

A Thank You Letter to Supporters from Steven Kurtz

July 12, 2008

Dear Supporters,

After four long, difficult years I have been released from my legal ordeal. I want to thank everyone who supported me through this—the greatest challenge I’ve ever had to face. I feel vindicated today because I am innocent, but today I am also humbled by a legal and political victory that is not mine alone. Everyone who contributed their support to this case can lay claim to a victory against the forces aiming to abridge our fundamental rights. I am mindful that my case was just one of many examples where fear and irrationality gained the upper hand after 9/11. I am aware that my vindication is an exception. I continue to have anxiety about the outcome of many pending cases still awaiting justice.

Although it seems that my case has come to a conclusion, it is only now that I can fully comprehend the immensity of what happened. The tragic death of Hope was a profound loss. The unfortunate events following Hope’s death occurred at a moment of intense pain and sadness for all of us. Neither my life nor the work of Critical Art Ensemble has been the same without her. If she were here today, I know she would be proud of everything that has been done by all the people involved. Collectively, we stood without flinching, and defeated a monster of social injustice. Hope always said that we should “never surrender” to authoritarian power, and we didn’t.

I was extremely fortunate to have a team of people immediately form a defense group at the very beginning, when I was still in shock. I want to thank the members of the CAE Defense Fund for coming to my defense from the beginning of the ordeal.

Throughout the past four years, so many people raised their voices in my defense, and that of my friend and co-defendant, Robert Ferrell. So many contributed time, energy, and resources. We could not have adequately defended ourselves without the labor and activism of thousands—individuals, groups, artists and activists. I am grateful to everyone who donated their work and talent to fundraisers for our legal defense. And although I cannot thank everyone by name, to all of you worldwide who helped organize fundraisers, letter writing campaigns, conferences, teach-ins, protests and other events, your actions made a real difference in this case.

To all my friends, thank you for helping me through my darkest hours.

To everyone, please accept my humble offer of thanks. I am grateful. I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all of you for seeing me through this terrible period.

Please remember also that this case was about so much more than just keeping me out of jail. This is a great legal and political victory that will affect many cases to come. Through its prosecution of this case, the Department of Justice was hoping to expand the most broadly written law on the books (mail fraud) into an all-encompassing Leviathan that could be used at its discretion against any citizen at any time. Not only did we prevent this dangerous expansion of the law, the precedent we set has narrowed it. Because of our collective effort, a bogus charge like the one targeting Bob and me is unlikely ever to happen again—and if it were to happen, any competent attorney could easily shoot it down.

What have I learned from my ordeal? I've learned that with tens of thousands of supporters, with hundreds of thousands of dollars, with one of the best legal teams in the US, with a crack media team, with a group of experienced fundraisers, with four years of one's life, and with total innocence, sometimes one can slice off a piece of American justice. Which in the end means: The overwhelming majority of people ain't gettin' justice, and we have to keep fighting until they do.

With Sincerity, Gratitude, and Appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'St. Kurtz', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Steven Kurtz