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Henry Spira
Animal Rights International

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Henry Spira

Animal Rights International

I'd like to explain why we (Animal Rights International) and others want Frank Perdue off the Board of Regents.

Some have suggested that outside activists, like ourselves, have no business getting involved with this issue. This makes about as much sense as a New Yorker ignoring civil rights in the South, (I didn't, I marched in Mississippi in the 60's), or pretending that the hole in the ozone layer is someone else's problem until it reaches our latitude. Similarly, every Perdue-type appointment eats away at that invisible shield which protects the vulnerable; be they people, birds or the Virginia waterways.

This is not simply an issue of what's good or not good for the U. of MD pocketbook. What's at stake here is how universities choose role models for their students. When Maryland honored Perdue with a seat on its Board of Regents, what kind of message were they sending to their students?

Were they saying that it's O.K. to view the Mafia as a silent partner when your workers try to organize in response to abuses in the work-place? (See the President's Commission on Organized Crime, March 1986, pp 191-214.) Because that's what Perdue did. And after being exposed, he responded that it was the stupidest thing he ever did. But it was not stupid enough for Perdue to break his ongoing ties with the Mafia-connected distributors who still deliver his products to supermarkets (Baltimore City Paper 4/30/92, p. 14)

Were they saying that it's OK to deliberately lie to the government about injuries to your slaughterhouse workers? Because that's what Perdue did, -- and he received a record fine. (The North Carolina News and Observer 10/14/89.)

Or that it's OK to spend \$20,000,000 a year deceiving consumers about the quality of your products when your workers and USDA inspectors have testified to a Senate panel that it's a lie? (Sen. Metzenbaum's June 28, 1991 Hearings on S.1324.)

And isn't it hypocritical that Perdue is willing to pay millions for respectability and status while his workers, mostly minority females, are humiliated and degraded, forced to urinate on the Perdue processing line because they can't get permission to leave it? (Washington Post 3/10/89.)

Universities need money to operate, but when they compromise their integrity to get it, they undermine the very foundation on which they are attempting to build. No university should be willing to settle for anything less than a role model who embodies what's best in our society, -- concern for others, be they human or non-human animals, and concern for protecting the environment.

Perdue is not likely to change-any time soon. In fact he's hardly likely to admit he's doing anything wrong. As he said to FBI agent O'Brien, when confronted with his dealings with the Mafia, "I'll lie to you if I have

to, Joe, to protect my business ... " (Boss of Bosses. Simon & Schuster 1991 p 87.) Kind of sums it all up, doesn't it?

Editor's note: University President Dr. Thomas Bellavance was asked to write a corresponding editorial supporting Mr. Perdue. He declined.

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