

Free all political prisoners!

written by Stephen Millies

August 28, 2019



Political prisoners and their families. SLL photo: Stephen Millies

The auditorium of the Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center in East Elmhurst, Queens, N.Y., was filled on Aug. 24 for the 24th Annual Dinner Tribute to Political Prisoners.

Organized by the Malcolm X Commemoration Committee and the National Alumni Association of the Black Panther Party, the event raises funds for freedom fighters held in U.S. prisons and brings attention to their cases.

Among those in the audience were former political prisoners, including Janet Africa and Janine Africa of the MOVE 9, who have just been released from jail after 41 years of imprisonment. Their comrades Chuck Africa and Delbert Africa are still imprisoned. Other members of the MOVE family, including Pam Africa, also attended the event.

People rejoiced when Nelson Mandela walked out of an apartheid concentration camp after nearly 28 years of hell. Yet political prisoner Ruchell Cinque Magee is still in jail after 56 years in California prisons.



It was shocking that political prisoner
41 years in solitary confinement in U.S. occupied south Korea before being freed in 2015. But it was vile that Black Panther Party member Herman Wallace spent nearly 42 years in solitary confinement at Louisiana's Angola prison only to die from liver cancer three days after being released. His comrade Albert Woodfox is now free after spending 43 years in "the hole."

Woo Yong Gak spent
41 years in solitary confinement in U.S. occupied south Korea before being freed in 2015. But it was vile that Black Panther Party member Herman Wallace spent nearly 42 years in solitary confinement at Louisiana's Angola prison only to die from liver cancer three days after being released. His comrade Albert Woodfox is now free after spending 43 years in "the hole."

Just as the United States jails more people than any other country on the planet, its political prisoners are serving the longest sentences.

Black Panther Party member Ed Poindexter has been in Nebraska prisons for 49 years. Black Panther Jalil Muntaqim has spent 47 years in jail. Black Panther Sundiata Acoli is 82 years old and has been jailed for 46 years. American Indian Movement leader Leonard Peltier has been incarcerated for 43 years. Former SNCC chairman Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin, then known as H. Rap Brown, will soon be 76 years old and has been locked-up for 19 years.

The annual dinner was initiated by the late [Herman Ferguson](#), who died in 2014. He had been a member of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, which was founded by Malcolm X.

Ferguson himself spent time in prison on ludicrous charges—cooked up by the FBI—of planning to assassinate civil rights leaders. He helped start the Malcolm X Commemoration Committee after getting out of jail in his seventies.

Mumia is going blind

Zayid Muhammad chaired the meeting and welcomed the audience. He reminded everyone of how the late Safiya Bukhari worked tirelessly to free political prisoners.

Zayid Muhammad noted that this was the first year the dinner was held during Black August, the month when Jonathan Jackson and his brother George Jackson were killed. At the end of the program, Regtuiniah Reg read a dramatic poem entitled Black August.

Charles Mitchell gave the libation, invoking the names of freedom fighters like Nat Turner and Fannie Lou Hamer.

Mumia Abu-Jamal's doctor, Dr. Joseph Harris, gave a somber report on Mumia's

health. After almost 38 years in jail, Mumia is effectively blind. Dr. Harris cited a paper about how people in prison age much faster than those outside the walls. That's all the more reason to free them.

Ksisay Sadiki gave a moving spoken word and dramatic presentation about her father, the political prisoner Kamau Sadiki. She described getting letters from her dad as a little girl when he was first framed up in the 1970s. Ksisay Sadiki was seven years old when her father finally came home from prison.

Kamau Sadiki went back to school and worked for 18 years as a telephone worker and member of the Communication Workers of America. But in 2003, he was framed again and sentenced to life for the 1971 killing of an Atlanta policeman.

Sadiki was railroaded to jail because he refused to cooperate with authorities in a scheme to lure Assata Shakur out of asylum in Cuba. The pigs told Kamau Sadiki that if he didn't help them capture Shakur, he would die in prison. Kamau Sadiki was already suffering from liver diseases when he was arrested.

Mother of the late political prisoner Abdullah Majid, 94-year-old Queen Mother Rose LaBorde, attended the dinner tribute and was honored at it.



Home of Betty Shabazz and Malcolm Shabazz and their daughters at 23-11 97th St., East Elmhurst, Queens, N.Y. SLL
photo: Stephen Millies

Traffic lights won by revolutionaries

Bullwhip, who was a member of the East Elmhurst-Corona branch of the Black Panther Party, spoke about the struggles in the surrounding community, which was known at the time as "the other Harlem."

While the event's venue, the Langston Hughes Library, is at 100th Street and Northern Boulevard, Malcolm X lived with his family less than a mile away at 23-11

97th St. The nearby home of Louis Armstrong at 34-56 107th St. has been turned into a museum.

A block away from Armstrong's house, at 108th Street and 36th Avenue, the Dominican honor student Manuel Mayi was lynched on March 28, 1991. The white racist mob used baseball bats, pipes and a fire extinguisher to beat "Manny" to death. He was just 18 years old. No one was sent to jail for this murder.

Back in the 1960s, East Elmhurst didn't even have a library. The Panthers and other activists fought to get one, which was named after Langston Hughes. It opened on April 26, 1969.

Both the Queens and Northern boulevards are still death strips with pedestrians and bicyclists being killed. It was worse 50 years ago.

Bullwhip described how drivers would speed on Northern Boulevard headed to their homes in suburban Long Island. Children would be killed.

Community residents pled with authorities for some protection. It took the Panthers to lead people into the streets, blocking Northern Boulevard, before City Hall did anything.

That's how traffic lights were installed from 112th Street to Junction Boulevard.

Just as the School Breakfast Program exists because of the Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast for Children program, so were the traffic lights on Northern Boulevard won by the Panthers.

That's part of the wonderful legacy shared at the Tribute to Political Prisoners that the capitalist state and its media want to erase. All the Trumps want political prisoners to die in jail and be forgotten. We must fight to free them.

For more information about political prisoners see: [/thejerichomovement.com/](http://thejerichomovement.com/)

