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Simon Townsend Talks To The Leaders Of The Black Panthers

... Two leaders of the Black Panther Party, known as field marshals, are Gary Foley, 21 and Paul Coe, 23. They claim a membership of about 30.

Foley and a third field marshal who asked to remain anonymous, talked freely with *The Sunday Australian* last week. They are uncompromising and dogmatic, but intelligent, articulate and intense.

Foley, married, says he has not worked for two years and would not divulge his source of income. He was a draughtsman: "But every job I had they would stick me up the front where everyone fell over me— I was the token Aboriginal." He spends much of his time now involved with the Aboriginal Legal Service and Medical Service at Redfern, Sydney.

"We're going to train a select group in urban guerilla tactics and use of explosives. We'll be ready to move in a month, and then all hell will break loose" ...

Won't you attract people interested solely in violence?

"You've got to expect that," Foley says. "But the re-education usually sorts that kind out."

Women play a key part in the party. "In the tribal culture everyone had a specific role. If someone fell down on their role, the whole system fell down. This is more or less the system we operate within the party."

Who would be unsuitable?

The third field marshal says: "Someone who's in it for kicks, thrills, who's got an ulterior motive like publicity or getting a few birds. It's a very disciplined party. People who don't face up to the discipline are generally sifted out."

Recruits see films, hear lectures and are given books to read, then they are asked to discuss them at a subsequent meeting. New recruit meetings are held about once a month in a house in Redfern. The re-education programme takes about three nights a week for the month.

The Panthers consider their enemies to be white society at large, Aboriginal Uncle Toms, the Nazi Party (from whom they fear violence) and white radical groups (who would use them for their own purposes).

Foley says "We don't like the Communist Party, although we're friendly with a few individual communists. They're fighting a class struggle, but we are not even up to that, because we're fighting for survival as a black race.

"The Australian Government has reduced Aboriginals to the same level as flora and fauna by saying we belong to the land, but the land doesn't belong to us. We want land rights now and then the black man can assimilate, integrate or live separately. But he must be able to choose for himself," Foley adds.

The Black Panthers claim they will bomb symbolic targets and gradually work up to more significant targets such as the property of employers and unions which discriminate against Aborigines.

What about the backlash?

Foley says violence is natural to an Aboriginal because he has been subject to it from birth: "Violence is their means of survival. All the Black Panther Party is doing is utilising and redirecting this violent feeling.

"When we go into action the government is going to get off its behind and do something, not publicly because that would be admitting they're bowing to the pressures of radicals. But changes will come, quietly and subtly."

The anonymous field marshal says publicity is important to the

cause. "Mainly we need coverage overseas because the Australian Press will never give the Aboriginal a fair go. We look to overseas because it's the only way of embarrassing this bloody government into doing something."

He says Aborigines identified with the American Indian. But they took the American name Black Panther for the glamor surrounding it. A party committee is now working on finding a fully Aboriginal name and symbol ...

They don't have any rule, like the American Panthers, forbidding fraternisation with whites. Foley adds "we do have a very strict ruling that no one be drunk or on drugs when carrying out party work."

No white can join because, says Foley, no white could understand the experiences of a black man in a white society.

Dennis Walker, son of Aboriginal poet Kath Walker, is probably the foremost guiding spirit of Black Power. He arrived in Sydney from Brisbane on Thursday and leaves for Melbourne tomorrow for discussions on extending the Black Panther Party to Brisbane and Melbourne.

Walker, 25, a tall ex-sailor, was financial co-ordinator of the Aboriginal and Islanders Council in Brisbane, until its Government grant funds ran out. Walker says he has deserted his wife and four children because he can't support them. He refuses to work except with blacks or for blacks, so the Commonwealth won't pay him unemployment benefits.

He describes the Panthers as a political education and self-defence group. "Its defensive violence of the people versus oppressive violence of the system, or survival versus money," he says.

"In the United States, the people have the constitutional right to arm themselves. We can't carry guns here but the police can, which puts Aborigines at a distinct disadvantage."

Walker sees a danger in the Panthers becoming black racist. He adds: "Going out and killing people haphazardly would make us just a terrorist group. We must be strategic."