

Rubin "Hurricane" Carter supports campaign for US political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal

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7 April 2000

Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, the former middleweight boxer and frame-up victim, pledged support for political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal during a March 25 anti-death penalty forum held in Pittsburgh. The meeting also heard new evidence that further discredits the case against Abu-Jamal.

Abu Jamal has now spent 18 years on Pennsylvania's death row in connection with the shooting death of a Philadelphia police officer, Daniel Faulkner. Federal Judge William H. Yohn Jr. is currently considering a habeas corpus appeal filed by Jamal's attorneys to overturn his state conviction and grant him a new trial. A decision is expected later this month.

Carter visited Mumia at Pennsylvania's SCI Greene Penitentiary earlier on March 25 to express solidarity with the death row inmate. Now 62, Carter was freed from prison after an appeals court ruled that his two trials were fundamentally unfair. He served 20 years after being framed by police for a triple murder in New Jersey.

Carter, whose dramatic story was made into a film last year (*The Hurricane*), compared his case to that of Abu-Jamal. He told those assembled that at the time "when I went to prison there was a movement for human rights. Not just in the US, but all over the world people wanted to have their freedom and independence. After World War II the Western world thought that they could go back to colonialism and peoples everywhere were saying they were not going to take it.

"J. Edgar Hoover, head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, ran a COINTELPRO program in which police in every city and every county targeted outspoken black people who opposed police brutality and racism. In 1963 John Kennedy was murdered, in '65 Malcolm X was killed and you had protests against the Vietnam war. In 1968, the same year I was put in prison, Martin Luther

King was murdered.

"The Mayor of Philadelphia and the police repeatedly harassed members of the MOVE organization and physically attacked their premises in 1979. Mumia spoke out against that and became a target of the police."

Carter was the featured speaker at the forum which was sponsored by the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to oppose capital punishment. Following his remarks, International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal, one of the major organizations involved in his defense, presented evidence showing that state prosecutors were well aware of the possibility that another person was present on December 9, 1981, the evening Officer Daniel Faulkner was killed.

The evidence consists of a transcript in which then District Attorney Joseph McGill and witness Cynthia White refer to a passenger in the car driven by Mumia's brother, William Cook. White was the state's star witness against Abu-Jamal, positively identifying him as the shooter.

The transcript is not from Mumia's trial, but from the March 29, 1982 bench trial of William Cook in the municipal court in Philadelphia. Page 33 of the transcript reads as follows:

[McGill] Q. When the officer went up to the car, which side of the car did the officer go up to?

[White] A. The driver side.

[McGill] Q. The driver side?

[White] A. Yes.

[McGill] Q. What did the passenger do?

[White] A. He had got out.

[McGill] Q. What did the driver do?

[White] A. He got out of the car.

[McGill] Q. He got out of the car?

[White] A. Yes.

The prosecutor's questions and the answers provided by White speak to a vital issue in the case. During Mumia's trial and in the period since, the state has repeatedly claimed that there were only three people at the site of the shooting—Faulkner, Cook and Abu-Jamal. This is a central element of the prosecution's argument that no one other than Mumia could have shot the policeman.

White's credibility as the prosecution's key witness has always been an issue. At the time of the trial she was serving an 18-month sentence for prostitution and was cited for the same offense in Philadelphia some 38 times. When originally questioned by police that evening she did not identify Abu-Jamal.

The forum also heard reports from Steven Hawkins, executive director of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty; Jeff Garis, executive director of the Pennsylvania Abolitionists United Against the Death Penalty; Caroline Roberto, president of the Pennsylvania Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers; Bruce Ledewitz, professor of Constitutional and Criminal law at Duquesne University and founder of the Western Pennsylvania Coalition Against the Death Penalty; and attorneys Christina Swarns and Kathy Swedlow, who work at the only center for the defense of indigent death row inmates in Pennsylvania.

The following stand out among the points that were made:

- * Philadelphia County now has the second highest number of people on death row, 125, after Harris County (Houston), Texas.

- * Blacks are 4.3 times more likely than whites to be sentenced to death in Pennsylvania for the same or similar crimes.

- * Indigent death row inmates lack access to adequate legal counsel

- * The rate paid to public defenders of death row inmates has not been increased in 30 years.

- * The right of inmates to appeal is being eroded by the speeding up of the pace of executions.



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