In October, HSUS President John A. Hoyt made the following comments at the HSUS annual conference introductory to the reports of individual departments on the activities of 1988.

If I were to mention the name Bill Bradley, I suspect that most of you would identify it with the able and energetic senator from the great state of New Jersey. But some of you will also remember that this same Bill Bradley was an All-American basketball player who, during his professional basketball days, was best known for his miraculous one-handed jump shot from the corner—miraculous because he could release the ball blind without a clear view of the goal and, more often than not, the shot would be true.

When someone asked what sort of sixth sense guided the ball through the hoop, Bradley thought a moment, then said intuitively, “a sense of where you are.”

That sentiment came to me as this annual meeting grew near because, in a very fundamental way, our annual conference serves no more important function than to force us to pause, assess, and define just where, as an animal-protection organization, we are.

Having a sense of where one is in relation to one’s goals or ambitions in life is a gift each of us would like to possess. Yet, to have this kind of discernment is, I suspect, more than a gift; it is a condition that results from an honest assessment of what it is we are seeking to achieve and how effectively we are pursuing that goal. What is true for each of us individually is equally true for our organizations, be they local, regional, or national.

Knowing who we are and where we are is probably the most difficult task facing those of us working within the animal-protection/rights movement today. For the most part, I am increasingly concerned that few, if any of us, including The Humane Society of the United States, have fully mastered that challenge.

In the first place, we are, I fear, attempting to be all things to all people, when we would probably be further ahead if we were more committed to a lesser number of tasks and goals and pursued those with a greater commitment of energy and resources. To put it another way, in trying to address virtually every major animal issue that surfaces, we have, in many cases, minimized our effectiveness in other, equally important, areas of
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concern.

Noted radio commentator and last year’s recipient of the HSUS James Herriot Award Paul Harvey said in a recent commentary entitled “A Voice For The Voiceless”:

None of us can fight a thousand side fights without losing the war. We cannot and must not get defeated by a too huge agenda. What we can do is to confront the obvious inhumanities.

During a recent planning retreat of approximately twenty-three members of the HSUS program staff, we attempted to identify what this group regarded to be the most important issues currently facing The HSUS, those meriting our primary attention and commitment of time and resources. Let me list them briefly and without comment. They are as follows:

1. Alternatives to the use of animals for biomedical research, various testing procedures, and other experimental projects now utilizing animals
2. Intensive rearing of food animals
3. Transportation of livestock and livestock auctions
4. Unnecessary animal experimentation (this objective contrasts with #1 in that it was felt that there are certain experiments involving animals that should be opposed immediately, whether or not alternatives exist or should or could be developed)
5. Habitat preservation of endangered species
6. Non-surgical sterilization

Whereas these six areas of concern were those the staff felt most merited increased emphasis and support, they unanimously agreed that the following issues merit our continued attention and aggressive support:

1. Various issues affecting horses, such as wild horse roundups and slaughter, Tennessee walking horses, transportation of horses, riding stables, carriage horses, horse racing, etc.
2. Dog racing
3. Killing dolphins in tuna nets
4. Genetic engineering of animals
5. Dog dealers and theft of dogs for research
6. Trapping
7. The using of animals for fur
8. Wildlife trade
9. Animals in education (dissection, etc.)
10. Humane (nonlethal) wildlife management
11. Animal fighting
12. Chimpanzee trade
13. Humane education

The fact that many of these latter issues were not among the previous six should not be interpreted as their being regarded of lesser importance as issues of concern. In many cases, they were viewed as equally important but were seen as already receiving major attention within our current program emphasis.

Yet, it is clear from reviewing both lists and the incredible amount of time and effort each requires that we must begin to be a bit more selective about those issues we tackle in a major way, lest we lose the war altogether.

A second reason why we as organizations may not have a good grasp of where we are is because we have tended to become somewhat schizophrenic as regards our personality and mission.

Who of us, for example, has not been influenced by the advent of the animal-rights movement, seeking to espouse a philosophy we were not fully prepared to accept and embracing a dogma we could not fully affirm? How many of us have reluctantly, yet demonstrably, joined the protest rallies and office sit-ins, simply because we dared not be absent? How many of us have found ourselves endorsing statements or supporting actions dictated by others because we feared their criticism and censure? Have we not, in some of those instances, sacrificed integrity for acceptability and conviction for attention?

For more than thirty years, The HSUS has regarded itself a moderate organization in a movement that embraces a wide spectrum of philosophies and practices. At the time of its emergence in the mid-fifties, it was undoubtedly viewed by some as being too radical, an upstart organization of dreamers and fanatics. Yet, when one compares its views regarding the use of animals for research to some other organizations of that day, especially the antivivisection societies, its positions were hardly revolutionary.

So, also, were its views regarding the slaughter of animals for food as well as their care and transportation. While embracing a philosophy based on the conviction that animals should not be caused to experience unnecessary suffering and abuse, The HSUS sought solutions to the causes of animal suffering that were both reasonable and realistic. It was our belief that half a loaf was better than nothing at all and that any change for the better was a step forward.

Then came the animal-rights movement and, with it, the emergence of a multitude of organizations that viewed themselves uniquely the saviours of animals. Those of us who had been working for the protection of animals for decades past were viewed with both suspicion and disdain. We were castigated because the change we were seeking was not all-encompassing; we were censured for our willingness to accept compromise, even though such compromise often resulted in achievement; and we were condemned for being successful, for realizing both organizational growth and financial success.

We were made to feel guilty and, all too

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often, we permitted ourselves to feel guilty, so we embraced the animal-rights movement and acknowledged its self-appointed messiahs; we joined its protests; learned its language; and joined its parade. But, in the final analysis, we have found it wanting.

Now, before anyone organizes a protest right here, let me reiterate what I am attempting to say. I also ask your reflection on what it is you think you hear.

I am not, for one moment, dismissing the animal-rights movement nor those who embrace its philosophy as being either ineffective or insincere. To the contrary, the message and tactics of this movement have dramatically exposed the horrendous ways in which literally millions of animals suffer at the hands of us human beings.

At the same time, it has had a profound impact on the life-styles and attitudes of tens of thousands of people. It is a movement whose contributions are surely needed, and a movement that has greatly disturbed the status quo of how animals are treated in our society. But it is not, thereby, the full story, nor is it necessarily the most effective catalyst for bringing about fundamental and lasting change.

I am not a frequent reader of Ms magazine. But one cannot have lived with a wife and four daughters for more than a few years and not have been exposed to a few items reflective of their life-styles and interests. So, occasionally I glance at Ms magazine, as I did this past month.

The September issue contained a sad yet enlightening article about Bess Myerson, Miss America of 1945, whose fall from stardom and success is chronicled by anthropologist and society columnist Shana Alexander. In that article, there is a paragraph which I read several times, for, in a very profound way, it suggests why the animal-rights movement, much like the women’s liberation movement, may not be the most effective and viable answer to the problem of animal abuse and suffering in today’s world. Let me share it with you.

*As for the women’s movement,* I often think we may have opened Pandora’s box. We wanted to be equal. We insisted. We did it. But we forgot we were in a man’s world; everything we saw, and felt, and raged against was seen through that perspective. We were like the Eskimos who don’t see snow, who have no word for snow, because they live in the world of snow. They have different words for falling snow, frozen snow, melting snow, sleetning snow, drifting snow, but no common linguistic root: snow. So when we decided to become equals, we meant, without thinking of it, equals in a man’s world. We were playing by their rules, or defining equality in their terms. We forgot that we were different from men; we are other; we have different sensibilities. Today, younger women across America are paying for our error.

We sometimes forget that in promoting the “rights of animals” we are doing so in a world where animals do not have equal status; indeed cannot and will not have equal status. The human species, by its very nature, will never concede equality to animals and will, I predict, resist with increasing vehemence all attempts to endow them with such.

But what concerns me more is the fact that those who propound the animal-rights philosophy and those who lead the animal-rights movement seem to be unaware of this reality. They are living in a world of illusions, a world of mirrors, so that every time they see themselves on television or read about themselves in the papers, or participate in an action that generates a response, they begin to believe that the world is changing at their hands and that the salvation of animals is right around the corner.

So what is the answer? Do we stop trying? Do we concede defeat? Do we throw in the towel and admit we are outnumbered and outclassed?

Not at all! But we do, I think, begin to be a bit more honest about who we are and where we are. We do, I think, begin to retreat a bit from our self-created illusions and reassess the ways by which we chart progress and measure success.

We must, I believe, come to terms with the reality that whatever differences we finally make, in a fundamental and lasting way, are going to be the result of hard-fought battles and long-enduring engagements. The fireworks of the animal-rights movement may light up the sky briefly but they are not to be compared to the emerging brightness of sunlight breaking over the horizon.

