

CLARIFYING OUR POSITION

BY DR. MARTIN L. STEPHENS

The use of animals in research and testing is an issue that went from relative obscurity in the 1970s to prominence in the 1980s. In the process of gaining currency among the general public, the laboratory-animal issue became preeminent in the animal-advocacy movement. There is cause for optimism about the prospect that the momentum generated in the '80s will be translated into important gains on behalf of animals in the '90s, despite attempts by some animal researchers and their allies to organize and fight back. The progress made in coming years, however, could be significantly compromised if acts of violence are undertaken by those who espouse the cause of animal protection. Will animal advocates commit violent acts that undermine whatever gains the movement has achieved or preclude additional gains? Will any such acts give our opponents the ammunition they need to undercut our efforts?

Just as a falling tide lowers all boats, violence on the part of only some animal advocates could set back the efforts of all such individuals and organizations, including The HSUS. Likewise, certain individuals and organizations could be unfairly labeled as violent or supportive of violence.

Webster's New World Dictionary defines

violence as "physical force used so as to injure, damage, or destroy." In the United States, violence on behalf of animals in laboratories has taken several forms, including vandalism, arson, and bombing. Instances of arson and bombing are exceedingly rare. Vandalism, though not rare, is uncommon and tends to occur during break-ins at research facilities. To date, no one has been physically injured, let alone killed, as a result of animal-rights activism in the United States.

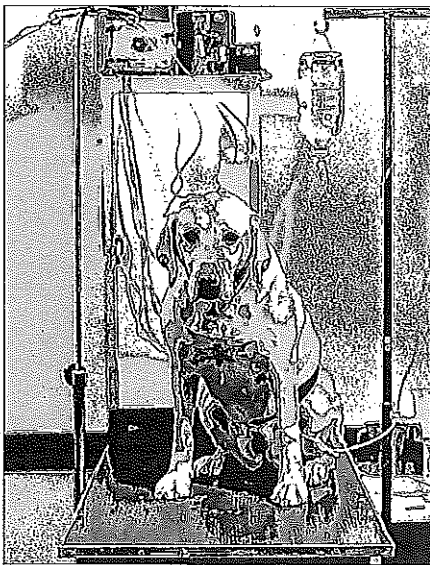
What is perhaps the most serious incident occurred at the headquarters of the U.S. Surgical Corporation (USSC) in Connecticut on November 11, 1988. New York activist Fran Trutt was arrested as she placed an explosive device near the parking space of USSC's chief executive officer, Leon Hirsch.*

A threat of injury or death can also be considered a form of violence, as can a threat of vandalism, arson, or bombing. It is difficult to verify that a threat of personal injury or property damage has been made and therefore difficult to get an accurate count of such threats, but dozens of people in the animal-research field claim to have received them.

Animal-research proponents have designated the violent acts and threats as terrorism. The label has not only stuck but also

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* USSC had long been a target of protest. At issue was the company's practice of having its salespeople use live dogs in demonstrating the operation of its surgical staplers to surgeons. After Ms. Trutt's arrest, the police found additional bombs at her New York residence. She was convicted of illegal possession of explosive devices. She was also charged with attempted murder. Ms. Trutt maintained that she had planted a bomb to scare Mr. Hirsch, not to murder him. Many members of the animal-rights community viewed her trial as an opportunity to resolve an allegation that she had been a victim of entrapment. Ms. Trutt eventually pleaded no contest to the charge of attempted murder, stating that doing so would permit her to have the earliest reunion with her dogs.



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been applied broadly and uncritically. A June 1990 news-wire story began, "The nation's top health official portrayed animal-rights activists as 'terrorists.'" The story was referring to a remark made by the secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Louis Sullivan, during a pro-animal-research press conference held a few days before the June 10, 1990, March for the Animals in Washington, D.C. (The press conference was timed to undermine the impact of the march, which was a peaceful and lawful gathering of tens of thousands of animal activists.)

Animal-research proponents have too readily applied the term *violence*—as well as *terrorism*—to such acts as breaking into laboratories and stealing animals and documents or other materials. Those acts, though illegal, do not constitute violence unless accompanied by vandalism or threatening messages left for laboratory personnel. To be sure, however, vandalism and threatening messages are not an infrequent accompaniment of the break-ins.

Most Americans object to violence as a means of advocating social change and believe in the pursuit of social change through nonviolent means. There is at the same time considerable public support for nonviolent but illegal activities such as nonviolent civil disobedience. At issue is violence's terroristic nature. Americans abhor terrorism.

The HSUS is unequivocally opposed to violence conducted in the name of animal protection. That has always been the case, but we have felt the need recently not only to decry violent acts but also to counter the statements of our opponents, who have seized upon the issue for its propaganda value.

