

FREE POLITICAL PRISONER JEFF 'FREE' LUERS



Lessons from the snitching of Billy Cottrell by Jeffrey Luers

December 2004

November 17, 2004 will be remembered as another sad day for the Earth Liberation front and the radical activist community. On trial for the ELF action of torching SUVs in Southern California, William 'Billy' Cottrell took the witness stand in his defense.

Accused of more than \$2.3 million dollars of property damage, I can imagine the fear Billy felt facing decades in prison. Many activists, past and present, remember that feeling all too well. For some it was our finest moment, if also most painful, as we stood before the state proud and unwavering.

Perhaps, the truest test of our warrior spirit can be found in the courtroom. Undoubtedly, our movement's defining moment will be how steadfast we stand when facing the full repression of the state.

After Billy's arrest, we wrote me. His naiveté at the situation he was in shocked me. We discussed what he was facing and I warned him to avoid doing media before trial. Billy shared his fears and heartache with me as well as his gratitude for all the support he was receiving from people. In his last letter, Billy told me how much of an inspiration other warriors and I had been to him.

As Billy took the stand that day, I can't help but wonder if the sick feeling in his stomach was fear of imprisonment or if it was nausea at his betrayal. Billy testified that his friend lit the fire against his wishes. He stated that he was coerced into going along with them because he owed one person \$200.

Despite all of his bravado to his supporters, the media and me, Billy tucked his tail and pissed down his leg. Sadly, this is not the first instance of betrayal. To date, the majority of ELF and ELF-style actions to go before the courts have had a defendant turn traitor. This fact devastates my heart, as it should every activist and revolutionary.

Illegal direct action is a dangerous path. The action itself is only a small part of the equation. Physical resistance once embarked upon is not a path easily abandoned. If it is a path you choose, you should be expecting to serve prison time or worse. If you cannot face the possibility of prison or you know you cannot accept the consequences with integrity and honor, do not pick up the matchbook.

The blame, however, does not solely lie with the weakness of individuals under pressure. The problem is one of our creating. This movement glorifies and romanticizes hardcore action. Crying out for salvation from would be heroes; writing stories and singing songs of faceless individuals who sab the dozers, raid the labs and who burned down Vail.

Honoring our warriors is good. But, the illusion fades when you are sitting in a jail cell. The once seemingly powerful movement bolstered by its own self-praise no longer appears so strong. The romanticized ideal of action

For more information, write:
Free's Defense Fund POB 3, Eugene, OR 97440 or freefreenow@mutualaid.org
Jeffrey Luers, #13797671, Oregon State Penitentiary, 2605 State Street, Salem, OR 97310
www.freefreenow.org

FREE POLITICAL PRISONER JEFF 'FREE' LUERS



and change remains. Yet, no revolutionary energy is directed at freeing our comrades.

That is our failure as a movement. If we expect our warriors to stand strong in front of the judge and jury with heads high and eyes burning with defiance, we must become realistic about what it means to be a revolutionary movement. We have to support those who have sacrificed their freedom with radical actions equal or mightier than their own.

For our movement to become more than a counter-culture, we have to stop mystifying direct action. We have to recognize direct action for what it is—a necessity. The support of the movement to its captured warriors must go beyond admiration and respect. It must extend into action and agitation for their release. We must never abandon our own. By any means necessary, we must see them free. Otherwise, we can expect more people to bow before the power of the state.

How do we go from romanticizing action to taking it? How do we go from accepting loss to preventing it? These are the obstacles in our path. If we cannot overcome them, then we are not trying hard enough.

There are always going to be Billy Cottrells. There just doesn't have to be more of them than there are true warriors. There is a hero in all of us—one just waiting to be given a voice. Find the courage to follow your heart and the pride to hold your head high and stand your ground. Because with that, this movement will go from a facade to a force.

For more information, write:
Free's Defense Fund POB 3, Eugene, OR 97440 or freefreenow@mutualaid.org
Jeffrey Luers, #13797671, Oregon State Penitentiary, 2605 State Street, Salem, OR 97310
www.freefreenow.org