

Animal Rights Activism Threatens Dissection

Rising protests against use of animals in biology classes may send some biology labs the way of evolution teaching

RECENTLY TWO MEMBERS OF PEOPLE FOR the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)—the nation's most visible animal rights group—went on an undercover assignment. They got themselves hired by two of the nation's major suppliers of preserved animals to biology teachers. Once hired, they spent some of their nonworking hours secretly videotaping the proceedings at the two—Carolina Biological Supply Co. and Ward's Biological Supply Co. The Carolina Biological tape yielded a chilling account of cats being brutally prodded to enter boxes to be gassed, and cats and rats being injected with formaldehyde, apparently while still alive.

The clandestine videotapes at the facilities in Burlington, North Carolina, appeared on ABC-TV on 22 October, adding fuel to a growing debate about the use of animals for teaching purposes. Indeed, the tide against dissection is now so strong that bills have been introduced in some state legislatures and some educators fear a repeat of what has happened in the debate over evolution—a subject many schools are now afraid to teach because of pressure from religious fundamentalists.

Officials of Carolina Biological issued a statement saying that although they have in the past allowed licensed animal suppliers to use the company's premises to kill cats, they will no longer do so. The officials denied that Carolina Biological employees prodded live cats and denied that cats are still alive when they are prepared for embalming. PETA, meanwhile, is publicizing its project with a press kit including appalling pictures of dead and mangled animals.

PETA has often been accused of bending facts to suit its purposes, but this time even staunch defenders of animal dissection acknowledge that evidence against the companies looks damning. At a recent conference of the Scientists' Center for Animal Welfare, veterinarian Richard C. Simmonds of the University of Nevada predicted that, as a result, "the availability of prepared specimens could go right down the tube." Lawrence Abele, chairman of the biology department at Florida State University, adds, "I think it's going to have a staggering impact" on the debate over animal experi-



Press kitty. The least appalling of the photographs distributed by PETA in their press kit.

ments in classrooms. Simmonds, who spends a lot of time talking with teachers, believes the subject "may be the big [animal rights] issue of the next year or two."

Simmonds says concern in the past has focused mainly on the use of live animals, but sentiment against dissecting dead ones as well has "really picked up steam" since 1987, when Jenifer Graham, a 16-year-old California vegetarian, became famous by refusing to dissect a frog in her biology class and then suing her school for failing to provide alternatives. Jenifer's mother, Pat Graham, has now set up (with PETA support) a "vivisection hotline" offering information on alternatives to dissection, which she says is logging 1000 calls a month.

Those callers aren't the only ones looking for a way out of dissection: student rebellion against animal use appears to be on the increase. Last year two other Jennifers became involved. Jennifer Routh, a biology student at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, brought suit in objection to a dissection lab. That case was dropped last spring when the university showed Routh had not been penalized for failing to do dissection. But Routh's lawyer, Gary Francione of Rutgers University Law School, has filed a similar suit on behalf of a veterinary student at Ohio State University. His client, Jennifer Kissinger, is protesting a required surgery lab on anesthetized dogs

on the grounds that it violates her freedom of religion: she believes in a "sanctity of life principle," according to Francione.

Francione, who recently got \$120,000—including \$80,000 from the New England Antivivisection Society—to pursue animal rights litigation, says he doesn't think student suits are the wave of the future. That's because high schools and colleges—even professional schools in the health sciences—

are responding to pressure by offering alternatives to participation in animal experiments.

Many colleges, including SUNY Stony Brook, now allow students to choose alternatives to dissection, such as direct observation of experiments, models, computer programs, and videotapes. At the medical school level, a recent survey by the Association of American Medical Colleges showed that of 126 accredited schools, 92 are using animals for dissection or live experimentation. Sixty-one of these now allow students to choose alternatives and only 22 require direct student involvement. The AAMC reports that so far only 5 to 10% of medical students are opting out of dissection or surgery labs.

Veterinary schools are also bowing to the trend. Francione reports that alternatives to surgery on live subjects are now being offered at 7 of the nation's 27 veterinary schools. At Tufts, for example, veterinarian Franklin Loew says the school will let third-year students practice surgery on pets who died from natural causes or were euthanized; to compensate for the lack of dissection, those students will be required to get more surgical experience on real patients during the fourth year.

Although relatively few students appear to be deeply concerned about the issue, the hassles even one or two antidissection students can create in a classroom are leading to a retreat from animal experiments, according to some scientists. And the pressures are being fed by propaganda not only from animal rights activists but also from some vendors of teaching materials who have jumped on the "alternatives" bandwagon.

As a result of such pressures, says Barbara Bentley of Stony Brook (who was Jennifer Routh's biology teacher), the university dropped from her course a lab in which students pinned the toes of live frogs apart to do a non-injurious observation of the capillaries. But beyond the specifics of her own case, she adds, "What seriously concerns me is [that] we are going to find out that dissection is going to go the way of evolution." ■ CONSTANCE HOLDEN