

Letters

Animal-Care Laws:

The Mood of Congress

For many years American scientists have believed that the general public and clear-thinking congressmen would not support the legislative restrictions on medical research for which "humane" societies have pressed. But now research laboratories are being seriously threatened with federal legislation which will impede the use of laboratory animals. Congress promises to bring forth from committees in the near future a bill or bills affecting all laboratories which buy animals across state lines or which receive funds from federal sources. Effective action by an alert scientific community will be essential to prevent inclusion of serious restrictions on all experimentation on "higher" animals.

In 1963 hearings were held on legislation concerning laboratory animals, and, although no legislation was forthcoming immediately, the seeds were sown for a variety of later bills.

At those hearings the research community presented an ill-prepared defense and little offense. As a result, the government published a document (1) which provided laymen with accounts of a variety of alleged "inhumane" acts against dumb animals. Thus encouraged, the antiexperimentalists greatly increased their efforts, using fragmentary evidence and poor documentation but with a flare for propaganda devices. They convinced legislators that the prevalent attitude of scientists toward animals was one of callous indifference. Attempts by scientific groups, such as the New York State Society for Medical Research, to press for constructive legislation based on scientific standards of laboratory care (2) met with opposition. In the absence of an effective program to interest legislators or the public in legislation which would provide healthier and better laboratory animals without restrictions on research, the void has been filled with bills backed by antiexperimentalists. . . .

On 2 September 1965 a hearing was

held by a subcommittee of the House Committee on Agriculture (3) concerning a bill on "pet stealing" (H.R. 9743). Testimony by scientists failed to shake the belief of Representative Resnick, sponsor of the bill, that 50 to 60 percent of all dogs and cats used in laboratories are stolen. These figures were subsequently used in a nationwide broadcast by an esteemed radio commentator, in network TV news programs, and in several newspaper and magazine articles. (The figures were based on the fact that the state of Pennsylvania does not have a "pound" law but yet is one of the larger suppliers of dogs and cats in the northeast; Resnick believes that most of the animals supplied from this state must be stolen.) Other alleged abuses in the transport of animals were discussed at the hearing, and scientists were placed in the same camp as animal dealers and were blamed for such abuses.

At another hearing (4), by a subcommittee of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce on 30 September 1965, Representative Rogers of Florida gave the clear impression that he will press very hard for passage of his bill (H.R. 10049) in the current Congress. This bill, which is quite restrictive as now written, is backed by many of the humane societies, including the respected American Humane Society. The National Society for Medical Research, representing 1100 scientific organizations, testified in favor of the Roybal bill (H.R. 5191) and against the Rogers bill. The Roybal bill is a statement of attitudes that the public and scientists should maintain toward medical research and laboratory-animal care; it does not provide for enforcement of its provisions and is therefore not popular with legislators.

In the Senate, Clark of Pennsylvania has offered a bill (S. 1071) setting up licensing procedures based on English laws that were written in 1876. The bill contains many restrictions, including one permitting vertebrate animals to be used only as "a last resort." Esteem for its backers, among them Justice

Fortas, one of its authors, has led the *New York Times* to editorialize in favor of this bill (5). Many other bills have been introduced.

The legislators' motives are honest and forthright. They are convinced that there is a need for legislation. Their failure to consider the effect on medical research and to recognize that scientists cannot regulate the transport and care of animals by dealers stems from the failure of scientists themselves to state their case effectively. . . .

In New York State several medical schools have recently invited congressmen to discuss the problem of legislation with them. These discussions have been held not only at tea, but also in the animal quarters and in research laboratories conducting animal experiments. The results have been gratifying. Not only have congressmen learned much about animal experimentation, but the scientists have become familiar with congressional feelings. . . .

Only a serious attempt by researchers and their organizations to put effective bills into the hands of leading legislators will persuade Congress to drop the harmful legislation now pending. Such bills should contain provisions for the effective enforcement of high standards of animal care and—perhaps most important of all—for government sponsorship of centralized animal farms where higher laboratory animals would be bred and raised. And there should be a separate bill for the licensing of animal dealers.

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References

1. Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, 87th Congress, on H.R. 1937 and H.R. 3556.
2. *Bull. N.Y. State Soc. Med. Res.* (Dec. 1965).
3. Hearings before a subcommittee of the Committee on Agriculture, 89th Congress, on H.R. 9743 *et al.*
4. Hearings before a subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, 89th Congress, on H.R. 10049 *et al.*
5. *New York Times*, 28 November 1965.

The Antiballistic Missile:

How Would It Be Used?

There is food for thought in Luther J. Carter's article on the proposed antiballistic missile system (*News and Comment*, 24 Dec. 1965). An item that I for one have been ruminating on is the evidence of disagreement between Major General Betts