

Mumia Abu-Jamal supporter Clark Kissinger remains in federal detention

Kate Randall
9 January 2001

Clark Kissinger, an outspoken supporter of US political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal and leading member of the left group Refuse & Resist, remains in federal detention following a December 6, 2000 sentence on a parole violation. After first being imprisoned in a Philadelphia facility, he was transferred to Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn, New York on December 13.

Kissinger was sentenced to 90 days in jail by Judge Arnold Rapoport after he had traveled to Philadelphia during the Republican National Convention and delivered a speech at a rally in defense of Abu-Jamal. The politically-motivated sentence was handed down for Kissinger's violation of the terms of his parole, stemming from an incident at another protest in defense of Abu-Jamal held on July 3, 1999 at the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia.

At this rally, demonstrators allegedly refused to move when ordered to do so by Park Rangers. Ninety-four people were taken into custody and charged with "failing to obey a lawful order." Eighty-six of these paid \$250 fines and were released. Kissinger and seven other defendants pled not guilty and asked to go to trial. These defendants were ordered by Judge Rapoport to pay \$250 fines and were also given one-year probation sentences.

The terms of the probation were draconian in relation to the offense—considered to be equivalent to a traffic ticket—and were clearly aimed at silencing Mumia Abu-Jamal's supporters at a critical juncture in his case. Abu-Jamal, who was framed up for the 1981 murder of a Philadelphia policeman, is appealing his conviction and seeking to stop his impending execution. His appearance before a federal District Court in relation to his appeal will be scheduled soon.

The conditions of Kissinger's original probation were

an attack on democratic rights, seeking to cut off his contact with Abu-Jamal and hinder his defense. The eight defendants were prohibited from having any contact with felons, including Abu-Jamal. They were required to have full-time, paid employment, which meant they could not participate exclusively in the defense campaign. They were ordered to turn over their passports and were required to receive permission from a probation officer before they could leave the federal court districts in which they resided. In addition, they were ordered to turn over a list of any organizations they belonged to, as well as financial records.

When Kissinger sought permission to travel to Philadelphia during the Republican National Convention in August, it was denied. When he defied the decision of the probation officer and went to Philadelphia to make a speech at a pro-Abu-Jamal rally, he was dragged into federal court and sentenced to jail for violating his probation. The judge also indicated that the terms of his probation will continue following the completion of his sentence.

In effect, he was imprisoned for exercising his right to free speech. As Kissinger commented in court before being sentenced by Judge Rapoport: "The purpose behind my sentencing and restriction has been in effect to try and put a brake on a political movement that the government does not like."

Mumia Abu-Jamal, a former journalist and Black Panther whose case has become a symbol of the anti-death penalty movement internationally, spoke from Pennsylvania's death row on Kissinger's sentencing and imprisonment: "Demonstrators who have dared to exercise their alleged first amendment rights at the Liberty Bell have learned that such an exercise is a crime, punished by judicially-imposed silence, and banishment from the environs where the so-called

'constitutional guarantee' was written!...

“Welcome to Philadelphia, y'all. Where the First Amendment doesn't matter. Where both the media and the government conspire to punish you for protest. Where you can be beaten, jailed, threatened, and insulted by a judge, and jailed again!”

The conditions of Kissinger's imprisonment have been restrictive and harsh. A December 17 statement from Judy Kissinger reported that she had received only one voice-mail message from him from the Brooklyn detention center. He was held in isolation for two days upon his arrival at the facility before being transferred to the general population. He had not been allowed to make any phone calls, receive family visits or purchase personal items from the prison commissary. After daily visits from his attorneys he was stripped searched.

With Kissinger's sentence and jailing the government and police authorities are sending a message that anyone who speaks out against the death penalty and political repression—or expresses any ideas they disagree with—will be dealt with severely. While the *World Socialist Web Site* has principled disagreements with Kissinger's political organization, we view his jailing as a gross affront to democratic rights and condemn it.

Protests of Clark Kissinger's sentencing can be directed to:

Judge Arnold C. Rapoport at 610-776-0369;

Fax: 610-776-0379;

or to the judge who will rule on his appeal:

Honorable Bruce Kauffman

US District Court,

601 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106

Fax: 215-580-2281



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact