Three principal strategies for effecting nonviolent social change have been employed historically: converting others to a minority viewpoint, largely through intellectual and moral suasion; reaching agreements with the established power structure by accommodating the various interests through compromise; and creating disequilibrium within the structure of a society through the application of intense social, political, and economic pressure. By relying almost exclusively on conversion and accommodation and only rarely on the skillful application of pressure, animalines believes our movement has inadvertently contributed to perpetuating the cycle of abuse—becoming more a part of the problem than the solution. animalines does not intend to disparage the efforts of any individual or organization, as we need a pluralistic movement operating effectively on many fronts. It’s long overdue, however, that we begin to apply stringent standards of critical analysis to ourselves, as our lamentable performance record cries out for reassessment.

animalines has frequently implored our movement to examine the historical dynamics of previous social justice movements, as, without this larger context, we will forever be haphazardly responding to symptoms and piecing together broken bodies. History alone provides us with successful models for social change, and, by identifying the parallels, analyzing the dissimilarities, adjusting for the cultural, economic, and political variables unique to each struggle, the possibility emerges for a coherent and comprehensive strategy. As mentioned above, historically, our movement has relied almost exclusively on the traditional reform approaches of conversion and accommodation, and animalines has often participated in such efforts; however, for reasons we will elaborate on shortly, there is precious little historical support for these approaches—and even less when applied to other beings.

No area more closely correlates with the dynamics of animal oppression than the sordid practice of human slavery. When one traces slavery in all its perverse forms, locations, and eras—from enslavement by birth to enslavement of “free” persons, from the Near East to Western slave societies, from the ancient and medieval world to the present—it’s manifestly evident that oppression does not bow to intellectual persuasion or altruistic appeal. This dramatically limits traditional reform movements as vehicles for liberation, as they are predicated on the patently absurd assumption that the human animal is a rational and altruistic being—and clearly our species has rarely been either for more than a fleeting sec-

Slow Dancing in All the Wrong Places

By Edward S. Duvin

Edward S. Duvin is editor of animalines, from which this essay is reprinted. animalines is a program of The HSUS.
the pie. Thus, the forces of dialectical materialism—historical change resulting from conflicts between economic classes—are considerably subdued.

This perception of upward-class mobility is a critical factor, as it effectively co-opts opposition factions and explains the propensity of this country (and our movement) to exercise extraordinary moderation in protesting even the most egregious forms of abuse. Most American reform movements are largely comprised of middle-class Caucasians who respond to specific injustices rather than underlying systemic causes, as movement leaders are products of a larger society conditioned to believe the system works for them—and, from their perspective, the system does, indeed, work! So traditional reformers play patty-cake with the system does, indeed, work! So traditional reform methods succeeded only after unrelenting stress was placed on the infrastructure of society. On no less a moral issue than slavery, in a land whose rhetoric extols the virtues of freedom, it required a civil war to liberate slaves—and, even then, economic considerations in the North, while seldom discussed openly, probably played a greater role than profound concern for slaves. So it has been with most social revolutions, such as the French Revolution, where the verbiage was noble but the driving force was economic. The salient point is that our movement, notwithstanding our limited numbers and resources, must utilize every nonviolent measure at our disposal to raise the economic and political price of exploiting other beings, for nothing less will move us from cosmetic face-lifts to substantive change.

How do we raise the price? Not by relying primarily on traditional reform methods, but through producing intense pressure on those parts of the societal structure that are saturated with blood—enabling the instrumentality of torture to fall by their own weight. We are talking about radical change, radical in the literal sense of reaching the root of the problem, which has never and will never be achieved through a top-down approach which seeks remedy from the the very corporate and political sources of power that profit most from the status quo. Animalines is not seeking a confrontational posture toward the existing power structure, but strategic forms of community-based activism designed to make the cost of oppression prohibitive.

The need for a bolder and more innovative form of activism is even greater in the animal-rights/environmental movement than other progressive movements, as we represent a constituency that cannot withhold their productivity from the system or express their dissent to the brutality inflicted upon them. Human liberation movements, be they in South Africa or Poland, depend principally on empowering the victims to assert their own freedom from oppression. As humans participating in the life of a society, we are always existentially responsible for our choices; for the animals, however, there are no choices, and thus we must act for them by proxy—and our collective actions must be forceful enough to compensate for our constituency necessarily being passive agents. This dynamic, combined with a generally co-opted middle class and relatively powerless economic underclass, all within a country that has transformed materialism into godliness, compels us to extend our efforts to the outer limits of creativity, tenacity, and pressure.

Raising the price of oppression is obviously a formidable challenge, requiring a level of vision and sacrifice that has heretofore been lacking in our movement. With the exception of defense-related expenditures, animals and animal by-products represent the largest economic component in our culture, and a walk along any commercial block indicates the incredible degree animals are woven into the economic fabric of this society—food, clothing, cosmetics, household products, research, recreation, and on and on ad infinitum. Animals suffer mercilessly and die to boost the gross national product, enhance profits, and feed the insatiable appetites of the human animal. Our movement responds to this slaughter with noble rhetoric and a tin cup extended to the powers that be—as though they will altruistically act against their own best interests. This surreal approach defies both history and common sense, for people act out of self-interest—and we must begin to nonviolently turn their interests inside out. Many will disagree with this analysis and that's as it should be, but please think twice about seeking change through pandering to the morally bankrupt, as history and your own conscience hold the answers.