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## **A new feeling of unity: decolonial Black Power in the Dutch Atlantic (1968-1973)**

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### **Chapter 3:** **“The Best Place to Help the Panthers is at Home”:** **Black Panther Solidarity in the Cold War Netherlands**

Early in the evening of 16 January 1970, hundreds of people made their way through the streets of Amsterdam to attend a special event at the monumental Moses and Aaron Church. When the final guests arrived at the venue, it was overcrowded. The wooden benches of the church were packed, forcing numerous visitors to take their places on the stairs to the pulpit. Dozens of others stood in the entranceway or leaned against the back walls. The baroque altar of the church, normally displaying an array of biblical statues, marble pillars, oil paintings, was hidden behind a large white screen and a banner with the words: “BLACK PANTHER PARTY – ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE – DE MACHT AAN HET VOLK,” accompanied by an illustration of a clenched black fist.<sup>337</sup> That evening, the church hosted the very first event of the *Solidariteitscomité met de Black Panthers*, or Black Panther Solidarity Committee (BPSC), which had been established several weeks earlier to raise support for the Black Panther Party in the Netherlands.

To kick-start their campaign, the committee had invited a speaker who knew the organization inside out: Elbert ‘Big Man’ Howard. Big Man was a veteran member of the Black Panther Party, having joined founders Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton as one of their first recruits in Oakland, California, in 1966. Since then, he had filled a number of key roles in the organization, serving as both Deputy Minister of Information in Eldridge Cleaver’s absence and as editor of *The Black Panther*.<sup>338</sup> Big Man turned out to be an ideal representative for the party that night. He appeared on stage in iconic Black Panther fashion, wearing a leather jacket with sunglasses and a round afro haircut, living up to the crowd’s idea of what a Black radical was supposed

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<sup>337</sup> Rob Mierenet, “Albert Howard Hield Lezing over “Black Panther” Beweging in USA in Mozes en Aaronkerk A’dam,” January 16, 1970, Photo Collection, col. nr. 2.24.01.05, inv. nrs. 923-1651 to 923-1660, Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Netherlands. “De Macht aan het Volk” is a direct translation of All Power to the People. All translations in this article are the author’s own.

<sup>338</sup> Curtis J. Austin, *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006), 40-43; Bloom and Martin, 264; Donna J. Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2010), 139.

to look like. He also proved to be an excellent orator. In a passionate yet carefully constructed speech, Big Man laid out the revolutionary nationalist ideology of his party, explaining how the Black Panthers fought racism, capitalism and imperialism all at the same time. Aware that many of these themes were popular among European activists, too, he invited the audience to join him and his comrades in fighting these systems globally. “We are prepared to collaborate with oppressed people wherever they are in the world,” he firmly stated. “Because in the end we are all doing the same thing.”<sup>339</sup>

By the time Big Man had reached the Netherlands, he had already traveled to Japan and Scandinavia to spread a similar message.<sup>340</sup> His tour was part of a broader effort by the Panthers to expand their network of revolutionary activists, liberation movements, and even politicians who could help them challenge the growing power of the United States in the midst of the Cold War. As one of the most oppressed groups in American society, the Black radicals believed they had a critical role to play in global resistance against their government, arguing that they were in a unique position to fight its imperialist project from within.<sup>341</sup> To strengthen their position, fugitive party members Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver had started building an international section for the Black Panther Party in Algiers, the capital city of Algeria, in the summer of 1969. From there, the Cleavers managed to form coalitions with some of America’s fiercest ideological opponents, including communist leaders Fidel Castro, Pham Van Dong, and Kim Il-Sung.<sup>342</sup> At the same time, they helped the Panthers build an extensive solidarity network in Europe, which has received much less attention in the historiography than their other transnational relations.

Representatives of the BPP had first made an appearance in Europe in the spring of 1969. Even before the Cleavers had settled on the Mediterranean coast,

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<sup>339</sup> Martin Ruyter, “Ze Kunnen de Revolutie Niet Doden,” *De Volkskrant*, January 16, 1970, 11, and Jelte Rep, “Big Man: ‘Zwarte Panters Laten Zich Niet Vernietigen,’” *Trouw*, January 17, 1970, 7.

<sup>340</sup> Elbert “Big Man” Howard, *Panther on the Prowl* (self-published, 2002), 34-52; Elbert Howard, interview by David P. Cline in Santa Rosa, California, 30 June 2016, filmed by John Melville Bishop, *U.S. Civil Rights History Project*, Library of Congress, accessed via <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016655436/>, 01:18:30-01:19:38.

<sup>341</sup> Bloom and Martin, 66-73; Malloy, 117; Clemons and Jones, 190; Williams, “American Exported Black Nationalism,” 16; Stephen Shames and Bobby Seale, *Power to the People: The World of the Black Panthers* (New York: Abrams, 2016), 43, 182.

<sup>342</sup> Malloy, 127, 165-66, 191.

Chairman Bobby Seale and Minister of Education Raymond 'Masai' Hewitt had gone on a tour through Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark to raise support for their campaign to free co-founder Newton from prison and to see if there was any interest in their work across the Atlantic.<sup>343</sup> Their tour had been organized by Jamaican activist Connie Matthews, who worked for UNESCO in Copenhagen, and Leonard W. 'Skip' Malone, an American journalist living in the same city. Both had previously been involved in the Scandinavian Solidarity Committee for Third World Peoples' Liberation Struggle (SSCTWP) and had later established the Danish Solidarity Committee Black Liberation (SCBL).<sup>344</sup> As they traveled across northern Europe, Seale and Hewitt left behind a number of committees which promised to keep raising support for them after they were gone. Upon returning to the United States, Seale and Hewitt rewarded Matthews for her help in organizing the tour by appointing her as the official International Coordinator of the BPP, authorizing her to develop this newly formed support network into a strong system of fundraising, education, and political pressure.<sup>345</sup> Under Matthews, with support of the Cleavers in Algiers, the Scandinavian committees gained several hundred followers and the network quickly expanded southwards, taking root in West-Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Italy as well.<sup>346</sup>

While it was quite unique for an organization to establish its own solidarity network like this, this type of activism was not altogether uncommon in Europe. Characterized by the countercultural spirit of the sixties, hundreds of student movements and action groups had begun to mobilize in support of the so-called 'Third World' through solidarity committees and other kinds of campaigns. According to historian Kim Christiaens, this type of activism was popular because it "contrasted the status quo and *ennui* in Europe with the whirlwind of changes and challenges in

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<sup>343</sup> Bloom and Martin, 107-11; Malloy, 120-22; Clemons and Jones, 187.

<sup>344</sup> David Hilliard and Bobby Seale, "The Black Panther Party Authorizes Leadership in Scandinavia," *The Black Panther*, 4 May 1969, 10; Robyn C. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2016), 118.

<sup>345</sup> Bloom and Martin, 313; Hilliard and Seale, 10; House Committee on Internal Security, *The Black Panther Party, Its Origin and Development as Reflected in Its Official Weekly Newspaper, the Black Panther* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Service, 1970), 67-68.

<sup>346</sup> Clemons and Jones, 197; Spencer, 103. The British Black Panther Movement is not included in this list because it was established independently from the Black Panther Party. See Angelo.

countries emerging out of the ruins of colonial empires and defying the stalemate of the Cold War.”<sup>347</sup> While on the surface this type of activism was characterized by a kind of romanticization of liberation movements in the non-Western world, it was also fundamentally critical of political developments at home. After all, for European activists to side with the ‘Third World’ from the heart of the ‘First World’ was to challenge not just their own governments’ foreign policies, but also the growing influence of the United States and international organizations like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) around the world. In fact, as some have previously argued, anti-Americanism even became a defining characteristic of European solidarity activism in this period.<sup>348</sup> Such sentiments had a significant impact on regional Black Panther solidarity as well.

Although multiple scholars have alluded to the wide reach of the Black Panthers in Europe, however, they have only provided in-depth analyses of their solidarity committees in West-Germany and, to a lesser extent, Scandinavia.<sup>349</sup> Research on Black Panther solidarity in the other countries and on the collective efforts, strategies, and operations of the overarching European network remains absent. This chapter aims to fill part of this gap in the literature by exploring the brief yet turbulent history of the Black Panther Solidarity Committee in the Netherlands, which was active from

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<sup>347</sup> Kim Christiaens, “Europe at the Crossroads of Three Worlds: Alternative Histories and Connections of European Solidarity with the Third World, 1950s-80s,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’Histoire* 24.6 (2017): 933.

<sup>348</sup> Christiaens, “Europe at the Crossroads,” 945; Kim Christiaens, John Nieuwenhuis, and Charel Roemer, *International Solidarity in the Low Countries during the Twentieth Century: New Perspectives and Themes* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020), 7-8; Konrad J. Kuhn, “Liberation Struggle and Humanitarian Aid: International Solidarity Movements and the “Third World” in the 1960s,” in *The Third World in the Global 1960s*, eds. Samantha Christiansen and Zachary A. Scarlett (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013): 69-85; Robert Gildea, James Mark, and Niek Pas, “European Radicals and the ‘Third World’: Imagined Solidarities and Radical Networks, 1958-73,” *Cultural and Social History* 8.4 (2011): 449-71.

