President's Perspective

A Further Word On Ralston Purina And TV Animals

By John A. Hoyt

In the Autumn 1975 issue of The Humane Society News, an article entitled "Cruelty to Animals in the Film Industry" described various training methods and housing conditions HSUS found objectionable and inhumane. Based on HSUS findings, a Jack Anderson column (Oct. 22) described conditions purportedly involving the Ralston Purina Company that Ralston Purina immediately denied.

After a series of conversations and meetings with representatives of Ralston Purina on Oct. 28 and 29, HSUS included with our Autumn 1975 News a statement acknowledging and correcting the alleged inaccuracies contained in the article and reported in the Anderson column. It is obvious from a review of the record that our willingness to try to correct a possible error was based on their attorney's flat assertion that Ralston Purina had in their possession documented evidence that they had not used this facility for about one year. To us, this meant that no animal housed in this facility was being used in Purina commercials. Perhaps we should have been a little more skeptical, but we do pride ourselves in trying to be fair and humane not only to animals, but to people as well.

It was subsequently admitted by Ralston Purina that they had used the facility during the period in question. Their attorney told our general counsel on Nov. 7 that he had discovered this fact after our Oct. 28-29 conference, but we note that as late as Nov. 7 Ralston Purina was still telling their customers that the HSUS report "is totally inaccurate as to any allegations relating to Ralston Purina Company," and that they "have not used the facility in question." It is now quite clear that Ralston Purina did in fact use the facility in question prior to and during this period. HSUS hopes that company officials have now established safeguards in order that there cannot be a repeat of this poor performance.

HSUS finds it interesting, saddening, and a bit surprising that a pet food company that allegedly "has a longstanding policy calling for the humane treatment of all animals" is currently seeking to discredit HSUS, while at the same time appearing to exonerate a facility that has not provided proper care and treatment to all its animals. We responded to Ralston Purina in good faith in the issuance of our explanatory note in the last issue of The Humane Society News. That our explanatory note was itself partially incorrect is because of inaccuracies conveyed to us by Ralston Purina. More to be deplored, however, is Ralston Purina's deliberate efforts to discredit HSUS's effort to bring about better conditions and care for animals being used in TV commercials and other film activities.