PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: HUEY NEWTON

a candid conversation with the embattled leader of the black panther party

When most of the American public first heard of him, it was as a name on a button, a graffito scrawled on subway walls: FREE HUEY. *Huey, it turned out, was Huey P. Newton, "defense minister" of the Black Panther Party, a paramilitary organization (founded by him and "chairman" Bobby Seale) with a flair for self-publicity and inflammatory sloganeering. He became a martyr for black militants—and a* cause célèbre *for white liberals—after being convicted of and imprisoned for manslaughter following a 1967 shoot-out with Oakland police that many called a frame; he swore he wasn't even carrying a gun.*

But being in trouble with the law—and carrying guns—was nothing new for Huey Newton. Son of a Louisiana sharecropper and Baptist minister who had almost been lynched for "talking back" to his white bosses, Huey was in a more or less uninterrupted state of war with his teachers in elementary school, started breaking open parking meters when he was 11 and was arrested at 14 for gun possession and kept in juvenile hall for a month.

Though almost illiterate until his last year of high school in Oakland—to which his family had moved when he was two—Newton taught himself to read and write and, in 1959, entered Oakland City (now Merritt) College. There he met Donald Warden, head of the Afro-American Association, hung out with members of a socialist labor party and, in 1961, was introduced to the Black Muslims. "Malcolm X was the first political person in this country that I really identified with," says Newton. "If he had lived and had not been purged, I probably would have joined the Muslims. As it is, his insistence that blacks ought to defend themselves with arms when attacked by police became one of the original points in the program of the Black Panther Party."

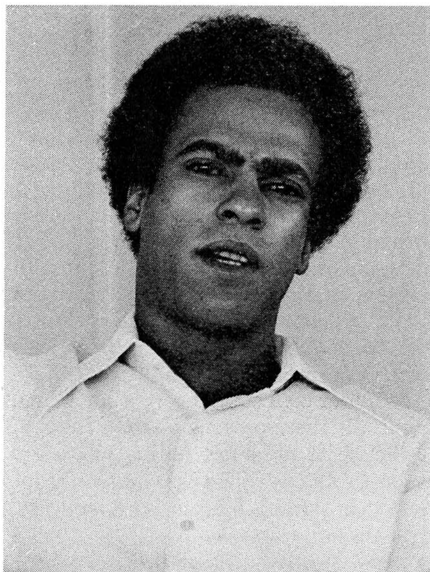
When he wasn't in class or at meetings during this period, Huey was spending his spare time burglarizing homes in Berkeley, passing forged checks, engaging in credit-card hustles and other activities for which he was occasionally caught—but never tried, for lack of evidence. His first jail term, in 1964, was for assault with a dangerous weapon: a steak knife. Huey and other witnesses present claimed it was an act of self-defense. In any case, he served eight months—two of which were spent in solitary confinement in a cell the other inmates called the "soul breaker"—and drew an additional three years' probation.

In 1965, out of jail and back at Merritt College, Newton joined Seale and a handful of other blacks in forming the Soul Students Advisory Council, which pushed for the rights of black students. But since the Watts uprising some months earlier, the Oakland police had been patrolling the black ghettos with shotguns and rifles at the ready; Newton and Seale felt a militant response was needed and, in October of 1966, created the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. "The party was formed as an alert patrol—an armed one," says Newton. "We wanted to show that we didn't have to tolerate police abuse, that the black community would provide its own security, following the local laws and ordinances and the California Penal Code." By then a prelaw student at Merritt, Newton had carefully researched the code and found that it was perfectly legal for a citizen to carry a loaded, unconcealed gun.

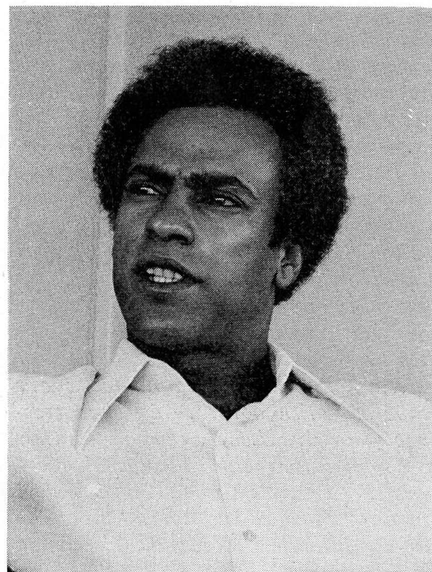
The alert patrols were an instantaneous success from the standpoint of gaining publicity, which is what the Panthers needed most. In a series of dramatic confrontations with police, Newton refused to surrender his weapon—and threatened to use it in self-defense if they tried to take it away. The impact on black crowds was electric; they weren't used to seeing a black man refuse to submit to a white policeman, let alone jack a round of ammunition into the firing chamber of an M-1, as he did once in the face of a squad of officers who then backed off and docilely went away.

But the event that launched the party

"Eldridge Cleaver's rhetoric allowed the police to murder many of our members without great community protest. If we'd had an organized people, they wouldn't have been able to get away with it."



"Our ambition is to change the American Government. I think that ultimately it will be through armed violence, because the American ruling circle will not give up without a bitter struggle."



CANDICE BERGEN

"While I was handcuffed on a stretcher, the police kept beating and spitting on me. I was bleeding internally, so I started spitting back—lungsful of blood right in their faces."

into national prominence took place in Sacramento on May 2, 1967. The state legislature was debating a bill to forbid the carrying of loaded weapons within incorporated areas when Bobby Seale and 29 other men in Black Panther uniforms, 20 of them ostentatiously armed, invaded the state capitol and made their way onto the assembly floor. The idea was to give the party national news exposure: It did, beyond their wildest dreams. Within 24 hours, the Black Panthers were a household phrase. "We really had only about four or five members at the time," Newton recalls. "We recruited the rest that day, just got them off the streets and strapped guns on them. It was our first manipulation of the press, a media event." Among those who traveled to Sacramento, as a reporter for Ramparts, *was Eldridge Cleaver. Recruited by Newton, he joined the party soon after the Sacramento episode and quickly became its most articulate and best-known spokesman.*

On October 28, 1967, the day on which he was formally off parole for the first time in three years, Newton was involved in the Oakland police shoot-out, during which he was seriously wounded and a policeman was killed. In the course of the next 33 months, with Newton in the California state prison, Cleaver took over de facto *leadership of the party, escalating the rhetoric of armed revolution through the news media. In retaliation, at the outset of the first Nixon Administration in 1969, a series of police raids was launched on Panther homes and headquarters throughout the nation. Among the victims in the resulting bloodshed, which decimated the party leadership, were Chicago's Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. That same year, facing trial on a murder charge himself, Cleaver fled to Cuba and subsequently to Algeria. Newton, meanwhile, remained in jail until August of 1970, when the California state court of appeals overturned his conviction on the grounds that the judge had improperly instructed the jury. His second and third trials, in August and October of 1971, ended in hung juries, and the state finally dropped all charges against him.*

Since emerging from prison, Newton has made few public appearances, and little has been seen or heard of him or the Black Panthers. To find out what's happening with both, we assigned free-lance journalist Lee Lockwood—author of "Conversation with Eldridge Cleaver/ Algiers," "Castro's Cuba, Cuba's Fidel" and our "Playboy Interview" with Castro—to interview Newton. Lockwood reports:

"Huey P. Newton is alive and apparently well in Oakland. Twelve Hundred Lake Shore Avenue, where he resides, is a high-rise luxury apartment house resplendent with semitropical shrubs, trickling fountains and smartly uniformed black doormen. With its façade of pastel stucco balconies and tinted glass, it rises from the otherwise flat landscape like a missile gantry. I gave my name to the door captain, who made me stand before a closed-circuit TV camera while he telephoned upstairs to announce me. Duly scrutinized, I took the elevator to the penthouse floor. Newton's door was opened by Gwen Fountaine, who is his secretary and the apartment's only other resident. I looked around, while she made me a cup of instant coffee, and found the apartment an eerie combination of opulence and Spartan impersonality, like some prison cell of the future. The walls of floor-to-ceiling glass provide a blinding view of Oakland and San Francisco across the bay. The furniture is all glass and black leather, the adornments simple and few: a heroic pastel portrait of Huey on a far wall, a vividly rendered painting of Ché Guevara set affectedly on an easel, an oversized onyx chess set and, curiously, a pair of binoculars with camera attachment mounted on a tripod and trained on the Alameda County Courthouse.

"Huey startled me by coming in behind me from the kitchen. He was as handsome as his pictures, his celebrated baby face showing few lines of aging. He is slim but enormously muscular, his voice high and soft, with a Louisiana lilt, and he mumbles a lot—especially when, as often, he seems to have more ideas in his head than he can articulate.

"Since moving into this $650-a-month apartment, Newton has seldom ventured outside. Indeed, most of his meals are ordered from restaurants and sent in. It was curiosity about this reclusive life style, and about the new low profile of the Panthers, that prompted my first question."

PLAYBOY: Only a couple of years ago, one could hardly pick up a newspaper or watch a newscast without learning of some new outburst from or about the Black Panther Party. The Panthers were talking "off the pig" and armed revolution, and J. Edgar Hoover denounced the party as "the greatest threat to the internal security of this country." Yet today one reads very little about the Panthers in the national press. Are the Black Panthers dead—or just lying down?

NEWTON: We are neither dead *nor* lying down. We are becoming better established in our own community—and hence potentially more powerful—than ever. As for the white press not telling our story, that shouldn't surprise you. It's only interested in sensationalism—and we were, in the early days, sensational.

PLAYBOY: Do you blame the press for that image?

NEWTON: No, I blame ourselves. We were premature in presenting the idea of armed struggle; we used rhetoric when we should have used organizing tactics. But I don't dismiss the blame the press deserves. The press serves the white establishment.

PLAYBOY: In any case, most of what's known about the Panthers today is in the form of rumor. The party, once seemingly dedicated to radicalism and violence, is now said to be forming coalitions with the black church, with white peace groups, even with the Democratic Party. And Huey P. Newton, whom Bobby Seale once called "the baddest motherfucker that ever set foot in history," has been talking electoral politics. Is there a new Panther Party and a new Huey Newton, as there is alleged to be a new Nixon?

NEWTON: There's no new Nixon. This era of peace he's talking about is nothing more than a new era of domination and oppression. The visits Nixon has made to Moscow and Peking only indicate that America is attempting to co-opt more territory by making agreements with the other great powers so that they won't interfere with United States imperialism in other parts of the world. Whether he will succeed remains to be seen.

As for the Black Panther Party, it is no accident that the party is now becoming more aware that we cannot stop this new level of siege without a very strong, organized people. To have an organized people you must have a conscious people, and we're now in the process of educating them and lifting their consciousness. That was always one of our essential goals. But in the early Sixties, we spent too much energy on phrasemongering and not enough on organizing. As a result, the Black Panther Party found itself divorced from the community. I don't view the party today as a new one. I think as history develops, new conditions require adjustments. Through community-service programs—which we call survival programs—we are now moving toward our original goal of organizing the black community; and toward making coalitions with as many people as possible, in order to fight a new wave of repression.

PLAYBOY: Against blacks?

NEWTON: Against all the oppressed people of the United States. We are being threatened with total destruction through more and more domination and control by the white establishment. Through survival programs, we can organize the people to make a revolution. For example, there's our food program. We not only have the breakfast-for-children program now; we also have given out over 10,000 bags of groceries to poor people.

PLAYBOY: Where do you get the funds for these efforts?

NEWTON: From books. George Jackson left his estate to the party, but we get only half of it. Plus the income from my books and all of the chairman's royalties—I mean, all of Bobby Seale's royalties. We have recently abolished all titles in the party, but I still call Bobby chairman from force of habit.

PLAYBOY: Are you able to raise money from the community?

NEWTON: Only a little. They don't have any money.

PLAYBOY: At one time the Panthers got a good deal of money from Eastern philanthropists.

NEWTON: We don't get that anymore. Actually, we got our first financial break back in 1966, by selling Chairman Mao's Little Red Book. I saw news reports that every Chinese in the Bay Area was reading a Red Book, so we checked with the New China Bookstore in San Francisco, which had just gotten in a shipment, and we bought all the copies they had at about 23 cents each and sold them for a dollar apiece. That is how we raised our first money for weapons, which we used to start patrolling the community. But now it's really a tight situation. We get by with a little from our newspaper, a few speeches and honorariums in addition to the money from book contracts and royalties, which has amounted to a few hundred thousand dollars in the last two years.

PLAYBOY: But you can turn out books only so fast.

NEWTON: Well, so far I've done pretty well. My latest, *Revolutionary Suicide*, comes out this spring. But I know I can't keep it up. I'm not primarily a writer, anyway. I mean, it's not my thing.

PLAYBOY: You were talking about community programs. What other projects do the Panthers sponsor besides food distribution?

NEWTON: Our health clinics have expanded, and so has our school, the Samuel Napier Intercommunal Youth Institute. It's a free school; there's no tuition. We have 42 students—most of them children of party members—in the school now. We hope soon to get new and larger facilities, so that the majority won't be children of Panthers but other kids from the community.

PLAYBOY: What about the party's health program?

NEWTON: We have six health clinics throughout the country. Our sickle-cell anemia program has tested over 175,000 people. At the clinic here in Oakland, we have three regular doctors, plus a number of trained party members and community workers who donate their time. What we're doing is a drop in the bucket, of course, if we talk about handling the real suffering of the people on any large scale. What we really want to do is organize the people so well politically that they won't need their own health clinic but the Government will provide adequate health care. In the same way, our school is different from parochial schools. Our children graduate back into public schools, where they will be the future organizers. But they will also be equipped with what I didn't get in public school—reading and writing.

PLAYBOY: At your last trial, the jury said, "The only thing Mr. Newton said that we can't believe is that he didn't know how to read before he was 16 years old." We find that hard to swallow, too.

NEWTON: Not even my parents believed it. But, in fact, I couldn't read until after I got out of high school. I mean, not even third-grade words like house and car, and so forth. But I have a very good memory and as a kid I was pretty clever. I could trick my brothers or someone else into reading something enough times so I could remember it.

PLAYBOY: How is it possible that you went all through grammar school and high school without learning to read?

NEWTON: Well, I was a good bluffer. I had to be, because I was suspended from school approximately 38 times, and that's a conservative figure. And we moved a lot. I went to every school in Oakland and five or six in Berkeley. We were always moving, either trying to get a better place or because they would raise the rent and we couldn't pay it. Even when I *was* in school, I spent most of my time standing outside the classroom door because of fights with my instructors. I found the classes humiliating, and because my father had taught me to stand up for myself, I would always speak up or cause a disturbance. I didn't like the stories they read in class. *Little Black Sambo*, for example—I hated that story. Every time they read it, I would have a fight. Once, I hit an instructor with my shoe.

PLAYBOY: A white instructor?

NEWTON: Yes. She started to run out of the room and I took my other shoe off and threw it and hit her with that, too—on the head. But *Little Black Sambo* was about the only story they would read that involved blacks, that and *Br'er Rabbit and the Tar Baby. Little Black Sambo* was given to the blacks to identify with, while the whites had the story of Sleeping Beauty and the glorious knight rescuing her. Little Black Sambo wasn't glorious or courageous at all. He stood for lack of strength, lack of courage, humiliation, gluttony, submission. Some of the other black kids would laugh at the story and that would make me even angrier, of course. Sometimes they would laugh just to cover up the fact that they were ashamed.

As a matter of fact, I remember that in junior high school, whenever the African continent was mentioned in geography class, the blacks would cringe, because they knew that the next thing the teacher was going to talk about was the missionaries who "civilized the heathens." They didn't say anything about the glorious kingdoms of Africa before the conquest in the 1100s—like Timbuktu, the cultural center of the world. The philosophers in Timbuktu were so advanced that the Greeks would take gold there in order to buy books from their university.

PLAYBOY: When did you finally learn how to read?

NEWTON: It happened when I was 16, just turning 17, and my guidance counselor asked me, "Well, what are you going to do now? You going to try to get some sort of manual job?" I guess I got mad, so I said, "No, I'm going to college." "You're going where?" he said. "You can't even make it into city college." So I taught myself to read and went to college—mainly because he told me I couldn't do it. In other words, he told me I wasn't smart, and I didn't like that. So it was really a matter of rebellion.

PLAYBOY: How did you teach yourself to read?

NEWTON: I started out with Shakespeare. Plays like *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* were on records; I remember Vincent Price had recorded a lot of them. And I would also get the book and read along. But the first real book I ever read was Plato's *Republic*, stumbling through. I read it about five times. By the fifth time, I could read it and understand it. The only thing I still had trouble with was all those Greek names. I would give them my own nicknames, you know, so I could tell the characters apart. But the records were the most helpful. I would hear the record and I would identify a word and write it down, over and over again. But the kids in our Panther school aren't going to have to learn that way.

PLAYBOY: Why is your school called an intercommunal institute?

NEWTON: Because we live in communes and we're mobile. Each unit is a family structure, and it's run like a family. People choose friends and stay with them, and when they decide they don't want to stay together anymore, they don't. As far as the children are concerned, they are the party's children. The kids live in their own school, and they go home on the weekends when they want to. Most of the time they don't want to. The kids raise each other; they make their own rules. We just make sure they don't hurt themselves. The few rules we do make probably hurt them more than anything else.

PLAYBOY: Why is that?

NEWTON: I don't know; I think adults generally make bad rules for children. I think all we should do is try to keep the kids from running in the street and having a car hit them or something. And work to give them reading and writing, make sure they learn the basic skills. If you do anything else, there is the danger that you will spoil their creative minds. But they do have to be disciplined.

PLAYBOY: Do your students get an ideological education?

NEWTON: Yes. Our children are taught at a very early age to grasp the primary

principles of dialectical materialism.

PLAYBOY: From a Marxist-Leninist point of view?

NEWTON: We don't subscribe to any particular school of dialectical materialism. Maybe we'll call it Pantherism.

PLAYBOY: In your book *To Die for the People,* you wrote: "We will never run for political office, but we will endorse those candidates who are acting in the true interests of the people." That policy seems to have changed since that book came out.

NEWTON: Well, it had to change, because never is an anti-dialectical word, one that flies in the face of the basic principle of the operation of nature and history. Therefore, we not only contradicted ourselves by running candidates; by saying never, we had contradicted our belief in the theory of dialectical materialism, which is change through contradiction.

PLAYBOY: Specifically, how have the Panthers entered electoral politics, and why?

NEWTON: We have run candidates for mayor and the Oakland city council, because we feel that we can use it as a forum from which to organize the people. We also believe that we can bring about certain practical changes by assuming administrative offices in the name of the people. We registered 26,000 people in Alameda County, 16,000 in Oakland alone. The registrar's office here told a reporter that we had signed up more new voters in Alameda County than had ever been registered before.

PLAYBOY: How did you go about it?

NEWTON: We registered 11,000 people in three days through our adult food program, where we passed out groceries and had people speaking about social ills—Congressman Ron Dellums, Johnnie Tillmon of the National Welfare Rights Organization and others. We have been most successful in registering large numbers of people when we've served them at the same time. We always give out food at survival conferences just before the welfare checks come out, when people have run out of money. At one conference, we had something like 7000 in the auditorium, and the next day we had 5000 or 6000. We've held five survival conferences and we're planning another one now, as soon as I get the advance on my new book.

PLAYBOY: We mentioned earlier that the Panthers are also said to be working closely with the black church, whereas not very long ago you were critical not only of those who worked with church groups but of the church itself.

NEWTON: The church is an integral part of the black community. It's an old institution, probably the oldest black institution in our history in America, and probably the most stable one. That's why we're trying to work with the church institution; of course, we'd like to revolutionize it as much as possible by drawing it into political action and service to the people in the black community. Actually, we worked with the church once before. When the party was founded, we had breakfast programs at the churches; they would let us use their facilities. Then, when I was in prison, the party went through something like the so-called filthy-speech movement, which was an infantile diversion from Mario Savio's "Free Speech" movement. I didn't understand it, and I stood against the profanity. But I didn't have much influence in the party while I was in prison.

PLAYBOY: This was when every third word in the Black Panther newspaper was motherfucker?

NEWTON: Not only in the paper but even inside the churches. They would go into the churches to give political-education classes for the general community and they would use motherfucker every other word. This was Eldridge's brain storm, this filthy-speech movement. And it really entertained the white radicals. Blacks had used motherfucker for a long time, in its proper place. But whites? Maybe it was their way of attacking their own rigid Anglo-Saxon culture. Maybe it served its purpose, though I doubt it. In any case, they were entertained. So we drew more and more white radicals and street people. But we alienated the whole black community and we got kicked out of the churches. The black community wouldn't bring their children to our rallies. So we ended up with 90 percent whites and ten percent blacks at the rallies. And we had lost the people we were trying to mobilize, those we could have worked with best at that time.

That experience taught me that most revolutionaries—or, rather, so-called revolutionaries—fail to understand the continuity of history. That's what really struck me in China when I was there on their National Day: their great continuity of history. I was somewhat shocked when I saw the pictures in Red Square. Of course, they had pictures of Mao, and of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. That didn't surprise me. But then I saw equally huge posters of Dr. Sun Yat-sen. Any Chinese will tell you that he was a bourgeois revolutionist. When I asked them why they had his picture there, they said they had to honor him on that day because it was Sun Yat-sen who made possible the existence of the Peasants' Institute, where Mao taught and trained his first troops. He was the leader of the left wing of the Kuomintang, with Chiang Kai-shek on the right. After Sun Yat-sen died, the right wing took over and the institute was closed. But it is still called the cradle of the revolution.

Immediately, I thought of Martin Luther King and how he has been criticized by the Black Panther Party and by other black revolutionists, who talk about him as if he didn't contribute anything at all. In many ways, King was a bourgeois revolutionist, but he did accomplish some things that were necessary for the revolution to proceed, and for the Black Panther Party to exist. That doesn't mean we should imitate Martin Luther King now, any more than Martin Luther King could have imitated us then. But it would be wrong to say that he didn't contribute anything.

PLAYBOY: What do you think he contributed?

NEWTON: He advanced the cause of civil rights, the human rights of black people and of oppressed people generally. But I could say the same thing about Nat "The Prophet" Turner and Denmark Vesey and their great slave rebellions, earlier in history.

PLAYBOY: All of the programs you've mentioned—running candidates for office, registering voters, setting up health clinics, giving away food, cooperating with the black church—seem to indicate that the Panthers are essentially working within the system. Yet, in 1970, just after you'd gotten out of prison, you stated in an interview: "We intend to overthrow the United States Government by force and violence." Isn't there a contradiction between what you said then and what you're doing now?

NEWTON: I think that Vietnam's National Liberation Front has been working within the American system. That's why they've been fighting. They don't like the American system, so they struggled to transform the situation so that it would not be one of domination.

PLAYBOY: But they weren't within the American system, and they tried to transform it by fighting, not by working within it.

NEWTON: I'm saying that they fought precisely because they *did* find themselves within the American system. I contend that *everyone* is within the system. I think the world is so close now, because of technology, that we are like a series of dispersed communities, but we're all under siege by the one empire-state authority, the reactionary inner circle of the United States.

As for whether we intend to overthrow the American system by force, the statement still holds that our chief ambition is to change the American Government by any means necessary. And when I say we, I'm talking about we, the people. We feel solidarity with the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America, and we feel that we're fighting now through armed violence, though on different fronts.

PLAYBOY: Do you think the *only* way to achieve your revolutionary goals is through armed violence?

NEWTON: Yes, and I think that ultimately it will be through armed violence, because the American ruling circle will not give up without a bitter struggle. But America will not be changed until the world is changed. To say that change will come here just through the ballot

box would be a fantasy. We're running for city-council offices today. But if you ask if we would be prepared to fight with armed force when the time is right, I would say yes, when the occasion presents itself—and I think it will come, at some point in the future.

PLAYBOY: Do you have any idea how far away that may be? A generation? Two generations?

NEWTON: I refuse to make a prediction. I'll tell you a story, though. I was very impressed with last year's Democratic Convention. I saw great potential there. It was the first open convention; there were liberal rules made; the people there were progressives. But I wasn't very impressed with their consciousness; they didn't know what they had or how to deal with it. And they had a misunderstanding: They went there under the false assumption that they had taken over the party. But the "real" Democrats, the old white Southerners and the big money, had already left the party. So the party powers had abdicated, and the progressives filled the vacuum. But the powers in this country don't care which party wins the election. Democrat or Republican, they regard the whole party system as nothing more than a scheme to put their man into office.

At any rate, the proposal came up at the Democratic Convention that they should have a dues-paying membership. And this was voted down in the rules committee. That was a mistake, because if they had created a dues-paying party—say, five dollars per month per person as an arbitrary kind of figure—the party would have had money to fight during the next four years, without having to cede control to big contributors. McGovern would still have lost the election, but the party would have had money. A couple of million people at five dollars a month—that's pretty good money to function on. Then by 1976, with a candidate such as, hypothetically, Cesar Chavez, and Ron Dellums as a running mate, heading up what would then be a wealthy and progressive party, the Democrats would be stronger than the American Independent Party, which is the only real party in this country with a physical apparatus and an ideology. The others are all, as I say, just schemes to put a man in.

Say that this happened—and, of course, I'm just dreaming. Between now and 1976, we would have been working very hard to mobilize thousands of people to go to every state convention around the country, using Bobby Seale as our whip. By the time of the next national convention, we would have been there with an organized force under the banner of the Democratic Party, which would really then be a socialist party.

PLAYBOY: But in this country, rather than a socialist proletariat, don't we have a mass of workers who really don't want revolutionary change, who really wouldn't vote for Cesar Chavez or Ron Dellums in 1976—or ever?

NEWTON: You're probably right. Many leftists, so-called dialectical materialists, say that dialectics is based on contradiction, and that nothing stands outside dialectics; everything can be transformed. Yet at the same time they seem to think that one thing stands outside it: the proletariat, who always carry the banner of revolution. But the dialectical method tells me that the proletariat, too, can be transformed into something else; and that's just what's happening in this country. The industrial proletariat is not now the class with the most revolutionary potential. As technology develops, you're getting a new class of people who are unemployed, or only seasonally employed, or unemployable. If that trend continues, this class may eventually constitute a majority of the people. I think it's this class that will ultimately carry the banner of revolution. When Rome fell, 80 percent of its people were unemployed.

PLAYBOY: What are the Panthers doing to develop this new revolutionary class?

NEWTON: We work closely with the Welfare Rights Organization. We were instrumental in forming a welfare-rights group in Oakland. And we've worked very hard throughout the black community in getting people to question the refusal of city and state government to take responsibility for the right to work, the right to live. We try to educate them through our paper and through block meetings. We're working with old people. We're just now organizing patrols in neighborhoods where old people are getting mugged. We take them to pick up their checks and to cash them, and we talk with them about their general problems.

PLAYBOY: Are most of your programs in the Oakland area?

NEWTON: No. We have several very large survival programs in Chicago, in North Carolina, in Detroit—all over the country, at the largest chapters.

PLAYBOY: What is the strength of the party at the present time?

NEWTON: We're very strong. We don't usually give out numbers. We don't think they're important, because we're not trying to be a huge organization. We want a party that's capable of organizing people, and we're strong enough to do that. But I've given out the number in Oakland before, so I'll tell you that around central headquarters we have about 300 regular cadre members.

PLAYBOY: In an interview in *Jet*, you said that there were 1500 members nationwide.

NEWTON: I didn't make that statement.

PLAYBOY: You were quoted as saying, "We have 38 chapters across the country which are located in principal cities, with a membership of 1500."

NEWTON: I'm quoted saying a lot of things I didn't say. I don't know where the interviewer got that figure. I've never given any estimate. The number of chapters is correct, though.

PLAYBOY: How is the party structured?

NEWTON: We have about 10 or 15 committees, and we have a coordinator for each committee, and a coordinator of the coordinators, and we have a central committee, which is the decision-making body for the whole party.

PLAYBOY: How large is the central committee?

NEWTON: We don't give out those numbers.

PLAYBOY: Are the names of committee members secret, too?

NEWTON: Yes.

PLAYBOY: Why?

NEWTON: Because of harassment from the police. When they think they've ascertained who has official authority in the party, he's focused on and followed, and his relatives and friends are badgered by the FBI. The mother of my secretary, Gwen Fountaine, has been approached and offered money. One of my staff workers, Robert Bay, has been approached by the FBI ten times in the past three weeks. His father was taken off his job to be questioned. They left $50 on Robert's car windshield with a note saying, "There's more where this came from." I can show you the note. Then three days ago, he was offered $20,000 by an agent.

PLAYBOY: Twenty thousand dollars to do what?

NEWTON: Just to tell them anything about me, about the party. But me in particular. They said that I'm hard to get to and I won't talk, anyway, so they want to "protect" me, since we're in the system now. We're not a threat, but they would pay $20,000 for the privilege of protecting me. It's crazy, huh?

PLAYBOY: Are the chapters under the same kind of surveillance and police pressure that they were two years ago? Have there been, for example, any assaults by police on Panther chapters?

NEWTON: We have reports that there has been something going on in Atlanta. But there hasn't been any shoot-out. The police seem to be worried; they know they can win a shoot-out at this point, but they're afraid they might lose the fight we're waging to mobilize the people against them and what they represent.

PLAYBOY: You make considerable use of such terms as mobilization and consciousness raising, which are also employed by the women's liberation movement. What is the party's position on women's lib?

NEWTON: We support the *white* women's liberation movement. The liberation of black women is a very different problem from what white women, in what is commonly called the women's liberation movement, talk about. The values are

different. White women talk about getting equal jobs, equal pay, and not being kept in the home as housewives. But black women have always been the breadwinners. Most of us are from matriarchal families. I'm an exception; my mother never worked and my father was a very strong figure in our home. He was what I'd call a benevolent tyrant.

PLAYBOY: In what way?

NEWTON: He was very strict. He insisted that we do our chores, each one to the letter; not the right way or the wrong way but *his* way, the way he prescribed. And he would discipline us. Whenever the kids would get into contradictions, he'd line us all up and listen to our stories—"No, he did it" or "No, she did it." Sometimes he'd listen for hours and hours; then he would point to one and say, "You're guilty." We never knew *how* he knew, but he would always get the right one. I can't remember him ever punishing the wrong kid. Then the guilty one would get two punishments: one for doing wrong and the second for lying about it.

PLAYBOY: Did you identify with your father?

NEWTON: I idolized him. He was a strong, proud man who had very few fears. As a matter of fact, I don't know anything he fears today. He even used to operate on himself. He once took his own tonsils out with something like a cactus. And another time—I was only about five years old—he hurt his foot, and it was all swollen, and I remember watching as he heated up a knife blade, put his foot in very hot water with Epsom salts, and then split his own foot open to let it bleed. Then he took some cat hair and some regular long thread and stitched the wound back together. Later it turned out that his foot was swollen because it was broken in five places.

PLAYBOY: You say your mother never worked. How did your father support a wife and seven children?

NEWTON: He had to hold down three jobs to do it—and he was an assistant pastor of a Baptist church, too, but that he did for nothing. He was never really out of work, because even during the Depression he would catch a freight train and go from state to state, city to city, finding a day's work here and a day's work there, and sending the money back to the family. He is a very responsible person. He was gone a lot, and I used to resent that, but we were luckier than most families I knew, that had no father at all.

That's why black women today would like to think of a time when they can stay home and raise their families. They try to get a strong masculine man who can protect them. It is hard for black women to get involved in the white women's liberation movement. I always laugh when that question about women's lib is asked in public, because I know it's going to start a big row.

PLAYBOY: How do black women feel about the Panthers?

NEWTON: It just happens that in the party, women hold more official positions than men do—and also higher offices, in general. All of which gets the black male pretty upset. There's no black male superiority complex, as you have with the white male. Really, it's because of an inferiority complex that he feels threatened, because the woman in his house is always the master, anyway, and he wants to cut the cord. So we get some disagreements in the party about women holding more of the positions; some of the brothers don't like it.

PLAYBOY: Let's discuss the Panthers' most publicized internal struggle. After the split between Eldridge Cleaver and the Panthers, according to the media, the party was in a shambles, its numbers reduced and its influence vastly lessened. Wasn't the change in tactics from paramilitary militance to community politics really as much a "survival program" for the Panthers as for the community?

NEWTON: No. We don't accept the idea that there was a split in the party, and the party was not in a shambles, although the media made it look that way. We lost one chapter in Harlem, plus Eldridge and a few other individuals. But our party was always made of stronger stuff than a few individuals. It's stronger now than it's ever been. Only, as I said, the media aren't publishing reports of our community work, because that doesn't sell papers.

PLAYBOY: In what way do you think the media built up the split?

NEWTON: By printing Eldridge's words; he made many derogatory statements about the party. We refused to answer him through the press, because we had too much work to do to bother with that kind of thing. And that's the way we feel now. If Eldridge comes back, we're going to make sure that he can organize and do as he pleases, but we're not about to get into any confrontation with him, no matter how much the police would like that.

PLAYBOY: Can you describe the circumstances behind the split between you and Cleaver?

NEWTON: The split was between Eldridge and the party, not between Eldridge and me. Eldridge left the party. When I was in the penitentiary, there were rumors that he was attempting a coup, but I didn't believe them. And after I got out in 1970, I talked to him once a week on the telephone. He was in Algiers, so you can imagine that it ran up a high telephone bill. We talked regularly, and he wouldn't make any complaints or anything; he just kept asking me to "come to Algiers, come to Algiers." I told him I was still on bail, waiting to go on trial. But he kept saying, "You've got to come to Algiers, I need you in Algiers." He also insisted that David Hilliard and others in the party were scheming to kill me, that it was unsafe for me here.

PLAYBOY: He wanted you to go to Algiers and ask for political asylum?

NEWTON: Yes. He kept repeating, "You can't win a trial. You don't need a court thing—you need an armed-struggle thing." Meantime, these rumors kept going around that there was something wrong between Eldridge and me. Maybe he was talking to reporters there, building it up. But I still didn't believe it. To stop the talk, I set up a conversation between the two of us on the Jim Dunbar show, which is a top TV program in the morning on channel seven in San Francisco. I called Eldridge and arranged the time, so that he'd be home, and I gave Dunbar the telephone number, so that he could place the call. I was to be in the studio with Dunbar, oncamera, and Eldridge would be on the phone. I had explained to Eldridge how people were talking and that I would like to go on with him to clear it up.

