Statement for Never Alone Art Exhibit by Sean Swain

I used to be a big fan of writer Daniel Quinn. For anyone unfamiliar, Quinn wrote Ishmael, My Ishmael, and Beyond Civilization, among other works. What I appreciated was that, through reasoned analysis, he led his readers to see that tribal living was not inferior to what we have now and, in fact, was probably superior. The logical conclusion from reading Quinn would be that this way of life, what I call SWIVILIZATION, with its mass production and its concurrent mass destruction, needs to go.

I’m sure that such a general statement - that Swivilization needs to go - would be acceptable to Marie Mason and to Eric McDavid. What I mean is, it would seem that such a statement would be a point of agreement for Marie Mason, Eric McDavid and Daniel Quinn.

Yet, as I understand it, when Quinn was asked to make a statement in support of Marie Mason, he not only refused but got somewhat irate and accused that people like Marie, engaging in radical attacks against the larger system, are part of the problem.

Now, to be clear, I didn’t hear Quinn say that myself. But a good friend that I trust affirmed that Quinn said that, and I have since lost respect for Quinn as a result. But whether he said it or not, those sentiments are often taken as a self-evident truism, even among activists and radicals and some self-proclaimed anarchists. It’s a popular position that holds that militant attacks on a system - however unjust or tyrannical the system is, or however much that system deserves to be attacked - only provoke more repression and tighter controls. Such a position was articulated by an Occupy Cleveland spokesperson who distanced the movement from the actions of the Cleveland 4, claiming that such acts of violence lead to the government “taking away” our “rights.”

I would say just the opposite is true. I’m one of the select few who have the luxury of saying exactly what I think in the United States because I’m expressing myself from a super-max facility, so let me put this out there: the real problem is that we have too few Marie Masons and Eric McDavids. That’s just a simple mathematical fact.

If you have a situation where only one person deviates from the norm, the enforcers can devote all of their resources to catching that single offender, and the odds of that offender getting caught greatly increase. That holds true for robbing a bank or tipping over a cop car or burning down a university that has it coming. But if you have fifty people doing it, that divides the enemy enforcers’ resources and increases the odds that the bank robbers or cop-car tippers or university-burners will get away with it. And, of course, with enough success and enough people joining in, the activity ceases to be a deviation from the norm and it becomes the norm.

Marie Mason and Eric McDavid got locked up for being too rare. If there were 50 Marie Masons and 50 Eric McDavids, I suspect the enemy system could never keep any of them locked up for any considerable period of time.

If there were a thousand, we’d all be living in yurts by now and hunting the buffalo, and the Hoover Dam would be a distant memory.

But, there isn’t a thousand. And that’s the problem. When Marie or Eric gets locked up and there isn’t an immediate rash of actions, just as big or bigger, we give them permission to go after Jeremy Hammond and to entice the Cleveland 4. We embolden repression with inaction.

We need more and more Marie Masons and Eric McDavids. Not fewer.

And I want to be clear here so there’s no mistake; I don’t want anyone thinking that I might be advocating criminal behavior. I want you to know unequivocally that I am most assuredly advocating criminal behavior. If you are not currently engaged in actions that would result in prison time, or you are not planning such actions, I’m hoping this statement shames you into doing something useful with your life. If what you’re up to isn’t illegal, it’s probably not worth doing.

In support of my point, when Henry David Thoreau was jailed for refusing to pay his taxes, Henry’s friend Ralph Waldo Emerson went to visit him and with a rueful smile asked, “Henry, what are you doing in there?,” to which Henry David Thoreau responded, with seriousness, “ No, Ralph, the question is: What are you doing out there?”

In the unjust world we inhabit, the only place for a just person is prison. Thoreau is a role model. Emerson is a collaborator.

For anyone still under the illusion that you are “free” and the risks associated with resisting are too great, I remind you that your world is a concentration camp and you’re currently being marched into the gas chamber of our collective future. The only reasonable hope of survival lies in breaking ranks.

So, having bewildered or pissed off the majority of you, I’d like to move on to the question of why Marie and Eric are still locked up. I realize this forum is designed to raise funds to help out the two of them - providing commissary and creature comforts, but I have to ask some rhetorical questions here.

Does anybody know where Marie or Eric are being held? Do you know if the prisons have gun towers? When are the shift changes? Can you troll the staff parking lot with a cell phone camera and capture faces and plates? How feasible is it to follow staff home? What are their security levels?

A few more questions - let me just throw this out there since I’m at a supermax facility and I can say things other people can only think about silently:

Are there helicopter piloting simulators on-line? What do helicopter tours cost? Are there metal detectors at places like that? Are there areas to land and conceal a helicopter close to the prisons?

I know - some extra snacks and envelopes would be nice. I get it. But a few decades ago, 2 women and 1 man broke Assata Shakur out of a federal detention facility. I know with advances in security, technology, particularly in surveillance, such actions are more difficult than they used to be. But trust me, with 23 years of experience I can tell you - except for, possibly, supermax facilities, prison fascists have virtually no contingency for preventing outside supporters from liberating a prisoner. They count on deterring the actions with the threat of huge penalties, and they count on rounding everyone back up later. Period.

It seems to me that the lack of even contemplating a liberation action speaks to the degree that everyone overestimates the power of the enemy. It’s bewildering to me that Mumia Abu-Jamal, to take one example, has millions of supporters, tens of thousands of dollars in funding through various revenue streams, and he has access to a prison yard on a daily basis but nobody has yet to simply get him out.

Why?

See, that’s the dynamic that needs to be defeated. Few of us act because prison time is a deterrent, and those few who do act then get caught and face that time. But if those who get caught were liberated, more would act and fewer would get caught and the larger system would de-stabilize faster. Liberated resisters would return to the struggle and return the favor. And, in the meantime, those who are on the inside temporarily can attack the system from within as the Army of the 12 Monkeys recently proved at a few different Ohio prisons. You can access their literature from a link at seanswain.org. Plunging prisons into disorder certainly wouldn’t hurt the larger cause.

Raising funds for Marie and Eric for their legal projects and their relative comfort is a noble thing. I don’t in any way want to discourage that. What you’re doing now makes a difference in their lives.

But our world is a concentration camp. This can end in only two ways, and one of them sucks. In the other, we have to stop spending time admiring Marie and Eric, and we have to start acting like them.

This is anarchist prisoner Sean Swain from Ohio’s supermax facility. If you can hear the sound of my voice, you are the resistance.