

US political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal responds to Supreme Court rejection of appeal

Helen Halyard
7 October 1999

US political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal has commented on Monday's Supreme Court decision to reject his appeal challenging the constitutionality of the 1982 trial that convicted him for the murder of a Philadelphia policeman.

The high court decided not to review a writ of certiorari filed last April by Abu-Jamal's legal defense team. The motion filed did not ask the court to consider any new evidence but to examine the 1982 trial, which violated Mumia's Sixth Amendment rights to act as his own defense.

"It was not unexpected that the Supreme Court would deny my appeal," Abu-Jamal said in a press release from death row at SCI Greene Correctional Facility in Pennsylvania. "The Supreme Court hears only a tiny percent of the cases that are brought before it, roughly 75 out of 7,000 in one semester or a term of the court. I entertained no expectations that mine would be granted."

He continued, "We have to remember that we are working with a conservative court that has worked assiduously in the Bush and Reagan administrations and now in the Clinton administration to narrow the chances of anyone having had their case heard, not just a prisoner on death row. Even the most charitable observer must agree that by virtue of the court taking such a small fraction of the important cases that are filed before it, it is impossible to ignore the fact that many grave injustices are going unresolved.

"The trend is increasingly in favor of the State, the trend is increasingly to disfavor the defendant and the accused. Certainly there are exceptions, but that is the undeniable trend, the expansion of state power and police power in the retraction of prisoners' rights."

Mumia's two lead defense attorneys, Daniel Williams and Leonard Weinglass, also commented on the ruling in a statement addressed to Mumia's supporters. "Today, the United States Supreme Court failed to seize an opportunity to do justice and to end a 17-year nightmare. An opportunity to vindicate a well-established right, secured with the Constitution itself, has been squandered."

They continued, "Mumia was unquestionably stripped unjustifiably of his right to represent himself. He had decided to represent himself after it became apparent that his court-appointed lawyer was unwilling and incapable of representing him adequately. Yet, at the very moment that the trial began, Mumia's right to handle his own case was taken from him and the case placed back into the hands of his incompetent defense counsel who did not even expect that he would be trying the case. When Mumia refused to sit in silence as his rights were being abridged, he was forcibly removed from the trial proceedings."

The attorneys stated that they are finalizing a habeas corpus petition to the federal court and will file it shortly. The motion will request that the federal court review the decisions by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court to uphold Mumia's conviction in light of new evidence uncovered by Mumia's attorneys.

In previous appeals Abu-Jamal's lawyers have exposed how the Philadelphia police and prosecutors coerced witnesses and suppressed evidence in order to frame the former Black Panther and public critic of police brutality.

Abu-Jamal's case has generated public opposition in the US and internationally to the death penalty and the violation of democratic rights. For this reason, federal

and state authorities are determined to silence him. Once a new execution warrant is signed by Governor Thomas Ridge, which is expected in the next 30 days, Mumia's ability to speak from prison will be greatly restricted.

Messages demanding a new trial for Mumia Abu-Jamal should be sent to:

Governor Thomas Ridge
Main Capital Building, Room 225
Harrisburg, PA 17120
Phone 717-787-2500, Fax 717-772-1198.

Messages of support can be sent to Abu-Jamal at:

Mumia Abu-Jamal
#AM 8335, SCI Greene
1040 E. Roy Furman Hwy.
Waynesburg, PA 15370-8090

For press statements and information on the defense campaign for Mumia Abu-Jamal see:
<http://www.Mumia.org>



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact