

US protests demand freedom for political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal

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On Saturday, December 11 rallies were held in Chicago, San Francisco, Atlanta, Houston, Philadelphia and other US cities in support of political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. Jamal is currently appealing to a federal court in Philadelphia his 1982 death sentence for the murder of police officer Daniel Faulkner. Jamal has steadfastly maintained his innocence and has become internationally known through his writings as a spokesman for those victimized by the US criminal justice system.

At the Philadelphia rally hundreds gathered at a shopping center in North Philadelphia to demand a new trial for Jamal. Delegations came from North Carolina, Boston, Baltimore and New York City, including four busloads of high school students.

One speaker at the rally said, "I'm wondering to what extent the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has really imprisoned Mumia. Mumia's name is known, not only here in the city of Philadelphia and the state of Pennsylvania and across this nation. His name is known in Europe. It is known in Africa. It is known in Asia.... Mumia knows that what causes him to be imprisoned today are causes which are unjust. Injustice cannot stand against the truth."

After the rally, a march was held through the neighborhoods of North Philadelphia where Jamal had spent his youth as a leader of the Philadelphia branch of the Black Panther Party in the late 1960s.

On December 6, as ordered by the federal district court for eastern Pennsylvania, Jamal's lawyers filed a Memorandum of Law to support the Petition for Habeas Corpus filed on October 18. The memorandum specifically addresses whether the petition meets the requirements for a new trial under the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, a reactionary federal law that severely restricts the right of those

sentenced to death by a state court to appeal to the federal courts.

The memorandum contends that during the municipal court appeal of Jamal's death sentence in 1995, later upheld by the state Supreme Court, two dozen valid subpoenas were quashed and all discovery requests denied without explanation by the appeals judge, Albert Sabo. Sabo was the judge who sentenced Jamal to death in 1982. Based on the outspoken bias of this judge, the memorandum states that the decisions of the trial were in violation of the US Constitution.

Jamal's lawyers also argue that of the 29 legal claims for a new trial cited in the petition, 11 will require testimony from witnesses to establish their factual basis because Jamal has never had the opportunity to present the evidence supporting them. The Effective Death Penalty Act severely restricts a defendant's right to evidentiary hearings. A ruling on whether the judge will allow evidentiary hearings is expected in March prior to his ruling on the Petition for Habeas Corpus.

Of the over 3,500 inmates on death row in the US, Jamal is the only one who has a well-financed and organized right-wing campaign demanding his execution. Spearheading the campaign is the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), whose greatest fear is that a new trial would expose the intimidation of witnesses at trial, tampering with evidence by police, and the misinformation supplied to the media by the police during the months following Jamal's arrest.

In the past year, the FOP has attempted to organize boycotts of artists who are supporting Jamal, in an attempt to stop the raising of funds for his defense. On November 30 police officers refused to work overtime in Baltimore to provide security at a concert of the rock band Rage Against the Machine. The band has been outspoken in its support of Jamal. After a December 6

Rage concert in Philadelphia at the First Union Center, the FOP called for a boycott of the First Union Bank. While the bank does not own or manage the center, the FOP hopes their campaign will intimidate concert promoters from booking artists who support Jamal.

The national FOP is also calling on the Republican Party to move its national convention scheduled for next summer at the First Union Center. Speakers at Saturday's rally in Philadelphia cited several recent instances when the police have shown up uninvited at neighborhood fundraising events for Jamal and warned participants that they are "keeping a file" on them.

In the words of a Stuyvesant High School student from New York City who attended Saturday's rally in Philadelphia, "The US is supposed to be for justice, but it's not. People are fed up with police brutality. We have to have social action. Seattle can happen in New York City."



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