<sup>349</sup> According to Kathleen Cleaver, these were “the most dynamic and the best organized” of all the committees (as cited in Clemons and Jones, 198), which could explain why these receive more attention in the literature. The only mention of the other national solidarity committees appears in the same article. For studies of Black Panther solidarity in Scandinavia, from the perspective of the Black Panther Party, see Bloom and Martin, 313-314; Malloy, 125. There appear to be no studies of the Scandinavian committees from the Scandinavian perspective (at least not in English). On Black Panther solidarity in Germany, see Klimke, 120; Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson, ““We Shall Overcome”: The Impact of the African American Freedom Struggle on Race Relations and Social Protest in Germany after World War II,” in *The Transatlantic Sixties: Europe and the United States in the Counterculture Decade*, eds. Grzegorz Kosci, Clara Juncker, Sharon Monteith, and Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson (New York: Columbia UP, 2013), 83; Maria Höhn, “The Black Panther Solidarity Committees and the Voice of the Lumpen,” in *German Studies Review* 31.1 (February 2008): 136-137.

December 1969 to April 1970, and the Freedom School, which continued its work until December 1970. It examines why activists in the Netherlands believed it was necessary to support the Black Panther Party and how this was informed by the specific environment in which they were active. Taking into consideration the political landscape of Cold War Europe, as well as the colonial context of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, it argues that the BPSC formed an alliance with the BPP because it offered them a framework to simultaneously challenge American imperialism in Europe and their own colonial legacies in the Caribbean and beyond.

In many ways, the BPSC forms an outlier in this dissertation as a whole. Not only is it the sole non-Caribbean organization, but it is also the only organization that did not emulate Black Power. Rather, it was created in support of the movement. Both of these deviations can be explained by the racial identity of the activists who formed the organization, all of whom were White and Dutch. While the members of the committee did believe the ideas of the BPP were relevant to Dutch society and collaborated with Surinamese and Antillean activists to promote the revolutionary nationalist ideology of the Panthers among Black communities, they recognized that their own identity limited their activism to the realm of solidarity. Furthermore, the BPSC was the first group with direct connections to the Black Power movement in the United States, unlike the BPC, which merely imitated it, and the ABP, which was tied to the movement only by its founder.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first provides an overview of the early history of the Black Panther Solidarity Committee, discussing who were involved, how they legitimized the need for Black Panther solidarity in the Netherlands, and what they did to support the party from afar. The second and third sections discuss the establishment of the Grand Committee for Black Panther Solidarity, which was set up to bring together Black Panther supporters from Antillean and Surinamese action groups and the New Left.<sup>350</sup> While this Grand Committee helped the BPSC grow exponentially, it also paved the way for major internal conflicts on protest methods and violence. The final section shows how this conflict led to a schism in the solidarity movement which, ultimately, forced the BPSC to hand over its

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<sup>350</sup> New Left here is not a translation of the 'Nieuw Links' group that arose from the Dutch Labor Party in the same period, but rather refers to the broader leftist movement of western Europe and North America in the 1960s and 1970s.

activities to the more militant Freedom School. Together, these sections demonstrate the successes as well as limitations of Black Panther solidarity in an interracial, transatlantic context.

### ***The Black Panther Solidarity Committee***

The first official Black Panther committee in the Netherlands, the Black Panther Solidarity Committee, was established on 15 December 1969 in Hilversum. The founder of the committee was Peter Schumacher, a young journalist who had come into contact with the party when he had traveled to the United States earlier that year. Based on what he had seen and heard, Schumacher was highly impressed with the Panthers, believing them to be “the first revolutionary party in America to fight for a radical social revolution.”<sup>351</sup> Eager to support the party upon his return to the Netherlands, Schumacher began to explore the possibility of gathering support for the Panthers at home.<sup>352</sup> He reached out to the European solidarity network, which sent two fellow Black Panther enthusiasts to the country: Leif Aingsmose, chairman of the Danish solidarity committee, and Bill Caldwell, chairman of the Swedish solidarity committee and coordinator of the European distribution of *The Black Panther*. Both stayed in the Netherlands for several weeks to assist Schumacher in setting up a local committee, sharing their experiences, providing him with the necessary knowledge and tools, and connecting him to their extensive transnational network of Black Panther supporters. It was also Aingsmose and Caldwell who arranged for Big Man to visit Amsterdam that January.<sup>353</sup>

In the meantime, Schumacher selected the first members of the founding committee. Initially, the BPSC consisted of journalist Jelte Rep, who worked for daily

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<sup>351</sup> Solidariteitscomité Black Panther Party, *Black Panther Nieuwsbulletin*, January 1970, 3, ZK 72913 (1970), International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands; “Ik Dacht: Dit Wordt te Gek,” *Leeuwarder Courant*, 24 January 24, 1970, 41.

<sup>352</sup> Peter Schumacher, “Zwarte Panters Vogelvrij,” *De Groene Amsterdammer*, December 20, 1969, 1; Solidariteitscomité Black Panthers, January 1970, 3; “Ik Dacht: Dit Wordt te Gek,” *Leeuwarder Courant*, January 24, 1970, 41.

<sup>353</sup> “Black Panther in het Universiteitstheater,” *Het Parool*, January 5, 1970, 4; “Panters,” January 13, 1970, 9; Haaster, “Harde Politieke Aanpak,” 4; Hanneke Meerum Terwogt, “‘Big Man’ Howard Spreekt, Vanavond,” *Het Parool*, January 16, 1970, 9; “Albert Howard komt Spreken in Amsterdam,” *Het Vrije Volk*, January 14, 1970, 4; “‘Black Panther’ Bill Caldwell en Provo-Raadslid Roel van Duyn naar Groningen,” *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, February 4, 1970, 11.

newspaper *Trouw* as 'America expert', film director At van Praag, who specialized in countercultural documentaries, and publisher Rob van Gennep, whose publishing house was known around the Netherlands for its leftist literature. Much like Schumacher himself, all were young white men who had learned about the Panthers through their work in the media. Even before the BPSC could get its work started, however, the composition of the committee already changed. Despite their initial enthusiasm, both Rep and Van Praag left the committee within weeks of its founding, listing rather ambiguous reasons for their resignation.<sup>354</sup> They were replaced by two young women: Lily van den Bergh and Anja Meulenbelt. Van den Bergh was a former actress and television host who had recently started working as a freelance journalist, writing for prominent magazines and newspapers like *De Groene Amsterdammer* and *Vrij Nederland*. As recently as 1969, she had traveled to California to interview Masai Hewitt and Elaine Brown on the ideas and programs of the Panthers.<sup>355</sup> For Meulenbelt, who would play a prominent role in the Dutch feminist movement and became a Socialist Party member later in life, the committee was one of her first activist experiences.<sup>356</sup>

Under the guidance of Caldwell and Aingsmose, the newly established BPSC began formulating its plans. This was no easy task. On the surface, the members of the committee understood that, as a solidarity group, their main purpose was to gather support for the Black Panthers in the Netherlands by raising awareness, collecting donations, and organizing solidarity protests. "From the very start, the Panthers have stated that white support is welcome, but that the Panthers themselves will decide how the black revolution will be realized," Schumacher clarified in a piece for *De Groene Amsterdammer*.<sup>357</sup> On a deeper level, however, the committee also believed that solidarity went beyond mere moral support. True solidarity also meant "fighting

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<sup>354</sup> Schumacher, "Zwarte Panters Vogelvrij," 1; "Ik Dacht: Dit Wordt te Gek," 41.

<sup>355</sup> Lily van den Bergh, "Bloemen, Drugs, Naaktheid en Anarchie zijn Geen Adequaate Antwoord op Onderdrukking," *Vrij Nederland*, January 1970, 5.

<sup>356</sup> These are the names of committee members listed in the BPSC newsletters. However, Meulenbelt later also mentions a Marcel, likely referring to Surinamese student Marcel Kross, and someone named Hannah, who according to Meulenbelt was Bill Caldwell's girlfriend and "did most of the work behind the scenes, virtually unnoticed." See *De Schaamte Voorbij: Een Persoonlijke Geschiedenis* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 1976), 109-10.

<sup>357</sup> Peter Schumacher, "Zwarte Panters Vogelvrij," 1.



against racism and imperialism on all fronts here.”<sup>358</sup> While the members of the committee acknowledged that there was no place for them in the United States, they did believe the BPSC could help them by challenging their shared enemies in their own society. “Why would we let black people in America, who have the courage to sacrifice themselves (...) do all the hard work?” the committee asked in its opening statement, while “we, here in Europe, can help the Black Panthers (...) by starting a fight against economic pressure at home and by opposing the exploitation of our colonies.”<sup>359</sup> Ultimately, the Dutch activists hoped they could help pave the way for an International Panther Party that could fight imperialism all around the world.

