

The Humane Society Institute for Science and Policy
Animal Studies Repository

3-18-1979

Metcalfe-Hatch Act: Profit, Politics and Pain

Henry Spira

Follow this and additional works at: <https://animalstudiesrepository.org/hensart>

 Part of the [Animal Experimentation and Research Commons](#), [Bioethics and Medical Ethics Commons](#), and the [Laboratory and Basic Science Research Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Spira, H. (1979, March 18). Metcalfe-Hatch Act: profit, politics and pain. Our Town.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Humane Society Institute for Science and Policy. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of the Animal Studies Repository. For more information, please contact eyahner@humanesociety.org.



Metcalfe-Hatch Act: Profit, Politics and Pain

Henry Spira

New York State's Metcalfe-Hatch Act forces tax supported pounds and shelters to turn over unwanted cats and dogs to New York laboratories. Such a law sets the precedent for unlimited laws which abuse the rights of animals and abuse the rights of citizens who care about animals. A coalition has been formed to abolish Metcalfe-Hatch.

Metcalfe-Hatch (MH) perverts a shelter's function. Instead of animals being reunited with their homes, being adopted as pets, or, as is usually the case, being humanely killed,--the shelter/pound is forced into becoming a collection agency to recycle unwanted pets into labs, where cruelty is legal and where they suffer without end.

An Unpopular Evil

People who are aware of MH will abandon animals rather than risk having them bodysnatched into labs. And this places additional tax burdens for rounding up abandoned strays. The cost of stray animals is already \$400 million a year in the USA.

The evil MH was passed in 1952 despite popular opposition. It is so unpopular, it cannot be enforced. And the NY State Assembly voted to repeal MH on Feb. 15, 1978 by 119 to 16. In 1977, the Assembly voted to repeal by 110 to 22. In 1978, Tarky.Lombardi, Chairman of the senate Health Committee, did not permit his committee to vote. And thus, it never reached the Senate floor. To pass, a repeal bill must be approved by the Assembly, Senate and Governor Hugh Carey.

40 Nobel Prize Laureates

Meanwhile, the tide is turning and animal rights is becoming a serious issue among creative researchers. Thus, the Federation of American Scientists, sponsored by 40 Nobel Prize Laureates, devoted an entire report to animal rights. And the World Medical Journal featured eight pages on "humanity towards animals" suggesting that imaginative scientists are using cell culture systems as one of the modern alternatives to live animals. But our tax dollars continue to promote the cruel and crude routine animal experiments.

The taxpayers' wishes are being trampled on to serve the special interests who profit from battering and violating the bodies of innocent animals who have done harm to nobody.

New York remains one among only 10 states to force the seizure of lab animals from pounds and shelters. Eight states absolutely forbid it: California, Florida, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island: No serious claim can be made that science has suffered in the 40 states which do not force orphaned animals into labs.

The .00001% Priority

In 1978, 1,033 dogs and 64 cats were seized by New York State Department Health labs. As a result of massive pressure, including threats of boycotts and public exposure, there has been a steady decline since 1971 when 8,000 dogs and 5,700 cats were seized in the state. And the current total of 1,097

animals (even if the true figures are triple that number), must be seen within the context of an annual lab population of 100 million animals, including an estimated 500,000 to two million cats and dogs.

David Axelrod, MD, director of the State of New York Division of Laboratories and Research, admits that "the economic impact of repeal at this time would not approach the impact there might have been in previous years. We nevertheless remain steadfast in our support" of the MH Act (April 10, 1978 letter).

Power, Profit, Pain

The issue is certainly not money. At most, MH saves the labs \$30,000 a year. But in Rochester, New York, alone, researchers grabbed \$14.5 million of our tax monies, in one year, just through the National Institutes of Health. If tax monies is the issue, then we need a General Accounting Office probe of Rochester and of the entire \$3 billion a year live animal lab industry.

