

Free Mumia—By Any Means Necessary

Love and Rage Prison Abolition Working Group

1995

“True justice requires more than a stay of execution—it requires a complete dismissal of this clearly political persecution! It requires more: it requires the committed mobilization of our communities to resist a system that is more repressive than South Africa’s—to abolish this racist death penalty! It requires freedom—for all MOVE political prisoners, and all political prisoners of whatever persuasion! Now! It requires a continuing revolution—to beat back the forces of the neo-apartheid state. Organize! Mobilize!”

—Mumia Abu-Jamal, July 12, 1995

Mumia Abu-Jamal is an articulate revolutionary journalist. He is also a political prisoner sitting on Pennsylvania’s death row with the clock ticking. Unless something drastic happens, the state of Pennsylvania will put him to death at 10:00 p.m. on August 17, 1995. Our work is cut out for us—we need to build a movement to make something drastic happen to prevent the execution. The question is— what do we need to make happen? What can we do that will cause the state to reconsider its options and spare Mumia’s life?

To answer this, we need to take a step back and look at where the movement is at, make our best guess at what it will take to save Mumia’s life, and then figure out how to get from point A to point B. In other words, we need a strategy.

We believe that the people most affected by an issue should be the ones to decide how to deal with the issue at hand. In this case, clearly Mumia Abu-Jamal and his family and comrades are the ones most affected by the situation.

Therefore, in this campaign, we think it’s important to take guidance from Mumia himself, from the MOVE Organization, and from Concerned Friends & Family of Mumia Abu-Jamal. Mumia, and spokespeople for the MOVE Organization are always clear that we need to build a movement not just to free Mumia, but to destroy this whole authoritarian system.

As anarchists, we don’t trust or rely on the state to bring justice. We believe that the legal process is highly political, which Mumia’s case itself demonstrates. This is not to say that no justice can be won in the courts for Mumia. We believe the current legal effort for a new trial is very important and should be supported. The legal campaign can actually help build public opinion against the “criminal justice” system, by bringing to light the kinds of dirty, underhanded tricks that were used to put Mumia on death row in the first place.

But on its own, the legal campaign would be doomed to fail, as it did the first time around. What gives the legal campaign half a chance is a militant mass movement in the streets demanding what seems to be the impossible—that Mumia not just get a new trial in the amerikkkan kourts, but that Mumia should be freed immediately and unconditionally. We think that state authority is illegitimate—especially the authority of the white supremacist US government over the colonized Black community. We agree with the Black Panther platform that called for release of all Black people held in US prisons, since the US government should have no jurisdiction over them in the first place.

Love & Rage members, and many other anarchists, have been involved in the campaign to free Mumia Abu-Jamal for years. And since the death warrant was signed in June, we have been even more heavily involved in building local coalitions in many cities, including Minneapolis, New York, DC, Milwaukee, Bay Area, Lansing, State College, and others.

We believe in building local coalitions because we want to help build a mass movement that goes beyond the control of any single organization. We seek to build a non-sectarian, democratic, and multinational movement. The local coalitions which have arisen to free Mumia usually include people with a variety of revolutionary and progressive perspectives and programs. We think this is a good thing. Our vision of revolution is a pluralist one, in which many organizations and people combine our efforts to topple the system. The Free Mumia coalitions give us a glimpse at the problems and possibilities of a revolutionary pluralist movement.

Within the mass movement, we believe in a direct action strategy. While mass educational work, the legal campaign, and peaceful protests are all crucial, we believe the power we have to affect this situation lies in direct action, or “uncivil” disobedience. Right now, it’s not clear what will happen in the streets if Mumia is executed. While Pennsylvania cops have acknowledged they’re preparing for mass arrests, it’s still unclear whether enough people know or care enough about Mumia Abu-Jamal to actually disrupt business as usual about it.

We believe that the Pennsylvania state authorities do their best to act in their own political interests, to preserve and expand their power and control. Clearly they see it in their interests to execute Mumia Abu-Jamal. We have to make it more in their interests to NOT kill Mumia Abu-Jamal. This will only happen if the result of killing Mumia is a loss of political power and social control. In other words, if people see the execution of Mumia as so illegitimate and unfair (like the beating of Rodney King) that it creates the possibility of urban uprisings or at least organized creative actions and uncivil disobedience and protests.

In that regard, we were involved with and very supportive of the torchlight parade in San Francisco where 300 people were arrested, the protest in Minneapolis where 11 people were arrested, as well as many smaller actions like banner hangings, street theaters, town meetings, and marches.

We feel this is the directions things need to go—a rapid yet patient escalation of tactics.

We don’t believe in militance for it’s own sake—we believe in escalation within a context of a broader movement.

The patient work of coalition-building, education, mass outreach, and peaceful protests must all be done. Within that context, we support taking things to the next level in every city.

Some people criticize a direct action strategy, saying it will just make us look like fanatical supporters of a cop killer, which they say plays into the hands of the state.

They might argue that instead, we should present a “respectable” image and only focus on the demand for a new trial, working through peaceful means to get that. This could bring in more liberals and high-profile people, which will win us more support and get Mumia off death row.

But we think this is a false dichotomy. We don’t think we should let the state set the limits on how we should struggle. And we don’t think you have to choose between “raising the stakes” or “catering to liberals.” We would argue that in fact raising the stakes is the very thing that will cause more liberals to speak out. The torchlight march in San Francisco shows this clearly — before that, not many people there even knew who Mumia Abu-Jamal was. Afterward, everyone who watches or listens to the news there at least knew about Jamal, and Mumia support meetings grew dramatically.

Similarly, the targeting of the National Association of Black Journalists for not supporting Mumia has caused their president to support Mumia in a Washington Post editorial.

Two recent protests at Judge Sabo’s house (including 11 arrests) clearly irked him and caused him to act even more irrationally in the court, further discrediting himself and the prosecution’s case. This has caused even the Philadelphia Daily News to call for Sabo to be removed from the case, and the Inquirer to harshly criticize Sabo’s conduct. And the news coverage of Mumia in Philadelphia seemed to change for the better after the Daily News and Inquirer were the targets of protests on June 5. Direct action & confrontation, in an escalating context, will not alienate liberals, but will alert more people to the issue and cause more moderates to speak out, while also foreshadowing the possibility of broader social unrest.

By advocating direct action, we understand that this will lead to run-ins with the police. We need to prepare for that. So far, all the people arrested in Mumia support demos have been released fairly quickly. We need to be ready to support all who put themselves on the line for Mumia. This is especially true in the prisons. As the execution date approaches, the possibility of uprisings and other disturbances in the prisons increases. We need to remember that the killing of George Jackson by the prison system in the 1970s led to mass protests inside the prisons, and was a leading factor in the huge Attica uprising in 1971. Our movement needs to be ready to support those on the outside who protest for Mumia, as well as those in prison who may rise up. The repression inside will be much greater, and we must work to expose and stop such repression, and support the prisoners who protest, if it does occur.

A direct action strategy must include mass outreach, especially among oppressed and alienated youth. We need to reach out broadly and boldly, saying “if Mumia dies, fire in the skies.” We should be at every hip hop concert and youth cultural event with information on Mumia Abu-Jamal. While we can’t “organize” a spontaneous uprising, we should lay the educational foundations and open up the possibilities for people to react in a way they find appropriate.

In the work we do supporting Mumia, we should emphasize the issues of police brutality, and the prison system in general. We should make connections with local anti-police brutality coalitions, and local prison reform and prisoner support groups. The relationships we build in these coalitions create the possibility of ongoing coalitions against police brutality & prisons. We need to consciously strive to create those connections so that we come out of this movement stronger than when we started.

[This statement was written by members of the Prison Abolition Working Group, which is a project of the Love & Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation. We work for the creation of a new society without prisons. We work toward that today by supporting political prisoners & prisoners of war, and educating the public about the inherent brutality of prisons. For more information, or if you'd like to get involved, contact the Love & Rage Prison Abolition Working Group, (address removed for the web archive —editor).]

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