Early in 1990 The HSUS, in conjunction with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, drafted and endorsed a resolution on nonviolence. The three organizations distributed the resolution to scores of other animal-protection groups and encouraged them to endorse it as well. On January 29, 1991, the three sponsors ran a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* containing the nonviolence resolution and other "joint resolutions for the 1990s" (see the text of the resolutions on page 24) in addition to a list of the endorsing organizations.

To inform the scientific community of the position expressed in the resolution on nonviolence, The HSUS sent a letter to the editor of the leading international scientific journal, *Science*. That letter appeared on September 21, 1990. We have also written to Secretary Sullivan to take issue with his repeated characterization of animal-protection activists as terrorists.

In testimony submitted to two congressional committees that were considering legislation designed to protect research facilities from being subjected to illegal acts, I wrote:

Let me begin by stressing our long-standing and firmly held view that we abhor violence in any form and have consistently used, and encouraged the use of, legal means for achieving the protection of animals. The HSUS not only opposes arson, vandalism, theft, and threats and acts of violence against people but also believes that such acts do not advance the cause of animal protection.

In speaking out against violent acts, we have questioned the perpetrators' means of trying to advance their cause, but we have not questioned their commitment to animal protection. Nor have we overlooked the fact that violence and intimidation have also been directed at animal protectionists.

It is undeniable that our opponents are exploiting the issue of violence as a propaganda tool. In his 1990 report to the members of The HSUS, delivered at the society's annual conference in October, President John A. Hoyt observed:

It should be clear to the most casual observer . . . that many animal users, such as the furriers, researchers, and agribusiness leaders, are attempting to discredit all animal activists by placing labels such as "violent" or "destroyer of property" on everyone and every group working on behalf of animals. And, unfortunately, they are succeeding in convincing a large segment of Congress and the American public that what they say is so.

It is not surprising, therefore, that there is a growing backlash against almost any kind of activism on behalf of animals. Animal-research advocates are already involving the specter of violence to advance their agenda beyond simply discrediting animal protectionists. In addition to seeking federal and state legislation that would prohibit violent acts, our opponents have

sought legislative provisions that would erect iron curtains of secrecy around laboratories. They have aggressively opposed greater public involvement in, and access to, animal-research review committees, arguing that violence and disruption would result.

The chief rationales for violence in the name of animal rights are economic sabotage and intimidation. Repairing damage to laboratories is costly, as is installing new security systems; when such expenditures are required, less money is likely to be allocated for animal research. Intimidation is meant to drive the scientists subjected to it and other scientists out of the animal-research field.

Sabotage and intimidation may have the intended effects over the short term, but even if one leaves aside their ethical ramifications, is there any evidence that they produce success over the long term? The economic damage inflicted to date has been relatively insignificant. Attempts at intimidation can backfire—and to a certain extent already have done so—and inadvertently build resolve within the target population.

There is no question that some nonviolent but illegal actions have fostered insights that might not otherwise have come to light as well as a new awareness of animal-protection issues. Few people who viewed the videotapes stolen from the University of Pennsylvania's head-injury laboratory in 1984, which depict experiments performed on baboons, could thereafter cling to the naive view that all is well in the nation's animal-research laboratories.**

Unfortunately, incidents of theft and other illegal acts are likely to occur as long as some animal advocates feel that they have no other recourse in the face of what they believe to be intolerable conditions for animals. It is, of course, imperative to institute measures that will not only prevent conditions from becoming intolerable but

** The videotapes were shot by researchers and intended to serve as a visual archive of their work. In a typical experiment, a baboon was strapped to a table and its head was cemented to a helmetlike device. The device was designed to jerk the animal's head extremely rapidly and thereby inflict brain damage. The tapes also depict laboratory personnel joking about the appearance of a disoriented and incapacitated baboon, smoking during surgery, and injuring a baboon's ear as the helmetlike device is being chipped off the animal's head. Also depicted is an obviously under-anesthetized animal about to be injured experimentally.

also rectify conditions that, for one reason or another, have become seriously deficient. Even that is not enough, however. The public should not be kept in the dark about what is happening behind laboratory doors. Secrecy breeds suspicion, and suspicion often breeds a reaction of an undesirable kind. The process of animal research must be subjected to more public scrutiny and access. To do so would be good public policy, not appeasement.

To be sure, even if such measures were put in place, violence and illegal acts at laboratories would probably not disappear altogether. The practice of conducting a break-in in order to liberate animals, for example, is likely to continue for as long as animals are used in laboratories. However, when violent and illegal acts did occur, they would find even less favor among the general public, trigger an even greater backlash, and perhaps eventually diminish in number.

Violence, break-ins, and other illegal acts no longer serve to bring animal research to the attention of policymakers and the public. Such research has already been made a significant issue of our time. Now that we have that attention, we should work peacefully but aggressively for much-needed reforms and hope that our opportunities to do so are not jeopardized by well-meaning but misguided acts of violence. ■

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