

Closer to Execution?

What is caste to the Indian elite is actually race to the white America. And racism has been so institutionalised in that land of opportunity that even a black President is no answer to the continuing social and legal discrimination and prejudice the blacks face in everyday life. In reality Obama embodies the rise to prominence in American political culture, of highly educated professionals, including a new black upper middle class that emerged from the struggles of the '60s. It seems next to impossible for him to support black liberation and reverse institutionalised racism nurtured over the centuries. For all practical purposes Mumia Abu Jamal is now the symbol of black resistance against racial politics in America and elsewhere. The recent judgement by America's Supreme Court is an ominous development in a 28-year battle over whether the ruling elite of America will be able to execute the progressive radio journalist, author and former Black Panther Mumia Abu Jamal.

Mumia was convicted and sentenced in a trial where almost all Blacks were excluded from the jury, where police officers were allowed to "remember" that Mumia had loudly confessed to shooting the cop (even though a written report—unseen by the jury—from that evening said Mumia in fact made no statement), and where Mumia was barred from the court room during half of his own trial because he continued to assert his right to refuse a court-appointed lawyer and to conduct his own legal defence. This is the face of American democracy.

A mass movement, reaching far and wide in American society and also international outcry against injustice and biased legal exercise, was an important factor in stopping executing Mumia in the '80s and '90s. But the situation is now very dangerous for Mumia. While America's apex court didn't explicitly find the Third Circuit to be in error, it did vacate the Third Circuit decision and ordered that court to "further consider" Mumia's case in light of their special decision. In other words all the move is aimed at not allowing Mumia to get rid of death penalty. After all Mumia represents the voice of voiceless blacks.

Forces ranging from Amnesty International to the European Parliament have expressed concern over the fraudulent nature of Mumia's conviction and sentencing. Yet America's Supreme Court not only denied Mumia's appeal for a new trial, but has now blatantly reversed existing principle and openly implied that the Third Circuit should come up with a new finding that might sanction Mumia's execution.

Mumia was railroaded to jail because of his political beliefs and resolve to fight for justice. Attempt to carry out "legalised murder" of Mumia at any cost exposes among other things how racism has been institutionalised in American judicial system. The Supreme Court's ruling on the Mumia case has broad and ominous implication in a system where death penalty is applied to enforce racial and political oppression. All this is happening at a time when movement against death penalty is developing across the globe.□□