

Mumia Defense in New Zealand

Fifty people braved cold, wintry conditions to attend a 4 July rally in Wellington, New Zealand, in defense of U.S. political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. The midday protest, held outside the Parliament grounds, coincided with other demonstrations around the world in defense of the former Black Panther, who has been on death row for 14 years after being wrongly convicted of shooting a Philadelphia policeman.

New Zealand's Trade Union Federation (TUF—a grouping of unions disaffected by the rightward drift of the larger Council of Trade Unions) helped publicize the demonstration in its newsletter. TUF president, Con Devitt, who spoke at the rally, said the TUF was not “anti-American,” but was opposed to a system that had “never executed a rich person.” He called for the abolition of the death penalty.

Other speakers included Sam Buchanan, a local anarchist, Sandra Buchanan of the Socialist Workers Organisation (SWO—New Zealand affiliate of Tony Cliff's British Socialist Workers Party) and Bill Logan of the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT). Like other speakers, Logan referred to the recent police execution of Terence Thompson in New Zealand, a country where officially there is no death penalty, but where those accused of murdering cops do not often survive to face trial. He recalled Mumia Abu-Jamal's history as a fighter against oppression, summarized the overwhelming evi-

dence of his innocence, and pointed to the racism inherent in the death penalty.

This is the third united-front protest in Wellington in defense of Jamal. The two earlier ones, which were initiated by the IBT, occurred in August 1990, and in June 1995, after the signing of Jamal's death warrant. In May the Bolshevik Club (BC—a Wellington campus group associated with the IBT) organized a video showing and a forum on Mumia. The BC also took the lead in establishing a Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Committee, which includes various activists from Wellington's leftist and human-rights milieu.

Recent Mumia defense work in Auckland, New Zealand, developed out of a Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Committee initiated in early April by an independent leftist and IBT supporters. Representatives of Workers Power and the Communist League (NZ co-thinkers of Jack Barnes' U.S.-based Socialist Workers Party) were involved in the committee, and practical support was given by the Communist Workers Group (a NZ split from Workers Power) and the SWO. Thirty-five people participated in a 17 May demonstration organized by the Auckland committee to coincide with Mumia protests in the U.S. This kind of international solidarity is vital to saving the life of Mumia and winning the struggle for his freedom. ■