Let the public see the true face of the ghoulish public works program created for principal investigators who pocket an average of \$54,000 a year (HEW Hearings Feb. 24, 1976). And for Charles River Inc., breeders of 18 million lab animals a year, which has increased its profits by 91 percent during the past five years (Standard & Poor's, Jan. 10, 1979). Innocent animals are suffering for profit's sake. And the issue is certainly not that repeal will hamper the progress of science. On the contrary, the National Academy of Sciences reported that among pound cats, "mortality rates in cats arriving at research facilities often reached 30 percent. As one might expect, many of the survivors were unsuitable for experimental purposes" (1978).

Similarly, Dean Robert Von Citters of the University of Washington School of Medicine, ridiculed "the use of the semi-starved, anemic pound animal" at a conference of 1,000 animal experimenters.

Real Health Priorities

Meanwhile, Senator Edward Kennedy calls for more support to develop alternatives to animal testing (press release, Feb. 15, 1978). And Donald Kennedy, head of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), admitted that "compared with most other contemporary biological techniques, animal testing is crude, cumbersome and expensive" (Human Nature May 1978).

There's also a shifting of health priorities. The government's "Forward Plan for Health" suggests that the greatest benefits will come from "efforts to improve the health habits of all Americans and the environment in which they live and work."

But others want to turn the clock backwards. A supporter of the evil MH Act is J. Howard Oaks, vice president for Health Sciences at Stonybrook, SUNY. He projects a boundless increase of animal suffering. "In a decade, our use of dogs will increase from the current 250 per year to about 17 times that number, or just over 4,000" (letter, Apr. 7, 1978).

Living Without Cruelty

The real issue is whether the suffering of lab animals matters. Are they mere lab tools? Or does their pain have to be taken into account? Will we permit the lab animal syndicate to expand the holocaust or will we demand accountability. There is a new ethic which says that biomedical research needs to be modernized and sensitized. That where alternatives are available they must be used and where there are none, they must be developed.

The ruling British Labour Party recently issued a "Charter for Animal Protection-Living Without Cruelty." it says, "The way a society treats its animals is an indication of the nature of the society itself."

Animal Rights Into Politics

It's time we brought animal rights into politics. That we hold our legislators accountable, at election time, for their actions. Are they responsive to demands for justice or are they catering to callous special interests?

The Coalition

Now, a Coalition to Abolish MH has been formed.

The steering committee includes the initiators and organizers of two animal rights' victories: halting cat-sex experiments at the American Museum of Natural History and the burning and shocking of pigs by Amnesty International members are: Pegeen Fitzgerald, Regina Frankenberg, Edward and Arlene Kayatt, and John F. Kullberg.

Sponsoring organizations include: ASPCA, Fund for Animals, Humane Society of the US, Lobby for Animals, Millennium Guild, Our Town, Society for Animal Protective Legislation, Students for Animal Rights, United Action for Animals, Vivisection Investigation League, NY Animal Adoption Society, NY State Humane Association, Animal Liberation Inc., Town of Babylon Animal Shelter, Washington County SPCA, Kent Animal Shelter Inc., Columbia-Greene Humane Society Inc., SPCA of Westchester County, NY Inc., Niagara County SPCA, Oswego County Animal Welfare League Inc., Animal Protective Foundation of Schenectady Inc., Animal Welfare League of Westchester County NY Inc., Stray Haven Humane Society Inc., Long Island Humane & Dog Protection Assn. Inc., Rockland County SPCA, Central Westchester Humane Soc., Humane Society of Rochester & Monroe County, Saratoga County Animal Welfare League, Pioneers for Animal Welfare Society.

New York organizations concerned with the welfare of animals are invited to join the Coalition. Mailing address:

**Coalition to Abolish Metcalf-Hatch
507 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY. 10017
212/PL2-0002**

We'll be fighting an uphill battle. Senate Majority Leader Warren Anderson is now saying, "Let the chips fall where they may." Senate Minority Leader Manfred Ohrenstein is playing evasive games and Chairman Lombardi is against repeal. But we've proven before that, when a cause is just, audacity and tenacity fused with an awareness of social attitudes, power relations and a serious concern for strategy and tactics, can win victories. We're going to bring animal rights into politics. And we're demanding that legislators represent their constituents instead of obstructing justice for the sake of special interests.

Recommended Citation:

Spira, H. (1979, March 18). Metcalf-Hatch Act: profit, politics and pain. *Our Town*.

