

Rally opposes murder trial of 13-year-old Michigan child

Our correspondent
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The jury in the murder trial of a 13-year-old Michigan boy charged as an adult failed to reach a verdict Friday, and deliberations will continue today. Nathaniel Abraham, arrested at the age of 11, is the youngest person in the US to be tried for first-degree murder as an adult.

Nathaniel is being tried under a 1997 Michigan law that sets no minimum age for the prosecution of children as adults for serious and violent offenses. He is charged with the murder of 18-year-old Ronnie Greene. Nathaniel's attorneys say he was playing with a rifle and firing at trees, nearly 300 feet from Greene, and that Greene was likely struck by a ricocheting bullet. Prosecutors claim Nathaniel is guilty of premeditated murder, despite the fact that they have no evidence to prove intent or motive. If convicted for first-degree murder Nathaniel could face life imprisonment.

Opponents of the prosecution organized a protest and press conference Friday outside the Pontiac, Michigan courthouse where the trial is being held. The North Oakland County Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Black Law Student Alliance from the University of Michigan Law School, the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan and the Michigan Coalition for Juvenile Justice Reform were among the organizers.

About 100 people were in attendance, including some students and workers from Pontiac and Detroit. The rally gave a small indication of the widespread disgust felt toward the vindictive prosecution of Abraham, whom psychologists say suffers from severe emotional problems and has the mental capacity of a child much younger than his age. One social work student from Wayne State University told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "I work with kids. This prosecution is ridiculous. Troubled children can and must be helped and

rehabilitated, not treated like criminals and punished."

Speakers included Nathaniel's mother, Gloria Abraham, his attorney Geoffrey Fieger, and Kary Moss from the ACLU. *World Socialist Web Site* correspondent Jerry White also spoke.

"I appreciate the support that my son and all children are getting from you," Gloria Abraham told the audience. "This is a worthy cause. As a people, we have to stand up. My son has been held for two years and that is not right.

"We are dealing with a child, not an adult. We all make mistakes. Nathaniel has physical and emotional needs that have to be addressed. And they cannot be addressed if he is sent to jail. I just hope that after this is all over, that people don't stop fighting. We all have to stick together against this."

Nathaniel's attorney noted that Michigan's Republican Governor John Engler had cut the funding for juvenile mental health facilities while spending millions for the construction of prisons. Fieger said the Abraham case was the first test of the state's new juvenile justice law, which, he said, would be used to fill the newly constructed prisons.

Michigan ACLU leader Kary Moss said the US was at a critical juncture. "It has long be said," Moss remarked, "that the character of a society is determined by the treatment of its youth." She noted how prosecutors and politicians boasted about being "tough on crime" to advance their political careers while they ignored the growing social problems in America. There were many people in the country, she said, that felt the answer was not imprisoning ever younger layers of the population but overcoming the lack of decent schools and opportunities for the youth.

A third grade student recited a poem by his brother Ken Corr entitled, "The boy without a smile." Among

the verses was:

Pontiac's on the upswing
The County Seat
Yet there's kids like young Nathaniel who
Aimlessly walk the streets
The *System* failed Nathaniel
Time after time.
Tragically a life was taken ..
At 11—Murder was the crime.

Prison is not the solution
Nathaniel is only a child!
Prayer, love, and commitment for
“The Boy Without a Smile.”

Jerry White began by explaining that the *WSWS* was bringing news of the Nathaniel Abraham case to an international audience. “There is a growing revulsion in the US and worldwide,” he said, “to what only can be described as a brutal society in America.”

According to the politicians and the news media, White commented, life in America has never been so good. “The stock market is rising, corporate CEOs are making millions.” But, he said, “children are being tried as adults; the US is imprisoning nearly 2 million of its citizens and executing the mentally retarded and juvenile offenders.”

White said Democratic and Republican politicians were blaming the poor for crime, but they were the ones responsible for the intolerable social conditions in Pontiac and other cities that breed crime and social ills. “Both Nathaniel Abraham and Ronnie Greene are victims,” he said, as many in the audience applauded and nodded their heads in agreement.

“What are the conditions in Pontiac? Only a few miles from the auto executives' million-dollar mansions in Bloomfield Hills are the closed auto factories and deteriorating neighborhoods of Pontiac. The Clinton Valley mental health center and dozens of schools have been shut down. Big business and the Democrats and Republicans are the real criminals, not Nathaniel Abraham.”

White said the prosecution of Nathaniel Abraham was an attack on the democratic rights of the whole working class, black and white. He concluded by saying working people needed to build a new political movement that spoke in the interests “of the Nathaniel Abrahams of the world, not the Bill Gateses.”



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