**PA. GOV. RIDGE TRIES TO SPURN FRENCH PETITIONS FOR MUMIA**

by Mark Lewis Taylor, Princeton NJ, April 4, 1996

*[Note: I am writing this immediately following the event.  I was not able to be in on every angle of the encounter at the State House today, and some of the quotes below, while accurate, are not verbatim.  I was able to speak at the event and stay for the entire time, so here is my report. If others on the internet were also at the event and can add things, please feel free to do so. -MLT]*

                     "No justice, No peace -
                      'til Mumia Abu-Jamal's
                                   released!"

   That was the chant from supporters of Mumia Abu-Jamal, which echoed throughout the State house Rotunda in Harrisburg, PA, on April 4, as 66,000 signatures on French petitions were hand-delivered to the office of Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge.

   The delivery of petitions, however, was hardly welcomed; indeed, the Governor's office seemed to do everything it could to ignore and spurn the distinguished French visitors bearing the petitions.  As always, the effort for Mumia was one of struggle.

   The delivery began with a formal press conference at the Capitol building at 11:00 a.m.  Pam Africa moderated the conference, speaking with passion and eloquence.

   Julia Wright, revolutionary journalist from France and eldest daughter of novelist Richard Wright (NATIVE SON, BLACK BOY, THE OUTSIDERS, and many more writings) gave both prepared and extemporaneous testimony to the power of French solidarity with Mumia.

   Mr. Jean Solbes, spokesperson for the French Committee to Defend Human Rights and Liberties, conveyed his organization's support as well as that of France's President Jacques Chirac.

   Mr. Robert Meeropol, who was six years old when his parents, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed, brought tears to many eyes as he gave witness to the pain worked by State executions upon the hearts of the children.

   Ms. Yuri Kochiyama, who held Malcolm X in her arms as he died on February 21, 1965, read a message to the press on behalf of Malcolm X's family.

   Christof Arnold of the Bruderhof, stressed his own religious community's international base, and underscored the multi-national character of the movement on behalf of Mumia and in resistance to fascist
abuse in the present U.S.

   Sue Africa spoke for the MOVE Organization, and challenged Gov. Ridge's stubborn silence in the face of daily faxes, letters, phone calls, and formal requests from leaders around the world.

   Mark Taylor (Princeton Seminary) of *Academics for Mumia Abu-Jamal* emphasized the long tradition of faithfulness that France has shown to African American writers and thinkers like Richard Wright who left a brutal America. Taylor celebrated this notable presence of French solidarity for Mumia flooding back across the Atlantic into the struggle here.

   Ms. Sabrina Green read a message from Leonard Peltier, who recently has undergone surgery AND had his parole denied, who yet sent word of his support for Mumia.

   Mr. Ali Bey Hassan, National Coordinator of the Sundiata Acoli Freedom Campaign, former political prisoner and former Panther, fittingly concluded the press conference with a warning to Gov. Ridge that the people were not going to tolerate Mumia's execution.

   With the press conference over, the group of nearly 70 speakers and supporters for Mumia, moved out of the Rotunda, down the hallways and up three flights of stairs to the Governor's office.

   Ridge's office was fully guarded by a team of plainclothes and uniformed security personnel.  Although this meeting with distinguished international visitors had been long scheduled, there was neither a
Governor nor his representative to greet the delegation.  Hardly a surprise, right?

   Although the time and date had long been established, all personnel from the Governor's office chose to ignore our delegation.

   Only because we remained outside the Governor's suite of offices on the third floor - chanting, sitting, standing, waiting - did someone finally send word that we could leave the petitions with a security officer.  With a building security officer?!

   The people said, "No way."  Julia Wright and Jean Solbes were understandably shocked by the rudeness of the Governor's office toward the visit - a visit about which both would be reporting to the President of their country. Carol Taylor, author of THE BLACK BOOK, spoke from the crowd to say that she, for one, would work to spread word about this affrontery and growing "international incident."

   Timothy Reeves, Press Secretary to the Governor, who usually receives citizen petitions, finally appeared, talked with Mumia supporters, and generally dodged all their questions about the Governor's handling of Mumia's case.  When he was asked for a notice acknowledging the delivery of petitions, he started scribbling notes on small scraps of paper and handing them to Ms. Wright.

   In response to this additional note of perfunctory acknowledgment and disrespect, the people again said, "No way!"  Julia Wright said to Timothy Reeves' face, "I have come to America from France, conveying the viewpoints of respected French citizens, and I have to report to the President when I return!"

Wright added something to the effect, "Although America is my country, this treatment is another example of why it puts pain in my heart!"

   Reeves eventually responded by saying something about how the Governor's Office respects citizens of the Commonwealth, at which point Pam Africa was "on the move" and said, "This government showed no respect for the Africa family, for their children's lives, and still to this day refuses to give us justice.  Nor has a respected journalist and Commonwealth citizen, Mumia Abu-Jamal, even received respect of his
constitutional rights!"  The Press Secretary then beat a hasty retreat to his office, with his bodyguard, while Mumia supporters kept their place in the third-floor hall for what seemed like another hour.

   In the meantime, Alton Maddox showed up, and took up negotiations with the Press Secretary's office.  Maddox secured Reeves' agreement to come back out to talk with Julia Wright and the delegation, AND to provide a typed, formal acknowledgment of receipt of petitions on the Governor's
official stationery.

   The formal acknowledgment was read aloud by Julia Wright to all gathered, and she gave her consent to its adequacy, even though it still was a rather gruding statement.  Mr. Maddox then requested, over
Reeves' complaint, that the delegation be given large, official envelopes in which to preserve the letters, instead of the small business envelopes Reeves had initially provided.

   By 3:30 p.m., Mumia supporters were marching back down the stairs, filling the Rotunda again with their chants - heading home by car, bus and train.  Another day of struggle.  More to come - for everybody!  Free Mumia, and keep on! -MLT