I am proud of the efforts and achievements of The HSUS over the past several years and, yes, I am not disillusioned by our failures. We knew when we began this effort many years ago that the task before us was formidable and the forces against us were legion. It is still so today; and though our strength has increased by multiples and our commitment remained sure, so also has the opposition become increasingly alert and unified, and commitment is a quality they are learning as well. But the light of a better existence for animals is breaking on the horizon, and, slowly but surely, new attitudes toward animals are being formed and embraced. Though it is certain that the forces opposing our efforts to prevent the abuse and suffering of animals are on the increase, I am confident that, through persistence and per-
severance, we can make a difference and that, in the years ahead, we may yet know a world in which the abuse and suffering of animals is a history of the past.

In the reports that follow you will read about those programs and activities we have been pursuing this past year. Some will have resulted in successes; some in failures. But nowhere else in this movement will you read the reports of a staff more dedicated to this cause nor will you find anywhere in this movement a gathering of people any more able. And I assure you that, though we have sometimes been the targets of criticism and disdain from within the movement as well as the lack of qualified staff, our accounting staff is now in the interest of “immediate successes,” we are not ashamed of who we are or where we are headed; and increasingly, I believe, we do have a right sense of where we are.

Before concluding this report, I would be amiss not to address recent news items, especially those printed by nationally syndicated columnist Jack Anderson, making reference to certain problems within The HSUS. As those of you attending this meeting are aware, we have, this year, experienced both tension and dissenision within the board of directors, some of it directly critical of actions involving myself and HSUS Executive Vice President and Treasurer Paul Irwin and other aspects of it critical of various board members.

Some of the concerns addressed by the board are those resulting from the rapid growth of The HSUS during the past few years and the inadequacy of certain procedures, as well as the lack of qualified staff, to cope with the consequences of that growth. Primarily, these are problems directly relating to certain accounting procedures and systems, all of which are currently under careful review. Additionally, our accounting staff is now being headed by a new controller, Mr. Tom Hunt, who comes to us after more than fifteen years of similar experience with Catholic University. The board has also created or enlarged certain board committees to work with the staff in these important areas of financial administration, a process which had already been initiated by our new chairman of the board, Bill Wiseman.

Another area of concern was one resulting from certain actions taken by a committee of the board that had been created several years ago to assist the chairman and president in matters relating to staff compensation and benefits, a committee that had been authorized to act on behalf of the board in matters pertaining to such compensation. Because that committee, often in the interest of respecting the confidentiality of certain major donors and benefactors of the Society, did not report its deliberations and actions to the full board, it was criticized by certain other members of the board.

Primary among those actions was a decision to provide a residence for the Society's president as a part of his compensation package. Based on the fact that such is common practice with colleges, churches, and various other similar institutions, the committee reasoned that this gesture was not inappropriate to The HSUS. Further, the action was prompted by the fact that a residence in the Washington area had already been given The HSUS expressly for this purpose but was not immediately available due to a life-tenancy arrangement. The same person who had given this house to be used as a residence for the president had just made an additional gift to The HSUS in the amount of $100,000. Consequently, that committee saw fit to approve this action, but because it was not reported to the full board, its members were severely criticized by certain other members of the board and its actions challenged.

As a consequence of these criticisms and various other actions of both board committees and staff, the board undertook a review of all its procedures and actions as well as those of the executive staff. Over the course of several months, two separate attorneys, as well as an independent auditing firm, worked with two special committees of the board to conduct an in-depth review of all matters that were the subject of criticism and concern.

As a result of those inquiries, the board has established several new committees, a process already underway, and has instituted a number of changes for improving operations and accounting procedures. It has also reviewed all actions of the committee assisting the chairman and president in matters pertaining to staff compensation and approved each action retroactively. It has now enlarged and expanded that committee and agreed that, in the future, all its actions and decisions will be reported to the full board as a matter of course.

Unfortunately, certain persons aware of the tensions and deliberations within the board chose to share them with the press, an action that not only does great harm to The HSUS but also serves to undermine our collective efforts on behalf of animals and, most assuredly, gives comfort to our enemies.

I wish to assure you that your board of directors remains a body of deeply committed and highly competent individuals who, together with your president and staff, will continue to make The HSUS a leading force in the cause of seeking justice for animals and protecting them from harm.