

# HHS Halts Animal Experiment

*A grant to the University of Pennsylvania for trauma research on primates has been suspended because of animal rights' allegations*

For more than 15 years, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania have been conducting studies of head injury using primates as experimental subjects. Each time their grant has come up for renewal, it has been approved as one of only a handful of such research on head trauma, a leading cause of death in accident victims. On 17 May, the advisory council to the National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Disorders and Stroke approved a recommendation to renew the grant, which has a priority score in the 120's, for 5 years. However, this time NIH officials put the renewal on hold while they investigated allegations that the researchers are needlessly cruel to their baboons.

On 18 July, Health and Human Services Secretary Margaret Heckler announced that, on the basis of a preliminary report from NIH, she has directed that the grant be suspended "until all questions about the use of primates in these head injury experiments have been resolved." Heckler declined to make the report public until the university has had a chance to respond. "It's a real blow to the university," says Thomas Langfitt, a neurosurgeon who is vice-president for health affairs and heads the university's trauma research team. "I am real surprised by it. I don't understand it," he says.

The NIH report is said to charge that there was insufficient supervision and training of the researchers who worked with the primates. NIH officials say, however, that the university told them it had revised experimental and training procedures that address many, if not all, of the deficiencies cited in the report.

Allegations of mistreatment were made more than a year ago by animal rights activists associated with the Animal Liberation Front and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (*Science*, 22 June 1984, p. 1319). The origins of the case are summarized in an NIH status report prepared for Congress, which was made public before the report of the investigation was sent to Heckler. In May of 1984, it says, "individuals claiming to represent the Animal Liberation Front broke into the laboratory, damaged equipment and destroyed records." The vandals also stole videotapes that

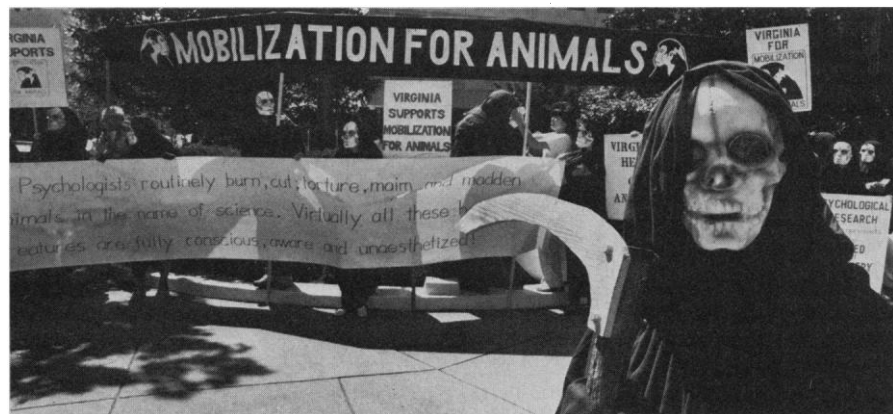
the researchers made to document more than 60 hours of experimental work.

The experiments at issue are ones in which a baboon, whose head is encased in a helmet, is subjected to a sudden jerking motion delivered by a specially designed piston. The shock, which is similar to whiplash in automobile accident victims, creates a coma in the animal. Data from these studies indicate that the shock causes injury to the axons of nerve cells, with the severity of injury proportional to the severity of the coma. Research is directed at finding ways to limit or even reverse the brain damage.

The videotapes, which show the animals during and after injury, have been edited down to about 30 minutes and have been shown around the country. The edited version reportedly attempts to show that the researchers are callous toward the animals and are negligent about providing anesthesia. Shortly after

investigation because it is on the basis of this record of what happened during experimental studies that animal rights activists claim noncompliance with the Public Health Service Policy for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. Thus, NIH was in the uncomfortable position of investigating a grantee on the basis of evidence obtained through the commission of a crime.

According to the recent status report, "NIH's investigation of these allegations has been impeded for almost a year by the unwillingness of these animal rights activists to give NIH unconditional possession of complete copies of the unaltered videotapes." In the end, PETA turned them over to the Department of Agriculture which was considering use of its subpoena power to get hold of them. (NIH had no subpoena power in this case.) "Copies of the tapes were finally turned over to NIH in successive



**Animal rights protest**

John Phillips/*Chronicle of Higher Education*

*The movement has succeeded in gaining national attention.*

the break-in, NIH officials recognized that there would have to be a formal investigation and, they report, efforts were made to obtain the tapes from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). Says one official, "At first our letters went unanswered. Then they tried to negotiate with us over the tapes. We were under a lot of pressure to conduct our investigation. The incident received a lot of publicity and we got calls from Congress. But we could not really look into this thing without the tapes."

The videotapes are at the heart of the

installments between 14 May and 23 May 1985, by the Department of Agriculture, which had received them from the activists during April and early May," the report states.

The head injury work is highly regarded by researchers at NIH and by those at universities. Although work on brain injury has been conducted at the university for 15 years, the baboon studies were initiated only 5 years ago after studies with other primates failed to produce comas resembling those that occur in human accident victims.

