Editorial

Neuroreality I.
Dedicated Demolition of the Decade of the Brain: The Genuine Threat to Neurologic Research From the Animal Radical Right

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EDITOR’S NOTE

In this era of budgetary constraints, the biggest threat to continuing biomedical research is often seen as governmental funding cutbacks. However, a much larger threat looms—the antiscientific programs of the various so-called animal rights groups. Unless clinicians and scientists mount a concerted defense of scientific investigation, the repressive antiscience movement will win out and thrust us into a Dark Ages scenario, with only a few gallant enough to maintain scientific thought until another Enlightenment. During World War II, the German clergyman Martin Niemoeller lamented the general apathy that allowed a small group of dedicated ideologues (the Nazi hierarchy) to terrorize the Germans: “In Germany they came first for the Communists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn’t speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up.” Not dissimilarly, the apathy of clinicians and biomedical scientists has permitted the radical animal rights movement to terrorize researchers and undermine our research freedom. In a call to action, the American Academy of Neurology has developed a statement (in association with the Foundation for Biomedical Research and other groups) on the threat to neurology research. This information was originally published in Neurology (1995;45: 609-610). In order to increase the dissemination of this important warning to clinicians and scientists everywhere, the Journal of Child Neurology in cooperation with the American Academy of Neurology is reprinting that material in this issue.

PRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM

The Felonious Fringe

Over the last decade, dozens of neuroscience research projects have been victims of criminal break-ins by animal rights extremists. Their evangelical leaders surely cannot be charged with malicious subtlety:

“Even painless research is fascism, supremacism.”
“I don’t believe human beings have ‘the right to life.’ That’s a supremacist perversion. A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy.”
“Animal research is immoral even if it is essential.”
“Even if animal tests produced a cure for AIDS, we’d be against it.”
“Only Joe Six-Packs of science, not the Einsteins, go into animal experimentation.”
“It’s not better cages we work for, but empty cages.”
“Economic loss is the only thing the vivisector understands. We have to make them pay higher premiums before we shut them down completely.”
“Ending animal research is as urgent as the obligation to crush the Nazi oppression of the Jews.”
“Meat eating is primitive, barbaric and arrogant, and pet ownership is fascism.”

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**News Reports From the Animal Research Rights Battlefields**

"Dr. Michael Carey, a neurosurgeon in Vietnam and now Professor of Neurosurgery at Louisiana State University School of Medicine, was targeted by animal rights extremists in 1989. Their protests and false charges halted his federally supported research on missile wounds to the brain. Drs. Carey and Oseid [his wife] repeatedly have been picketed, harassed, defamed and have received anonymous death threats. While under personal and professional attack, Dr. Carey served in the Desert Storm operation as the only neurological surgeon with Vietnam combat-wound experience. During his four months in Saudi Arabia, Dr. Oseid, also an LSU School of Medicine professor as well as pediatrician in private practice, remained in New Orleans. She spoke out in defense of her husband and colleague, fielding constant mail and phone threats to their home."

"Animal Rights Guerrillas Trash Professor’s Office

The office of a University of Pennsylvania professor who has frequently defended laboratory experimentation on animals was vandalized over the weekend."

"Woman is Charged With Trying to Kill U.S. Surgical Chief

Police in Norwalk, Conn., arrested a woman and charged her with attempting to kill Leon C. Hirsch, U.S. Surgical Corp.’s chairman, president and chief executive officer. Fran Stephanie Trutt of New York said she is an animal-rights activist. U.S. Surgical uses anesthetized animals in testing its equipment for surgical stapling, an alternative to stitches for closing wounds."

"13 Dogs Used in Research Are ‘Liberated’

Thirteen beagles used for medical research at University of California, Irvine, have been stolen by an animal rights group that said it broke into the campus kennel and freed the dogs to spare them the ‘pain and misery’ of more research."

"23 SSU Lab Rats are Testing Freedom Today

Creeping into a Sacramento State University building at night, a group of animal rights advocates ‘liberated’ 23 laboratory rats."

"Protesters Kidnap Cats from UC Lab

A group calling itself the Urban Gorillas stole a cat and two kittens from a campus psychology laboratory early Tuesday in protest of the mistreatment of research animals. The protesters left a Christmas card wishing ‘peace and love to all’ and a lengthy typewritten letter in a basement laboratory in Tolman Hall at the University of California."

