

# OUR WORDS ARE OUR WEAPONS

A statement for the June 11th International Day of Solidarity with Long-Term Anarchist Prisoners

by Sean Swain

As humans, we are the lucky beneficiaries of three biological developments that greatly contribute to our long-term survivability. The first one is the structure of our jaw which is conducive to eating meat and taking in proteins that non-meat-eating mammals don't get. That's the only one of the three that's irrelevant to the discussion.

The second of the top three biological developments that contribute to our long-term survivability is our cerebral cortex. The cerebral cortex is the outer-most layer of the brain, and is principally responsible for conceptual thought. Because of our cerebral cortex, we can imagine things that we cannot see. We can conceive of stuff we did not experience.

The third biological development that contributes to our long-term survivability is our opposable thumbs. Our opposable thumbs are pretty useful. They gave us the ability to carry things and to share with others. They gave us the ability to use and manipulate tools.

This is really important when you consider that we humans are, really, the least fit for survival on the planet, all things being equal. We are most dependent upon tools, upon stuff outside of ourselves. All other species pretty much get by on what they were born with. You don't see beavers putting on scuba suits or monkeys in the rain forest wearing rain coats. No other species requires assistance in locomotion or cooks their food on barbecue grills because their digestive tracts are so sensitive. Just us. So, without the opposable thumb to develop all the tools we need, we would have sputtered out a long time ago.

Now, just to be clear, I'm not anthropocentrist. I'm not under any delusion that we humans are the center of the universe. We're not. We're not a special or superior form of life. We do have some benefits we developed – our jaws, our cerebral cortexes, and our opposable thumbs – and those have been very useful to us. But, in all fairness, we cannot perform a death-roll like an alligator or race a cheetah across an open plain or go toe-to-toe with a low-land gorilla. So, all other forms of life have their biological developments that have served them quite well too, and ours do not make us superior or special.

That said, of the three biological developments, two of them are relevant. As our meat-conducive jaw-line is not, we can start with our cerebral cortexes.

Because I have a cerebral cortex, I have it within me to imagine, however imperfectly, the experience of fighting the police in Greece and tipping over a cop car – even though I've never been there. I can close my eyes and smell the burning gasoline, hear the bewildered screams of a running police officer as he is chased by a masked rebel swinging a tire tool. I can imagine the rush and the thrill, the euphoria of seeing the billowing black smoke rising from the roof of the police station, and realizing what that means.

As humans with our big cerebral cortexes, we have the ability to transmit, one to another, our experiences, our feelings, our ideas. We do that principally through language. Language is a tool for this transmission of experiences and feelings and ideas, from one to another.

For this transmission to work properly, we must have agreement as to what sounds and symbols mean. For instance, if I use the word "elephant," and by those collections of sounds, I mean to transmit to you the idea of a large, gray mammal with big ears and a long trunk, I have failed miserably if you imagine a yellow piece of fruit shaped sort of like a crescent and serving as a principle staple in the diet of chimpanzees. If I use the word "elephant," but you imagine what I would otherwise call a banana, then we do not have communication. We have mis-communication.

We need agreement on the meaning of sounds and symbols, and then we can use them as tools – tools that are only properly used when shared. Unlike rakes or shovels or blow-guns, tangible tools, words are intangible tools that really only work in collaboration between two of us. Words are special tools used only in collaboration, which means they can only be used in social spaces, unlike rakes or shovels or blow-guns.

And, again, this all goes back to our cerebral cortexes. If you attempt to communicate some complex story to a golden retriever or to a lizard, you're likely wasting your time. Not even dolphins or chimpanzees or crows can fully participate in the complex transmission of symbolic thought the way that we can, any more than we can death-roll like alligators or race cheetahs or beat up gorillas. As humans, with our big cerebral cortexes, we are singularly capable of complex transmissions of symbolic thought.

This means we have two different kinds of tools at our disposal. We have tangible tools we can grasp, like rakes and shovels and blow-guns, using our opposable thumbs; we have intangible tools that we can grasp with our cerebral cortexes. And I think it is probably worth mentioning that anything we can use as a tool, we can use as a weapon. That is, a weapon is really only a tool used for inflicting injury. Consider, a rake is a tool used for collecting leaves but can just as easily be used as a weapon to rip someone's face off. Shovels are useful for digging

holes but can also be pretty handy for cracking skulls. As to the argument that pens are mightier than swords, I once saw a guy stabbed in the neck with a pen in the chow hall, and he bled profusely into his mashed potatoes.

All tools are weapons. And I would suggest to you that, in some ways, the intangible tools we grasp with our cerebral cortexes can be immeasurably more dangerous than tools we grasp with our opposable thumbs.

Take, for instance, the weapons that our enemy uses. As I write this, I'm looking out of my cell window at the perimeter vehicle positioned directly across from my cell on the other side of the double fences, and I know that vehicle has a shotgun in the shotgun rack. Although I cannot see them, I know the enemy also has a compliment of Apache attack helicopters somewhere. Off in the distance, as this typewriter pecks out my thoughts onto this handy computer paper, I can hear the staccato pop-pop-pop-pop of shots fired at the not-so-distant firing range where the enemy practices.

