# “Progressive” Philadelphia District Attorney exposed by appeal of Mumia Abu-Jamal ruling

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Larry Krasner was elected Philadelphia District Attorney in November 2017 on the promise of reforming the criminal justice system that plays such a devastating role in the lives of the poor and heavily African-American population of the largest city in Pennsylvania. Krasner, a former public defender, won the Democratic Party primary earlier that year, with the enthusiastic support of the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and Socialist Alternative.

Only a bit more than a year later, Krasner was put to the test, after a Pennsylvania Superior Court judge ruled last December 27 that the internationally known political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, who has spent nearly 40 years behind bars while steadfastly maintaining his innocence, was entitled to a new opportunity to appeal his conviction. Before an agreement in 2011 to reduce his sentence to life imprisonment, Abu-Jamal had spent nearly 30 years on death row for the murder of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner.

Abu-Jamal’s original trial in 1982 was held under conditions of a law-and-order frenzy, and Amnesty International, among many other organizations, accused the prosecution and judge in the case of unfairness and racial bias. Defense attorneys have introduced numerous examples of misconduct, including an affidavit that the trial judge, Albert Sabo, had declared, “Yeah, I’m going to help ‘em fry the nigger.” An international campaign has been waged on behalf of the Abu-Jamal, who has spent his time behind bars writing several books, as well as speaking on Prison Radio.

Krasner, the “progressive” hailed by the DSA and assorted other pseudo-lefts, announced on January 25, 2019 that he would appeal the decision of Justice Leon Tucker giving Abu-Jamal another chance to reargue his appeal. This action by the DA, in essence acceding to the demands of the Philadelphia Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) and Faulkner’s widow, further prolongs the period during which Abu-Jamal, now 64 years old, sits in prison without the opportunity to make his case, if not permanently snatching away the chance for him to challenge his conviction.

Justice Tucker was forced to recognize that former Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Ronald Castille should have recused himself in a 2012 appeal by Abu-Jamal, because Castille had been Philadelphia District Attorney in the late 1980s, at the time when the original conviction in this case was being appealed.

The district attorney’s move exposes the complete fraud of the claim by pseudo-left organizations like the DSA that it is possible to secure fundamental democratic and social rights through the mechanism of the Democratic Party and the capitalist state which it represents and defends.

Various “lefts” have hailed some relatively minor measures taken by Krasner. He has effectively decriminalized the possession of small amounts of marijuana, as have the authorities in a number of other major US cities. He made a splash when he first took office by firing several dozen prosecutors, and he has also made some changes in bail demands. But the Abu-Jamal case is different. It is one in which a bipartisan coalition has stood firmly behind the police. There is no constituency within the ruling class for the defense of democratic rights, and Krasner has toed the line.

The district attorney attempted to defend his action in the Abu-Jamal case. He called the decision of Judge Tucker “incredibly complex and nuanced,” and

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claimed it would potentially affect thousands of other cases. “I hope that the people who are critical will take a deep breath and wait and see what it is we actually say in the brief that we file,” he added.

Some longtime defenders of Abu-Jamal have expressed outrage. The organizers of the Rebellious Lawyering Conference at Yale Law School had invited Krasner as their keynote speaker, but rescinded the invite in response to the appeal of the Abu-Jamal ruling.

Pseudo-lefts like Socialist Alternative are squirming as they attempt to justify their earlier full-throated support for Krasner, while maintaining a pose of disappointment with his latest move on Abu-Jamal. Krasner “is rightly seen as one of the most progressive DAs in the country,” they write. “Socialist Alternative strongly supported the demands of the campaign that elected Krasner but warned of the limits of relying on a DA specifically and one individual generally to carry out the profound changes to the criminal justice system that we need.”

According to these middle-class anti-Marxists, what is required is not a break with the Democratic Party, but instead stepping up a campaign to push it to the left. “We call on Larry Krasner to boldly and actively apply the full power of his office to re-balance the scales of justice,” they continue. “Further, he must use the bully pulpit that comes with elected office to build the movements that could force changes to the law.”

Marx, the founder of scientific socialism, long ago provided the refutation of such opportunist arguments in his book on the Paris Commune of 1871, *The Civil War in France*. The Commune proved that the “working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes,” he wrote, it must rather erect its own state structure, the genuine democracy to which he gave the name “dictatorship of the proletariat.”

When genuine socialists run for political office and seek a “bully pulpit,” it is NOT as Democrats or other defenders of capitalism, not to “lay hold of the ready-made state machinery,” but as representatives of the working class fighting to educate, expose and organize for the socialist reorganization of society.

Krasner is demonstrating in one US city the political and class essence of the campaign to “transform” the Democratic Party by backing figures like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. It is designed to sabotage the struggle against the system that is behind the imprisonment of Mumia Abu-Jamal, along with mass incarceration, the moves towards censorship, and the drive towards dictatorship and war, by channeling the movement behind efforts to regulate and defend the capitalist status quo. There can be no defense of democratic rights without a break with the Democratic Party, and the fight to mobilize the working class independently in the struggle against the system.

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