

ARRAIGNMENT STATEMENT -- Dr. Alan Berkman

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Over the last 20 years, I have had the opportunity to meet, to treat, and sometimes to directly join in struggle with freedom-loving people all over this country. I treated some of the survivors of the 1971 Attica Rebellion; I worked and lived with the largely Black community of Lowndes County, Alabama where it cost 13 lives to secure the most basic rights in the face of Klan and government violence; I was at Wounded Knee, South Dakota when 350 Native Americans claimed the land that is theirs by right and treaty and were attacked by the U.S. government.

In each case, the oppressed were called the criminals; each time they asserted their human rights, they were breaking the law. Having had no say in a system constructed by white male slave owners, their lives as individuals - more importantly, their very existence as nations of people - are supposed to be ruled by its structures and statutes. Each time, the government's response was violent, brutal, and designed to terrorize: 43 dead at Attica, 13 in Lowndes County, over 25 at Wounded Knee and its aftermath.

Now, 11 Black men, women, and children and 61 homes in the middle of a Black community in Philadelphia. As I watched the attack on television, as I heard the thousands of rounds of automatic weapons fire and watched the ultimate conflagration, my mind flashed to the bodies in D yard at Attica, to the burned churches in Alabama, to the people hit by those .50 calibre machine guns in Wounded Knee. The real crimes are deeply rooted and haven't ended; the criminals remain free. The real criminals are investigated by blue ribbon commissions, not juries, and never go to jail; some occupy the highest government positions. This is accomplished all under color of law.

I also learned something of the dignity and strength of those willing to fight for human rights by any means necessary. The love that comes from those whose love of justice and principle is greater even than their personal love of life. The hope that we can draw from the example of those who think more of others and of future generations than they do of themselves. I think of those things and I know that some day justice will be done.

I am a revolutionary, an anti-imperialist, a supporter of human rights for all oppressed peoples. I'm not guilty of any crimes -- just of trying to stop them.