazil, where the state is working to crush the black struggle against oppression anywhere.

The popular-front reformist program means to divide us, as it did during World War II—which was an interministerial war, and not a "war for democracy and freedom," as American Loyalists supported Roosevelt, backed the intrusions of Japanese Americans, defended the Apartheid regime of the Afrikaners, and opposed the struggle for black rights, and broke strikes to preserve their alli­ances with the racist South African regime.

But at this United Front Against Fascism conference, the Panthers' program was characterized as not in conflict with capitalist control of the police."Today it's dressed as "community policing," and behind it is the capitalist state planning to extend this control. The capital­ist state can be pressured into reforming itself, by dismantling its repressive state apparatus as a basis of hero worship and glorification of a street­gang mentality. Hilliard admits as much today, that they con­sciously built a cult of personality around Newton. He admits that his glori­fication of lumpenism caused them a number of problems, and here's one graphic example:

"We send some Panthers in our Panther truck—a contribution from a support group, if it has a picture of a springing black Panther and the words "The Black Panther" painted on the side—to San Francisco. It is a distribution point. After hours later we get a telephone call. Our Panther truck is in a shoot-out. The driver pulls up at a gas station. A black guy—Bill Brent—goes to the john while the others get up. Some time passes. The tank is full, still no Bill Brent. The men look around. Where's Bill? Oh, there's Bill: he's robbing the attendant. The guys in the truck are amused. They don't know what to do, get him or leave? As that moment the whole party arrives some police drive by, see Bill with the gun, set off their sirens. Freaked. Bill forgets about the attendant and fires into the cops. The rest is pandemonium. Finally, a bullet grazes Brent and one of the others arrested; the Panther truck is seized. Next thing we know, the five o'clock news claims the Party has tried robbing a gas station in broad daylight for the grand sum of seventy­five dollars.

So it's not an abstract question when we insist on the centrality of the proletariat in fighting to abolish the racist capitalist system. In 1971, the Panthers suffered a split between the more overtly reformist, pro­gressive faction of the Pan­thers or Black Punks," and the more radical Black Panthers, who threw the urban guerrilla warfare Cleaver—wing—a split characterized by murder, rape, and social fragmentation and inflamed by COINTEPRO provocations. The corruption of top Panther leaders nailed down their destruction, like Newton's

Glorification of Lumpenism: Male Chauvinism

It is tragic that the Panthers were destroyed by bloody state repression, and there was not the communist inten­tion of a revolutionary party sizable enough to win the best of these radical black youth. With their military posture, the Panthers were easy pickings for the mass murderers of U.S. imperialism. You can't build a revolutionary party on the basis of hero worship and glorification of a street­gang terror. Hilliard admits as much today, that they con­siously built a cult of personality around Newton. He admits that his glori­fication of lumpenism caused them a number of problems, and here's one graphic example:

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"We send some Panthers in our Panther truck—a contribution from a support group, if it has a picture of a springing black Panther and the words "The Black Panther" painted on the side—to San Francisco. It is a distribution point. After hours later we get a telephone call. Our Panther truck is in a shoot-out. The driver pulls up at a gas station. A black guy—Bill Brent—goes to the john while the others get up. Some time passes. The tank is full, still no Bill Brent. The men look around. Where's Bill? Oh, there's Bill: he's robbing the attendant. The guys in the truck are amused. They don't know what to do, get him or leave? As that moment the whole party arrives some police drive by, see Bill with the gun, set off their sirens. Freaked. Bill forgets about the attendant and fires into the cops. The rest is pandemonium. Finally, a bullet grazes Brent and one of the others arrested; the Panther truck is seized. Next thing we know, the five o'clock news claims the Party has tried robbing a gas station in broad daylight for the grand sum of seventy­five dollars.

So it's not an abstract question when we insist on the centrality of the proletariat in fighting to abolish the racist capitalist system. In 1971, the Panthers suffered a split between the more overtly reformist, pro­gressive faction of the Pan­thers or Black Punks," and the more radical Black Panthers, who threw the urban guerrilla warfare Cleaver—wing—a split characterized by murder, rape, and social fragmentation and inflamed by COINTEPRO provocations. The corruption of top Panther leaders nailed down their destruction, like Newton's

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The Panthers had a ten-point program, which was a program of mild liberal reforms. They'd call on the government for reparations, they wanted land. Some of their demands would sound familiar today: they wanted the universities to teach the "true history" of black people and oppressed people in this country, etc. But basically it was a program to reform capitalism, a system based on the bourgeoisie striving for maximum profit, which can't be reformed. We Trotskyists put forth a revolutionary pro