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Henry Spira
Animal Rights International

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The Meek Don't Make It

Henry Spira

Born 51 years ago in Antwerp, Belgium, Henry Spira ran away from home at 17 to join the Merchant Marine and took his first politics lesson in the National Maritime Union. After the Korean War he worked on a General Motors assembly line in New Jersey. "One thing you learned," Spira said, "is that the meek don't make it." In the late 1950s he first saw animal experiments in a laboratory while working his way through Brooklyn College. He joined the civil rights campaigns in the South and marched against the war in Vietnam, "from beginning to end." Henry Spira is now devoting his considerable energies to the fight for animal rights. He recently headed the campaign which successfully overturned the Metcalf-Hatch Act which permitted laboratories to confiscate animals from humane shelters for experimentation. One New York newspaper commented: "The repeal of Metcalf-Hatch is a major breakthrough for the animal rights movement and for the growing questioning of the lack of medical/industrial complex accountability of which animal experimentation forms a multi-billion dollar part." What follows are extracts from an essay by Henry Spira entitled Notes of An Animal Activist.

The fundamental lesson is that the meek don't make it. Audacity must be combined with attention to detail, with an awareness of social attitudes, power relations and scientific possibilities.

Effective actions are the result of people gaining confidence in their capacity to effect change. And confidence comes from winning limited victories which in turn become the stepping stones for further struggles and greater victories. And to be effective, we must relate to people's perceptions-though they may be myths fabricated by those who profit from them.

THE EMPEROR NAKED

The animal research industry cloaks itself in the noble cause of protecting human health and saving lives: a myth which is a source of their power. To challenge this fabrication, we targeted the American Museum of Natural History's 20-year cat-sex experiment. They were getting tax monies to deliberately blind deafen and mutilate the brains and sex organs of cats and kittens, in order to then study their sexual performance.

We reproduced and circulated hundreds of documents acquired through the Freedom of Information Act. We challenged Museum officials to public debates. And we stopped the funding of this bizarre horror through massive demonstrations and wide publicity. In the process, we helped change the ideological climate. We questioned the lack of payoff in make-work research projects. We focused on a crude and ghoulish big business which rips off \$3 billion from taxpayers while creating a living hell for 100 million lab animals a year.

The Museum skirmish was a significant, symbolic victory. We moved from rhetoric to struggle. We increased awareness within the research community and the public. And our protests were discussed in Congress, which funded these atrocities.

AMNESTY FOR ANIMALS

Our next action involved Amnesty International's experiments in which live pigs were electric shocked and burned.

Veterans of the Museum struggle, with the credibility earned from a hundred marches, threatened AI with massive protests and media publicity. We spoke with their leadership and produced an extensive memo, suggesting their medical resources should help victims of torture instead of creating additional victims. As a result of pressure from their own membership and from animal activists, AI no longer participates in any animal experiments.

BIOLOGY: WHAT'S LIFE WORTH?

A worthwhile protest, which can be mounted with few resources, focuses on the traditional and repetitive school frog and fetal pig butcherings to prove what's already known. We're asking: What values do we want youth to grow up with? What's life worth? Should schools promote moral amnesia? Is murder forbidden except when the biology teacher says it's OK? We are challenging the animal researchers' desensitising of young people to accept nonhumans as "lab tools" and to then seduce them into live animal research.

Protests can be sparked through letters to the newspapers, PTAs, community groups, poster picketline and leaflet distribution which can generate schoolwide walkouts. Plant seeds with students and then step back. Demand that tax-supported schools abolish live animal experiments because schools should focus on a gentle, life-affirming society. As a last resort, demand that students who are Conscientious Objectors have the option to perform projects which do not inflict pain. All these activities are consciousness raising since they question the ethic of inflicting pain on others.

CAMPUS CLUBS

There is enormous potential energy and dedication on campus. The college community has frequently led the way in fighting against injustice.

Demand that live animal labs be opened to TV and press photographers during and after the experiments. Let the campus community see, feel and hear what's being done.

Organise study-discussion groups. Mobilize grassroots sentiment. Demonstrate at live poultry markets when the chicken trucks arrive so the media can photograph it. Take photos--they're worth more than a thousand words-of animals in factory farms and in labs, recycle these photos into the mass media and to photo agencies. Write to the editor, organize community meetings, picket campus animal labs. A healthy society is not compatible with deliberately inflicting pain on the powerless.

ANIMAL RIGHTS INTO POLITICS

Bring animal rights into politics. Future coalitions could focus on the widely used Draize Test in which rabbits are restrained in stocks. Everything, from shampoo to rocket fuel, is tested in their eyes and no pain relief is used. Reactions include inflammation of the iris, hemorrhage, ulceration.

Organise coalitions to abolish the LD50, the most common use of lab animals. All chemicals and drugs are tested by finding the lethal dose from which 50% of the animals die -- with no pain relief used. Sometimes enormous quantities are pumped into the animals by stomach tube. The crude LD50 and Draize tests are incompatible with modern research and with increasing concern for animal suffering. These targets are gross, shocking and very vulnerable.

A possible spin-off could be animal activist candidates with a human-and-animal rights platform gaining access to the mass media during local and national political campaigns.

The animal holocaust creates a world of the living dead, of total domination. Most nonhuman animals live with fear, terror, torture and pain. We who oppose slavery must speak for the voiceless. We must raise consciousness, make an impact, create meaningful change, find bridges--bridges to move people, to propel awareness forward. And we need to remember the words of Frederick Douglass, the Abolitionist: "If there is no struggle, there is no progress."

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