But, you know what? I've never been shot. In fact, none of the enemy's agents have ever so much as fired at me. I've never even seen the enemy shoot at another prisoner. The reason I have spent twenty-five years in custody without witnessing anyone get shot while trying to hit the fences is that, apart from the shotguns and helicopters, the enemy's weapons include intangible weapons – the dual ideas of the enemy's legitimacy and perpetuity.

This is what I mean: I'm surrounded by criminals and law-breakers, but it turns out that most of them broke the laws not because they recognize the laws as illegitimate, but because they generally recognize that the law sucks. Once caught, these same law-breakers recognize the authority of those who claim it and they submit to the punishments imposed on them in the belief that the punishments they receive are legitimate consequences of violating the laws. Further, there exists a shared sense among most prisoners that this system is perpetual, that it will go on forever, that it is immutable, and therefore resistance or efforts to escape would be futile.

These ideas have not been implanted so thoroughly by recourse to rakes and shovels and blow-guns. What the enemy has used is a powerful weapon crafted with words, a weapon called "mythology." This "mythology" has to some degree paralyzed all of us, more so than we are paralyzed by the actual reality of the threats posed by cops or soldiers or attack helicopters.

This mythology might be the most powerful weapon that the enemy employs, one that we cannot smack with a rake or shovel, or shoot with a blow-gun. We have to attack this false mythology in another way. We have to develop weapons just as powerful, or more powerful, than the enemy's.

That is, if we want to liberate ourselves and others from this false mythology that keeps us paralyzed, we have to develop a weapon that will work for that purpose, so others can use both their cerebral cortexes and their opposable thumbs in a way that will best bring about the future we would like to make manifest together.

The key to whatever activities we undertake, I think, is to demonstrate to ourselves and to whatever audience might be watching that the enemy's systems are not legitimate and they are not unassailable. They are illegitimate and fragile.

We have the ability to develop and project an alternative mythology, a different "story to be in," to borrow a phrase from writer Daniel Quinn. In developing a different story to be in, and in projecting it, we will be taking back from the enemy the power and authority over words, exercising our own power to define what words mean rather than deferring to the enemy's self-serving use of them. This is a kind of collective "re-orientation" to language itself. By challenging and dismissing the enemy's claimed legitimacy and perpetuity, we take back our power to form a new narrative, one where the old "good guys" are exposed for the swindle they've been committing on us all.

In this struggle between competing narratives, the truth is on our side. And the truth is dangerous.

The fact of the matter is, our enemy's systems are not perpetual. They will not go on forever. The fact is, humans have been around for about four million years and this hierarch delusion has been foisted upon us for roughly eight thousand years – that's a fraction of one percent of human existence. That means that humans lived in other ways for the vast majority of our existence. Further, after only eight thousand years, this hierarch delusion is falling apart. Their own experts use terms like "unsustainable," which means it cannot keep going. It has, in a very short time, done great damage not only to the environment, to the planet we inhabit, but has devastated our ability to live lives of general happiness and purpose. So, this system is not just unraveling before our very eyes, but it is a system we really have no reason to keep around anyway because it has never worked as advertised and it never will.

This thing is about as perpetual as the Titanic.

As to the system's legitimacy, it seems laughable that some small group of privileged elites should assume some right to rule the vast majority and to impose rules that clearly benefit those who make them. Not only are these elites miserable failures in creating anything that resembles "order" after eight thousand years of passing law after law for achieving the "order" that eludes them, but I am aware of no argument that has ever been presented as to why any of us have some kind of "duty" to obey those we never agreed to obey in the first place. Such a hijacking of

our autonomy and freedom can never be “legitimate,” so all such decrees and demands and laws are absolutely unlawful and invalid, serving as nothing more than tools to impose the will of the ruling opportunists onto the rest of us. The fact of the matter is, the true enemies of real peace and real prosperity are those who maintain this oppressive system at our expense.

Everyone alive has a sense of their own suffering and their own trauma, a sense of their own experiences of diminishing returns for their obedience and compliance. What they do not connect is that what they experience is a universal suffering and trauma, to lesser or greater degrees, and that the source of it is the very system of authority they have been indoctrinated to worship. So, if by our words and by our symbolic acts, we can make larger and larger numbers of those currently hypnotized and mesmerized fully aware of the system’s invalidity and vulnerability, we can provoke wider and wider rejection of the system.

This is fatal to the enemy’s program.

Consider, this massive, sprawling, global machine only functions optimally if it manages to maintain a hundred percent participation, all of us performing whatever roles have been assigned to us. That optimum performance is diminished if even one of us stops performing that assigned role, and the machinery gets progressively more clunky and cumbersome with each one of us that bails. Also, it becomes progressively more unmanageable with each of us that becomes actively opposed to the machinery’s operation. That is, the more that we seek to sabotage the operation of the machine, the more that this sprawling system of centralized control and distribution breaks down.

So, we can certainly use our opposable thumbs to pull the proverbial fire alarms in a number of imaginative and highly-disruptive ways, but such actions will not even occur to us until we use our cerebral cortexes for something other than hat-racks. And that means we have to win the battle of ideas, the war of conflicting narratives.

The hierarch delusion cannot possibly win from here. Every day, there is an increasing dissonance between what the program promises and what it delivers, between the narrative and the reality. Every day, there arise billions of opportunities to puncture the hierarch mythology, not with rakes and shovels and blow-guns, but with words.

Our words are our weapons.

The truth is dangerous.

*Freedom,*  
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