

Union back Free Mumia

by LOUISE NOUSRATPOUR

BRITISH trade unionists gave the Free Mumia Campaign a welcome boost at the weekend, pledging to mobilise support in their branches and nationally to stop US authorities stealing the life of an internationally renowned death-row political prisoner.

Time is running out for Mumia Abu Jamal.

In just 10 days time, a US court of appeal in Philadelphia will decide his fate - death, life in prison or yet more legal proceedings.

At this critical juncture, a diverse line-up of lawyers, trade unionists and activists gathered at the University of London Union on Saturday to rally support for the man, who has been on death row for 25 years for allegedly killing Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner.

An award-winning journalist, Mr Abu Jamal was wanted by the FBI for his involvement in the Black Panther Party (BPP) and black revolutionary group MOVE long before his death sentence in July 1982.

Rachel Wolkenstein, who represented him between 1995 and 1999, spelled out the overwhelming evidence that he is an innocent man, including Arnold Beverly's stunning confession that he and not Mr Abu Jamal had killed Faulkner.

Ms Wolkenstein noted that the facts indicate that Mr Abu Jamal is the victim of a murky state-sanctioned frame-up designed to silence "the voice of the voiceless."

Highlighting the similarities between Mr Abu Jamal's case and the situation of the so-called terror suspects held in Guantanamo Bay prison camp without charge or trial, she warned that "the US appeal court is refusing to even consider this evidence."

Speakers agreed that the US had framed him because it saw in him the "spectre of revolution."

The audience was urged to raise awareness about the campaign in their locality and to pass motions in their union, campus or religious organisation.

"We want Mumia freed, nothing less," stormed Kate Klien of the Partisan Defence Committee (PDC), which organised the rally.

A key aspect of the campaign, Ms Klien said, is to abolish the "racist US death penalty, which is the legacy of slavery.

"It is the lynch rope made legal," she declared.

Hundreds of prominent British trade unionists, including RMT general secretary Bob Crow, National Union of Journalists leader Jeremy Dear and Matt Wrack of the Fire Brigades Union are among the signatories to the Free Mumia Campaign.

Speakers drew parallels between CIA covert campaigns to isolate and destroy US revolutionary movements in the cold war era, Britain's murderous collusion policies in Northern Ireland and the current witch-hunt of Muslims under the guise of the "war on terror."

RMT union activist Stephen Hedley said that Mr Abu Jamal's case and the US death campaign against the BPP members in the 1970s "reminds me of home.

"The same vicious policies that British imperialism used against the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland were also carried out by the US, where there was collusion between police and

the mob to take out anyone who dared put their head above the parapet," he noted.

Explaining that he did not share the politics of the PDC, Mr Hedley stressed the need to rise above sectarian divisions and unite behind this campaign.

"Trade unions can raise awareness by getting resolutions through their branches and at national level," he insisted.

Communication Workers Union eastern region secretary Paul Moffat pledged his union's support for the campaign and vowed to raise the issue at this year's TUC annual conference.

The Scottish TUC passed a motion at its conference last month, pledging its support for the campaign.

"We must drive home that Mumia is an innocent man, whose conviction is politically motivated by the US system which sees him as a threat," Mr Moffat insisted.

Global Afrikan Congress general secretary and RMT member Glenroy Watson called on his fellow trade unionists to whip up support for Mr Abu Jamal.

"People sometimes forget that Mumia is also a trade union member. Backing this campaign is an act of solidarity with the workers of the world," he pointed out.