So the program started and the first thing he said was, "Hi. I'm splitting the party down the middle." That was his opening statement: "I'm splitting the party down the middle, and if you don't purge David Hilliard and some others, then you're purged also." I was flabbergasted. I told him that this wasn't the proper place to discuss it, that I would report his outburst to the central committee and we would come up with a decision. Dunbar was sort of shocked. He thought it was a scheme of ours to get publicity, so he didn't even pursue the matter after Eldridge got off the phone.

PLAYBOY: What else did Cleaver say?

NEWTON: Well, he went on to say these guys were revisionists, that they were ruining the party because they were turning it into a breakfast-for-children program and a health-clinic program, whereas a revolution is armed violence, and so forth. After the show, I went downstairs, and the news media were waiting, about 25 reporters, asking all sorts of questions. They bit the bait, you know. But it was a serious thing.

PLAYBOY: What happened next?

NEWTON: Right after that, I went to Boston for a fund-raising party for our attorney, Charles Garry. As soon as I landed, I called Eldridge up again. I had restrained myself on the TV program, but this time I cursed him out and threw the phone down. He was very calm; he just kept saying: "After all, this is a political thing, you shouldn't be emotional about it." And he just listened to me swear. What I didn't know was that he had his telephone hooked up to a tape recorder and was having himself video-taped all the time I was cursing him out. And he sent a tape to various radio and TV stations in the U.S. It was played in Chicago, it was played in New York, it played here in

Oakland, on the TV news, with pictures of both of us on a split screen. And Eldridge was shown sitting back, smoking a cigarette, looking very relaxed and mature, while I was made to look as if I was a raving maniac. And people thought it was a public conversation. Really, it was a great violation of friendship and confidence, because it was a private conversation which he made public. But that's the kind of person Eldridge is.

PLAYBOY: Had he been a close personal friend of yours?

NEWTON: I felt that he was. But in retrospect, I don't think he ever felt the same way. I was very hurt at first. That's why I cursed him out. But I got over it after a while. I don't hate Eldridge Cleaver. I have sympathy for him, if anything; he's a very disturbed and unhappy person.

PLAYBOY: Do you believe he hates you?

NEWTON: Well, let me tell you something. Just before this whole thing happened, when I was making a tour of the country, I visited our Harlem branch, which was the only one that later defected to Cleaver. They had five security guards assigned to me, and I felt uncomfortable with them. I didn't have any concrete information then to explain my discomfort, but something just wasn't right. The people there had arranged for me to speak at the Apollo Theater, and they had sold tickets. It was sold out, as a matter of fact; it was going to be my first speech in Harlem. But that night, just before I was supposed to speak, I convinced Hilliard, who's chief of staff, to ditch those security guards, walk out and come back with me to the West Coast. Later, after Eldridge defected, these same guys who had been my bodyguards in New York announced that they wanted me dead. I also received information that if I had spoken at the Apollo that night, there was a plan that they would kill me from the audience.

PLAYBOY: As Malcolm X was killed?

NEWTON: Yes. That way, they would have been covered by the confusion of the crowd. Then, on another occasion—a few months after the split—our office in San Francisco was blown up. Dynamite blew out a reinforced brick wall. I was supposed to be there that day. At the time we blamed the police for it, but later we got information that it was one of Eldridge's men.

PLAYBOY: Do you think they're still out to kill you?

NEWTON: Well, I don't think they're interested in my welfare.

PLAYBOY: You said you feel sorry for Cleaver because he's disturbed. On what do you base that opinion?

NEWTON: I think Eldridge is so insecure that he has to assert his masculinity by destroying those he respects. It's very dangerous to become a friend of his, because he'll only accept a person whom he respects, and then he'll try to destroy him. It's a very self-destructive thing; he probably hates himself very much. I think Eldridge has to be understood as a disturbed personality rather than as a serious political problem. In a book I'm now writing—it will probably be called *Infantile Leftism*—I make a long analysis of his book *Soul on Ice* and his attack on James Baldwin. Baldwin is a homosexual, and Eldridge finds it necessary to make a vicious attack upon him for this reason. It has always struck me that a male who goes out of his way to attack another male because of his sexual relations must have a psychological fear that he, too, might not be so masculine.

I use Eldridge's discussion of rape in *Soul on Ice* as an example to prove my point. He went to prison as a rapist. When I was in prison, I quickly learned that guys who would come in with many counts of rape ended up as homosexuals a large percentage of the time. I think it was no accident that Eldridge had the rape conviction or that when he came out of prison he became so attached to the Panthers and the idea of the gun. I think the gun was a substitute for his penis; he called it his "rod." That's what the party meant to him: a masculine kind of demonstration that he needed in order to reinforce his very shaky sexual identity.

PLAYBOY: How do you view Cleaver's thesis that rape is an "insurrectionary act"?

NEWTON: Well, many times you get eloquent people like Eldridge in politics; they're very intelligent and they disguise all their internal difficulties with eloquent phrases. He also said that he had practiced on black women in order to get to the *real* woman—the white woman. That statement says an awful lot about his attitude toward black women, that they're something to be practiced on. You know, most blacks didn't like that book at all. In any case, I don't think rape is a revolutionary act. It's a social disorder.

PLAYBOY: Do you have any factual evidence that Cleaver is a repressed homosexual, or is it just conjecture?

NEWTON: Well, there was something that happened on the occasion when he and I met Baldwin. We met Baldwin shortly after he returned from Turkey, I guess in 1966 or the early part of '67. Eldridge had been invited to a party to meet him, and he asked me to go along. So we went over to San Francisco in his Volkswagen van and we got there first. Soon after, Baldwin arrived. Baldwin is a very small man in stature; I guess about five-one. Eldridge is about six-four, you know; at the time, he weighed about 250 pounds. Anyway, Baldwin just walked over to him and embraced him around the waist. And Eldridge leaned down from his full height and engaged Baldwin in a long, passionate French kiss. They kissed each other on the mouth for a long time. When we left, Eldridge kept saying, "Don't tell anyone." I said all right. And I kept my word—until now.

I was astounded at Cleaver's behavior, because it so graphically contradicted his attack on Baldwin's homosexuality in his article "Notes on a Native Son," which later appeared in *Soul on Ice*. In the article, Cleaver indicted Baldwin as a self-hater and homosexual. "Homosexuality," he said, "is a sickness just as baby rape or wanting to become the head of General Motors." But unlike Cleaver, Baldwin makes no attempt to conceal his homosexuality; he thereby escapes the problems of the repressed homosexual. The problems and conflicts Cleaver has with himself because he's engaged in the denial of his own homosexuality are projected onto an external self—Baldwin—in order to defend his own threatened ego. He attempts to project his own femininity onto someone else and to make someone else pay the price for his own guilt feelings. I didn't understand it at the time, but now I realize that Baldwin, who hadn't written a word in response to Cleaver's attack on him, had finally spoken at that meeting. Using nonverbal communication, he had dramatically exposed Cleaver's internal ambivalence. In effect, he had said: If a woman kissed Cleaver, she would be kissing another woman; and if a man kissed Cleaver, he would be kissing another man.

PLAYBOY: You've written: "If it is argued that it is the condition of exile that wrecked Eldridge Cleaver's once great and tragic imagination, then it should be noted that the exile was in large measure staged by the exile himself." Are you saying that Cleaver didn't have to go into exile?

NEWTON: Yes. He's a very complicated person, but I think he staged his exile. Thanks to all the publicity, he saw himself as a great revolutionary being sought by American authorities. It's part of a fantasy that he indulges himself in. I think that now he finds his exile not so exciting, because they've taken away his means of communication: his telephone, his toy. So he wants to come back now and be heard again.

PLAYBOY: When you talk about Cleaver's defection from the party, you usually mention it in tandem with what you call "the defection of the party from the black community." You apparently blame Cleaver for leading the party away from the community and into paramilitarism and coalition with white radicals. How could Eldridge command such influence in the party, when you were its leader?

NEWTON: That's part of the criticism Bobby Seale and I give ourselves. We created Eldridge's influence ourselves, from the very beginning. I had great respect for Eldridge because he was such a good writer and a good speaker, so when I recruited him into the party, we offered him the highest rank. On two occasions, we even offered him the party leadership, but he turned it down, saying

that we were more qualified. But it was known in the party that I respected Eldridge, and in this way I delivered some degree of influence over to him without knowing enough about the man.

Placing as much emphasis on the weapon as he did made the black community afraid of us. You can't organize anyone who's afraid of you. Even though they respected our posture, they weren't about to help us in building any urban guerrilla activity. And when we found ourselves allied with white radicals —who were alienated from society in general and from the white community in particular—the black community didn't understand it. They viewed it as the whites' taking over the party; we were talking a language they didn't understand or respect. And that's why I say we alienated the black community.

PLAYBOY: Didn't you realize at the time that wearing guns, dressing in black uniforms and talking violence was alienating the community?

NEWTON: I knew it after I got into prison.

PLAYBOY: Did you try to do something about it?

NEWTON: Yes, but I was outvoted. Before I went in, our police-alert patrols, even though they were armed, were actually working to organize the community. At one point, we had a broad cross section of the black community supporting us across the country. Our patrols were respected. Remember that when we started in 1966, we called ourselves the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. But then we adopted an aggressive, off-the-pig posture instead of a defensive one, and the community wasn't ready for that. We kept accelerating it as the press jumped on it, because it was sensational. And the more publicity we got, the more we set ourselves up for shoot-outs with the police, until finally the blacks were afraid to have us in the community.

PLAYBOY: Among the most celebrated of those shoot-outs was the one in October 1967 that sent you to prison and was responsible for the "Free Huey" movement. What's your version of that incident?

NEWTON: I remember the night very well. I had just completed three years' probation—I'd been in continual trouble with the police ever since 1964, when I did my first prison term—and that very night in October I had become a free man. I went down to Seventh Street and Willow in Oakland to get something to eat, some barbecue. It was late at night —three or four A.M., maybe. I was riding with a friend, Gene McKinney, when I turned onto Seventh Street and noticed some spotlights behind me. I should say that all during my probation the police used to harass me—stop me and hold me for two hours or so, not giving me a ticket but just "checking"—so I wasn't surprised when they stopped me that night. I sat there and another police car came up, and then they ordered me out of my car. I asked, "Am I under arrest?" One of the policemen opened the door, ordering me out of the car—he never did place me under arrest—and we got out and started to go back toward his car.

PLAYBOY: Were you carrying a gun?

NEWTON: No. He frisked both of us after we got out of the car. Anyway, as we were walking toward the police car, the policeman had me by the arm, pushing. I had a book on criminal law in my hand —I always keep it for such emergencies— and I opened it up, trying to find an appropriate section on "reasonable cause for arrest." And he hit me. He held me with his right hand and hit me with his left. I reeled and hit the ground on one knee. I started to get up—I think I still had the book in my hand—and the policeman drew his gun and fired on me. And then all hell broke loose, all sorts of shots.

PLAYBOY: Where were you hit?

NEWTON: In my midsection, in the stomach. The bullet went out through my lower back. After that, I don't know what happened. I was unconscious. The next thing I knew, I was in the hospital, being guarded by police. While I was lying handcuffed on a gurney, waiting for surgery, they abused me and hit me.

PLAYBOY: The police hit you while you were lying in handcuffs, with a bullet hole in your stomach?

NEWTON: Yes, and spat on me. So I yelled for help, and one of the doctors who were preparing me for surgery came in. I asked him to stop the police and he told me to shut up. And they kept beating on my wrists, which were handcuffed to the gurney behind my head, and spitting on me. I was bleeding internally, so I got this bright idea of how to stop them. I started spitting back—lungsful of blood right in their faces. And they ran out of the room. I told the doctor, "All you white boys are alike." And then I passed out. His is the only face I really remember in that whole thing.

PLAYBOY: But you were convicted of voluntary manslaughter for killing a policeman and sent up for two to 15 years in the state penitentiary.

NEWTON: Where I spent a good deal of time in solitary.

PLAYBOY: That experience shakes a lot of men very deeply.

NEWTON: Not me. I had already learned how to handle it.

PLAYBOY: When?

NEWTON: When I was in the Alameda County Jail and in Santa Rita, back in 1964.

PLAYBOY: What were you sent up for?

NEWTON: I was given a year for assault on a man named Odell Lee.

PLAYBOY: Were you guilty?

NEWTON: No, I wasn't.

PLAYBOY: Were you framed?

NEWTON: No. It was self-defense. I admitted on the stand that I had stabbed him, but he wouldn't admit that he had attacked me twice that night. I stabbed him because I thought he was reaching for a weapon. But I was convicted and sent to jail—first to Alameda County. I can't remember what problem I got into with the bulls over there, but they put me in the hole. It's called the soul breaker, and it's four and a half feet by six and a half feet, padded, with one steel door. No bed—only a concrete floor. There's no light, no window, no washbasin and no toilet, only a hole in the center of the floor about four inches in diameter that you're supposed to urinate and defecate into. They ran a hose in about every week or two to flush it out. If you used it too often, of course, it would back up. They give you a half-gallon milk carton with water in it, to last for two weeks. And every 15 days they let you out for a shower. You're out for 24 hours; then they take you back if you haven't broken yet.

PLAYBOY: What were you expected to do to get out?

NEWTON: Apologize. Practically no one would do the whole 15 days.

PLAYBOY: How long did you stay in the hole?

NEWTON: I did 15, went out for a day and did 15 more. Thirty days on that trip. During nine months, I made three trips to the hole.

PLAYBOY: How did you keep your sanity?

NEWTON: I knew about the hole from other guys who had gone there. Either you apologize and get out or else you scream and have to be taken to the hospital, because you're mentally disturbed. It's well known that the brain gets disorganized if it isn't bombarded with external sensory stimuli. So, to occupy my time, I would try to think of the most pleasant experiences I'd ever had. But then I found that this didn't work, because the images started to pick up in speed, like a fast-moving projector, and I couldn't control them, and it would put me into a spin. I almost screamed a couple of times. One time, as a matter of fact, to repress a scream, I threw up, but I swallowed it again because I didn't want to admit it was making me do that. Finally I started to exercise, and I found that if I exercised until I became exhausted, I could fall asleep.

PLAYBOY: What did you do for exercise in that cramped space?

NEWTON: Just push-ups and dynamic tension and squats, stuff like that. After a while, even that didn't work. But somehow I found myself lying on my back on the floor with my buttocks tight and arching my back and shoulders, so that my shoulders touched. Later I was told by a Buddhist that this is a Zen Buddhist position that controls breathing and slows down the thought processes. And I started to be able to control those images in my mind; I could stop them, like freezing a frame of a film, and then I could make them disappear. I mastered the technique so well that later, in 1967, being

in solitary was really no problem.

PLAYBOY: This time you were in the penitentiary for three years. What was it like to get out after all that time?

NEWTON: Well, I was bewildered. I didn't ever expect to get out of the pen. First I had expected to go to the gas chamber; then I was sure I would have to do at least 15 years, if not life. When I got out, I was disoriented. Life seemed jerky and out of synchronization. All those sounds, movements and colors coming on simultaneously—television, radio, people talking, doorbells and phones ringing—were dizzying at first. Ordinary life seemed quite overwhelming. I even had to figure out what to eat and what time to go to bed. In prison, all this had been decided for me. And things had changed a lot by the time I got out.

PLAYBOY: What were the biggest changes?

NEWTON: Well, the party. Many of my old comrades had been murdered. Bobby was in jail, Eldridge out of the country. We had suffered shoot-out after shoot-out and were under constant surveillance. We had made many mistakes in the direction of "radical" militance, and the community was leery of us. But I couldn't do anything about it but argue. The party didn't relate to what I was saying, because it had been influenced by Eldridge.

PLAYBOY: It sounds as though the party defected from you, too; that you weren't in control of it.

NEWTON: I've always had only one vote. I was simply outvoted, so I won't say it was a defection. Others can vote against the way I think any time they want to, just as I can vote against them.

PLAYBOY: Do you think that because of this build-up of fear, Cleaver's leadership was ultimately responsible for the murders of several young Panthers—Fred Hampton and others in Chicago, for example?

NEWTON: Yes, yes. I think that Eldridge's rhetoric allowed the police to attack us and murder many of our members without a great community protest in most cases. If we had had an organized people, and the same police attacks and murders had taken place, the police wouldn't have been able to get away with it.

PLAYBOY: You once said that the party was thinking in terms of "a new International," based on armed struggle and socialist ideology, that would presumably bear some resemblance to the old Communist Internationale. Do the Panthers have any relationship with the Communist Party of the United States?

NEWTON: No, we don't like them.

PLAYBOY: Why not?

NEWTON: They're not a very revolutionary group. They don't *do* anything. I mean, so they run their candidate. They're more alienated than we were before we went back to the community. Their ideology is foreign. They're so connected up with Moscow they have no relationship with what's going on here. The best thing they can be used for is defense funds. They have a good apparatus for raising money, and they know how to do it. Their officials have a lot of money. Everyone I've met is pretty well off, very middle-class, you know?

PLAYBOY: Why do you think Angela Davis is such a fervent supporter of the American Communist Party?

NEWTON: I think she must be a fool of some sort. I could see why some of those old blacks got tied up with the C. P., when it was the only group that would give any sort of dignity to blacks. But for her to do it, she must be a fool of some sort. How could any intelligent person join the U. S. Communist Party at this date? Even their own children won't join now.

PLAYBOY: Were you being intelligent when you offered the leadership of the Black Panther Party to Cleaver—and then, when he wouldn't take it, giving it to Stokely Carmichael, who you now say was an agent of the CIA?

NEWTON: No, *I* was being a fool. That's why I have faith that I know what a fool is.

PLAYBOY: In deciding on a new direction for the party after you got out of prison, did you consider the possibility of going underground?

NEWTON: Underground! That's funny. You go underground when you're buried. After we get underground, then what? Guerrilla warfare? Then you make the same mistake that we made by alienating ourselves from the community. They'd be terrified. We have to organize and mobilize the masses, because that's our support. And you can't do it by the underground method.

PLAYBOY: The Weathermen tried to operate underground. Do you think they made any contribution to the revolutionary movement?

NEWTON: I can't really see it. I try very hard to, but I can't see the contribution—only the negative aspects of terrifying a lot of workers and central-city dwellers.

PLAYBOY: How do you relate to the Black September Movement and the kind of terrorism it engaged in at Munich and through the letter bombs that followed? Is that so different from the Weatherman tactics?

NEWTON: I think it's much different. I can judge whether that tactic is right or wrong only by what they accomplish through it. Our official position in our paper was that we criticized the German police for murdering the hostages as well as the guerrillas.

PLAYBOY: But you don't criticize the Black September movement for invading the barracks where the Israeli athletes were housed, killing people there and then abducting the others?

NEWTON: As I say, I can criticize it only in the context of how positive or negative an accomplishment it turns out to be for their freedom movement.

PLAYBOY: Then the end justifies the means?

NEWTON: No, not necessarily.

PLAYBOY: Are there limits, then, as to what means you would use?

NEWTON: Yes, of course. I have principles I operate within.

PLAYBOY: Would you spell them out?

NEWTON: I guess I would have to have a situation presented. I think that when terrorism is disciplined and directed, it sometimes serves a positive purpose. But you almost have to judge each act within itself. In other words, I don't make a blanket condemnation of terrorism. I do condemn it if it doesn't come from an organized body, such as an army, and if it's not disciplined and directed toward a specific goal. Now, the goal of some terrorists' activities has been the release of prisoners, for example. In that context, I would say it was all right.

PLAYBOY: What about terrorism when it's used by an organization such as the Ku Klux Klan, which also has specific goals?

NEWTON: I don't think anything they do would be justified, because I disagree with their principles. I oppose everything they support, and I support everything they oppose. So I would have to make a subjective choice on what organization I'm talking about. You have to be subjective.

PLAYBOY: So you would feel no hesitation about using violence as a tool, even to the point of killing people, provided it advanced your movement or your principles?

NEWTON: That's right.

PLAYBOY: And you say that without reservation?

NEWTON: The death of any man diminishes me, but sometimes we may have to be diminished before we can reconstruct.

PLAYBOY: That raises our last question: If you're ready to kill for the cause, you must also be ready to die for it. Are you?

NEWTON: I will fight until I die, however that may come. But whether I'm around or not to see it happen, I know we will eventually succeed, not just in America but all over the world, in our struggle for the liberation of all oppressed peoples. The revolution will win. But Bakunin wrote that the first lesson the revolutionary *himself* must learn is that he's a doomed man. If that sounds defeatist, you don't understand the nature of revolution: that it's an ongoing process and that we don't get out of life alive, anyway. All we can do as individuals is try to make things better now, for eventually we all die. I think Mao's statement sums it up best: "Death comes to everyone, but it varies in its significance. To die for the reactionary is as light as a feather. But to die for the revolution is heavier than Mount Tai."