

How to free Mumia? Shut it down!

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At OneArt Community Center in Philadelphia, April 23, 2023. SLL photo: Gary Wilson

On April 23, a day before Mumia Abu-Jamal's 69th birthday, protesters marched down 52nd Street in West Philadelphia to a rally at the OneArt Community Center. A glorious mural demanding Mumia's freedom marks the entrance.

Speakers at the rally, representing a coalition of different organizations, spoke with outrage and untiring optimism about the struggle to free Abu-Jamal. He has now been imprisoned for 41 years. Speaking in Mumia's name, they called for the freedom of all political prisoners and an end to mass incarceration.

The movement to "Bring Mumia Home" was dealt a grim setback on March 31 by the corrupt Pennsylvania judicial system. In 2019, boxes of evidence were found to have been hidden in the Philadelphia District Attorney's office. These boxes contained proof of Mumia's frame-up that had been withheld from him and his attorneys since the dirty trial in 1982 when he was initially given a death sentence.

The new evidence, finally released after 37 years, should have provided the basis for a new trial. It included documentation that the police bribed key witnesses and that there was deliberate racist manipulation of the jury selection.

After months of hearings and delays, Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas Judge Lucretia Clemons ruled that she would not allow this evidence to be heard, thus depriving Mumia of his right to a fair trial.

The power of organized labor

At the rally, Clarence Thomas — a retired leader of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union from Oakland, California, and co-founder of the Million Worker March Movement — told those gathered at the rally: "We need the working class, organized and unorganized, to shut it down. We will be heard. Such an action at the point of production will free Mumia, and it won't stop there."

Omali Yeshitela, chair of the Uhuru Movement and African People's Socialist Party, was one of those [indicted on April 18 by the U.S. Justice Department](#) for opposing the U.S./NATO proxy war in Ukraine. He received a universal response of support when he condemned the entire U.S. system of injustice.

Rasakhan Wali from Nation Time talked about the infamous racist atrocities carried out by the Philadelphia administration at the time when Mumia became a brilliant young journalist, reporting for the Black Panther newspaper and other media. He was just 16 when Mayor Frank Rizzo ordered the brutal strip searches of Black Panther leaders on the eve of their massive Plenary Convention in 1970.

Fearlessly reported attacks on MOVE

In 1978, a police siege of the MOVE headquarters led to the imprisonment of nine African American men and women. Some were held behind bars for 40 years, while two died in prison.

Then, in May 1985, the city of Philadelphia bombed the MOVE house, wiping out 61 neighboring homes in the conflagration. Janine Africa and Janet Africa only learned that their children had been killed in the fire bomb through prison yard conversations overheard from their solitary confinement cells.

Another outrage occurred the following year when a Philadelphia grand jury cleared all city officials of criminal liability for the MOVE bombing that killed 11 people, including five children.

At Mumia's birthday rally, Michael Africa Jr. spoke as people wrote messages to Mumia. He was born in Debbie Africa's prison cell a month after her incarceration. In his presentation at the rally, Mike Africa evoked the name of a child killed in the MOVE bombing, Tree Africa.

He was talking about a grotesque crime revealed in a 2021 video for a Princeton University course, "REAL BONES: Adventures in Forensic Anthropology." The video was a case study of the remains of MOVE victims.

The children had not been buried, as reported in 1986. The bones of Tree Africa and Delisha Africa had been secretly held at Penn Museum and later Princeton

University without the knowledge of their families.

Mumia will be freed

Much of the discussion at Mumia's birthday rally centered on the drive to win his freedom.

ILWU's Thomas drew rapt attention when he talked about the potential of the labor movement. He reported on the 1999 West Coast shutdown by dock workers demanding Abu-Jamal's freedom when he was threatened with execution. In 2001, under the pressure of a growing International movement, a judge re-sentenced Mumia, a labor union journalist, to life in prison.

On Feb. 16, ILWU locals in San Francisco and Oakland shut down their ports to demand that Judge Clemons allow a retrial. Their action resonated in support for Mumia internationally. South Africa's National Union of Metalworkers, the Japanese Doro-Chiba railroad workers' labor union, the German IG Metal Workers, and various English unions applied to the Pennsylvania court to grant a new trial.

Other speakers at the rally included Theresa Shoatz, daughter of political prisoner Russell Maroon Shoatz; Candace McKinley with the Philadelphia Community Bail Fund; and Keyssh from Decolonize Philly. Performers included Cleo, Antonella, New World Warrior, and hip-hop artists Spiritchild.