The NIH status report lists contribu-

tions the research has made to the care of patients, citing the management of metabolic imbalance in the brain in comatose patients, and the use of the drug mannitol to treat edema or swelling of the brain after trauma as examples.

Like NIH, the university has appointed a committee to review the laboratory. That committee, appointed a couple of months ago, includes three members of the medical school faculty and also persons not affiliated with the university, with the head of the Pennsylvania SPCA among them. Its report will be published, as will the final report from the NIH.

So far, no one has been prosecuted for the burglary. A move to make break-ins at research laboratories a federal crime has recently been made in Congress. Representative George Brown (D-Calif.) has introduced a bill (HR 2654) that would levy a fine and/or imprisonment on anyone who vandalizes a research laboratory that uses live experimental animals.

Representative Brown also has introduced a bill (HR 2653) to strengthen the existing Animal Welfare Act. A similar bill (S 1233) has been introduced in the

Senate by Senator Robert Dole (R-Kansas).

In another development in the arena of research with animals, NIH has recently issued a special edition of its guide to grants and contracts. Dated 25 June, it provides researchers and institutions with the newest versions of four documents concerning regulation of animal studies, including the revised Public Health Service Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals by Awardee Institutions.

There is little doubt that renewed efforts to assure proper treatment of research animals has been spurred by the unrelenting, occasionally illegal, actions of animal rights activists, many of whom do not believe it is appropriate to use animals at all. The movement has succeeded in gaining attention nationwide and NIH officials frankly admit that politically it cannot be ignored. It is also acknowledged that some abuses have taken place and that the more stringent guidelines are in order.

Scientists who deplore the tactics of certain animal rights groups that resort to illegal activity nonetheless admit that

there has been room for improvement in the care and treatment of animals in the laboratory. Many institutions have let animal facilities deteriorate because of decisions to spend scarce resources elsewhere and the staffs of animal facilities are not always ideal in terms of number or training. There is little doubt that the animal welfare movement has accomplished some of its goals by focusing attention on the matter. According to one person familiar with the NIH review of the Pennsylvania lab, researchers there now are doing things better since the break-in. According to Langfitt, improvements in animal care techniques have "evolved" since the earliest baboon studies which are shown on the tapes. The university has made changes in training and supervision, he says.

Under normal NIH procedures, the agency will consider lifting the suspension after the university responds to the charges. Its response will be reviewed by a panel of NIH officials and institute directors who have not been involved in the investigation and a final decision will be made by NIH director James B. Wyngaarden.—BARBARA J. CULLITON

## Low-Level Waste Deadline Looms

*Unless Congress passes an acceptable bill by the end of the year, the disposal system could be plunged into chaos*

The nation's system for disposing of low-level radioactive wastes could be plunged into chaos at the end of this year unless Congress takes action to end a political stalemate over access to existing dump sites. The governors of the three states that house the only commercial low-level waste sites in the United States—at Hanford, Washington; Barnwell, South Carolina; and Beatty, Nevada—have served notice that they will not accept everybody else's nuclear garbage indefinitely. State officials have threatened to close access to these facilities on 1 January 1986 unless a strict timetable is developed to open up sites elsewhere.

This was not supposed to happen. In December 1980 Congress passed legislation aimed at getting new sites opened within 5 years. Not a single new facility has been built, however, and none is in prospect at least until the end of the decade.

Congress was prodded into passing the 1980 legislation after Washington, South Carolina, and Nevada, irked at becoming

the nation's nuclear dumping grounds, provoked a crisis by closing or restricting access to their dump sites in 1979. In the ensuing chaos, some medical and research facilities were reported to have been within 2 weeks of shutting down because they had nowhere to store radioactive waste materials.

The best hope for avoiding a similar crisis next year is a bill, sponsored by Representative Morris K. Udall (D-Ariz.), which would establish a strict new timetable for getting alternative dump sites in place and impose penalties on states that do not take certain specific steps to deal with their low-level nuclear wastes. If the bill is approved by the end of the year, the existing dump sites will probably be kept open.

The bill (HR 1083) is supported in principle by the National Governors' Association and the governors of the three states with operating facilities. But some thorny political issues remain to be settled when the measure is voted on by the House Committee on Interior and Insu-

lar Affairs—possibly in the last week of July. Moreover, the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, to which the bill was also referred, has yet to take action and similar legislation has not even been introduced in the Senate.

This political brinksmanship is the result of a stalemate that has developed over implementation of the 1980 legislation. The measure attempted to encourage the establishment of regional dump sites by giving states the authority to form coalitions—called compacts—to build facilities to which the coalition members alone would have guaranteed access after 1 January 1986. In effect, only those states that form a compact with a facility in operation by 1986 would be assured a place to dispose of their nuclear trash.

Compacts quickly formed in the Northwest, the Southeast, and the Rocky Mountain states, where dump sites were already in operation. The legal agreements establishing these compacts would exclude wastes from nonmember