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International Coalition to Abolish LD-50

Michael Marten

What may prove to be the major anti-vivisection campaign of the next three years was announced Saturday May 23 at the Animal Aid rally in Birmingham. Jean Pink of Animal Aid and Henry Spira of the Coalition to Abolish the Draize Rabbit-Blinding Test told the demonstrators that they were jointly establishing an international coalition to campaign for abolition of the LD-50 test. The announcement was greeted with cheers.

LD-50 stands for Lethal Dose 50 percent. It involves administering chemical substances to a group of animals until half of them die. (The other half survive, but are of course acutely ill). By definition, the test is applied to animals without benefit of anaesthetics and results in extreme suffering. Even some members of the vivisection community agree that it is crude and wasteful. Nonetheless it is the prime test of the toxicity of new chemical products of all kinds, including medicines, weed-killers, detergents, fly-sprays, cosmetics, paints, drugs, oven-sprays, etc. In many countries it is required by law.

The new coalition, which at the time of going to press has yet to be given an official name, will operate along similar lines to the coalition to abolish the Draize. There will be a separate Coordinator or Coordinating Council in each country (Spira in the USA). All humane, anti-vivisection, animal welfare and other concerned groups will be invited to affiliate to the coalition, but will remain free to contribute to the campaign in the manner and to the extent they wish. Affiliation involves no cost.

If the LD-50 campaign follows the same methods as the one against the Draize, the initial step will be to target one or more large, well-known corporations that employ the test. Proctor & Gamble and Unilever are the names currently under consideration. These corporations will be approached and asked to discuss ways in which the test can be halted and replaced by non-animal alternatives. If no satisfaction is obtained, public awareness of the company's use of the test will be stimulated by mass leafletting, newspaper ads, demonstrations, and consumer boycotts of the companies' products.

Henry Spira told *The Beast*:

"We are aiming at better protection of the public. The LD-50 is not just cruel, it is also an archaic method of testing for toxicity. The question that the test puts is: 'How many bars of pure ivory soap does it take to kill half of a batch of 20, 30 or 60 dogs?' It's ridiculous."

Spira estimates that in the US the chemical industry using the LD-50 has a turnover of \$450 billion a year. He aims to pressurise these companies into putting up "a quick \$10 million" for research into alternatives.

This follows the Draize coalition's success in persuading cosmetic companies to fund alternative research. Revlon has stumped up \$750,000, Avon \$750,000, Estee Lauder \$250,000, Rimmel and two other small companies an as yet undisclosed amount.

"Even though it might be a long road," Spira says, "at least we've started on it. We have developed good relations with the research and toxicology community. Regulatory agencies are revising their position on the need for tests like the Draize. We are acting as catalysts to make it possible for these people to do what they should be doing in the first place -- developing a humane toxicology that does not require animals. Also, the Draize campaign has established the basic principle that companies involved in animal

testing have a social responsibility to fund research into alternatives. It is similar to the principle that companies that contribute to pollution have a responsibility to pay for cleaning up their mess.”

The use of coalitions to fight and win specific issues represents a relatively new development in the animal welfare movement and has largely been inspired by Henry Spira's work in New York. In the past three years he has succeeded in obtaining the repeal of New York state's Metcalf-Hatch act, which allowed impounded strays to be handed over to labs for vivisection, halted sex experiments on cats at New York's Museum of Natural History, and masterminded the continuing Draize campaign.

All these coalitions, however, can be seen as trial runs for the LD-50 campaign. The LD-50 is a symbol of the cruelty and wastefulness of modern vivisection. In Britain alone, according to a 1979 Home Office Advisory Committee estimate, some 229,500 animals a year are killed in LD-50s. In the US, the figure probably exceeds one million.

Individuals and groups interested in affiliating to or participating in the new coalition, or in forming related coalitions in other countries, can contact Jean Pink at Animal Aid (see Network) and Henry Spira at the Coalition to stop the Draize (also in Network).

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