

# EDITORIAL

Editorial Articles Do Not Necessarily Reflect Or Represent The Views Of The Portland Observer

**M**umia Abu-Jamal is an African American journalist, author and community leader in Philadelphia who most believe is wrongly accused of killing a police officer. Pennsylvania's Republican Governor Thomas Ridge has scheduled him for execution August 17, 1995--without compelling evidence that Abu-Jamal committed the crime.

The accused has always maintained his innocence. Eyewitnesses at the scene describe a person of different physical appearance, and police never tested Abu-Jamal's hands for powder burns.

Abu-Jamal, as an active journalist and president of the local Black Journalists Association, had long been a thorn in the side of the local police establishment through his critical writings on police brutality and other conditions in Philadelphia. Police shot, arrested and beat him at the scene of the crime and, despite having no previous criminal record, sentenced him to death. Abu-Jamal has been on Pennsylvania's Death Row for 12 years.

A recent letter signed by five prominent members of the CBC, addressed to the Attorney General of the U.S., sets out the case in the following words: "A grave injustice is about to be committed. We are rushing to execute someone in the

## NATIONAL RAINBOW COALITION

### Mumia Abu-Jamal's Race To Avoid Legal Lynching

face of ample evidence that his constitutional rights have been denied, that he did not receive a fair trial, and most importantly, that he is in fact innocent. Passionate and documented racial biases, both personal and societal, surrounded this man's arrest, his trial, his conviction and his sentencing."

Mumia's community activism dates back to the days of Frank Rizzo, former Mayor and Police Chief of Philadelphia. The Fraternal Order of Police has been actively lobbying for his execution, and Gov. Ridge made reviving carrying out the death penalty a key issue in his election campaign. Ridge rushed to sign the execution papers on Friday, June 2 when he learned that Abu-Jamal's lawyers were filing papers for a new appeals court trial the following Monday.

Human rights activists have organized an international committee to educate the public and bring pressure to stop this gross miscarriage of justice. The committee, co-chaired by actors Ossie Davis and Mike Farrell, set forth the following position: "Months of investigation, research and review demonstrate unequivocally that Mumia, a man who has claimed his innocence since the very beginning, was the victim of a politically-motivated, racially-based prosecution in which evidence of his innocence was suppressed. He was denied his most fundamental right to a fair trial and appeal".

Rev. Jesse Jackson has sent Governor Ridge an open letter to demand: (1) an immediate stay of execution; (2) a new trial so that Abu-Jamal's lawyers can present

new, formerly suppressed evidence; and (3) that Judge Sabo, who presided over the original trial, should not be permitted to participate in or interfere with the appeals process.

On Wednesday, July 12, in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas, Judge Alvert Sabo refused to recuse himself from the hearing to stay the August 17 scheduled execution. Although Abu-Jamal's attorney, Leonard Weinglass, has submitted over 400 pages in appeal, including a statement of 19 claims of constitutional error and improprieties committed during the first trial, Sabo refused to rule whether these claims "had merit" and whether a stay of execution is applicable and a new trial warranted. Another hearing to rule on the stay is scheduled for Friday, July 14, with others to follow. Judge Sabo, Death Row's "King", has a career total of 32 death sentences, of which 93.5% have been people of color (84% Black).

JaxFax is urging emergency action! Write your outraged and protest to: The Honorable Thomas Ridge, Governor of Pennsylvania, 225 Main Capitol Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120; or call him (in state) at 800-932-0784 or (out of state) 717-783-1198. You may also want to write: The Honorable Janet Reno, Attorney General of the United States, Department of Justice, 10th & Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20530 or call 202-514-2001.

## "Along The Color Line"

### Toward A Politics Of Black Liberation

BY DR. MANNING MARABLE

**M**ore than a decade ago, black progressives throughout the country were optimistic about the political future of black America.

We had been actively involved in building Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, and an unprecedented presidential campaign within the Democratic primaries. Many of us were participating in the growing anti-apartheid mobilizations and nonviolent protests throughout the nation, which eventually pressured the white-minority regime in South Africa into capitulation.

Today, that level of optimism has largely retreated from the political landscape, as the public mood of black America has become far more pessimistic. Our middle class, black leadership seems largely ineffective and lacking in motivation against the weight of the Far Right and the new conservative majority in congress. But candidly, we must also have the courage to reassess the shortcomings of the more progressive and activist-oriented strategy for black empowerment, as it evolved in the 1980s and 1990s.

Many progressive black activists a decade ago favored what I have previously described as an "inside-outside" approach toward black politics: strong support for candidates in the left wing of the Democratic Party, such as Congressman Ronald V. Dellums of California and the late Chicago Mayor Harold Washington; critical support for some liberal and centrist Democrats, on a case-by-case basis, and only if necessary to defeat candidates of the extreme Right (e.g., black Democrat Harvey Gantt's

unsuccessful campaign to unseat reactionary Republican Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina); extensive efforts to build independent, Third Party movements and campaigns at local and state levels; and the development of principled coalitions and dialogues between elements of what might be termed the "Rainbow Left" to facilitate the practical tasks of constructing an alternative political culture to the mainstream of the social order. At the level of theory, this political orientation was expressed in the formulation of a "race/gender/class analysis": that is, the grounding of one's politics at the sites of these central categories of oppression, and to build linkages from antiracist, feminist and anticorporate organizations and campaigns toward a vision of a democratically restructured society. In practice, this political orientation embraced a radical multiculturalism, challenging from the margins the bastions of the dominant political culture. It embraced the diverse struggles of the oppressed: the battles for the empowerment of gays and lesbians, feminists, progressive environmentalists, Asian Americans, Pacific Island Americans, Latinos, progressive-minded trade unionists, farm workers, African-Americans and many others.

This leftist approach to radical democratic reform has largely collapsed over the past decade. At one level, the reasons for this retreat are not difficult to discern. For the past fifteen years, black people, the American working class and the most disadvantaged sectors of society have been the targets of a massive political offensive by the Right. In a series of presidential elections (with the partial exception of the election of 1992)

and within national politics overall, there has been a triumph of Reaction. Both Houses of Congress are dominated by a governing elite whose ideology is unambiguously racist, sexist, homophobic and anti-working class.

But we must also recognize that certain weaknesses and limitations in our political outlook and theoretical orientation have contributed to the current sense of pessimism and demoralization in poor people and working class communities, as well as in various segments of communities which experience racial oppression. Speaking from the vantage point of the Left, activists had an analysis of capitalism which did not adequately appreciate its capacity to deflect criticism, to displace contradictions, and to manipulate subordinate social classes against themselves and their own material interests. Our view of history was distorted by a deterministic belief that the world's social protest movements would, within our own epoch, triumph over the forces of imperialism and corporate capitalism.

Martin Luther King, Jr., talked about a "moral arc of the universe which bends toward justice." I also hold this view. But the struggle is also affected by the fact that people make their own history, but not in the manner in which they choose. The struggle for power is always multifaceted. It involves much more than what occurs in the electoral arena, or even at the point of production. The struggle for power is profoundly cultural: it is the battle to redefine values, assumptions, collective behaviors and rituals. Political institutions and the collective participation within them are directly associated with

the values of the market, which dominate the ideological landscape of American society. Mapping a strategy for social transformation requires a sober and honest evaluation of real contradictions as well as sources of democratic resistance within the political culture.

What is crystal clear to anyone is that the contradictions within American capitalism are more profound than ever before. In the past fifteen years, there has been a massive redistribution of wealth upward, from working people to the privilege elites. The top 1 percent of all US households has today a greater net wealth than the bottom 95 percent of all households. We have witnessed the massive growth of the US penal system as a primary means for warehousing unemployed Latino, black and poor young people. What then, should be the basis for constructing a new radical democratic politics: a politics of black liberation?

A politics of liberation should ground itself in the actual conditions and perspectives of those who suffer most greatly from the disempowerment of globalized capitalism.

The common points of experience and struggle, resistance and suffering, of hope and human emancipation between classes and those communities defined by racial and gender domination, by the oppression of political and social control, create the context for a unified social movement.

We must build strong black institutions that address the immediate material needs of our people, but we must also advance a political vision of radical democracy which challenges oppression at every level of our society.

Now to the problem. Thusly situated, black voters, encouraged to reinforce our black "identity" by electing black Democrats, had arguably become more "Democrat" than black. Militant rhetoric about electoral self-determination and black empowerment notwithstanding, we had given up our political independence and our ability to coalitionize with whomever it made sense, because we "belonged" to the Democrats. Then, as political polarization in the country intensified and the white liberals found themselves at odds with the black community, they deserted the coalition and left us powerless.

equated having black voters electing black officials without having political power, it necessarily limited the scope of our influence. We are still a minority of the American population. To impact more broadly we, of course, have to participate in coalitions with other voters not just around the issues, but at the voting booth itself.

Those black leaders who attack coalitional politics on separatist grounds or who insist that the black community has to "get itself together first" are usually disingenuous. The question is not whether we should engage in coalitional politics, but who it is we're in a coalition with and

what the terms are.

Since the strategy to increase the number of black elected officials first evolved in the early 1970s, our singular political partnership has been with white liberals in the Democratic Party, who saw great political benefit to themselves from this arrangement. Even the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, by a majority Democratic Party Congress, was both a product of our fierce struggle for civil rights and a practical recognition on the part of the Democratic Party that the empowerment and activation of Black votes would shore up national party strength, particularly in the South.

## perspectives

### A Rock And A Hard Place

#### "The Oregonian" Shakes Up The Black Community: Part II

**P**ortland's far-ranging daily newspaper - and often arbiter of everybody's affairs - has once again fastened its eclectic eye on the future (or non-future) of black Americans. Reference is to the July 19 article, "From Benefit to Burden," suggesting through a chain of inferences that public sector jobs for African Americans may be in serious danger.

Last week, we cited a spirited response here in the northeast community and it has grown in intensity, ranging from consternation to suspicion. Visiting several neighborhood coffee houses where the "middle class" denizens of the "public sector" gather to discuss all and sundry, I found spirited discussions in respect to the major premise of the article "Affirmative Action In Public-Sector May Damage Blacks" (Too many of you!).

Since there is universal agreement among Americans (black and white) that white males control the media and all other systems for information transfer, it was not surprising to find this cultural shock already had begun to modify the vernacular and the idiom. One gentleman reminded every one of the warning by Marshall McLuhan of "Global Village" fame: "The medium is the message." The group came up with a new spin on a current political adage: "It's the medium dummy, not the economy."

At a meeting of a neighborhood organization, most of the evening was taken up by a spirited discussion that was sort of a paraphrase of my close to last week's article, "Do we have a black leadership that can save the situation?" It was humorous how fast participants rushed to give the debate a national focus, avoiding any local assessments. Outside after the meeting, it was a different story, with some rather strong (and capable) personalities promising some serious challenges: "local leadership captives of 'outsider' board of directors... We've lost direction and control, not to mention millions in real estate." (Did blacks ever have any control?).

The NAACP, of course, is still at the forefront of any discussion of black leadership, though that may change as grassroots dissatisfaction reaches a critical mass. I found conversations that centered only for a moment on the ability and dedication of Myrtle Evers-Williams, the new board chairman. Quickly, a younger generation seems to move to a super-rational position. "The 'old school' has failed us, she is from that set." Will youth risk another Benjamin Chavis?

But, then, African America youth remember very well when an ambitious, middle-class dominated NAACP bulldozed them aside in 1989 and sided with Virginia police because "bad publicity" might threaten their "Jet Magazine" upward mobility. Black college student victims of a police riot were denied support because the black establishment was terrified that a protest would endanger Doug Wilder's chances of becoming America's first elected black governor.

The terrible irony is that it was the sacrifices of black students (beatings, imprisonment and death) that secured these members of the black establishment their middle-class jobs and income. Doesn't anyone remember SNIC, Carmichael, et al? (The "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee" whose sit-ins at lunch counters and marches secured so many rights and opportunities for our new Negroes and Uncle Toms). Could this happen here in Portland if the middle class were put to test? (It may happen soon).

Some think that Oregonian article was extremely useful because it has "provoked some long-overdue self-examination."

I heard one career woman speculate, "have we (some of us) become so comfortable and secure that we have completely forgotten who we are - and are not? I'm afraid that a lot of us have become "plantation managers" - well-paid "Negroes" employed in the public sector to stroke the masses and do a good job for the master. We've become so good at public relations, we believe we are real. Now the wall is cracking."



By Professor Mckinley Burt

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## Letter To The Editor

Send your letters to the Editor to:  
Editor, PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208

BY DR. LENORA FULANI

**T**he U.S. Supreme Court decision on racial redistricting was a political one. After several decades in which "identity" politics has shaped the political landscape and has gone hand-in-glove with the growth of big government, a backlash against so-called "special interests" spurred the court's ruling.

Where does this leave the black community? For 25 years we have pursued a strategy of getting more black elected officials in office, pushing black political representation as the key to our empowerment. Within the framework of this strategy, the political/legal pursuit of drawing district lines to favor maximal black representation was coherent. But from the very start, in my opinion, this strategy was seriously flawed. Since it