

December 2 death warrant signed for US political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal

Martin McLaughlin
14 October 1999

Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge signed a death warrant Wednesday for Mumia Abu-Jamal, ordering the political prisoner to be put to death on December 2 at the state prison in Rockview. Ridge took the action only nine days after the US Supreme Court rejected an appeal from Abu-Jamal, who has become well-known internationally as an opponent of police brutality, racism and the death penalty.

It is the second time that an execution date has been set for Abu-Jamal, who has been imprisoned for nearly 18 years on frame-up charges in the killing of a Philadelphia policeman, Daniel Faulkner. A previous execution date in 1995 was stayed because of a pending appeal to the Pennsylvania state Supreme Court.

The death warrant does not necessarily mean that the execution will take place December 2, since attorneys for Abu-Jamal have already made clear their intention to file a new legal appeal, which they expect to be heard first.

Ridge's action has as much political as legal significance, since signing the death warrant gives Pennsylvania prison authorities the power to cut off much of Mumia's access to the outside world. He will no longer be allowed to give interviews, and his visits will be sharply restricted, in effect gagging him at the most critical moment of the campaign to prevent the first execution of a political prisoner in America in more than four decades.

The signing of the death warrant is also Ridge's assurance to the police, prosecutors and right-wing death penalty supporters that the Pennsylvania governor intends to go through with the execution as quickly as possible.

The lead attorney for Abu-Jamal, Leonard Weinglass, suggested that timing of the death warrant was suspicious, coming only two days before he files a

habeas corpus petition in federal district court. "It's just another coincidence in Mumia's case," he said. "There have been coincidences since day one."

Weinglass told the press that the appeal will raise 29 separate issues concerning the procedure of the 1982 trial in which Abu-Jamal was convicted and sentenced to death for the murder of Faulkner. "My understanding is the court will want to review the 29 issues he's raising and that can't be done by December 2," Weinglass said. "On the grounds of due process, Mumia's trial would never pass muster in any court."

The legal appeal will ask the US district court to review the refusal of the Pennsylvania state courts to give Abu-Jamal a new trial, despite well-documented abuses committed by Albert Sabo, the judge in Abu-Jamal's first trial. Sabo, a life member of the Fraternal Order of Police, has sentenced more prisoners to death than any other judge in America.

Abu-Jamal was denied the right to act as his own attorney and was even barred from attending a portion of his own trial, a clear violation of his constitutional rights. Moreover, in the sentencing phase of the trial, Abu-Jamal's political beliefs as a former Black Panther and activist against police brutality were highlighted by the prosecution, showing the politically motivated character of the effort to railroad him to the death chamber.

Facts uncovered by Abu-Jamal's attorneys have undermined the evidence against him as well, demonstrating, among other things, that Faulkner was killed with a bullet fired from a .44 caliber gun, while the pistol which Abu-Jamal carried on the night of Faulkner's death was a .38. Five witnesses have come forward in the years since the shooting to say they saw someone other than Abu-Jamal shoot Faulkner and flee the scene.

Abu-Jamal has maintained his innocence and demanded a new trial. The former radio journalist emerged as an internationally known opponent of the death penalty in the course of nearly 20 years of outspoken criticism of the US criminal justice system, including the publication of two books. He is now being held on death row at the State Correctional Institute, Greene County, in Waynesburg, Pennsylvania, about 90 miles south of Pittsburgh.

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

See Also:

The fight to free Mumia Abu-Jamal and the defense of democratic rights

[23 April 1999]

The social context of a police frame-up

Why we defend Mumia Abu-Jamal

[17 May 1999]

Petition filed before US Supreme Court for Mumia Abu-Jamal

[19 May 1999]

Philadelphia mayor witch-hunts supporters of Mumia Abu-Jamal

[4 June 1999]

US media attempts to discredit campaign for Mumia Abu-Jamal

[16 July 1999]



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact