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Museum Victory for Animal Rights

Henry Spira

Massive demonstrations and public outrage has forced the American Museum of Natural History to halt its 20 years of mutilating cats and kittens to then observe their sexual performance. And the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which funded these experiments with our tax dollars, is getting enough pressure to change its animal guidelines.

NIH Deputy Director Thomas Malone told animal researchers that the public is "asking profound ethical questions about the use of animals in research... Does the potential good justify the use of an animal in an experiment? Will the research yield fruitful results which cannot be obtained by other means? Is the research necessary?"

The NIH's revised guidelines take into account the suffering of animals, the availability of alternatives and whether the research will "yield fruitful results for the good of society, not feasible by other methods or means of study, and not random or unnecessary in nature." The American Psychological Association (APA) and the Animal Behavior Society are likewise changing their principles. We'll see whether this is mere rhetoric, but in any case, it dramatizes the defensiveness of, and intense stress on animal experimenters. This is the time to keep the pressure on.

8,000 LETTERS TO THE MUSEUM

The energy and boldness of the protest were summed up by Museum Director Thomas D. Nicholson in his annual report: "A broad segment of the public—by no means limited to antivivisectionists—became involved in questioning the research. More than 8,000 letters were received and an uncounted number of telephone calls were taken." The core "who initiated the issue in the spring of 1976 kept it alive throughout the year through a well-executed campaign. Advertisements were taken out in the media, attacks were written in humane society publications, letters and telephone calls of harassment (some threatening) were directed at employees and Trustees, demonstrators picketed the Museum on most weekends, inflammatory handbills were distributed, the granting agencies that supported the research were attacked, political intervention was sought and contributors to the Museum (particularly corporations and private foundations) were pressured in various ways."

Nicholson indicates a change towards an intelligent approach. There will be "greater emphasis on natural populations of animals and on field research, as opposed to physiologically-oriented laboratory research with domesticated or laboratory-bred animals."

On a recent visit we found the Sixth Floor cat-sex lab area deserted and dismantled. (Still, there's a completely separate space, elsewhere, in which Dr. Philip Zeigler apparently continues mutilating pigeons and rodents. We've just been granted permission to visit there.)

121 ON CAPITOL HILL

The Museum symbolized millions of animals suffering in repetitive make-work tortures which add nothing of value to the sum of human knowledge; animal agony for the sake of profit. And thus, the Museum became a national issue. Then Congressman Ed Koch discussed it twice on the floor of Congress and 121 members of Congress questioned the NIH. Congressman Biaggi and Koch participated in Museum

demonstrations. The Secretary of Agriculture complained that despite an extra inspection, "the leaders of the campaign wanted the cat research stopped."

GAINING HUMAN AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

Our protest was seen as promoting the new morality—a serious concern for the weak and helpless who cannot defend themselves. Dr. Stephen Toulmin, a member of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects alerted top animal researchers concerning a "novel interest in distributive justice...I fear myself that the same climate that has been unfavorable to biomedical research involving human subjects is also unfavorable toward biomedical research involving animals. The recent shindig at the Museum of Natural History in New York may be, in this respect, an indication of a difficult phase that animal research workers are going to have to live through in the years ahead."

The Museum protest called upon the scientific community to pursue a vital biology instead of one which is both death dealing and spiritually dead. The first breakthrough was Nicholas Wade's thoughtful essay, "Animal Rights: NIH Cat Sex Study Brings Grief to N.Y. Museum" which appeared in *Science*, the prestigious journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Wade treated the suffering of animals as worthy of serious consideration. He concluded that animal rights is *not* that far fetched, "history teaches that only fashion in clothes changes faster than fashions in ethics."

DECADE OF ANIMAL RIGHTS

Recently, the World Medical Journal had an eight page section dealing with "Humanity Towards Animals." There are ever more books, articles and campus courses concerned with the ethics of our relation to animals. The Federation of American Scientists, sponsored by 40 Nobel Prize Laureates, devoted its entire October '77 Report to "Animal Rights." Some FAS proposals would merely ameliorate and regulate the suffering allowed. But in publicizing the mistreatment of animals, they may be bridging the gap from the unheard cries of the animals to an awareness that we have no right to inflict pain upon those who are powerless.

We may well be entering the decade of animal rights. The APA Monitor's extensive study of the Museum confrontation, by Dr. Robert Lowman, perceived that "Research with animal subjects has been the object of considerable public attention in recent months, and the prospects that the attention will soon die down do not look particularly good."

WHAT'S NEXT?

What next? By way of the Museum, we've exposed and challenged unnecessary animal research. But most animals suffer and die in mandated, so called "necessary" testing: the archaic eye searing, poisoning, radiation and inhalation killing of millions of animals *to* test everything from developing neutron bombs, to oven cleaners, lye and shampoo. These death tests are being considered as the focus for the next major demonstrations. The concept is: where alternatives are available, use them; where there are none, find them. And for the Public Health Service to stop producing medieval animal hackers and poisoners, instead, to train and retrain researchers in modern non-animal technology, including the use of cell, tissue and organ cultures growing outside the body, mathematical and physical models.

Through the audacity of thousands of marchers, letter writers, petition gatherers, publicists; through the massive and continuing support of Our Town, Ed and Arlene Kayatt, Pegeen Fitzgerald and the Millennium Guild; most local, national and international animal welfare-rights organizations including ANY, API, AV, AWI, FFA, FOA, HSUS, IAAPEA, SAR, VIL, the Pat Burns-Laurie Cassels communication center; fair and objective reporting by the media, including the NY Times, Christian Science Monitor,

Chicago Tribune, NBC-TV News, the campus press—we've won the first battle. But, as you read this, there are millions of animals in labs. And lab animals never have a good day. So, the fight goes on. And nothing, not even a multi billion dollar animal research cartel with powerful political connections, can stop an idea whose time has come—that we must treat other feeling creatures the way we'd want to be treated were we in their place.

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