

Michigan students denounce Troy Davis execution

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24 September 2011

Students at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan demonstrated in outrage over the brutal execution by lethal injection of Troy Davis Wednesday night in Georgia after the United States Supreme Court refused to order a stay of his execution. Davis was executed despite a preponderance of evidence pointing to his innocence.

Citing the outpouring of support for the victim at protests in front of United States embassies throughout the world and the hundreds who signed petitions in his defense, the Michigan demonstrators explained to passersby that the case exposed the hypocrisy and brutality of the American criminal justice system.

The demonstration began as the spontaneous expression by a few students at the growing injustice and reaction all down the line that has come to dominate political life. Supporters of the Socialist Equality party distributed the statement “The execution of Troy Davis,” which provoked interest among those assembled.

As the hour of execution approached, Geoff Iverson, a first year student in the masters program of the School of Information for Library Science, was overcome by horror and disgust. He went to the center of the main campus, a plaza called the Diag, expecting to find a crowd of angry students who shared his sentiments.

“I thought there would be a demonstration of outrage at what was happening,” he said. But there was no protest. “I went home, made a sign and got a lot of people to come out, standing here with a guy named Chris the rest of the evening.”

“I could not allow this travesty of justice to pass without comment,” Geoff said. “It would not be

responsible of me to do nothing. I am against the death penalty in all cases and in this case in particular because there is the real possibility that Troy Davis is innocent.

“I am studying library science because I like the idea of helping people to help themselves. The library closures in Detroit are blocking access to information to our poorest and most vulnerable citizens. In my department, we discuss the concept of the digital divide. The more information becomes digitized, the more access to information becomes a privilege of the rich rather than a right shared by everybody.”

“I was shocked,” said Constance James, who has been following the Troy Davis case for two years. With her father she had been gathering support for Davis, writing letters and emailing politicians and officials in the US Justice Department. “I thought that with the eyes of the world on them they would not do it,” she said. “I feel the justice system went ahead and murdered him.”

What had happened had caused her to reconsider her approach. “I feel like we were on our knees begging,” Constance reasoned. “But every human being has the right to life. The US has no right to execute anyone.” She held a placard declaring, “Take a Stand for Life.”

“We have been begging and now we have to take a stand,” she said. “This will not be the end of it. They have killed a million people in Iraq,” she said, “all for profit.”

“The US government is a criminal enterprise. The people of this country overwhelmingly oppose these wars. I do not want to profit from the death of people who have done nothing to us. Imagine if the tables were turned and other countries were imposing their views

upon us.”

Other demonstrators held signs that read “What happened to Troy Davis can happen to you” and “I am Troy Davis, You are Troy Davis, We are Troy Davis.”

Students passing between classes stopped to ask about the case and express their support. Many had voted for Obama in 2008 and were shocked by his callous indifference to the grisly proceedings in the Georgia death chamber. Obama had issued a statement through press secretary Jay Carney that the president had “worked to ensure accuracy and fairness in the criminal justice system,” but that it would be inappropriate for him to intervene in a “state prosecution.”

James Daley, an undergraduate in the English Department, said, “I have not read a lot about it. I oppose the death penalty in general. Even if we take the argument of wrongful death off the table, I would oppose it. It does not seem ethical for the government to put people to death.” He explained how the prosecution’s evidence in another capital case had been shown to be falsified.

Amber Saunders, a third year student of child psychology, said, “The lack of evidence really bothers me—the fact that he was killed with so much doubt.” She had also supported Obama in the past, but rejected his comments with contempt. “The state is part of the criminal justice system,” she said. “If you cannot correct a wrong at the state level, then you cannot correct it at the national level.”

She added, “Yesterday, when the Supreme Court refused to grant a stay and proceeded to execute him, it really demonstrated to me that begging and pleading is useless. There were demonstrations at US embassies all over the world, in Hong Kong, the UK, Germany, France. I feel like we were on our knees.

“Every human being has the right to life. We have to take a stand. We are not going to let this go. It cannot be forgiven until the death penalty is abolished. This is just a drop in the ocean of the injustice that occurs in this country. They claim to be for human rights and yet slaughter over one million people in Iraq.

“I cannot tell you how upset I was when I heard of

Obama’s refusal to intervene. It is shameful!”

Amanda Hill is a senior in kinesiology and Public Health. “To put it harshly,” she said, “I think Obama is a coward. He wants to please the rich. Who in our corrupt government and justice system has the right to put a man to death?”



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