

Mumia Abu-Jamal supporters arrested in Washington anti-death penalty protest

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About 500 people demonstrated outside of the US Supreme Court in Washington, DC Monday, protesting the death penalty and demanding a new trial for political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. Jamal has been incarcerated on Pennsylvania's death row for 18 years after being framed up for the December 9, 1981 murder of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner. The protest was organized by the Free Abu-Jamal Coalition.

Eighteen people have been put to death in the US so far this year. Since the death penalty was reinstated in by the US Supreme Court in 1976, 616 executions have been carried out.

Police detained about 150 protesters, who were taken into custody for civil disobedience. A similar protest of about 400 outside a federal appeals court building in San Francisco resulted in 164 arrests. The Washington demonstrators were arrested for sitting down in the street between the Supreme Court and the US Capitol, and for crossing police barricades to go on to the Supreme Court plaza, which was blocked off because of the demonstration.

Abu-Jamal's case is currently at a critical stage before the federal Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia where Jamal is appealing for a new trial before Judge William H. Yohn Jr. Last October Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge signed a death warrant for Abu-Jamal, setting December 2, 1999 as the date of execution. Jamal's lawyers applied for and were granted a stay of execution pending appeals. They have filed a petition for a new trial citing 29 constitutional violations in his case. The US Supreme Court rejected appeals filed on Abu-Jamal's behalf in 1990 and 1999.

The campaign for Abu-Jamal has been gaining international support. On February 17 Amnesty International issued a 35-page report, "A Life in the Balance: The Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal," which

documents the human rights organization's research into his case and calls for a new trial. On February 5, 8,000 people demonstrated in Berlin calling for Jamal's freedom and for an end to the death penalty.

The Washington demonstration was timed to coincide with the Supreme Court hearing arguments in the case of Williams v. Taylor. Virginia death row inmate Terry Williams is appealing a Fourth Circuit ruling that a state prisoner seeking relief in federal court on the basis of ineffective counsel must demonstrate that all 12 jurors would have imposed a lesser sentence had the inmate received adequate representation. The case challenges tenets of the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, signed into law by Bill Clinton, which severely restricts the right of death row prisoners to file federal habeas corpus petitions.

The state of Texas has scheduled the execution of Odell Barnes Jr. for March 1. Barnes has spent eight years on death row after being convicted of the robbery and murder of Helen Bass. If carried out, it would be the tenth execution in the state so far this year. According to Barnes's attorneys, newly uncovered evidence in his case creates reasonable suspicion that others robbed and murdered Mrs. Bass. They also argue that prosecutors in the case had secret deals with some suspects and other witnesses in return for their testimony against Barnes. Odell Barnes's attorneys are calling for Texas Governor and Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush to grant a 30-day reprieve of the execution.

On February 24 Texas put to death 62-year-old Betty Lou Beets after Governor Bush refused to grant her a reprieve. The US Supreme Court refused to hear Beets's case, despite arguments by her current attorneys that she received inadequate defense counsel at her 1985 trial. It has also been revealed that she suffered

physical, sexual and emotional abuse both as a child and by her husbands.



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