

Execution Date Set for Mumia Abu-Jamal

Pennsylvania Governor Acts To Condemn Activist As His Appeal Is Filed & His Book Is Released

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On June 12, Pennsylvania Gov. Thomas Ridge signed a death warrant for Mumia Abu-Jamal—meaning that unless a judicial stay is granted, he'll be executed in the state's electric chair at 10 p.m. on Aug. 17.

[News came as we were going to press that San Francisco police attacked a peaceful Free Mumia demonstration June 26 in San Francisco's UN Plaza. Police charged 270 people with felony arson, riot and jaywalking. Several demonstrators were beaten including journalists.]

The former Black Panther and MOVE supporter—now a nationally syndicated death row newspaper columnist and radio commentator—was convicted of killing a Philadelphia police officer in a 1982 frame-up trial marked by racism, judicial error, perjury, and prosecutorial misconduct.

Ridge, a rabid right-wing Republican, was elected on a hysterical anti-crime platform and pledged to begin executions again upon taking office.

"Make no mistake," Ridge told a January special legislative session on crime, "I intend to see that Pennsylvania's death penalty exists in more than name only."

Since taking office, Ridge has signed seven other death warrants. Pennsylvania executed its first inmate since 1962 on May 2, the same day Mumia's new book, "Live from Death Row," was released for publication. The state, being oh, so politically correct, chose a white inmate, Keith Zettlemoyer, as the first to be electrocuted, even though Pennsylvania's death row is overwhelmingly African-American. Zettlemoyer was so stressed by a decade on death row that he declined an appeal and asked the state to kill him.

Abu-Jamal's legal team, led by renowned defense attorney, Leonard Weinglass, had notified the news media the day before that the defense planned to file an appeal brief on behalf of their client the following Monday, June 5. Learning of the impending appeal, Ridge hurriedly signed the execution order so as to be in technical compliance with his policy of not signing death warrants for prisoners with active appeals.

"Consigning Jamal to death with a stroke of the governor's pen was a particularly vindictive act," Weinglass said. "Gov. Ridge was well aware we were set to file legal papers, and this shows his policy to be a vengeful race to death."

A Murderous, Corrupt Bunch

As support for Mumia has grown worldwide and his case publicized in national TV and newspaper coverage, the state has made it more difficult for him to be interviewed. Recently, prison officials denied him access to CBS, National Public Radio and several foreign radio stations. However, Mumia's commentaries continue to be aired on several local NPR stations, and his column is carried by many newspapers around the country, including the Highland Park-based *Michigan Citizen*.

Incensed by the growing political support for Abu-Jamal and by the publication of his book, the Philadelphia chapter of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) and their lackeys in the state Legislature intensified pressure on Ridge to sign the death warrant. The Philadelphia cops are a murderous, corrupt bunch whose racism under chiefs such as Frank Rizzo is legendary. FOP members regularly counter-demonstrate at pro-Mumia events chanting “Kill Mumia!” FOP has called for a boycott of actors Ed Asner and Whoopie Goldberg for participating in fund-raisers for Mumia’s defense fund.

The Philadelphia police had a vendetta against Mumia because of his Black Panther membership and his support for the intransigently radical MOVE group. Besides the frame-up of Mumia, the police committed numerous crimes against the two groups, the worst of which resulted in the 1985 deadly assault on MOVE’s communal home in inner-city Philadelphia.

Explicitly Political Execution

After a police siege proved ineffective in dislodging the group, their house and 61 others on the block were destroyed by an aerial incendiary bomb dropped by a cop helicopter. The fire killed six MOVE adults and five of their children. Notice that no right-wingers are complaining about the tyranny of the government in this case.

In February, two FOP officials were convicted on federal racketeering charges, and the following month five more Philadelphia cops were indicted by a federal grand jury. Leading the demands for Mumia’s execution is former Philly cop, Edward O’Connor, who personally prepared the bomb that was dropped on the MOVE houses.

If Mumia’s sentence is carried out, it will be the first explicitly political execution since the government murdered Ethel and Julius Rosenberg in 1953, after their conviction as atomic spies. Like Mumia’s case, that trial also was marked by extensive judicial misconduct and perjured testimony.