"Chimps Stolen From AIDS Lab

Animal rights activists have stolen four baby chimpanzees to be used for AIDS and hepatitis research from a medical laboratory here, representatives of an animal rights group said today."

"Arson Investigators Eye Davis Man

Law enforcement agencies [are] on the trail of a Davis man in connection with the $2.5 million arson fire that heavily damaged a UC Davis veterinary diagnostic laboratory on April 16."

Although Congress recently enacted new federal statutes regarding such crimes, the threat of laboratory invasion and personal attack has greatly increased the operating and security expenditures of every neuroscience research laboratory. As a result, with decreasing research funding, the actual up-front cost of research productivity has been wastefully increased.

**REALPOLITIK I: DIRECT CONFRONTATION IN THE JUDICIAL AND LEGISLATIVE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT**

The anti-medical research operation is led by dedicated and clever True Believers. They recognize that shards in the due process machinery may be more effective than violence. Reasonable estimates of their annual combined budgets range between 50 and 100 million dollars a year. They have aggressive strategies and full-time executors to advance them.

One recent approach through litigation was the effort to secure judicial authority to challenge the government’s scientifically based guidelines for ethical animal care. This controversy reached the federal appellate court level before the National Association for Biomedical Research won the decision. One legislative proposal is an Animal Bill of Rights, which states that “animals, like all sentient beings, are entitled to basic legal rights in our society.” Another approach is to strangle biomedical research in bureaucratic reporting and regulation. Such bills have been called “The Animal Experimentation Right to Know Act” and the “Information Dissemination and Research Accountability Act.”

Several states have already passed laws to prohibit vertebrate animal science demonstration in the schools or even dead animal dissection exercises. In many communities, ordinances prevent the use of unclaimed dogs and cats in public pounds for humane research, but do require that abandoned animals be destroyed.

**REALPOLITIK II: FIFTH-COLUMN SUBVERSION OF COMMUNITY AGENCIES AND EDUCATION**

At the grass roots level, the antiresearch neighbors have moved into operational control of humane animal care organizations and school programs, both public and private. Professionally produced campaign materials of falsehood and half-truth persuade many citizens and politicians to accept their ideas. Dr. Frederick A. King, an early leader against these antiresearch sects, has pointed out that we should reject the strident style used by our opponents:

“I think the way to defeat the animal rights movement is through educating the public, government administrators, legislators, and especially students and teachers. We need to make sure that textbooks in our schools and classroom curricula are honest, fair, and objective, and that they emphasize humane treatment of animals while showing the tremendous benefits that have come from animal research. We know PETA [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals] and other groups are already in the schools, setting up special courses. Right now, science education for teachers as well as their students is terribly inadequate. We must try to influence in an honest way the education of teachers so that they will understand, not only the achievements of biomedical science, but how the process of science works.”
COMMENT

It won’t help for neuroscientists and neurologists to bay at the moon and cry political foul play. The direction of national public policy for medical research belongs to the people. Our neurologic patients and their families are the true vested interest parties in neuroscience research. The word “doctor” means teacher. We can contribute if we recognize our own responsibility for public education. Our piece of the act is to teach the citizens who need neurologic care that neuroscience research involving the use of animals must continue if better treatments are ever to be attained. These voters must be brought to appreciate their ultimate power to effect moral and economic support for ethical medical research.

The Animal Studies Subcommittee of the American Academy of Neurology has prepared an informational brochure; an order form appears on page 610B [see Figure 1B]. We urge every neurologist to order a stack of these brochures and to distribute them conspicuously in the waiting room. Beyond the brochure, we expect that every neurologist will discuss these scientific and ethical issues with patients and families. The committee will continue to provide follow-up news articles about animal research issues. The members will also be glad to provide ad hoc assistance in response to troublesome questions that may come forward in patient discussions.

CONCLUSION

Well-informed popular support for ethical and humane medical research is not a phenomenon of spontaneous generation. The animal radical right has clearly proved this point. In our own field, we neurologists are the best qualified educators. If we fail to become effective components of the long-term solution, then we are, indeed, a major part of the problem. The responsibility is ours.