

WellBeing International

WBI Studies Repository

10-28-1977

Amnesty International Scandal

Henry Spira

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.wellbeingintludiesrepository.org/hscedi>



Part of the [Animal Experimentation and Research Commons](#), [Bioethics and Medical Ethics Commons](#), and the [Laboratory and Basic Science Research Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Spira, H. (1977, October 28). Amnesty International scandal. Our Town.

This material is brought to you for free and open access by WellBeing International. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of the WBI Studies Repository. For more information, please contact wbisr-info@wellbeingintl.org.



Amnesty International Scandal

Henry Spira

Amnesty International (AI) is guilty of betraying their avowed principles. Amnesty International, which is devoted to abolishing torture, has itself promoted torture. The A.I. Danish Medical Group has conducted grotesque experiments with animals.

Live pigs have been subjected to torture by applying hot metal rods and high voltage electric shocks to sensitive parts of their bodies. A.I.'s General Secretary said the purpose of these experiments was to determine whether torture leaves marks.

In an A.P. dispatch, Sherman Carroll, who heads A.I.'s worldwide Campaign Against Torture, said that the animals suffer no pain—I assume Carroll felt no pain—it is easy for those who are callous to bear the pain of others. But A.I.'s current literature does not attempt to justify some forms of torture as opposed to others. Their bold masthead tells us that conscience is "a knowledge or feeling of right or wrong, with a compulsion to do right."

And as if they were writing this piece, they proclaim, "torturers go unpunished, their numbers increasing ... torturers in various countries insist on being addressed as 'doctor' ...instead of as sadistic criminals ... torture dehumanizes those who serve its purposes ... Those who shield themselves from the almost unbearable knowledge of what is happening become silent accomplices to the torturer's deeds, prisoners of the nightmare."

When it comes to suffering, what relevant difference is there between us and other animals? What gives A.I. the right of property over the body and mind of an animal with feelings?

Animals, like us, have the elementary right to pursue their own happiness. And that precludes being deliberately shocked and burned. Consistency demands that we oppose torturers whether they are Chilean secret police or A.I.'s doctors in white coats.

Meanwhile, A.I. is pulling a Watergate. Since Jon Evans, president of the International Association Against Painful Experiments on Animals, exposed A.I.'s research, A.I. has attempted to stonewall the charges. Thus, an undated internal statement from A.I.'s London International headquarters says, "The doctors wish to make it clear that they are not torturing pigs ... there was at no time any suffering, the pigs were anesthetized. Some national sections have been embarrassed that A.I. is responsible for torturing pigs. We have chosen not to make a news release that would piece the issue out of proportion."

Instead, A.I., on getting the Nobel Peace Prize, hoped "to awaken people everywhere to the urgent need to abolish immediately the practice of torture."

We therefore urge the same combination of people of conscience, who forced the Museum to stop their cat sex research, to form a Coalition to Stop Animal Torture by Amnesty International. Larry Cox, A.I.'s press officer told us that the resumption of these experiments is being discussed by A.I.'s international executive committee; a decision is expected this coming month. Unless A.I. declares a halt to this disgusting and absurd torture, within the next two weeks, the Coalition will mount demonstrations at the AI-USA Hdq.

Recommended Citation:

Spira, H. (1977, October 28). Amnesty International scandal. *Our Town*.

November 11, 1977 / Our Town

TO THE EDITOR

Henry Spira ("Amnesty International Scandal." Oct. 28), rages against Amnesty International for using pigs in experiments designed to aid in the detection of torture. "When it comes to suffering," asks Spira, "what relevant difference is there between us and other animals?" I would have thought the question answers itself: we are human beings and they are not. Human beings are rational, self-aware, and capable of acting in accordance with moral principles; that is why we have rights and why animals do not have the rights we have. All men are created equal, not all animals. I suppose Mr. Spira will want to know why such traits as I listed should count; but surely the onus is on Mr. Spira to prove that they do not count.

What if the experiments Mr. Spira deplores actually did make torture easier to detect, and thereby deterred some potential torturers: would Mr. Spira still insist that the experiments not be done? I think so. Evidently, Mr. Spira's concern for his fellow man is inversely proportional to his concern for animals.

Michael E. Levin
Assoc.: Prof of Philosophy
City University

SPIRA REPLIES

Professor Levin is under the misapprehension that we have a limited reservoir of feelings. Prof. Levin is wrong. Compassion for humans and animals is not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they reinforce each other. There's a direct link between respecting the rights of humans and animals. In both cases we take into account the interests and needs of others; treat others the way we'd want to be treated were we in their place; and consider it cowardly and unconscionable to pick on someone weaker, more helpless than ourselves.

Levin maintains that men, or possibly all humans, have rights because they are equal. That's utter nonsense, our species contains the entire gamut from Einsteins to mental defectives. If rights depend on being rational, having a concept of self and the capacity for moral choices, then we'd include various nonhuman primates and exclude some humans. As an example, a Northwestern University compassion experiment forced monkeys to choose between starvation and hurting a fellow monkey—they chose to go hungry rather than electric shock a fellow monkey.

The line between human and nonhuman animals is becoming ever more blurry. It's not an unbridgeable gap between them and us—but shared feelings differing in quantity along a continuum. Evolution is not only physiological but also psychosocial. Apes now have vocabularies of up to 300 words, communicating in the sign language of the deaf. What will Levin's response be when nonhuman animals ask him, "Why do you favor tormenting me?"

Levin's position that justice demands only that we treat equals equally, justifies every crime, rationalizes every brutality. The experiments on the retarded youngsters at Willowbrook, the concentration camps of Dachau, the napalming of the people of Indochina and even human slavery, are not so far in our past.

Opressors customarily rationalize, in a self serving fashion, that the victims, after all, are not equal to themselves.

Since we are a species capable of moral choice, it's time we used that option in respecting the rights of other living, feeling creatures cohabiting our planet. Not because we are intellectually equal but because we equally seek to avoid pain and get some pleasure out of life.

A. I. RESPONDS

First, I wish to assure you that Amnesty International takes the concerns you raise regarding the humane treatment of animals extremely seriously. It is for this reason that every effort was made to guarantee that the medical experiments in question were carried out in accord with the highest legal ethical standards.

Nonetheless, we recognize that many people, including many people within Amnesty International, are opposed to any experiments involving live animals. For this reason this issue was fully discussed at the International Council Meeting and was referred for further deliberation to the International Executive Committee. As you have been told this committee will be meeting to discuss this on Nov. 25, 26, 27.

There is little doubt that demonstrations such as you propose to organize will do damage to AI's attempt to stop torture and free political prisoners around the world. For this reason we would ask you to at least wait until the International Executive Committee has had the time to discuss and take a position on this matter before you take any action. Whatever decision is reached will be communicated to you as soon as is possible.

I might add that the article you wrote distorts and misquotes the AI material which was sent to you. Far from "watergating" on this issue AI has supplied immediately to any concerned individuals all relevant information on the experiments. You were sent immediately upon your request an internal document on the matter. It is disturbing to learn that you have misquoted that document. The document reads "some national sections have been embarrassed by allegations that AI is responsible for torturing pigs." In your story the quote reads "some national sections have been embarrassed that AI is responsible for torturing pigs." We trust you will see that this serious misquote is corrected.

David Hawk
Executive Director, AIUSA

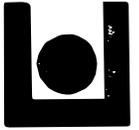
SPIRA REPLIES

I personally agree with Amnesty International's aims and, like Mr. Hawk, do not want to see AI damaged or put down. But I believe that as with "my country right or wrong"—one needs add that, when wrong, outrages need be corrected. In line with Mr. Hawk's suggestion, we'll wait until after AI's November 25-27th meeting.

Mr. Hawk is correct, an unfortunate typographer's error caused a misquote. The document actually reads "some national sections have been embarrassed by allegations that AI is responsible for torturing pigs."



amnesty
international



International Secretariat 10 Southampton Street London WC2E 7HF
Telephone: 01-836 7788 Telegrams: Amnesty London Telex: 28502

1977
Prisoners of
Conscience Year

Henry Spira,
1 West St. 85 St.
New York
N.Y. 10024
USA

23 February, 1978

Dear Mr. Spira,

Mr. Hammaberg, chairman of our International Executive Committee, has asked me to thank you for, and to answer your letter to him of 11 February expressing your concern about Amnesty International's undertaking medical experiments on animals.

We understand your concern; this matter has caused a certain amount of controversy within and outside our movement and it was decided at our last International Council meeting in September 1977 that a special 'forum' should be held in order to deal with this issue. The whole subject will be discussed at our next IEC meeting at the beginning of March. The Executive Committee meets here in London every three months and have to deal with a very large number of matters concerning this organization in a short space of time. This makes it very difficult for them to discuss specific issues with people outside the International Secretariat. It is unfortunately not possible outside the Secretariat to attend that meeting. However all decisions and discussions of that Committee are notified to our national sections and the American section will be informed after the meeting of the outcome of the discussions on the subject of medical experiments and when the planned forum will be held.

You will be informed of whatever decisions are taken either directly from this central office or from the New York office.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. F. blakiston
Secretary to the International
Executive Committee

Leonard Rack M.D.
392 Central Park West
New York, N.Y. 10025

Henry Spira
1 West 85 Street
New York, N.Y. 1002

Tel: (212) 873-3674

March 1, 1978

To: THE INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

1. The memorandum addressed to the IEC-AI, dated February 27, 1978, was drafted under pressure of an unexpected deadline. Upon further reflection, we are submitting a revision and elaboration.

2. The position taken by AI concerning live animal experiments could have enormous impact. It could give a major boost to the modern interpretation of concern for the weak and helpless, by extending rights to non-human animals, a concept in accord with growing ecological concerns.

3. We feel that AI would be acting more in accordance with its own aims by using the energies of the medical community to treat the victims of torture instead of creating additional victims in experiments of questionable value for the victims or for legal-political clarification.

Concerning the live animal experiments at issue, there is no legal tribunal which will admit the evidence obtained by electric shocking and burning anesthetized pigs in order to prove that persons with unmarked skin were in fact tortured. Proof of electric shock or burns cannot be of legal consequence since the wound may be self-inflicted.

If false accusations of torture generated political capital, then persons who wish to claim torture may have themselves anesthetized and cattle prodded or heat burnt.

If these experiments succeed in some way in creating political difficulties for the torturers, this in no way prevents them from using countless other and much more sophisticated techniques, including possibly sensory deprivation.

If AI gets to be a better detective, the torturers may decide to kill the victims after torture. Thus the political and social effect of these biological experiments may in fact run counter to the welfare of the victims.

4. The problem of testing credibility is a large research issue which has been worked on with inconclusive results. Considering limited resources and the urgent needs of victims, such a project could prove a distraction of energy from more pressing needs.

AI has an excellent reputation for investigating, publicizing and protesting torture. This is no doubt accomplished by evaluating diverse sources. This would also seem the most reliable check on the victim's stories.

5. Torture is not a biological disease in the conventional sense. It is a predominately psychosocial disorder with severe medical consequences, much as in forcible rape, child abuse, violent assaults and shell shock.

We note that in the literature supplied to us by AI, the use of psychiatry is limited to investigating abuses of psychiatry in inflicting torture. This omits the potential usefulness of psychiatric methods in helping victims of torture.

It seems to us that the attention of AI to the plight of the torture victims must have profound positive emotional significance.

Nevertheless, it also seems likely that the addition of psychiatric methods could help in alleviating the psychological effects of the torture, much as in the traumatic neuroses. Victims could be helped through psychotherapy, hypnosis, sodium amytal, group therapy, desensitization and also various methods used for the treatment of depression.

We are currently investigating the best state of current research in the field. Under separate cover we have given you a sampling of printouts and documents emphasizing the treatment of post traumatic neuroses. There is a literature on therapy for the severely stressed. We have collected material from the Veterans Administration concerned with rehabilitating POWs and shell shocked troops; from the National Center for the Prevention and Control of Rape concerned with the treatment of rape related fear and anxiety responses. One of us visited the American Psychiatric Association for their material. We are contacting major authorities in relevant fields. We have generated a number of computer printouts dealing with trauma and torture which provide references for the treatment of victims. And we're making this material available to AI.

6. AI has an opportunity to enhance its sphere of moral influence and effectiveness in fighting for justice and rights, by disassociating from these live animal experiments and redirecting psychomedical efforts to raise the quality of life for those who have suffered so much.

7. Since the issue at hand concerns universal rights, an appropriate forum for the discussion might well be the court of world public opinion and we therefore urge a free and open discussion.

Sincerely,

Leonard Rack MD

Henry Spira



amnesty
international

International Secretariat, 10 Southampton Street, London WC2E 7HF, England
Telephone: 01-836 7788 Telegrams: Amnesty London Telex: 28502



SGO/DO/JG

25 July 1978

Mr Henry Spira
1 West 85 Street
New York
NY 10024

Dear Mr Spira

I am replying to your letter of 1 July, addressed to the Chairman of our International Executive Committee, Mr Thomas Hammarberg, concerning the animal experiments. This matter will come up again at Amnesty International's next International Council Meeting in September, in Cambridge UK, where the main discussion document will be the report of the study group established earlier this year by the IEC. The main recommendation of that group is that AI should cease to lend its name to such experiments and, although I am of course not in a position to predict the outcome of the debate in September, it is not unlikely that this recommendation will be accepted by the Council.

I hope you understand that I cannot give you a more definite answer now, and I would suggest that you contact the AI office in New York at the end of September to hear the results. I appreciate your thoughtful letter and am forwarding a copy, together with this reply to Thomas Hammarberg.