Seven hundred pages of Mumia’s heavily censored Freedom of Information Act files recently released to his attorneys show Mumia was under government surveillance since the age of 15 when he began working with the Panthers.

A Prosecutor In Robes

Mumia’s 500-page appeal brief clearly shows the pattern of prejudicial misconduct on the part of city prosecutors and the sentencing judge, Albert Sabo, who has condemned 31 people to death—all but two of them African-Americans.

Sabo is known to Philadelphia defense lawyers as a “prosecutor in robes,” and was scheduled to hear the appeal for a stay of execution July 12. The brief asks Sabo to “recuse” himself from hearing the appeal because of his long association with the police including serving 16 years as Under Sheriff of Philadelphia County.

Equal Justice USA, one of Mumia’s defense groups, has launched an emergency campaign to demand Sabo be kept off the case. “Sabo cannot be allowed to be the judge of his own bias,” said Noelle Hanrahan, one of the Equal Justice coordinators.

Worldwide demonstrations were held immediately to denounce the death warrant and many more are scheduled as the gravity of the situation increases. Attorney Weinglass said, “The prison received so many faxes on Mumia’s behalf that it knocked the system out of order.”

The Philadelphia FOP also launched an intense campaign to block publication of *Live from Death Row*, a collection of writings originally intended for NPR’s All Things Considered nightly news program in 1994, but never broadcast. NPR folded under pressure from the cops and Sen. Robert Dole, whose Senate speech threatened to deny funding to NPR if the commentaries were aired.

Frances Golden, Mumia’s literary agent, said, “The book has really got the police crazy. In order to justify an execution they have to demonize him, but the book shows him as a man committed to social justice, who passionately proclaims his innocence.”

The police demanded that Mumia's \$30,000 publisher's advance be confiscated and prison officials have launched an investigation of him for running a business from prison, i.e., publication of the book. They have used the charges as an excuse to deny him visitors, media representatives, and his paralegal advisors.

In contrast, Stacey Koon, the Los Angeles police sergeant who led the racist beating of Rodney King, raised almost \$4 million in mail solicitations and book advances while in prison on federal civil rights charges.

Over 20 public readings from Mumia's book have taken place since its release, including one in New York featuring Melvin Van Peebles, director of the film, "Panther," attorney William Kunstler, MOVE survivor Ramona Africa, and author John Edgar Wideman, who wrote the book's introduction.

Ossie Davis, the renowned actor and social activist, who delivered the eulogy at Malcolm X's funeral 30 years ago, called the impending execution "an outrage."

"Mumia is somebody we desperately need," he said. "We cannot let them take such a voice from us."

How to Help Save Mumia Abu-Jamal

* Tell the governor to rescind the death warrant and grant Mumia a reprieve; write: Gov. Thomas Ridge, Main Capitol Bldg., Rm. 225, Harrisburg, PA 17120; phone 717/783-1198; or fax 717/783-1396. Firm, but polite letters will help Mumia better than denunciatory ones.

* Information on how to aid the defense of Mumia is available from Equal Justice USA, PO Box 5206, Hyattsville MD 20782; phone: 301/699-0042.

* Write Mumia and send him copies of your letters or what you write about him in your publication or reports of demos in his support. Mumia Abu-Jamal, #AM-8355, SCI Greene, 1040 E. Roy Furman Hwy., Waynesburg PA 153708090.

* Subscribe to The Jamal Journal, the newspaper edited by Mumia. For a sample, send \$2 to International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal, PO Box 19709, Philadelphia PA 19143; phone/fax 215/476-8810.

* Buy *Live From Death Row* at your local bookseller, from Equal Justice USA at 1-800/746-1160 or Fifth Estate Books. All of our profits go to Mumia's defense fund. Make this a best seller.

* Carry Mumia's book in your info shop, book store or catalog. Write the publisher to order: Addison-Wesley, One Jacob Way. Reading MA 01867 or call 617/944-3700.

* Sponsor readings from *Live From Death Row*. Demonstrate and do whatever else makes sense.



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