

Oaxaca and Mumia: Radio as a Tool for Justice

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We, The Frequency Mutineers, have been covering the student protests in Oaxaca, Mexico on our weekly radio show. And during the course of our work, we recently crossed paths with another activist using the radio waves to publicize the plight of these student protestors. Mumia Abu-Jamal has written elegantly on Oaxaca, and I'd like to iterate some of his words here.

Several weeks ago, a long, dusty trail of thousands winded their way from the southern city of Oaxaca, to the capital of Mexico City, some 800 kilometers (or over 250 miles) to support democracy, and demand the removal of the governor, who got there through a stolen, and deeply corrupt election.

The Oaxaca resistance was born in repression, when Governor Ruiz ordered the police assault on the striking Oaxaca teachers' union in June. The teachers fought back, and within days, over 300,000 people gathered in a mass march to support the union. Out of that massive outpouring of support came the APPO, the Popular Assembly. The continuing crisis in Mexico may push social forces to join the radicalizing efforts of the APPO, or may open the door to the threatened terror of the 'instruments of the state.' To be frank, what began in repression may indeed end in more repression; but that will not, nor could truly be the end.

That's because the forces that gave rise to APPO are still rumbling barely beneath the surface, ready to emerge in another state, where workers and the poor are struggling to resist the ravenous forces of globalism. When the poor are treated poorly, when workers are poorly paid, the conditions for resistance are already present. And while the temptation of the State to use its brutal 'instruments' may be strong, it's also very possible that it may spark more resistance, deeper and broader.

Oaxaca is spreading like the wind, and the examples of popular and indigenous resistance from Mexico, like the APPO, and the Zapatistas, and various struggles from throughout Latin America, are spreading also. The people of Oaxaca should be supported, not just with words, but with similar organizing against flawed and corrupt elections, from folks all over the world. It should begin with the people of the U.S.

Of course, we've been echoing these words and today we are extending the ideas underlying them. In addition to calling for justice concerning elections—justice we were robbed of in Ohio during the elections of 2004—we are asking for the fair treatment of prisoners. That is, justice for prisoners such as those held illegally in Guantanamo Bay, those abused in Iraq, and especially those such as Mumia who are held unfairly in American jails. In each of these situations, reputable independent groups—such as Amnesty International—have evidence of “irregularities” which demand immediate attention. Yet in few prisoner cases is there even awareness let alone action.

Fortunately, years of protest—a few of which I've been personally involved with—are culminating in both awareness and action for one of these prisoners as Mumia has been granted a final hearing. And I'd like to take a moment and tell you a bit about Mumia including a brief review of his biography, the allegations against him, and his judicial proceedings.

As a teenager in Philadelphia, Mumia joined the Black Panther organization and then became a well-know radio reporter working on a promising career in journalism. In fact, his African-American colleagues elected him local head of the National Association of Black Journalists. Mumia, however, starting associatiing with members of the radical anti-technology group MOVE, and his journalism career began to suffer. Hius professional negligence eventually forced him to take a job as a cab driver. During a routine traffic stop of his

brother, Mumia became involved in a scuffle with police that ultimately led to an officer being killed and Mumia himself being seriously wounded. Mumia was found guilty of killing the officer—a charge which he has both apparently initially accepted and later denied. During the subsequent legal process, a variety of issues arose especially those concerning race. And because of these issues, Amnesty International has declared his trial unfair resulting in delay after delay.

Mumia has spent 20 years on “death row” and 5 years in uncertainty. That’s because in 2001, a judge temporary overturned his death sentence. While that official did not order a new trial, he did decide that Mumia should either be sentenced to life in prison or that prosecutors should hold another death-penalty hearing. And this decision was supposed to be made within 180 days. Unfortunately, the 180 days became 1,800 and that number is still increasing. A resolution, however, on this complex case is imminent and it will occur this year as oral arguments are to begin at any moment. In the meantime, people including many students continue to protest this miscarriage of justice.

We will be using these daily reports to keep you updated on both Oaxaca and Mumia as well as similar issues in the activist and protest “scene”. So please stay tuned to the weekly NEWS programming here on 88.1 WBGU.

[This essay was recently turned into a production piece. That is, it was read over a background of ambient music and began/ended with a sound collage comprised of samples from a variety of music genres as well as motion pictures, political speeches, and field recordings. The piece represents the first in a series of audio recordings we are doing for the Radio News Organization (BGSU), and they will be performed live at the Allied Media Conference (Detroit, 2007). We are also compiling the pieces for release on compact disc with world-wide distribution. For this series, we have carefully chosen a name of “The Revolution Beat”.

“Revolution” refers to both a revolution in a political sense and the revolution of a turntable. “Beat” refers to both the area we cover (as in a reporter's or policewoman's beat) and a musical beat (as in a technique we use to segue our tracks called beatmatching). The name thus reflects a unique combination of the two things we love/perform/promote: activism and turntablism. And although the pieces may appear a nontraditional way of presenting the news, they actually represent part of a long tradition. We’ve come across a series of historical analyses indicating that nearly one thousand years ago the traveling bards took the same approach to news presentation we are taking and for the same reasons. That is, they combined the news with their traditional songs and music in order to (at the King’s request) ensure the public was aware of current events (which were likely propagandized however).]