Yours sincerely

Dick Oosting
Deputy Secretary General

Amnesty International is a worldwide human rights movement which works impartially for the release of prisoners of conscience: men and women detained anywhere for their beliefs, colour, ethnic origin, sex, religion or language, provided they have neither used nor advocated violence. Amnesty International opposes torture and the death penalty in all cases without reservation and advocates fair and prompt trials for all political prisoners. Amnesty International is independent of all governments, political factions, ideologies, economic interests and religious creeds. It is financed by its membership and by subscriptions from all parts of the world. Amnesty International has consultative status with the United Nations (ECOSOC), UNESCO and the Council of Europe, has cooperative relations with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States, and has observer status with the Organization of African Unity (Bureau for the Placement and Education of African Refugees).



October 1978

Dear Friend:

Thank you very much for sharing with us your thoughts about Amnesty International's involvement with medical experimentation. At the International Council Meeting held in September 1978 in Cambridge, England the following Resolution was passed:

The International Council

Having received the June 1977 statement by the Medical Advisory Board on animal experiments,

Having received the May 1978 report of the (Amsterdam) Committee to Discuss Amnesty International's Medical Experiments and comments on the report by the Danish Section Board and the AI Medical Advisory Board,

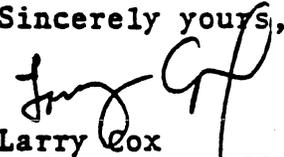
Recognizing the ethical integrity of the doctors concerned in the experimentation by the Danish medical group and further recognizing that no human person nor any animal has been subjected to pain during the experimentation,

But being concerned with the possible consequences of misuse or misinterpretation of information about these experiments,

RESOLVES that AI should not sponsor further medical experimentation involving the use of either human beings or animals.

This now represents the official policy of Amnesty International.

Sincerely yours,


Larry Cox
Information Officer

Amnesty International is a worldwide human rights movement which works impartially for the release of prisoners of conscience: men and women detained anywhere for their beliefs, color, ethnic origin, sex, religion or language, provided they have neither used nor advocated violence. Amnesty International opposes torture and the death penalty in all cases without reservation and advocates fair and prompt trials for all political prisoners. Amnesty International is independent of all governments, political factions, ideologies, economic interests and religious creeds. It has consultative status with the United Nations (ECOSOC), UNESCO and the Council of Europe, has cooperative relations with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States, and has observer status with the Organization of African Unity (Bureau for the Placement and Education of African Refugees). Amnesty International was the recipient of the 1977 Nobel Prize for Peace.

CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF DIRECTORS
David Hinkley

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
David Hawk

Amnesty for Animals

Henry Spira

Amnesty International (AI) has stopped its animal experiments. AI, winner of the 1977 Nobel Peace Prize for its work to abolish torture, had been under enormous pressure from both animal rights advocates and its own membership, to stop betraying their principles by promoting experiments in which live pigs were electric shocked and burned. The purpose of these experiments was to determine whether humans could be tortured without leaving marks.

In a victory for nonhuman animals, for AI's integrity and for the animal rights movement, AI's 11th International Council Meeting, Sept. 21-24, 1978, Cambridge, England, voted overwhelmingly not to sponsor animal experiments. AI's previous position had, in effect, given an aura of respectability, to animal torturers.

Recently, AI's bizarre animal experimenters attempted to expand their grotesque operations. They urged that: "Several other experimental groups should be formed with the purpose of revealing the sequelae (symptoms or effects) to all types of torture as for instance phalanga (beating on the soles of the feet), pharmacological torture, torture of teeth, just to mention a few" (Memo 6/16/78).

But AI's official committee on medical experiments unanimously concluded that experiments on animals "should not form a part of AI's activities in the future, since they reflect a de facto approval of vivisection. It should be noted by way of a minority report in this context that one member of the committee felt strongly that AI should consider expanding its mandate to include an anti-vivisectionist position, on the basis of the relationship between human rights and animal rights" (Report AI Medical Advisory Board 6/21/78).

And that's been our position. That there's a direct link between respecting the rights of human and nonhuman animals. In both cases we take into account the interests and needs of others; treat others the way we'd want to be treated were we in their place; and consider it cowardly and unconscionable to pick on someone weaker and more helpless than ourselves.

AI's experiments were publicized in the Oct. 28, 1977 issue of *Our Town*. Veterans of the successful American Museum of Natural History protest, which stopped 20 years of deliberately mutilating cats to then observe their sexual performance, threatened massive demonstrations. AI, aware of the credibility of our challenge, requested time to evaluate their position. Meetings were held with members of AI's International Executive Committee and AI's vivisection spokesperson. It is to their credit that they've now adopted a position in line with their noble purpose of halting torture throughout the world.

During the past year, there were outpourings of letters and phone calls. There were challenges to debate in the forum of world public opinion. AI declined. They were vulnerable because their position was indefensible.

Recommended Citation:

Spira, H. (1978, October 22). Amnesty for animals. *Our Town*.