

These 2 articles came from the July\August 1992 issue of *Love and Rage*, P.O. Box 3, New York City, New York 10012

Mumia Abu-Jamal

By Richard Van Savage

JOURNALIST MUMIA ABU-JAMAL is currently on death row. The former president of the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists was driving on December 9, 1981, when he witnessed police beating up his brother, who had been pulled over for a minor traffic infraction. (sound familiar?) Approaching the scene he was shot in the stomach by the police. In the ensuing chaos an officer was also shot and subsequently died. Witnesses claim the gunman fled on foot, while Mumia Abu-Jamal and his brother waited for an ambulance. Three days later he was charged with the murder of the cop. Neither ballistics nor fingerprints could link either a bullet or a gun to him.

At his trial he was denied the defense attorney of his choice. The prosecutor rejected all black jurors but one. They withheld evidence and testimony and actually used excerpts from his newspaper articles as the justification for the death penalty, in direct violation of both the first amendment and the UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1949, which prohibits persecution on the basis of political views. What makes the state want to kill this man so badly? A further look into who Mumia Abu-Jamal covered in his career illuminates their motives.

In 1967, at age 13, Mumia Abu-Jamal and three other black teens had the courage to go into predominantly white South 'Philly to protest a rally for segregationist presidential candidate George Wallace. They were thrown out of the rally and soon afterwards beaten up by a gang of white adults, who later turned out to be off duty policemen. This was his first run in with the notorious Frank Rizzo, who was police commissioner at that time.

The following year he began writing for the *Black Panther Newspaper* and helped form the Philadelphia chapter of the Black Panther Party, which brought him continual harassment from the police. The Black Panther Party was formed in the late 1960's to facilitate the move toward self sufficient, self-determined communities. They fed children, clothed families, opened free health clinics, educated children about their history and the true nature of this society, fought drug dealers and helped to organize in their communities. It would be clippings from this young journalist that the District Attorney would use to justify the death penalty. The DA in the case is now the mayor of 'Philly, further showing how politicians will use the death penalty and a racist prison system to further their political careers.

Mumia Abu-Jamal went on to a distinguished career in both print and radio journalism that earned him the title "the voice of the voiceless" for his fearless portrayal of both sides of any story, something few corporate media types have the courage to do. When Frank Rizzo, at this point Mayor Rizzo, in 1978 ordered a blockade of the house of MOVE, a black, radical, back to nature group, Mumia attempted again to give both sides of the story. The blockade failed to starve them out and the police eventually stormed the house with 600 heavily armed SWAT team members. A policeman was killed with evidence pointing toward police crossfire. The city went so far as to demolish the house the following day to prevent evidence in the upcoming trial which sentenced 11 people for ONE murder which the police themselves were probably responsible for.

The notoriously racist 'Philly police frequently harassed MOVE members, often beating them. One such occasion resulted in a miscarriage and another in the death of a child as the mother holding the child was knocked to the ground and beaten. Mumia Abu-Jamal reported all of this for WUHY, as well as many national programs such as National Public Radio, which only infuriated the police that much more.

Later on MOVE would make international headlines when Mayor Wilson Goode ordered a bomb dropped on a MOVE house, killing eleven people, five of whom were children.

The US wants to execute a political prisoner now, for the first time since the Rosenbergs. The FBI COunter INTELligence PROgram (COINTELPRO) in the 60's and 70's used death squads to assassinate prominent dissidents. They killed some 38 members of the Black Panther Party alone. The 80's in the US saw a shift, along with Europe, as a rash of questionable suicides swept through the left, and then a more overt process of "criminalization of political dissidents" began to occur. This would often include harassment by the IRS and other government agencies, sting operations, and provocations to justify violent responses.

The following dialogue is what was used to justify the death penalty for Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Q. To Mumia: "Do you recall saying, 'All power to the people?'"

A. "Yes."

Q. "Do you believe your actions as well as your philosophy are consistent with the quote: 'Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun?'"

A. "I believe that America has proven that quote to be true."

We as anarchists have an obligation to point out the hypocrisy of the government, as well as taking more direct action in assisting anyone under attack. When author Margot Harry asked Mumia Abu-Jamal how to prevent future bombings of MOVE and other dissident groups he responded with a quote from IWW organizer Joe Hill: "Don't mourn, organize! Pull together, unite, come together to resist this system's usurpation of your inherent and god given rights to freedom, clean air, uncontaminated earth, fresh water, and an untainted, unpoisoned gene pool. People, all peoples on this planet, must be free and unthreatened by a nuclear pistol placed at the temple of the earth's inhabitants. Demand that this system of injustice free MOVE prisoners and political prisoners from the dungeons of America."

MOVE is a group formed in the 1970's around the teachings of John Africa that advocates, among other things, the wearing of dreadlocks, vegetarianism (raw food only), composting, living naturally without technology, chemicals etc., home education (due to the continued US policy of cultural apartheid) and a revolutionary movement to separate oneself from the corruption of the US system with a belief in the sacredness of all living things, including plants, flies, rats, dogs, etc.

Write to protest :

Gov. Robert Casey
Main Capitol Bldg, Rm. 225
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Send funds for Mumia's defense to:
New Afrikan Network in Defense of PPs
and POWs

P.O. Box 90604, Wash, D.C. 20090

Partisan Defense Committee
c/o Rachel Wolkenstein, Esq.
P.O. Box 99
Canal Street Station, NY, NY 10013

Special thanks to:

Partisan Defense Committee,

Margot Harry and her book *Attention, MOVE!*

This is America from
Banner Press
P.O. Box 6469
Chicago, IL 60680,

Prison News Service
PSC Pub

POB 5052, Stn A
Toronto, Ont. Canada M5W 1W4

WHAT IS THE MOVE ORGANIZATION?

THE MOVE ORGANIZATION surfaced in Philadelphia during the early 1970s. Characterized by dreadlock hair, the adopted surname “Africa,” a principled unity, and an uncompromising commitment to their belief, members practiced the teachings of MOVE founder John Africa.

“MOVE’s work is to stop industry from poisoning the air, the water, the soil, and to put an end to the enslavement of life-people, animals, any form of life. The purpose of John Africa’s revolution is to show people how corrupt, rotten, criminally enslaving this system is...Our work is to confront this system up-front to show people not only that they *can* fight this system and win, but to show them the urgent *need* to fight.” (MOVE)

MOVE’s early work included helping homeless people find lodgings, assisting elderly people with home repairs, intervening in gang violence, and running a rehabilitation program. Their more public face included demonstrations at zoos, pet shops, political rallies, public forums and media offices, using a strategy of “non-violent protest and strategized profanity to expose the profane circumstances of the system’s injustices.” It was when MOVE launched demonstrations against police brutality that the better-known period of their history began. From then on MOVE was a target for extreme police violence which culminated in the May 13, 1985 bombing of MOVE’s headquarters and the murder of six adults and five children.

MOVE members were repeatedly harassed, arrested, and beaten. Four pregnant MOVE members suffered miscarriages after beatings by police, including Alberta Africa, who was held spread-eagled while an officer kicked her in the stomach and vagina. One MOVE baby has its skull crushed during a 1976 attack on the MOVE household. In 1977 MOVE began a demonstration outside their headquarters to demand the release of MOVE prisoners and to expose the treatment they had been receiving. Armed, to prevent police attack, the MOVE members held off the authorities for 14 months. Having no legal grounds to make arrests, police used some old housing code violations as an excuse to launch a major assault on the MOVE house on August 8, 1978. During the assault one police officer was killed — shot in the back of the head, with the bullet travelling downwards — and 11 MOVE members (who were holed up on the basement at the time) were convicted of his murder. They were sentenced to 30 — 100 years each.

During the next seven years, securing the release of MOVE prisoners became MOVE’s priority. From their new headquarters on Osage Avenue, the group began another demonstration in 1984. On May 13, 1985, the police staged a full-scale military assault, firing over 10,000 rounds of ammunition into the house. When this didn’t succeed in getting MOVE members out, a police helicopter dropped a bomb on the roof. Deliberately leaving the fire to rage, the police let 60 neighborhood row houses burn to the ground. With the house on fire, MOVE members repeatedly tried to exit into the alleyway, but were shot at by police, killing some of the adults and children. Only one adult, Ramona Africa, and one child, Birdy Africa, survived, and were both taken into custody.

Ramona served 7 years for conspiracy, riot, and multiple counts of assault. She was released this spring. She and other MOVE members have now focused their efforts on freeing the remaining 12 MOVE prisoners.

For more information on MOVE, and to help work for the release of MOVE prisoners, write to:

**Concerned Citizens in Support of MOVE
PO Box 19709
Philadelphia, PA 10143.**

Parts of this article were reprinted from the excellent book *Twenty Years On the MOVE* available for \$5 (US) from the same address.