Although the committee thus had significant ambitions, its program initially focused only on its first goals: to educate the public about the Black Panther Party, to collect financial support for its programs, and to advance its causes through political protest. After all, as the committee argued, “real solidarity can only be given once one knows what it’s all about.”<sup>360</sup> The educational element of their program was the most extensive and consisted of two main components: writing and lecturing. The first mostly took place in the BPSC’s monthly newsletter, which became a medium for committee updates and Black Panther news. Using the Panthers’ own writings as their source, the committee wanted to provide an alternative view on recent events involving the party, such as the FBI’s assassination of Fred Hampton in Chicago and the murder of suspected FBI informant Alex Rackley in New Haven. Although Dutch media had covered these events widely, the BPSC believed that the American sources used by Dutch journalists – which they referred to as “Hoover’s reports” – were untrustworthy.<sup>361</sup> In addition to news items, the publication also contained translations of some of the party’s core texts, such as the Ten Point Program (‘What We Want, What We Believe’) and its membership rules, as well as updates on the work of the solidarity committee in the Netherlands. The newsletter was distributed to

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<sup>358</sup> Solidariteitscomité Black Panthers, February 1970, 1; “‘Big Man’ Howard Spreekt, Vanavond,” 9.

<sup>359</sup> Solidariteitscomité Black Panthers, January 1970, 2.

<sup>360</sup> Solidariteitscomité Black Panthers, February 1970, 1.

<sup>361</sup> Rob van Gennep, “Rob van Gennep Over,” *Het Vrije Volk*, January 10, 1970, 19.

subscribers, but could also be bought at a selected number of bookstores around the country and at lectures and events organized by the committee.

Each of these newsletters also contained a reading list with books on the Black Panther Party, the Black Power movement, and African American history in general. Some of these books were written or published by members of the committee, such as Peter Schumacher's *Eldridge Cleaver: Een Zwarte Panter in Amerika* (1969), Ton Regtien's *Black Power en de Derde Wereld: Een Interview met Stokely Carmichael* (1968), and the Dutch translation of Stokely Carmichael's *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (1969). Other books on the list were written by members of the party itself, such as Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (1968) and his *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches* (1969), or by other Black radicals, such as Malcolm X and Alex Haley's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) and Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). The lists were constructed by Van Gennep, who sold all of these books and the BPSC newsletter at his shop in Amsterdam, though the committee mentioned they were also available at other "progressive bookstores" in the Netherlands.<sup>362</sup>

Besides their own newsletter, members of the BPSC also wrote about the Panthers in a number of newspapers and magazines. The most detailed of these was founding member Jelte Rep's six-part series on the Black Panthers in newspaper *Trouw*. In this series, he discussed the living conditions in African American neighborhoods, the police violence they encountered, how the Black Panthers were trying to combat this, and what the BPSC did to support this.<sup>363</sup> In less detail, fellow committee member Van Gennep wrote about the BPP and BPSC in his personal column for socialist newspaper *Het Vrije Volk*.<sup>364</sup> Other members wrote about their activities on a freelance basis. Both Schumacher and Van den Bergh, for example, submitted pieces on the party to *De Groene Amsterdammer* and *Vrij Nederland*, both of which were major left-leaning journals. Through these articles, Schumacher and Van den

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<sup>362</sup> Solidariteitscomité Black Panthers, January 1970, 7, 9; February 1970, 8; March 1970, 2; April 1970, 2.

<sup>363</sup> Jelte Rep, "Toenemende Solidariteit in de Ghetto's," *Trouw*, February 21, 1970, 9; "Gewapende Negers Verbijsteren Blanke Politie mannen," *Trouw*, February 24, 1970, 7; "'Ik Zal Vermoord Worden,' Zegt Huey P. Newton," *Trouw*, February 25, 1970, 7; "Eldridge Cleaver Komt Diep Onder de Indruk van Nieuwe Negerpartij," *Trouw*, February 26, 1970, 7; "Politie Zet op Keiharde Wijze de Aanval in," *Trouw*, February 27, 1970, 7; "FBI Werkt met Zwarte Spionnen," *Trouw*, February 28, 1970, 13.

<sup>364</sup> Van Gennep, 19.

Bergh hoped to convince “those whites freed of racial delusions” to join their committee or make donations.<sup>365</sup> Some of these works were spread around the Dutch Atlantic, also reaching the Caribbean through personal networks and republishing the information in journals like *RUKU*.<sup>366</sup>

The second part of their educational program consisted of a series of lectures organized in collaboration with various student organizations, cultural institutions, and political pressure groups around the Netherlands. These lectures took place in large cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague, but also in student cities like Leiden, Tilburg, and Nijmegen, and in towns with large leftist communities like Groningen, Assen, and Deventer. At its height, the committee organized two or three of these lectures a week. Each was slightly different, though most of them followed a similar format. First, one of the committee members would start off with a short introduction to the ideology and programs of the Black Panther Party. Sometimes, this lecture was not given by a committee member but by a special guest, such as Caldwell. After this lecture followed a short documentary film on the BPP or on racial inequality in the US in general. Afterwards, there would be room for an interactive activity, which could be a discussion, brainstorming session, or even the drafting of a policy proposal. Once the audience had gained a basic understanding of the work and relevance of the Black Panthers for Europe, the committee invited its audience to sign up for one of their solidarity protests, to subscribe to their newsletter, or to make a donation to the party.<sup>367</sup>

After all, the information provided by the BPSC was not only intended to be educational, but also to stimulate the collection of financial aid for the Panthers. As the previous paragraphs suggest, the committee’s most steady sources of income were the profits from their newsletter, payments for articles in major papers, money raised at events, and gifts by individual donors. On top of that, the BPSC gathered money by selling *The Black Panther*, which they received from Caldwell in Stockholm and

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<sup>365</sup> Schumacher, “Zwarte Panters Vogelvrij,” 1; Van den Bergh, 5.

<sup>366</sup> Letter to Stanley Brown, The Hague, March 19, 1970, Vito-artikelen, Archief, 1969-1971, N.B. Correspondentie e.a., Archivo Nashonal, Willemstad, Curaçao; “Leefwijze van de Panters,” *RUKU: Algemeen Cultureel Maandblad voor de Nederlandse Antillen* 2.4 (1970), 10.

<sup>367</sup> Meulenbelt, 109; Vrijheidsschool, *Vrijheidspers Informatiekrant*; Solidariteitscomité Black Panther Party, April 1970, 3; Terwogt, 9.

distributed to booksellers nationwide. When the distribution of *The Black Panther* faltered because shipments from the United States were disrupted, it was replaced by a new information bulletin written by the Cleavers for their European allies.<sup>368</sup> Although none of the BPSC's financial records were archived, one of its newsletters states that it had raised approximately 2000 fl. (Dutch guilders) in the first month, of which 800 fl. had been collected at the event with Big Man and 1200 fl. had been gifted by individual donors. Half of this money was used to cover the committee's own expenses, including the materials for the newsletter and costs of communication, while the other half was transferred to the national headquarters of the Black Panther Party in Oakland. The money was meant to fund legal assistance for prosecuted members, social projects, and training programs, such as the Free Breakfast Program and the Liberation Schools.<sup>369</sup> Big Man later wrote that most European aid was spent on legal support for prosecuted Panther leaders.<sup>370</sup>

Besides teaching and fundraising, the BPSC also showed its support for the Panthers through demonstrations. The purpose of these demonstrations was to pressure American diplomats, Dutch government officials, and even large businesses like American Express into denouncing the persecution of the Black Panthers in the United States. Two protests in the spring of 1970 are especially noteworthy. The first took place on 2 March, after the committee had gotten word from the European network about plans for a continent-wide uprising against the prosecution of Bobby Seale in the trial of the Chicago 8 and in New Haven. Even though they had only learned about these plans several days before the chosen date, the committee was determined to join the operation and side with their comrades in Paris, Frankfurt, Copenhagen, Oslo, and Stockholm. Despite the last-minute organization, some 150 people joined their march, starting at Beursplein in the city center of Amsterdam and ending at the highly secured US Consulate at Museumplein.<sup>371</sup> Along the way, the Black Panther supporters paused for short sit-ins, obstructing trams and causing delays throughout

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<sup>368</sup> Vrijheidsschool, "Aan de Abonnes van de Black Panther Krant," Private Archive Lily van den Bergh.

<sup>369</sup> Schumacher, "Zwarte Panters Vogelvrij," 1; Solidariteitscomité, February 1970, 2.

<sup>370</sup> Howard, *Panther on the Prowl*, 52.

<sup>371</sup> Solidariteitscomité, March 1970, 1; "Demonstraties tegen Chicago-Proces," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 3, 1970, 2; "Politie Belet Afgifte Brief aan Consul Ver. Staten," *Het Parool*, March 3, 1970, 5.

the city. Once the group arrived at the Consulate, they presented a letter in which they requested the Consul General to inform the American government of their discontent with “the way in which ever more people in the[ir] country are tried and judged based on made-up facts.”<sup>372</sup> They furthermore used the letter to accuse the US of becoming a police state where “fascist tendencies” were steadily increasing. According to an eye-witness, the entrance to the Consulate was protected by fourteen police officers, some of whom tried to obstruct the delivery of the letter.<sup>373</sup> Meanwhile, the young crowd held up countless banners and signs, holding up images of Bobby Seale and making statements like “Bobby Seale Moet Vrij” (“Free Bobby Seale”), “Alle Macht aan het Volk” (“All Power to the People”), and “Nixon in de Cel” (“Imprison Nixon”).<sup>374</sup>

The BPSC organized an even larger protest on 24 April, which the committee had declared a national day for Black Panther support. Similar to their previous protest, this demonstration was set up to call for Seale’s release, as they believed him to be “yet another victim of the American capitalist government’s systematic campaign to extinguish all active members of the Black Panther Party.”<sup>375</sup> Because it would be too much work for the five-person committee to prepare a nationwide event of this size by themselves, they decided to delegate the arrangements of protests outside of Amsterdam to a number of local task forces.<sup>376</sup> Located in at least twelve cities, and led by separate groups of Black Panther supporters, these subcommittees were authorized to set up their own protests using the promotional and educational materials of the national Black Panther committee. In the weeks leading up to the national event, the committee supplied them with posters, pamphlets, ideas for slogans, buttons, and newsletters from their central office, which was now based in

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<sup>372</sup> Solidariteitscomité, March 1970, 1.

<sup>373</sup> “Politie Belet Afgifte Brief aan Consul Ver. Staten,” 5; Solidariteitscomité, March 1970, 1. The committee later suggested that they had managed to slip it into his mailbox, but it is unclear if the Consul General ever received it or forwarded their message.

<sup>374</sup> “Demonstraties tegen Chicago-Proces,” 2; “Politie Belet Afgifte Brief aan Consul Ver. Staten,” 5.

<sup>375</sup> “Stop Moord op de Black Panthers,” 1970, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, Poster, 48x35 cm, BG D11/49 (1970).

<sup>376</sup> These cities included The Hague, Eindhoven, Haarlem, Hengelo, IJmuiden, Groningen, Baarn, Arnhem, Nijmegen, Rotterdam, Utrecht, and Zeist. The committee also encouraged readers in other places to sign up for the National Black Panther Day, but it is unclear if they did.

Amsterdam.<sup>377</sup> In the capital, the BPSC itself set up an information fair at Leidseplein, followed by a night of performances and short films at the Moses and Aaron Church. At the end of the day, the protesters gathered for another demonstration at the Consulate. An estimated six hundred people attended the performances at the church, of whom four hundred later made their way to Museumplein.<sup>378</sup> They carried signs and banners that depicted the iconic image of a black panther and, once again, the slogan “All Power to the People! Alle Macht aan het Volk!”<sup>379</sup> The widespread support for the Panthers that day showed just how far the BPSC had come in under four months’ time, making the Dutch movement for Black Panther support one of the largest and fastest-growing in western Europe.

### ***Caribbean Involvement and Alliances***

From the moment the BPSC first announced its plans, activists around the Netherlands were drawn to its ideas, and requests for collaborations simply started pouring in. As the mass attendance of Big Man’s lecture and later BPSC protests indicated, there was a tremendous interest in the party, especially among Caribbean students and other revolutionaries in the Dutch New Left. When the committee informed International Coordinator Matthews about the widespread support for the Panthers during her visit to Amsterdam in early 1970, she advised Schumacher to establish a Grand Committee of Black Panther Solidarity that could operate as an umbrella network for all Dutch organizations and individuals who wished to support the party. As the country’s official Black Panther committee, the BPSC would serve as the head of this network and coordinate its activities with Matthews to ensure that

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<sup>377</sup> Solidariteitscomité, April 1970, 5; “Vier Arrestaties bij Betoging,” *De Telegraaf*, March 23, 1970, 5.

<sup>378</sup> “Black Panther Demonstratie in Amsterdam,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 25, 1970, 2; “Bobby Seale Moet Vrij,” *De Tijd*, April 24, 1970, 9; “Black Panther Films,” *Trouw*, April 24, 1970, 9; “Film-Actie,” *De Volkskrant*, April 24, 1970, 17; “Ongeveer 400 Sympathisanten Black Panther demonstreerden,” *Het Parool*, April 25, 1970, 5; “Black Panther-Dag in Amsterdam,” *De Groene Amsterdammer*, April 25, 1970, 4; “Vrijdag: Dag van de ‘Zwarte Panters,’” *Trouw*, April 21, 1970, 4; “Stop Moord op de Black Panthers”; Vrijheidsschool, “Black Panthers Vrijheidsschool,” April 1970, Poster, 50x35 cm, BG D49/814 (1970), International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

<sup>379</sup> Koen Wessing, Photograph, April 24, 1970, BG B23/492 (1970), International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

they matched the party's expectations.<sup>380</sup> Within a matter of weeks, the group grew from a mere five-person committee to a full-fledged movement that included over ten organizations and hundreds of followers.

One section of the Grand Committee consisted of Caribbean student organizations and interest groups: the Surinamese Student Union (*Surinaamse Studentenunie*, SSU), the Antillean Action Group (*Antilliaanse Aktiegroep*, AAG), and the Surinam Revolutionary People's Front (*Revolutionair Volksfront Suriname*, RVS).<sup>381</sup> Most of these became involved with the BPSC in January 1970, when the committee had invited them to discuss the relevance of Black Panther ideology for Black communities in the Netherlands and to explore how it could extend its solidarity to Antillean and Surinamese groups with similar goals as the BPP.<sup>382</sup> In discussing this decision with a journalist from *Het Parool*, the committee explained that Dutch people often read about African American resistance without realizing that Black people in the Netherlands "for a large part encounter the same problems in their interactions with whites as negroes in America."<sup>383</sup> Whether through the 'internal colonialism' of African Americans in the United States or through Dutch colonialism in the Caribbean, both of their problems were caused by the same root problem: imperialism.

According to Swedish committee leader Caldwell, who had taken part in this session, the BPSC's initial meeting with the Caribbean groups had been so successful that the groups decided to partner up. Over the following months, members of the SSU, AAG, and RVS attended many of the committee's events, participated in their demonstrations, and helped them organize events in their own communities and neighborhoods. From Meulenbelt's reflections on these collaborations in her autobiographical *De Schaamte Voorbij* (1976), it seems like the BPSC did not take their involvement in the solidarity movement lightly. In demonstrations, Antillean and Surinamese groups were encouraged to march up front, moving ahead of the white

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<sup>380</sup> Solidariteitscomité, Invitation to Grand Committee Meeting, March 18, 1970, Private Archive Lily van den Bergh.

<sup>381</sup> Solidariteitscomité, Invitation to Grand Committee Meeting.

<sup>382</sup> Terwogt, 9; "Panters," January 13, 1970, 9.

<sup>383</sup> "Panters," January 13, 1970, 9.

crowds.<sup>384</sup> Their voices were amplified in other activities too, such as the lectures given by the BPSC all over the country. “I [gave] lectures, sometimes together with Marcel from Suriname,” Meulenbelt wrote, likely referring to Marcel Kross, a Surinamese student who was highly involved in the committee. “After my lecture on America, he would share how we are complicit in what is happening in Suriname.”<sup>385</sup> This suggests that, while the issue of racism in the Netherlands was not central to the BPSC, the committee believed that the African American and Afro-Caribbean freedom struggles were deeply interconnected, if not the same.

Collaborations between the BPSC and its Caribbean partners were not limited to the work of the solidarity movement alone. In its writings, the BPSC also promoted and supported the anticolonial protests of Antillean and Surinamese groups outside of its own platform. One example was a protest in De Pijp, a neighborhood in Amsterdam which was home to a large community of Caribbean migrants. On 28 March 1970, some thirty Surinamers, Antilleans, and other “representatives of the Third World” came together near the famous Albert Cuyp Market to stand up against “the colonialism, the oppression and the exploitation of non-white Americans by white settlers.”<sup>386</sup> Waving around Black Panther flags and signs, the protesters called for an immediate end to the persecution of the Black Panthers and the withdrawal of police forces from African American neighborhoods. Though the BPSC had not played any role in the organization of the event, their public support for it shows how much they valued these kinds of efforts, even if they took place outside of their own program. “The participating organizations hope to organize more of these manifestations in the future,” the BPSC wrote, before adding: “We hope more Surinamers will join the next one.”<sup>387</sup>

On one occasion, the committee even decided to support its Caribbean partners financially with money that was intended for the BPP. On 1 June 1969, one day after the Trinta di Mei uprising in Curaçao, some seven hundred protesters from around the

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<sup>384</sup> Meulenbelt, 110.

<sup>385</sup> Meulenbelt, 109.

<sup>386</sup> Solidariteitscomité, April 1970, 3; “In Amsterdam: Betoging Tegen Kolonialisme,” *Het Vrije Volk*, March 27, 1970, 27.

<sup>387</sup> Solidariteitscomité, April 1970, 3.



Netherlands had gathered at the Antillenhuis in The Hague (home of the cabinet of the Minister Plenipotentiary of the Netherlands Antilles) to protest against the way the Dutch government had intervened in the uprising and to denounce Dutch colonialism in general. While mostly peaceful, the protest escalated when a small number of protesters smashed some of the windows of the Antillenhuis, which started a wave of violent altercations between the police and the demonstrators. By the end of the night, seventeen activists had been arrested for use of violence, even though many witnesses would later testify that it was the police who had started the violence and not the other way around.<sup>388</sup> After a long wait, eight of the arrestees were prosecuted in February and March 1970. Leading up to the trial, several large Antillean and Surinamese organizations expressed concerns that the case served as “an attempt at intimidating the Antillean and Surinamese community in the Netherlands” to stop them from criticizing the Kingdom.<sup>389</sup> During the trial, defendants made similar arguments, contending that the police had prevented them from “practicing their fundamental civil rights to freedom of expression” because they were “scared that our protest against the problems in the Antilles will be heard by the Dutch.”<sup>390</sup> They did not manage to convince the judge, who found four of the defendants guilty and charged them with 100 fl. fines.<sup>391</sup>

One of the defendants in the Antillenhuis trial was Lucien L. Lafour, who was suspected of having hit an officer on the head with a stick. Lafour, who also went by his ‘Muslim name’ Brada X, was half Surinamese and had been a public supporter of the Black Power movement for several years.<sup>392</sup> Knowing that his speech would be

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<sup>388</sup> Rudi F. Kross, “Het Proces,” *De Vrije Stem*, March 26, 1970, 1; “Politie Provoceerde het Geweld,” *De Waarheid*, February 13, 1970, 2.

<sup>389</sup> Quote from “Surinaamse Organisaties Protesteren Tegen Proces,” *De Waarheid*, February 11, 1970, 2.

<sup>390</sup> “Kritiek op Proces na Demonstratie voor Antillenhuis,” *De Volkskrant*, February 12, 1970; “Rechtbank: Begrip voor Rellen Antillenhuis,” *Trouw*, February 13, 1970, 3; “Berechting Rellen bij Antillenhuis,” *Het Vrije Volk*, February 12, 1970, 9; “Antillianen Protesteren Fel,” *Het Parool*, February 13, 1970, 5;

<sup>391</sup> Letter to Stanley Brown, The Hague, March 19, 1970, Vito-artikelen, Archief, 1969-1971, N.B. Correspondentie e.a., Archivo Nashonal, Willemstad, Curaçao; “Officier Eist Geldboetes in Antillenhuis-Proces,” *De Volkskrant*, February 13, 1970, 6; “Verdachten Ontkennen in Antillenhuis-Proces,” *Limburgsch Dagblad*, 13 February 1970, 4.

<sup>392</sup> Hans Stevens, “Vroeger Konden We Woningen Bouwen: Waarom Nú Niet?” *De Tijd*, March 27, 1970, 9; Lucien Lafour, “Deep South,” *Trouw*, May 22, 1970, 11; Lafour, Speech.

heard by a full courthouse and a range of journalists, he used the opportunity to speak not only to the allegations made against him but also to make a political statement on colonialism and racial inequality. In the first half of his address, Lafour drew the attention of his listeners to the racial biases of the judicial system, the police officers at the Antillenhuis, and the Dutch marines whose actions on 30 May had sparked their protest. “Charged with collective assault. You wonder if this isn’t a mistake, a typing error, because isn’t this what the 600 marines should be charged with, who are busy keeping the people of Curaçaoa enslaved?” he asked the court, referring to the Dutch marines who were sent to shut down the protests.<sup>393</sup> In the second half of his speech, he shifted his focus to the need for Black resilience in resisting colonial oppression. Drawing stark comparisons between the Antillenhuis protesters, the leaders of Trinta di Mei (Godett and Brown), anticolonial fighters elsewhere (Lumumba and Fanon), and prominent Black Power activists in the United States (Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and H. Rap Brown), Lafour warned the court that “it would be madness to think blacks can be stopped. (...) Blacks will persist.”<sup>394</sup>

The BPSC, which had followed the trial closely, was highly impressed with the rhetoric of the defendants and decided to start an additional fundraising campaign to help the Antillenhuis protesters pay their fines. While these protesters had not been directly involved in their efforts to support the Black Panthers, the committee believed both parties fought the same anticolonial battle and were therefore equally deserving of its solidarity.<sup>395</sup> On top of that, Lafour himself joined the BPSC, where he became responsible for the communication between the committee and its Antillean and Surinamese partners.<sup>396</sup> Already in its earliest days, the BPSC had announced that they were “working on the addition of a Surinamer,” which they considered to be “no unimportant participant in this kind of committee.”<sup>397</sup> In his speech to the court, Lafour had proven to be the perfect candidate for this position. Over the following

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<sup>393</sup> Lucien Lafour, Speech, Private Archive Lily van den Bergh.

<sup>394</sup> Lafour, Speech.

<sup>395</sup> Solidariteitscomité, March 1970, 4; Letter to Stanley Brown, The Hague, March 19, 1970, Archivo Nashonal, Willemstad, Curaçao, Vito-artikelen, Archief, 1969-1971, N.B. Correspondentie e.a.

<sup>396</sup> Solidariteitscomité, March 1970, 1; April 1970, 15.

<sup>397</sup> “Panters,” January 13, 1970, 9.

months, he would help the committee improve its interracial collaborations, helping the BPSC progress towards its goal to “fight against (...) the exploitation of our colonies.”<sup>398</sup>

While the BPSC strongly valued these interracial collaborations, they were by no means perfect. Although the white Black Panther supporters could be considered ahead of their time in that they understood their role within the movement as somewhat passive, it was clear that they struggled to fully translate the Panthers’ antiracist rhetoric into the Dutch context. On paper, the committee repeatedly spoke out against structural and institutional racism, but in practice the topic was often overpowered by their interest in imperialism and capitalism. This was certainly the case when members discussed racism in the Dutch empire. In fact, early interviews show that most of the committee’s initial efforts to tackle Dutch racism came from Caldwell rather than Schumacher or the other members of the Dutch BPSC.<sup>399</sup> It was also clear, at least in the beginning, that the solidarity committee upheld an exoticized, even glamorized image of the Black Panthers, which sometimes projected the BPP as little more than a media hype.<sup>400</sup> One clear example of this was a deeply problematic statement by BPSC member Van den Bergh, who argued that Big Man’s lecture had been well-attended because seeing an African American in real life was “like seeing a wild animal at Artis,” referring to the local zoo.<sup>401</sup> Such statements created a distance between the BPP and the Dutch public and contradicted the BPSC’s commitment to inclusivity, as it gave the impression that Black activism was foreign to the Netherlands, when in reality there was a long history of Black resistance not just in the Caribbean but also in the metropole, as discussed in the introduction. Besides, Van den Bergh’s statement showed how deeply unaware the BPSC was of the painful history of

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<sup>398</sup> Solidariteitscomité, January 1970, 1.

<sup>399</sup> See for example the BPSC’s interview with Terwogt, where Caldwell intervened when Schumacher kept talking exclusively about the Black freedom struggle in the United States. Himself an African American, Caldwell interrupted Schumacher to ensure that he would also mention racial inequality in the Netherlands and stated that “things will happen here, too.”

<sup>400</sup> Malloy has argued that this was also the case elsewhere in Europe, see 125-26.

<sup>401</sup> “Panters,” January 13, 1970, 9.

racism in the Netherlands, which included a long tradition of eugenics, human zoos, and dehumanization.<sup>402</sup>

### ***Position in the New Left***

Besides alliances with these Antillean and Surinamese organizations, the BPSC also collaborated with a variety of groups in the Dutch New Left, including Cineclub Amsterdam, the Freedom School, the Netherlands Students' Bureau for International Cooperation (NESBIC), the Red Youth (*Rode Jeugd*), and the United Support Groups of the NFL (*Verenigde Steungroepen aan het FNL*).<sup>403</sup> While all of these organizations had different agendas and platforms, with some being communist and others more interested in Third World solidarity, they were united in one critical aspect: their opposition to American imperialism. Although the Dutch government maintained close diplomatic ties with the US and was, according to historian Rob Kroes, even considered "NATO's most faithful ally" in the region, years of American interference in Europe and violence in Vietnam had made Dutch youths critical of the superpower.<sup>404</sup> Or, as student activist Pieter Hilderling phrased it in a letter to the Panthers at the time: "this country, as well as (...) the rest of the pig-tortured world, has just had enough of the dirty deals [Americans] think they're making."<sup>405</sup> In this context, the BPSC was seen as a welcome addition to the countercultural scene, as it provided Dutch radicals with a direct link to what they believed to be "the only group in the United States that is able to transform their country."<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> For the history and legacies of Dutch racism, see Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving, *Dutch Racism* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

<sup>403</sup> Solidariteitscomité, Invitation to Grand Committee Meeting; Solidariteitscomité, April 1970, 1; Netherlands Students' Bureau for International Cooperation (NESBIC), *NESBIC Bulletin*, March 1970, ZO 31245, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands; Black Panther Demonstratie," 2; "Ongeveer 400 Sympathisanten Black Panther demonstreerden," 5; "Black Panther-Dag in Amsterdam," 4.

<sup>404</sup> Rob Kroes, "The Great Satan versus the Evil Empire: Anti-Americanism in the Netherlands," in *Anti-Americanism in Europe*, eds. Rob Kroes and Maarten van Rossum (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1986), 42-43.

<sup>405</sup> Pieter Hilderling, "Letter From Holland," *The Black Panther*, February 7, 1970, 12.

<sup>406</sup> "Vrijheidsschool," *De Telegraaf*, 10 March 1970, 9; "Cineclub organiseert Vrijheidsschool," *De Volkskrant* February 7, 1970, 11; "Vrijheidsschool Gaat Acties Voeren," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, February 7, 1970, 2.

Of all the groups that collaborated with the BPSC under the umbrella of the Grand Committee, two stood out in particular: Cineclub Amsterdam and the Freedom School. Cineclub, which was established by filmmaker At van Praag in 1966, was an Amsterdam-based film production and distribution company that specialized in the acquisition, creation, and screening of documentary films on global liberation movements. The organization's main purpose was to use film "as a means to create consciousness, as a 'weapon in the fight' that did not prioritize anyone's individual career or personal success."<sup>407</sup> By the turn of the decade, Cineclub had drawn approximately 2500 members and screened its films multiple times a week.<sup>408</sup> The company first became involved with the BPSC in the fall of 1969, when Van Praag was invited to join the founding committee. Although the Cineclub director did not stay in the committee for long (for reasons unknown), his company remained highly involved in its work. Starting with the opening event with *Big Man*, Cineclub supplied the BPSC with an array of relevant slide shows and documentary films, which included a recorded interview with Bobby Seale, Agnès Varda's *Black Panthers* (1968), and Santiago Álvarez's *Now* (1965).<sup>409</sup> As mentioned previously, these films played an important role in the educational program of the BPSC, as they were shown at nearly every lecture they gave.

In February 1970, Cineclub and several other action groups formed a new organization which they called the Freedom School. At first, the Freedom School was established as an educational initiative to teach Dutch students and educators about the oppression and liberation of the Third World. During its first event, which was described as a 'discussion week', some 150 participants got together to debate issues related to non-Western school curriculums, discriminatory admissions policies at Dutch universities, and what students and educational staff could do to challenge these practices. Every session was concluded with a Cineclub film about a foreign liberation

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<sup>407</sup> "Geschiedenis," *Cineclub Vrijheidsfilms*, <https://cineclubvrijheidsfilms.nl/geschiedenis>; J. P. G. van Laarhoven, "'PAN': Nederlandse Film Als Socialistisch Wapen," M.A. Dissertation (Utrecht University, 2013), 88-89.

<sup>408</sup> Van Laarhoven, 88.

<sup>409</sup> An overview of the films in Cineclub's collection can be found in the inventory of Cineclub Vrijheidsfilms (Amsterdam), "Collectie Beeld- en Geluidmateriaal Cineclub Vrijheidsfilms," COLL00544, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

movement, including those in China, Argentina, Vietnam, France, and the United States.<sup>410</sup> While this discussion week was a success, however, the educational side of the Freedom School would not last long. Within a matter of weeks, the Freedom School transformed from an educational platform to a loose-knit network of radical student protest.

Despite the broad range of topics discussed at the initial Freedom School discussions, the new organization was particularly interested in one revolution: that of the Black Panthers. During their first get-together in February, many of the participants had come to the conclusion that American imperialism posed the number one threat to global freedom, as it was responsible for “the oppression of all black people, the exploitation of the third world, the war in Vietnam, [and] the political and economic domination of Europe.”<sup>411</sup> Together with its parent organization Cineclub, the student organization began organizing regular demonstrations for the party. The largest of these took place on March 14, following a Black Panther-themed week at the Freedom School. Hundreds of students gathered at the US Consulate to call for the release of Bobby Seale and to denounce the reluctance of the Dutch government to guarantee protection to Eldridge Cleaver, who had been invited to attend the event but had to cancel when the Dutch government – “which clearly dances to the tune of the USA” – threatened to extradite him.<sup>412</sup> Other Freedom School protests took place at the Krasnapolsky Hotel in Amsterdam, where the group disturbed a televised election night to condemn the Dutch government’s membership of NATO, and at Leidseplein, after one of their Black Panther information fairs had been disturbed by the police. The latter ended with several Freedom School members setting their banners on fire and getting arrested on charges of arson.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> “Vrijheidsschool Gaat Acties Voeren,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, February 7, 1970, 2; “Cineclub Organiseert Vrijheidsschool,” *De Volkskrant*, February 7, 1970, 11; “Vrijheidsschool’ Bereidt Acties Voor,” *Trouw*, February 10, 1970, 5

<sup>411</sup> “Vrijheidsschool,” *De Telegraaf*, March 10, 1970, 9.

<sup>412</sup> Vrijheidsschool, “Eldridge Cleaver Mocht Niet naar Nederland Komen,” *Vrijheidspers Informatiekrant*, n.p., Amsterdam, 1970 (2), ZK 37945 (1971?):3, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, the Netherlands; “Betoging voor Vrijlating,” 3; “Politie Jaagt Demonstranten Weg bij VS-Consulaat,” *Het Parool*, March 16, 1970, 5; “Kans dat Cleaver Komt Erg Gering,” *Trouw*, March 10, 1970, 1.

<sup>413</sup> “Een Maf Avondje Verkiezingen,” *De Telegraaf*, March 19, 1970, 13; “Geen Aardverschuiving: Winst D’66 Valt Tegen,” *Trouw*, March 19, 1970, 3; “Samkalden had Zeer Rumoerige Verkiezingsavond,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, March 19, 1970, 9; “Vier Arrestaties bij Betoging,” 5; “Onrust in A’dam bij Betoging Zwarte Panters,”

Cineclub and the Freedom School became, with the exception of the Black Panther Solidarity Committee, the most well-known organizations in the Dutch Black Panther solidarity movement. While their priorities and approaches were different, most of the groups' activities were organized in collaboration with the other members of the Grand Committee. After all, each of them had something distinct and valuable to offer. The BPSC, which consisted primarily of journalists, was most knowledgeable on the history, ideology, and political programs of the party. Their newsletters and lectures provided Dutch Black Panther enthusiasts with essential information and updates on the party. Cineclub was able to make the BPSC's message come alive by delivering an inspiring and insightful visual representation of this information. Once the crowd had been fired up, the Freedom School played into their energy and led them onto the streets, sometimes mobilizing as many as four hundred students and young professionals at once. By March 1970, collaboration within the Grand Committee had become so close that "one could hardly speak of separate organizations anymore," as a report from the Dutch security agency stated.<sup>414</sup> Together, these groups transformed Black Panther solidarity in the Netherlands from a single committee into a movement spanning hundreds of activists and multiple organizations.

### ***Conflicts and Decline***

Unfortunately, the vast growth of the solidarity movement did not occur without any complications, many of them emerging from these very same collaborations. Though the Grand Committee may have seemed like a well-oiled machine to outsiders, the diversity of parties involved also made things quite difficult. At its best, the Dutch solidarity movement was a loose-knit network of individuals and semi-organized pressure groups that came together to defend the party's campaigns and ideology. At its worst, however, the movement was a chaotic and disorganized web of young activists who were never quite sure what the Black Panthers expected of them and who had many different views on what their allyship was supposed to

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*Turbantia*, March 23, 1970, 7; "Demonstratie voor Zwarte Panters Liep Uit op Verkeerschaos," *Leeuwarder Courant*, March 23, 1970, 10.

<sup>414</sup> "Notitie Betreffende Solidariteitsdemonstratie met Zuid-Molukkers, Amsterdam, 28 November 1970," *Inzagedossier Molukse Zaken*, 03 Activiteiten van Zuid-Molukkers na het Bezoek van President Soeharto September 1970, accessed via Inlichtingendiensten.nl, <https://inlichtingendiensten.nl/groepen/molukken>.

look like. This led to a number of internal disagreements, especially between the BPSC and the Freedom School, most prominent of which concerned their preferred methods of resistance.<sup>415</sup> In a number of their protests, members of the Freedom School had resorted to minor forms of violence, such as smashing windows, throwing stones at police officers, and throwing firecrackers at politicians.<sup>416</sup> At their own events, they had also set banners and portraits of President Nixon on fire and had painted Black Panther slogans on the walls of public buildings.<sup>417</sup>

The BPSC, by this point regarded as the 'old guard' of the solidarity movement, strongly disapproved. The actions of the Freedom School were, in the committee's view, too reckless, and created confusion within the movement, distracting outsiders from the important message they tried to convey. While the BPSC emphasized that it was not against political protest per se, it believed any resistance coming from the movement "would have to proceed in a completely disciplined manner, in accordance with the traditions of the American Black Panthers themselves."<sup>418</sup> The 'new guard' of the movement, under the leadership of Cineclub director At van Praag, labeled the stance of the BPSC as elitist and pushed for a more militant form of protest.<sup>419</sup> They believed that these kinds of disturbances were useful tools in getting their message across and that they gave those they targeted, like the US consulate, a deeper sense of urgency to act. Even more aggressive resistance was not out of the question, as they were convinced that "protest without violence is simply no longer possible in today's society."<sup>420</sup> Plus, they added, "the Panthers say that the best place to help them is at home," meaning they also had to use BPP tactics to fight oppression in their local environment.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> "Panthers," April 24, 1970, 19.

<sup>416</sup> "Gevechten bij Amerikaans Consulaat," *Algemeen Dagblad*, March 16, 1970, 3; "Politie Jaagt Demonstranten Weg bij VS-Consulaat," 55; "Ongeveer 400 Sympathisanten Black Panther demonstreerden," 5; "Een Maf Avondje Verkiezingen," *De Telegraaf*, March 19, 1970, 13.

<sup>417</sup> Vrijheidsschool, "Straatakties, Plakken, Kalken, Krantverkoop, We Gaan Door, Doe Mee!" *Vrijheidspers Informatiekrant*, n.p.; Vrijheidsschool, "Stop Murdering Black Panthers!!!!!!," Private Archive Lily van den Bergh.

<sup>418</sup> "Panthers," April 24, 1970, 19.

<sup>419</sup> Meulenbelt, 110.

<sup>420</sup> "Ongeveer 400 Sympathisanten Black Panther demonstreerden," 5.

<sup>421</sup> Letter to the Editor of Het Parool.



Although the groups were able to work around their differences for a while, tensions became increasingly unmanageable and needed to be resolved. Eventually, this happened not at one of their regular meetings in Amsterdam, but at the official BPP Solidarity Committees' Conference in Frankfurt on 18 and 19 April 1970. This conference was organized by Matthews, who had invited some four hundred delegates from different parts of Europe "to coordinate and learn from our common struggle."<sup>422</sup> Besides the formal solidarity committees, the International Coordinator invited anyone who wished to organize in support of the Black Panther Party to attend. Writing about the conference in the International News section of *The Black Panther*, Matthews explained that she aimed to draw the committees' focus towards "the brutal attempt of the racist fascist power structure of the United States to annihilate the Black Panther Party."<sup>423</sup> She wanted to construct a plan of action to address this issue from across the Atlantic. By the end of the conference, the European solidarity network had agreed on the following points of action: (1) to "intensify our support [through] our coordinated attack on U.S. Imperialism in our own countries," (2) to "organize mass actions in solidarity with the Black Panther Party and against the fascist repression in the U.S. (...) directed to the working masses and oppressed peoples of our countries," (3) to "condemn the repression and harassment of the Party's representatives in various European countries," and (4) to "demand that all European countries give free travel papers" to Eldridge Cleaver.<sup>424</sup>

These new resolutions indicated a rather profound transformation in the European solidarity network. Exactly one year after Seale and Hewitt had authorized Matthews to set up a network for education and fundraising, the International Coordinator announced a new approach to solidarity that was much more proactive and politically engaged than originally intended. This worked to the advantage of the Freedom School and Cineclub, whose hands-on approach to solidarity was closer to Matthews' view than to Seale and Hewitt's original one. Hearing these resolutions at

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<sup>422</sup> Connie Matthews, "B.P.P. Solidarity Committee's Conference," *The Black Panther*, May 9, 1970, 15; House Committee on Internal Security, *The Black Panther Party*, 68-69; "Europese Steun voor Zwarte Panter," *Amigoe di Curaçao*, April 21, 1970, 4.

<sup>423</sup> Matthews, 15.

<sup>424</sup> Matthews, 15.

the conference, Van Praag's delegation decided that this was the perfect time to settle their disagreements with the BPSC once and for all. They requested to present their case to the European convention, after which they proposed to take a collective vote on the issue. This vote would decide whether the Dutch solidarity movement would continue with Schumacher's "protest through education" or if they would follow the more proactive path of the 'new guard'. Schumacher and Kross, who represented the BPSC at the convention, strongly opposed Van Praag's proposition, as they had come to Frankfurt in much smaller numbers than the Freedom School and therefore had fewer votes of their own.<sup>425</sup> Despite the objections of the BPSC, the other European delegates agreed to accept the motion and take a vote on the issue. In the end, extra votes for the BPSC would not have made a difference: the European committees largely voted in favor of Van Praag and decided that the BPSC had to be dissolved. Effective immediately, the committee had to hand over its activities to the Freedom School, which now became the official Dutch Black Panther solidarity committee – albeit under its own name.<sup>426</sup>

The fate of the Black Panther movement in the Netherlands was thus not determined by internal differences within the Dutch New Left alone, but also by the changing attitudes of the European solidarity network writ large. While this same network had mentored the founders of the BPSC and helped them establish an educational program only four months earlier, recent developments within the Black Panther Party itself had convinced Matthews and her followers that education and fundraising were no longer enough: it was time to take more radical action. To the original Black Panther committee, this new form of solidarity was unacceptable. Although Matthews encouraged them to join the Freedom School in their ongoing efforts, all – with the exception of Lily van den Bergh, who had already sided with the Freedom School in the preceding months – left the movement upon their return to the Netherlands. "All we have to do now is to wait for the windows of consulates and

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<sup>425</sup> 'Panthers,' April 24, 1970, 19; Meulenbelt, 110.

<sup>426</sup> Vrijheidsschool, Letter tot he Editor; "Black Panthers-Comité Uit Elkaar," *Het Vrije Volk*, April 24, 1970, 5; "Panthers," April 24, 1970, 19; "Nederlandse comité Panthers ontbonden," *Trouw*, April 27, 1970, 3; Frits N. Eisenloeffel, "Wereld Drie," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, May 23, 1970, 28; "Black Panther-Dag in Amsterdam," 4; Meulenbelt, 110.

embassies to be smashed,” a bitter Schumacher shared in *de Volkskrant*, before sarcastically adding, “an unusually powerful argument.”<sup>427</sup>

With the ‘moderate figures’ of the BPSC (as the Dutch security agency described them) gone, the local solidarity movement grew increasingly more fanatic.<sup>428</sup> Now that they no longer had to take the wishes of the BPSC into account, members of the Freedom School were free to express their solidarity as they pleased. Now under the leadership of Van den Bergh, the group continued to organize lectures with film screenings, fundraisers, and small-scale protests over the summer of 1970.<sup>429</sup> They also started publishing their own newspaper, the *Freedom Press Information Paper*.<sup>430</sup> This paper was slightly more detailed than that of the BPSC, though its content was almost identical. The main difference with the former was its visual appeal. Whereas the BPSC’s newsletter had been written on a typewriter and was completely free of images, the *Freedom Press* paper was filled with Emory Douglas’s iconic Black Panther art, portraits of Black Panther activists, pictures of previous solidarity protests, and countless political slogans. Copies of the paper were handed out at lectures and protests, of which there were only a couple after the Frankfurt conference.<sup>431</sup>

Several months after taking control of the Black Panther solidarity movement, the Freedom School also became involved in the highly controversial case of the Wassenaar 33. This case revolved around a group of South Moluccan activists who had forced their way into the residence of the Indonesian Ambassador on 31 August 1970, one day before President Suharto’s state visit to the Netherlands. The purpose of their protest was to demand a meeting between Suharto and Johan Manusama, President of the unrecognized Republic of South Maluku (RMS). While the ambassador escaped the scene, a security officer was killed by protesters.<sup>432</sup> The actions of the Wassenaar 33

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<sup>427</sup> “Panthers,” April 24, 1970, 19.

<sup>428</sup> “Notitie Betreffende Solidariteitsdemonstratie met Zuid-Molukkers, Amsterdam, 28 November 1970.”

<sup>429</sup> Vrijheidsschool, “Vrijheidsschoolactie,” *Vrijheidspers Informatiekrant*; Vrijheidsschool, “Steunfonds voor Vrijlating Black Panthers,” *Vrijheidspers Informatiekrant*.

<sup>430</sup> Originally called the *Vrijheidspers Informatiekrant*.

<sup>431</sup> Meulenbelt, 110.

<sup>432</sup> Peter Bootsma, *De Molukse Acties: Treinkapingen en Gijzelingen 1970-1978* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2015), 33-50; Fridus Steijlen, “Actie Wassenaar 1970 – Een Wake Up Call,” *Moluks Historisch Museum*, <https://www.museum-maluku.nl/actie-wassenaar-1970-een-wake-up-call/>.

immediately caught the interest of the Freedom School. The Black Panther supporters saw many similarities between these anticolonial 'Heroes of Wassenaar' and the Black Panther Party, both of whom they considered to be key players in the liberation of the Third World.<sup>433</sup> On 28 November 1970, the Freedom School and the Moluccan activists got together for a massive demonstration in Amsterdam where hundreds of activists rose up in support of the Moluccan and African American liberation movements. Protesters carried banners with slogans such as "Viva R.M.S. en Black Panthers" ("Viva R.M.S. and Black Panthers") and "Politieke Gevangenen Vrij!" ("Free Political Prisoners!"), referring to the Wassenaar 33 as well as the countless Black Panthers in the US.<sup>434</sup> Although the crowd left several trams, cars, and buildings damaged, the protest proceeded without any police interference.<sup>435</sup> The day was concluded with a meeting at Paradiso, where Cineclub screened a Black Panther movie and two British Black Panther advocates, who had been invited through the European network, addressed the crowd.<sup>436</sup>

Despite the large numbers of activists attending this protest, however, it seems the Freedom School soon lost interest in the party. After their collaboration with the Moluccans in November 1970, which had already been their first Black Panther activity in months, they did not organize any further protests for the BPP. Instead, they decided to focus on more local community activism in Amsterdam, especially in working class neighborhoods such as the Jordaan and De Pijp. Soon, they disappeared from the public eye completely. Its parent organization Cineclub did continue to screen Black Panther movies, but ceased to make an effort outside of its regular screenings.

