

Statement in the Municipal Court, Berkeley, California, April 19, 1971

Your honor: We appreciate the court's willingness to let us make a statement concerning our reasons for blocking the entrance to the Berkeley draft board on Good Friday/Passover, April 9, 1971.

While the seventeen of us acted for a variety of reasons, we were united in a belief that the war in southeast Asia is wrong, that Americans should not be destroying Asian lives and Asian countries, and that as long as men go through the doors of draft boards, the manpower for waging that war or similar wars is assured. On Good Friday/Passover we chose to engage in a symbolic act of stopping that flow of human lives heading toward destruction. What we have said for years with our words we chose to say this time with our bodies as well. We tried to say that as long as we stand here, no man will be enrolled here to kill or be killed, no work will be done here to widen the war, no one will receive orders here that make him a potential war criminal, no action will emanate from here that will lead to the dropping of napalm on children, the shooting of women, or the destruction of villages.

In doing what we did, we broke a law. We did so knowingly. We did not do so lightly. Before that morning all of us had decided that we must up the ante of our protest, risking whatever charges might be brought against us (whether five years in jail, or five days, or less), believing that the crime we committed pales to insignificance before the crimes our nation orders young men to commit once they have walked through those doors.

Any of us, seeing a defenseless child in Berkeley, and standing between that child and someone ordered to burn the child, would break a law, whether local ordinance or federal statute, in order to save that child from burning. Your honor, without seeking to be melodramatic, I say as soberly as I can that each of us sees burning children (and many other horrors) as the ultimate end of what begins in a draft board office. So to prevent such deeds, even at the cost of breaking a law, seems to us not only morally defensible but morally necessary, not simply to purge our consciences but to sensitize the consciences of others as well. We hope that our act will force you and others in this court and those on the street outside to ask again and again and again, "What am I doing to end this war?" We do not say that you must do what we have done, but we do hope that, acting in a spirit of non-violent love as we have tried to do, and in whatever ways are most consistent with your own consciences, you too will insist that not only must the killing stop, but that it must begin to stop right here.

I think there was a kind of intuitive feeling on the part of those arrested, whatever their religious convictions, that Good Friday/Passover was an appropriate time to do what we did. Good Friday is the day when non-violent love appeared to be defeated by a powerful state. But for Christians the seeming defeat became a victory on Easter when love rose triumphant out of apparent defeat. The feast of Passover is the time when Jews recall their liberation from the tyranny of a powerful state. Again, the triumph appeared to be a defeat, for there were forty years in the wilderness before the Promised Land was reached. In both cases hope was deferred but not extinguished, and so those two events, Good Friday and Passover, help to illustrate our trust that in the midst of the seeming defeat of our own act of non-violent love, a victory is being worked out.

For we believe, whether Christian, Jew, Zen or agnostic, that what we stood for on that pavement will triumph over what the draft board stands for, and we believe that the vulnerable love of a single human person is stronger than the apparently invincible power of an entire state. So we are here not in frustration or anger or resentment, but in hope. For we also believe that no arrests, no police stations, no courts, no governments, and no prisons will finally prevail against the quiet but growing movement that is the conquering power of love.

Robert McAfee Brown