

Thousands rally in Philadelphia on eve of Republican convention

Tom Bishop, Eula Holmes
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Some ten thousand demonstrators marched and rallied July 30 in Philadelphia on the eve of the Republican National Convention, calling for measures to address poverty, injustice in the legal and prison system, environmental degradation, and discrimination based on race, gender or sexual preference. A common theme reflected in the banners carried by demonstrators and the remarks of some of the speakers was the essential identity of the Democratic and Republican parties, and the increasing domination of the political system by big business.

Prominent were placards and banners calling for a new trial for Mumia Abu-Jamal, a political prisoner from Philadelphia who has spent nearly seventeen years on death row in Pennsylvania.

The "Unity 2000" march set off from 30th Street Station where two weeks ago Amtrak police shot and killed a homeless man. The march ended on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, where some thirty speakers addressed the crowd. The demonstration was endorsed by over 200 labor, community, religious and political organizations. Those represented included city and state workers' unions, farm workers, teachers, health care workers and commercial workers. Organizations included various political tendencies, anti-death penalty activists, supporters of Mumia Abu-Jamal, activists for the homeless, and other protest groups.

All of the speakers, including state and local union officials and Patricia Ireland from the National Organization of Women (NOW), denounced the Republican presidential ticket of George W. Bush and Richard Cheney, and some complained of the pro-business policies of Democratic candidate Al Gore, but none called for a break with the two-party system. In an effort to present a "left" face to the demonstrators, the

union officials who spoke kept silent on the fact that their organizations were backing the Democrats in the 2000 elections.

Speaking for the Campaign to End the Death Penalty, Joan Parkin said it was appropriate that Texas Governor Bush, who has overseen the execution of 134 people, was invited to Pennsylvania by Governor Ridge, who has signed two death warrants, and Philadelphia District Attorney Lynn Abraham, who she characterized as "one of the most racist District Attorneys in the country." Parkin said Philadelphia had quashed more complaints of police brutality than any other city. She denounced the Democrats for "following the lead of the Republicans in implementing the Effective Death Penalty Act, which makes it impossible for death penalty inmates to get any kind of appeal."

After Sunday's rally about one hundred protestors sat down in the street near DA Abraham's office to protest the police beating several weeks ago of suspect Thomas Jones. They were quickly surrounded by 200 police, and dispersed when threatened with arrest.

The previous day, Saturday July 29, some 3,000 marched to demand universal health care at a demonstration organized by the Ad Hoc Committee to Defend Health Care. Speakers included doctors, health care workers and community organizers. Green Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader also addressed the crowd. Speakers pointed out that over 43 million people in the US did not have health insurance, and the number was growing by 100,000 every month.

There was a heavy police presence at both the Unity 2000 march and the health care protest. Police lined the march routes and groups of police on motorcycles or bicycles frequently passed by. Large numbers of police have also been deployed at hotels where delegates to

the Republican National Convention are staying.

A member of Laborer's Local 332, who had helped set up the convention facility on Friday night, told the WSWs that nine white police vans, twelve school buses and fifteen squad cars filled with police were in North Philadelphia on Friday evening. "They were there to get the homeless and any loiterers off of the streets. They wanted to clean up the town for the Republican Convention. I saw them arresting and harassing people who wouldn't leave. The streets were deserted."



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