

Gregory Koger's Statement on the "Ethical" Humanist Society

I come from a background like millions of others—troubled financial circumstances led to my family losing our home and put me on the streets at the age of 15, where I got involved with a street organization (AKA “gang”) to survive. By the time I was 17 years old, I was locked down in an adult maximum security prison, sentenced to serve many years behind the wall of the hellholes of the American prison system. Like too many other youth, this system offered me no greater purpose and no better fate than crime and punishment – a future of living and dying for nothing.

Once I was locked down behind the walls, I soon started to question what brought me—and all the other people there with me—to prison. And as conditions became more repressive, I began to develop an understanding of the historical forces that led all of us into the horrendous conditions of the American prison system.

Within a few years I was placed in segregation—solitary confinement—for an indeterminate period of time, and faced the prospect of languishing in isolation devoid of human contact in a concrete tomb until my release. It was in the midst of this—the pepper spray choking the whole cell house, the tactical team stomping down the gallery to drag someone out of their cell and beat them down, the constant agony of men straining against the solitude crying out for some kind of conversation or contact—that I first read *Revolution* newspaper.

Revolution began to open my eyes to a whole other way that society could be organized and a whole other way of thinking. Instead of focusing intently on revenge and my own personal oppression or wrongs, I began to see that this capitalist-imperialist system is fundamentally based on the exploitation and oppression of the vast majority of humanity at the hands of the few within the ruling class who own and control the means of production. And that the basis exists to emancipate all of humanity from the oppressive relations of class society, and unleash people to flourish in ways undreamed of under the confines of this capitalist system.

Besides studying broadly and reading as much as I could get my hands on while I was locked up, I also began to develop as a writer. I had several pieces published in the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center's newspaper, *The Public i*, and in *Words Through Bars: Poetry, articles and stories written by people in prison*, published in 2006 by the Urbana-Champaign Books to Prisoners Collective. I also earned a paralegal diploma while personally litigating a federal civil rights lawsuit challenging prison policies. After being released in December 2006, I attended several semesters at the College of Lake County while I was still on parole. I am now employed as a paralegal at a law office in Chicago.

I have also continued to develop my understanding and break out of looking at things from the perspective of my own experience of oppression. Now my life is dedicated to the struggle to end all exploitation and oppression and getting to a world where people contribute what they can to society and get back what they need to live a life worthy of human beings.

As part of that struggle to liberate humanity, I've been in the streets opposing the wars for empire in Iraq and Afghanistan – both under Bush and Obama. I've worn an orange jumpsuit and black hood to bring home the reality of torture being committed by our government in our names at anti-torture demonstrations. I've spoken in classrooms to students around topics such as police brutality and the criminalization of youth to U.S. imperialism and torture. I've been out in the streets demanding gay marriage now, equal rights and liberation for the LGBT community, and I've marched with the immigrant community demanding an end to ICE raids, detention and deportations ripping apart families who come here yearning for a better life. And I've been on the front lines of the fight for women's liberation and the right to abortion.

I consider documenting Sunsara Taylor a part of that work. Sunsara is an extraordinarily inspiring speaker and a revolutionary communist dedicated to the liberation of all humanity. Opening up debate and ferment, and involving people broadly in society in struggling over key questions of morality, philosophy, and politics is critical to radically transforming society. The EHSC was wrong to dis-invite Sunsara, especially as it was based on misrepresentations of her positions and outright anti-communism.

I am now facing charges and possible jail time for doing videography *before* an event started that was open to the public at the Ethical Humanist Society of Chicago, as I documented a political statement condemning censorship, anti-communism, and the broader stifling of progressive and radical thought in society! This is a fundamental betrayal of the ethics and humanism that the EHSC claims to represent and an egregious abuse of the law.

Due to the pending legal charges, I cannot comment on the specific details of my arrest until after the proceedings are over. You can read more of the details about it on Sunsara's blog, as well as *Revolution* newspaper. There has also been debate about this in the blogosphere, including on P. Z. Myers' blog (which the science journal *Nature* listed as the top-ranked blog written by a scientist – Myers is a biology professor at the University of Minnesota and prominent atheist), where one of my former professors spoke out in my defense. It would be very helpful and greatly appreciated if you would take the time to look into this and consider what needs to be done and how you might contribute to defeating these charges.

Please join and support the Ad Hoc Committee for Reason & Dropping the Charges and demand that these outrageous charges be dropped!

-Gregory