

## The Effects of Municipal Interference

Since the inception of the Zoo Program, Sue Pressman has stressed to animal welfare advocates and the general public that problems in zoos are often the result of interference by municipal officials. Everything from vandalism due to inadequate security, to deaths resulting from insufficient veterinary care or equipment, to aberrant behavior caused by sterile exhibits can be traced to the unwillingness of municipal officials to follow the recommendations of the zoo's professional staff. In a letter to an HSUS member Sue stated her belief that "we have some of the most capable zoo professionals in the world working under impossible conditions in American zoos" (HSUS files).

A newspaper article in 1973 drew attention to the municipal constraints causing problems with the San Francisco Zoo (Lublin, 1973):

In 1965, San Francisco's Zoo had an estimated 846 animals and 28 keepers. Eight years later, the zoo has approximately 400 more animals and the same number of keepers. . . . requests for additional keepers 'have been steadily turned down for the last several years.'

The same article revealed that, until recently, the zoo's staff did not have control over the funds generated by the sale of surplus animals. Those funds went back into the city's general fund while "new animals [were] purchased on a lowest bid system, [and] frequently arrived deformed and maimed."

One of the original zoos inspected by Sue in 1971 was the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Zoo. Half of the zoo was operated by the zoological society and received a rating of 2; the other half, operated by the municipality, was rated 3. She referred to it as a "Jekyll and Hyde establishment" and told the Director of the municipal half, "we can show you antiquated zoos stymied by municipalities and

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zoos that are true learning facilities managed by zoological societies. . . . Pittsburgh Zoo is the epitome, for it shows the differences in one place and in one zoo" (HSUS: Pittsburgh Zoo Files).

The zoo became the scene of a political struggle between the zoo society and Pittsburgh's Mayor Flaherty. Flaherty blamed The HSUS's criticisms on the Zoo Society. He revealed his own lack of understanding of the zoo's function when he publicly criticized the Zoo Society for spending its money on new exhibits. He stated to the press, "We don't need exhibits, we need a better zoo." He never explained how the zoo might be improved without better exhibits.

The Zoo Society also asked for assistance from the AAZPA. Fred Zeehandelaar, an animal dealer and one of the trio sent by AAZPA to assist the Zoo Society in its struggle, stated that the society had changed its part of the zoo from one of the worst in the country to one of the best. He also stated he knew of five other zoos around the country that were locked in similar battles with their municipal officials, and he compared the situation to the AAZPA's own struggle for autonomy:

[Zeehandelaar] said a trend is developing across the nation for greater control of zoos by agencies such as the [zoo] society and added in no uncertain terms that municipal officials, despite the best of intentions don't know how to handle a big-city zoo. . . . Only six months ago, the AAZPA managed a divorce [from the National Recreation and Park Association], the purpose of which was to concentrate exclusively on the zoo profession--the conservation of animals, the education of the public, the enjoyment of the children and the improvement of zoo exhibits--without the burden of interference and supervision by well-meaning but unqualified public officials (HSUS: Pittsburgh Zoo Files).

After battling the Mayor for several years, the Zoological Society finally withdrew altogether in 1975, charging the city and the Mayor with harassment by failing

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to provide adequate police protection, lighting, and other essential services for the society's half of the zoo. The entire zoo has been under municipal control since that time and, according to Sue, has remained stagnant.

On two other occasions since the Zoo Program was initiated, The HSUS has been asked to enter a conflict surrounding a zoo at the same time that a panel of zoo professionals was asked to make an evaluation. The Los Angeles Zoo in 1973 was in the midst of a struggle after a group of disgruntled keepers issued a 45 page report complaining of, among other things, overcrowded conditions; poorly designed exhibits which were difficult to clean and dangerous to animals, keepers, and the visiting public; lack of concern on the part of the zoo's administrators; consistently poor communications between management and staff; and insufficient equipment for handling animals. They also complained that management tended to accept temporary solutions to permanent problems, and city maintenance crews caused problems because they were only answerable to the city.

The three zoo directors called in to make an evaluation of the problems stated frankly that there were both management and design problems. They suggested the zoo be established as a separate department of the city government with the zoo director as the department head. Further, they recommended that a new policy making board devoted exclusively to the zoo be established, and sufficient funds be allocated to enable the zoo to function properly.

The panel of directors declined to refer to themselves as investigators, and suggested that the zoo staff would be the best source of information concerning improperly housed animals. Their responses indicate a certain ambivalence

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about the task of evaluating a zoo which was "under fire." If they proved to be too critical of the specific inadequacies of the zoo, they might be charged with professional jealousy or of "throwing stones" while living in "glass houses," since inadequacies could doubtless be found in their own zoos. If, on the other hand, they were not sufficiently critical, they would be charged with a "whitewash" and simply protecting the members of their own profession. Some of the keepers and one of the zoo's veterinarians did, in fact, charge the panel with "whitewashing" the zoo's problems, but the charge was probably unfair in light of the rather extensive criticisms and recommendations the panel actually made.

The panel did acknowledge that the zoo had extensive problems and referred to it as a "professional graveyard" (i.e., it was unable to retain professional staff members due to its reputation for municipal interference). But at the same time they declared that "the citizens of Los Angeles and the news media should realize what a fine zoo they have and what an asset it is to the community" (HSUS: Los Angeles Zoo File). Perhaps Dr. Charles Schroeder, one of the panel members and the Director Emeritus of the San Diego, California Zoo, said more than he realized when he stated to the Los Angeles Times (Goodman, 1973): "If there's a crisis in the L.A. Zoo, there's a crisis in zoos across the country."

The HSUS position was more reflective of the keeper's position than that of Dr. Schroeder and the panelists. The keepers and the zoo directors had both submitted lengthy, detailed reports to the city. Sue's remarks were more brief, and with one or two exceptions, were of a general nature. They were in keeping with The HSUS's usual approach to zoos: to draw attention to specific conditions of an urgent nature, but otherwise to defer to the professional staff or professional

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zoo planners for changes in program or exhibit design. She recommended that the zoo needed: both a director and a business manager; improved health care and diets; a lightening of the inventory; and for the city to follow the actions suggested by the zoo staff in its list of "high priority zoo projects" which had already been submitted to the Zoo Board.

Sue's report differed from that of the panel in that she placed part of the blame for conditions in the zoo upon the Zoo Society. She charged that its membership was "stagnant" and that it had "failed to reach out to the . . . community and the community [had] failed to respond to the zoo." She contended that "the Zoological Society, much like a humane society, should represent the public, its needs, and its desires for conservation and [education about wildlife]."

Unlike Mayor Flaherty of Pittsburgh, Mayor Bradley of Los Angeles welcomed constructive criticism. He concluded that the city was hindering the zoo's progress and took steps to rectify the situation. Mayor Bradley expressed his thanks to The HSUS for its help, hired a professional director and gave him the autonomy necessary to operate the zoo properly.

In 1979 Sue was able to change the rating of the Los Angeles Zoo from a class 2 to a class 1. She also reported that the Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association (GLAZA) has increased its membership very dramatically and is now functioning as an effective intermediary between the community and the zoo.

On one other occasion Sue has been asked to investigate a zoo at the same time as a panel of zoo professionals: In Kansas City in 1978. Though the Mayor welcomed The HSUS's intervention saying it was "supremely qualified to carry out an investi-

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gation," the Parks Board ultimately was unhappy with Sue's criticisms because they were of a general nature. Sue, however, felt it important that the Parks Board not become so involved in details that they lose sight of the larger issues. She stated to one Kansas City newspaper that the Parks Board "must identify the disease and attempt to fix the entire body . . . they can't keep on with their policy of fixing little wounds."

The Parks Director indicated his ignorance of modern zoo management when he stated his reluctance to honor Sue's request to "lighten the inventory by 30%," because people "want to see lots of animals."

A number of the zoo's keepers had charged that animals were mishandled and kept in crowded, filthy surroundings. As has often been the case when zoos have been investigated by The HSUS in the wake of a "keeper revolt," Sue found that the substandard conditions were the result of the Parks Board's interference with the ability of the Zoo Director to do his job. She also found that the Director lacked administrative ability and tended to be somewhat old-fashioned in his overall approach to the zoo, but she found no evidence of deliberate cruelty or neglect. She explained her view of the keeper's charges in an internal HSUS memorandum: "One way of looking at these things is not to respond necessarily to [a] particular charge but to look at it as a symptom and find out how that particular fester got there."

The panel of three zoo professionals, including again Dr. Charles Schroeder, made extensive recommendations and cited numerous specific problems; but, they added, many of the problems could be corrected within two or three days. Dr. Schroeder,

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the spokesman for the panel, stated to the Kansas City Times that "most of the complaints [that had appeared in the newspaper] are legitimate . . . on the other hand, they're no different from any other zoo, our own [San Diego Zoo] included." Although they seemed to be trying to give as objective an analysis of the zoo's problems as possible, the panel was accused by one of the Parks Commissioners of being biased because of "close, personal ties" between two of the panel members and the Parks Department Director.

When the evaluations of the panel of zoo professionals, The HSUS, and the USDA were compared and found to be similar in many respects, the Parks Board began to make some changes at the zoo. The Board, having been stung by Sue's criticisms, appeared to defer more to the recommendations made in the evaluations of USDA and the zoo professionals. The keepers, however, attributed improvements to The HSUS's intervention. They even named one of the zoo's new baby animals Sue Ann after Sue Pressman and Ann Gonnerman, stating: "Because of those two women, a lot of changes are being made [in the zoo]" (HSUS: Kansas City Zoo Files).

Most people in the zoo world would probably be surprised to learn that complaints about zoos have often come from within the zoo's own staff. The "keeper revolts" which prompted The HSUS's investigation of the Los Angeles and Kansas City Zoos were not isolated phenomena. The HSUS files indicate similar charges of cruelty and mismanagement have been levelled against zoo administrations by keepers or other staff people in zoos in San Francisco, California; Tulsa and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Buffalo, New York; Rio Grande, New Mexico; and Bloomington, Illinois.