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<sup>433</sup> "Groep Linkse Jongeren op de Bres voor Zuidmolukkers," *Trouw*, October 20, 1970, 1; "Bondgenootschap," *De Volkskrant*, October 22, 1970, 13; "At van Praag: Actie in Wassenaar gaf ons Geweldige Shock," *Trouw*, October 30, 1970, 9; "Vrijheidsschool: Op de Bres voor Scholieren en Zuidmolukkers," *Tubantia*, October 30, 1970, 27.

<sup>434</sup> "Z.-Molukkers Hielden Huis in de Hoofdstad," *De Telegraaf*, November 30, 1970, 3.

<sup>435</sup> "Zuidmolukkers op Oorlogspad," *De Tijd*, November 30, 1970, 1; "Net Geen Geweld bij Demonstratie voor Z.-Molukken," *NRC Handelsblad*, November 30, 1970, 2; "Trams en Auto's Beschadigd bij Demonstratie van Zuidmolukkers," *Leeuwarder Courant*, November 30, 1970, 4; "Zuidmolukkers in Actie voor 'Helden van Wassenaar'," *Tubantia*, November 30, 1970, 7; "Onrustige Betoging van Jonge Zuidmolukkers," *NRC Handelsblad*, November 30, 1970, 3.

<sup>436</sup> It is unclear which British Black Panther advocates spoke at the event. According to Dutch intelligence officers, both Michael X and Kathleen Cleaver were supposed to be there, but neither seems to have been present.

The decline of Black Panther solidarity in the Netherlands did not stand in isolation but reflected on much deeper disparities within the BPP itself. As Cleaver was growing his network in Europe, his colleagues at home were starting to worry that the global ambitions of the International Section were alienating the party from its African American base. While Cleaver was convinced that Black America could only be liberated once the US government lost its superpower status, the Oakland-based Panthers increasingly felt that his diplomatic efforts distracted the party from its commitments at home. Of all Cleaver's comrades, founder and chairman Huey Newton proved to be his fiercest opponent. Several months after his release from prison in 1970, the party's founder decided to stir the BPP back into the direction of community service. In his perspective, tackling child hunger, building medical facilities, and ending police brutality in poor Black communities were much more beneficial to the survival of his people than "waiting for a revolution that might never come or depending on international allies thousands of miles away."<sup>437</sup> This sentiment was shared by Chief of Staff David Hilliard, who believed that the revolutionary ideals of the International Section were unrealistic. "When we begin our attack who's going to join us?" Hilliard wrote in his autobiography. "Party comrades will jump off the moon if Huey tells them to. Our allies won't."<sup>438</sup>

The FBI cleverly played into the question of transnational alliances in its efforts to sabotage the Panthers. In its forged correspondence between the party's headquarters in Oakland and the International Section in Algiers, the bureau repeatedly suggested to Newton that Cleaver was undermining his authority, while implying to Cleaver that Newton did not respect his work abroad. As historian Robyn C. Spencer has shown, Matthews inadvertently played an important role in these strategies. Following her successful work for the party in Europe, the International Coordinator had spent some time in the United States, where she had become more involved in the Oakland chapter of the party, working closely with Newton. "Now a close associate of both Cleaver and Newton," Spencer writes, "she was used by the FBI in their plan to "create doubts" about people close to Cleaver."<sup>439</sup> By the time the

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<sup>437</sup> Malloy, 174.

<sup>438</sup> David Hilliard and Lewis Cole, *This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 2001), 284, as cited in Bloom and Martin, 358.

<sup>439</sup> Spencer, 104.

Panthers realized how the bureau had used Matthews to foster internal hostilities, the damage had already been done, as Newton expelled both Matthews and Cleaver from the party in 1971.

When all of this took place, it was already clear that the European solidarity network had chosen his side in the dispute. Over the spring of 1971, many former Black Panther supporters laid down their Black Panther work and instead joined Eldridge and Kathleen's new organization, the Revolutionary People's Communications Network (RPCN). Though short-lived, the RPCN came to rely heavily on the Cleavers' contacts in France and West-Germany, but also involved Van den Bergh, who had built close friendships with both Matthews and Kathleen Cleaver over the preceding years. Between 1970 and 1972, the former BPSC and Freedom School leader regularly traveled back and forth between the Netherlands and Algeria to supply the International Section with money, technical equipment, and other materials.<sup>440</sup> She was even staying with the Cleavers during Eldridge's formal expulsion on live television and later traveled to the US to distribute a videotaped interview with him in an effort to persuade members of the BPP to join the RPCN.<sup>441</sup> Van den Bergh, as well as several other European activists, continued to stay in touch with the Cleavers until Eldridge went underground in Paris in 1972 and abandoned his pursuit of a revolution for good.

Despite the short-lived success of the Dutch and broader Black Panther solidarity network, its history provides some critical insights into the transnational efforts of the Black Power movement, also in the context of the Dutch Atlantic. Though ultimately destroyed by disagreements on the need for violence, the fact that Schumacher and his partners managed to bring together hundreds of activists from

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<sup>440</sup> Kathleen Cleaver, Daily Reports, 22 February 1971 - 4 April 1971, Daily Reports, by Kathleen Cleaver, Communications Secretary 1970, 1971, Carton 5, Folder 46, International Section Subseries, Black Panther Party series, Eldridge Cleaver Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; Paul J. Magnarella, *Black Panther in Exile: The Pete O'Neal Story* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2021), 111.

<sup>441</sup> Peter Sachs Collopy, "The Revolution Will Be Videotaped: Making a Technology of Consciousness in the Long 1960s," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Pennsylvania, 2015), 280-289; Lily van den Bergh, "Ondergang of Vernieuwing van een Revolutionaire Partij?" *De Groene*, May 22, 1971, 3; Correspondence between Lily van den Bergh and Kathleen Cleaver, November 8, 1971, July 18, 1972, Van den Bergh, Lily, Carton 5, Folder 33, International Section subseries, Black Panther Party series, Cleaver Papers; Videofreex, "CBS—Lily and Cleaver Tapes," 5 March 1971, Video, 00:23:36, Video Data Ban, <https://www.vdb.org/collection/browser-artist-list/cbs-lily-and-cleaver-tapes>.

around the Kingdom within a matter of months to offer their support to the BPP was quite remarkable by itself. Perhaps even more notable, however, was its ability to create an alliance between the Black Power movement, the Dutch New Left, and Dutch Caribbean radicals. This triangular alliance allowed activists in the Netherlands to directly support the African American freedom struggle from afar, based on the Black revolutionaries' own vision for transnational interracial solidarity. This was quite unique both in the context of the Black Power movement, where any kind of White involvement was typically rejected, and in the context of the European solidarity landscape, where support groups rarely had any contact with the organizations and movements they supported, much less operated under their supervision. Of fundamental importance to this was the Panthers' self-proclaimed status as a vanguard in the global revolution against imperialism, racism, and capitalism, which the BPSC gladly accepted.

At the same time, the solidarity movement provided Dutch, Caribbean, and – to some extent – Moluccan activists with new ways to challenge issues in their own societies. While the BPSC's platform was predominantly intended to convince the Dutch public that the BPP was worth defending, this also enabled them to introduce local activists to new revolutionary models, most of which were centered around the Panthers' ideology of revolutionary nationalism. One critical issue that was addressed by the BPSC and its allies in the New Left was the increasing power of the United States in Cold War Europe. Especially intellectually, the BPSC stressed the importance of supporting the Black Panthers in their opposition to American imperialism and underlined the many atrocities committed by the US government against its own citizens, thus undermining its reputation as the leader of the 'Free World'. Similar messages were conveyed at the many protests organized by the committee and its partners, which often took place at the US consulate in Amsterdam and involved slogans and banners that explicitly targeted American authorities such as President Nixon and the FBI.

That is not to say that the Black Panther advocates pointed the finger at the United States exclusively. As the collaborative efforts between the BPSC and its Antillean and Surinamese partners show, it also motivated Dutch activists to endorse a more self-critical approach to imperialism and encouraged Antillean and Surinamese in the Netherlands to join the Black Panthers in their quest for global Black liberation.

Taking a deeply transnational approach to revolutionary activism, the committee believed it was essential that oppressed communities around the world joined the Black Panther Party, especially those who shared the same experiences as the Panthers. To motivate this kind of cross-border collaboration, the committee created an intellectual and political space where Antilleans and Surinamers could familiarize themselves with the ideology of the party and where they could connect to activists from different Black communities in the United States, Jamaica, England, and Sweden. In other words, the BPSC provided a bridge between the anticolonial efforts of Dutch Caribbean communities in the Netherlands and the transnational Black Power movement.