

Federal judge grants stay of execution for US political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal

Our reporter
27 October 1999

US District Judge William Yohn Jr. granted a stay of execution for Mumia Abu-Jamal Tuesday, 13 days after Pennsylvania Governor Thomas Ridge set December 2 as the date the political prisoner would be put to death by lethal injection. Abu-Jamal's lawyers had expected the federal judge to grant the stay in order to review a habeas corpus petition they filed on October 15, the day after Ridge signed the death warrant.

Abu-Jamal, a former member of the Black Panthers and a radio journalist, was railroaded to prison nearly 18 years ago on charges that he murdered a Philadelphia policeman. His defense attorneys are demanding a new trial on the grounds that his constitutional rights were violated and that police and prosecutors coerced witnesses and manufactured false evidence to convict him during the original trial.

The appeal pending before the federal district court is the last chance Mumia Abu-Jamal has to present the evidence uncovered since his 1982 trial, which the Pennsylvania courts have refused to review. The 160-page habeas corpus petition lists 29 separate issues of constitutional violations.

Abu-Jamal's legal team is requesting an evidentiary hearing to enable the federal court to examine all the evidence and hear witnesses proving their client's innocence. Judge Yohn is not required to grant such a hearing, and may choose to rely on transcripts from the Pennsylvania courts.

Abu-Jamal's lead attorney Leonard Weinglass, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that Yohn will probably rule in February on whether or not Mumia gets a evidentiary hearing. He also said the stay would remain in effect indefinitely until the federal court made a final ruling on the habeas corpus petition.

"It is our hope we will have the opportunity to present the facts concerning this case in a neutral and

fair courtroom," Weinglass said in a statement.

Following the signing of the death warrant Mumia was placed on "death watch" where his movements are monitored by a 24-hour surveillance camera, effectively silencing the political prisoner at a critical point in the fight for his freedom and a new trial. The stay of execution means that Mumia will now be removed from this "death watch."

Abu-Jamal's case has become a focal point in the US and internationally in the struggle against capital punishment and in defense of democratic rights. His writings from death row, translated into seven different languages, have drawn attention to the brutality of the US justice system, which has imprisoned 2 million people, including nearly 4,000 on death row.

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



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact