

ILWU LEADS THE WAY!

20,000 MARCH FOR MUMIA ABU-JAMAL IN S.F.

MAY 1, 1999 At the head of a sea of protestors defending black political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal on Pennsylvania's death row was the 300-strong ILWU contingent—from longshore, warehouse, IBU and even some pensioners, chanting, "An injury to one is an injury to all, Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!" Joining San Francisco members in the militant march were longshore workers and clerks from the ports of Sacramento, Los Angeles, Port Hueneme, and as far away as Seattle. The Longshore, Clerks and Walking Bosses Caucus voted overwhelmingly to shutdown the Coast on April 24 for stop-work meetings to demand: 1) Stop the Execution and 2) Free Mumia!

When the PMA in Los Angeles objected, ILWU Vice President Jim Spinosa, who is heading up contract negotiations, and the Coast Committeemen made it clear to PMA that the rank and file of the Longshore Division had spoken through the vote of its democratically-elected Caucus delegates. The PMA backed down. The Caucus action prevailed. Every port on the West Coast was shut down tight from 8AM to 6PM. This kind of unity of action couldn't have happened for a more worthwhile cause—to use our collective muscle to save the life of an innocent man and at a better time—just weeks before we go into critical contract negotiations

Labor Support for Mumia

Speakers at the rally at Civic Center Plaza included Art Pulaski, head of the California Federation of Labor (AFL-CIO), Walter Johnson, Secretary-Treasurer of the San Francisco Labor Council (who proposed a two-hour nationwide strike in defense of Mumia), ILWU President Brian McWilliams and Vice President Jim Spinosa. Local 10 member Jack Heyman told the crowd that the ILWU had supported many international and labor struggles. Then he asked, "If the ILWU goes on strike, will you be there for us?" To which the 20,000 demonstrators responded with a resounding "Yes!"

Messages of international dockworkers' solidarity with the ILWU's action in defense of Mumia came from Liverpool, Sweden, Denmark, Cyprus, Finland, Japan and from the 100,000 member teachers' union in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil which struck for two hours the day before calling for freedom for Mumia.

The Link Between Labor and Mumia

In the era of so-called "free trade agreements" like NAFTA, the world is changing rapidly as the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. This is a direct result of privatization and union-busting that accompanies these "free trade agreements". As we've seen from Liverpool, England, in countries where dockworkers' unions used to be strong, they no longer exist. In the U.S. only 14% of the workforce is unionized; others work non-union for low wages and no benefits. Still others have no jobs and many are homeless. Nearly every corner in downtown San Francisco, like many cities across the country, has a beggar whose sign often reads: "Homeless vet. Will work for food. God bless."

To maintain this "new world order" of capital requires an increased and unrestrained police force to keep the desperate underclasses down. It requires expanded prisons to accommodate a burgeoning prison population. This is the new growth industry in the U.S. Targeted disproportionately for victimization in this racist criminal justice system are blacks and hispanics, especially on death row. Mumia, by his irrepressible fighting spirit and outspokenness, has become a symbol in the struggle against this system of repression.

As the ILWU enters into tough contract talks, longshore workers and clerks have to keep in mind that PMA is pushing for major changes on the waterfront—in our hiring hall, working conditions, jobs and benefits. The Caucus has designated maintenance of benefits a strike issue. If, in a few months, we vote to strike, then we'll need support not only from other unions but from the unemployed, as well. Harry Bridges and the strike committee of '34 successfully appealed to black

and other unemployed minority workers not to be used as strikebreakers by waterfront employers. We must lay the groundwork for the same kind of unity. And as was done in the '46 and '48 strikes, we've got to organize international labor solidarity too. The International Dockworkers Conference in Sweden in May comes just as our negotiations get underway. Mumia's case will be one of the major topics of discussion. Support for Mumia Abu-Jamal links ILWU to both the struggle of minorities here and the dockworkers' movement internationally.

Mumia: "Confessed" Cop-Killer or Framed Freedom Fighter

The news media keeps repeating a bogus story of Mumia "confessing" in the hospital. But the cops didn't report this concocted "confession" until 2 months after it supposedly happened. The emergency room doctor reported that Mumia was silent.

Mumia had no criminal arrest record before this. He continues to proclaim his innocence and refuses to renounce it for a pardon. A standard shooting investigation includes a nitrate or paraffin test of the shooter's hands. Yet, cops claim they didn't do one.

Three prosecution witnesses with criminal charges against them testified that Mumia shot the cop. Charges against them were dropped. Four witnesses who saw the shooter run away didn't testify. One who did testify to this was arrested on the witness stand.

The truth is that former Mayor Frank Rizzo and the Philadelphia police department had targeted Mumia Abu-Jamal since his award-winning exposes of police brutality. This was a frame-up waiting to happen and the killing of policeman Faulkner provided the key.

Remembering "Bloody Thursday" and the Role of Police

During the 1934 maritime strike six workers were killed by police on the West Coast. In San Francisco, strikers marked the spot where the men fell: "2 ILA men killed—shot in the back" and "Police murder". In any strike, cops are there to protect the employers' interest-- escorting scabs through picket lines, attacking and arresting strikers. Because of the murderous police actions during the '34 strike, Local 10's constitution bans cops from membership in our union.

When a benefit was held for Mumia's defense in July 1995 at the Local 1199C, the Philadelphia Hospital and Health Care Workers Union, 300 armed cops besieged the union hall screaming for his execution. This is what Mumia has to say about the role of cops: "Police are agents of the ruling class, and, as such, soldiers who serve their interests. They exist, not to protect the people, but to protect capital. What role do they perform when workers strike? What role do they perform when the people demonstrate against any social injustice? Their job is to wage war against the people, and to instill terror against anyone—anyone—who resists against the system."

Harry Bridges and the '34 Strike Committee would have agreed with Mumia.

DEFEND MUMIA! STOP THE EXECUTION! FREE MUMIA!

Rank and File ILWU Committee to Defend Mumia Abu-Jamal
Labor Action Committee; P.O.Box 16222; Oakland, CA 94610; email jhook@jps.net