

CLIVE HOLLANDS, COMPASSION IS THE BUGLER: THE STRUGGLE FOR ANIMAL RIGHTS, (EDINBURGH: MACDONALD PUBLISHERS) 1980, xx + 201 pp.

The strange title of this book, contrasting with its more militant and modern sub-title, says a lot about its theme. It is the story of the traditional British animal welfare and anti-vivisectionist movement awakening from the doldrums of the past fifty years and beginning to organize itself into a twentieth-century political cause.

More specifically, Compassion is the Bugler is the story of Animal Welfare Year, held in Britain in 1976 to mark the century that had passed since the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876, the Act which governs animal experiments in Britain to this day. It is also the story of the subsequent movement to 'Put Animals into Politics' (as if there weren't enough animals in politics already, as someone inevitably remarked). Clive Hollands is well-qualified to tell of these events, since he was the Chairman of Animal Welfare Year and Secretary to the General Election Co-ordinating Committee for Animal Protection, also known as GECCAP, the body which did, finally, succeed in putting animals into British politics.

Hollands is an animal welfare administrator whose home base is the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Vivisection. He is not a philosopher, and his book contains no sustained discussion of why it is wrong to test shampoos on the eyes of rabbits, or to do any of the other things that Animal Welfare Year and GECCAP were directed against. Although he happily goes along with the idea that animals have rights, the real basis of his concern seems to be, as his title suggests, compassion.

So read Compassion is the Bugler not to increase your understanding of the philosophy of animal rights, but for an appreciation of the tactical issues involved in actually bringing about change. How are the many different and often feuding animal groups--rivalling, as one reporter said, a school of amoeba in their fissiparous tendencies--to be united? Is it really possible for the League Against Cruel Sports to sit down at the same table as the British Horse Society, many of whose members are active fox-hunters? And what about the National Anti-Vivisection Society and the British Union of Anti-Vivisectionists, which have squabbled ever since 1898, when uncompromising members of the former group, dismayed at its efforts to seek reform rather than abolition, left it and founded the latter?

Hollands confronts these problems with a confident pragmatism: 'I am not interested to know whether a society is too moderate, too extreme or even too militant.' As long as they aim for the general goal of improvement in the treatment of animals, Hollands is happy to have them join in.

Is he right? Or is there a real danger of diluting the drive of the radicals to such an extent that any measures of reform succeed in appeasing the public rather than aiding the animals? Since all the efforts of Animal Welfare Year and the movement to Put Animals into Politics have not yet yielded any change in the laws relating to the treatment of animals in Britain, it is still too soon to say. Hollands believes legislative changes are on their way, and will take place in the next few years. So we shall have to wait a little before we can know if he has taken the right road.

For those not living in Britain and not familiar with the animal welfare scene there, this book will provide valuable information. Britain still is, in many ways, the forerunner in animal welfare, and those working in other countries can learn from what has happened there. Though we non-British citizens may smile at some of their quirks, like the number of titled people on the Boards of their organizations, they did run a political campaign, costing over £100,000, to make animal welfare an issue in the 1979 General Election. They persuaded every major party to put something about animal welfare in their election platforms. An animal welfare group, the League Against Cruel Sports, made a separate donation of £80,000 to the Labour Party's election fund, making it one of the largest donors, apart from the party's constituent trade unions. (Can you imagine an American animal welfare group ranking alongside the dairy farmers and the AMA in its campaign contributions?) For its part, the Labour Party promised to abolish hare-coursing and stag and deer hunting. Unfortunately the party with the vaguest and weakest animal welfare policy--the Conservative Party--won the election. The 1979 election, however, will surely not be the end of the story, in Britain or in the rest of the world. In every nation the animal liberation movement must find its own path, but it helps to know of the paths that others are taking.

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