

New trial sought for Herman Wallace

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An attorney for prisoner Herman Wallace argued on Sept. 19 at a hearing in a prison courtroom here that Wallace deserves a new trial because the prosecution withheld important evidence that could have won him an acquittal.

Wallace, along with Albert Woodfox and Robert King Wilkerson, make up the Angola 3, who were all sentenced to life without parole after their conviction for the 1972 killing of a prison guard. Wilkerson proved his innocence and was released in 2001.



Supporters of Wallace, including relatives, organizers for Katrina survivors, students and former political prisoners like Geronimo Pratt, who has come from around the United States to attend the hearing, held signs and banners in the parking lot outside the state prison after guards stopped them from entering.

Left to right: Robert King Wilkerson; Linda Carmichael; Herman's sister, Victoria Wallace; Dave Strano & Geronimo ji Jaga Pratt at courthouse in Baton Rouge, La.
WW photo: Anne Pruden

Though a SWAT team viewed the supporters from guard towers, the supporters held their ground for six hours in the Louisiana heat until the press and attorneys came out from the hearing.

The hearing covered Wallace's charge that the state hid the fact that prison officials paid off the chief witness at his 1974 trial with a pardon of the witness's life sentence and ongoing supplies of cigarettes.

Longtime Angola 3 lawyer Scott Fleming had explained earlier that Wallace's conviction could be overturned if the state court finds that the state offered favors to the prosecution witness and did not disclose this fact to the defense or the jury. A ruling on the case is expected in about 30 days.

According to the Sept. 19 AP report on the hearing, Wallace's lawyer Nick Trentecosta stated that Hezekiah Brown, the witness who testified against Wallace: "received a weekly carton of cigarettes as a payoff for his testimony. The cigarettes amounted to valuable currency that Brown could spend on gambling, alcohol, drugs or sex."

"After the trial, Brown was transferred to a private house with his own room and television set, former guard Bobby Quileaux testified."

Organizations all over the world, including Amnesty International, have demanded freedom for the Angola 3. The parliaments of Indonesia, Portugal, Belgium and the Netherlands, and the African National Congress in South Africa have all denounced the decades of solitary imprisonment the men have endured as "cruel and unusual punishment" and have recognized the Angola 3 as political prisoners.

The prison houses over 5,000 people, having grown in population since Katrina struck New Orleans. Most of the prisoners are African American and most are serving life terms. It is a maximum security prison, the largest in the country, which sits on 18,000 acres of land where slaves were once bought and sold.

For more information, visit www.Angola3.org.