

Field

City of Detroit
EXECUTIVE OFFICE

ROMAN S. GRIBBS
Mayor

Black Panthers

July 8, 1970

(Following letter sent to the members of the Michigan Committee
Against Repression)

Attached is the report of the Detroit Police Department and my staff on the charges and demands made by the Michigan Committee Against Repression. After a review of the report, I am sure that you will agree that further meetings are not necessary at this time.

Should you have any further questions for this office, please contact my special assistant, John Amberger. Any questions for the Police Department can be directed to Inspector Henry Jason who is in charge of the recently expanded Community Relations Bureau. Because of our deep concern these gentlemen have been directed to maintain liaison with the Committee.

Your interest in the citizens of Detroit is appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

Mayor

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City of Detroit

EXECUTIVE OFFICE

ROMAN S. GRIBBS
Mayor

July 8, 1970

TO: Mayor Roman S. Gribbs

FROM: John M. Amberger, Administrative Assistant

RE: Report on "Michigan Committee Against Repression"

On May 18, 1970, a letter was received from the above committee charging 24 cases of "arrests, beatings and other repressive measures which have been taken against members of the National Committee to Combat Fascism (organizing bureau of the Black Panther Party) by the Detroit Police Department." The letter was signed by 19 citizens, some of whom are legislators or members of responsible organizations. Due to the serious nature of the charges, a meeting was quickly scheduled for Friday, May 22, 1970.

At that meeting, the City was presented with a list of 24 allegations of "harassment and improper" police conduct. The meeting was attended by yourself, Commissioner Murphy, Mr. Peloso of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, and Curtis E. Rodgers of the Commission on Community Relations.

The charges were briefly discussed at the meeting and the Detroit Police Department's Citizens Complaint Bureau was told to make an all-out effort to quickly investigate all 24 cases. The preliminary investigation of all 24 cases did not clearly indicate any evidence of police harassment, but rather, in many cases indicated that the police were reacting to illegal and questionable activities of certain persons some of whom are possibly members of the Black Panther movement.

On June 1, 1970 we scheduled a meeting with the spokesman of the group to discuss our preliminary findings. In a number of cases our investigations were incomplete due to the lack of information in the original allegations. Our preliminary findings also indicated that some of the charges were not in our jurisdiction or did not concern the Detroit Police Department. It was our hope at that meeting to begin to limit the scope of our inquiry to the more serious charges and to obtain more facts needed for a fair and equitable evaluation.

Frankly, from the City's point of view this meeting was quite fruitless as the participants from the committee rejected all of our preliminary findings, refused to narrow the issues, and insisted that we continue to investigate all 24 cases. One participant indicated to the press and television that five additional charges would be documented and sent to the Mayor's office. To date, these have not been received.

After this meeting, the Police Department's Citizens Complaint Bureau returned to work but it quickly became apparent that they would need more information to investigate all 24 charges. On June 3, 1970 a call was made to a spokesman for the group. He was asked to have someone from his committee supply further information to as we did not want the police to go to the Panther's headquarters, as this might have been construed as further harassment. He indicated that he would have someone contact this office and on June 9, 1970, we received a call from Mr. James Pita. He was informed of our need for information and indicated that he would call back. No call was received, and on June 19, a letter was sent to the spokesman specifically indicating our need for information on 7 cases. During the following week, this office had two telephone conversations with Mr. Pita who finally stated on June 25, 1970 that it would be pointless to provide further information on the 7 cases as they would probably lead to nothing more than further denials and counter-denials. Mr. Pita indicated that he had spoken to Senator Coleman Young, who he identified as the chairman of the committee and the spokesman of the committee. Mr. Pita indicated that it was Senator Young's position that the real issue was not the 24 cases but the three demands verbally made at the first meeting of May 22, 1970. Those verbal demands were:

- (1) Instruct the First Precinct of Police to stop bothering the Black Panthers who sell the party's newspapers downtown.
- (2) Break up the Police Department's Mod Squad of young persons, mostly black, who infiltrate activist groups.
- (3) Make public the secret files of the Detroit Police Department's Special Investigation Bureau and let the Black Panthers monitor the Bureau's activities 24 hours per day.

These demands were modified in a letter of June 10, 1970, from Frank Angel to Your Honor to the following:

- "(1) Have the police stop harassing people selling Panther newspapers.

- (2) Have the Mod Squad stop bothering people selling papers in the downtown Detroit area.
- (3) Open the Special Investigation Bureau's files to the Committee Against Repression."

It is felt that these three demands can be sufficiently answered at this time. Based on our general information and specifically on the 24 cases cited by the committee, we have no clear evidence to indicate that members of the Detroit Police Department are harassing persons selling the Panther newspaper. On the contrary, our investigation reveals that the Police Department has procedures to insure that unnecessary confrontations with the Black Panthers are avoided. There have been complaints from some of the Panthers when they create a nuisance in the downtown area. (See attached May 19, 1970 report to the Common Council.)

On the matter of breaking up the Mod Squad, it should be pointed out that this has been a highly effective force in dealing with purse snatching and pickpockets in the downtown area. They are needed to keep the downtown area safe. Their work would be more effective if the Panthers would stop identifying them and did not interfere with attempted arrests. (See attached May 19, 1970 report to the Common Council.)

As to the demand that the Special Investigation Bureau open its files to the Panthers, the committee, or any group, this would be simply impossible. There would be no point to the existence of the Bureau under such conditions. It was the confidential work of this Bureau that prevented the shootings of June 28, 1970 from turning into a major disaster.

In summary, it is felt that the 24 charges of "harassment" are unproven and may be unprovable. Of the 24 cases submitted for investigation, seven did not contain sufficient information for investigation, and although we requested more information, no additional information was received. Six cases did not concern the Detroit Police Department or the activities were routing and proper and no "harassment" was involved. Two cases remain under investigation, the remaining nine cases have been placed in the hands of the court for their determination.

Attached is a copy of our preliminary and updated report on those 24 cases.

Should further information be developed, it is recommended that meetings be resumed as soon as possible in this sensitive area. Hopefully, in the future, the committee can find a more effective way to relate their concerns to the City. The public confrontations, the multiplicity of contact persons and the changing spokesmen has not helped to develop the hard and specific information that would help the City and Police Department identify problem individuals, if they exist.