Universities Fight Animal Activists

Cornell episode has underscored the need for an active strategy at research institutions and a firm stance by top administrators; some institutions are fighting back

CORNELL UNIVERSITY is in the doghouse these days as far as many researchers are concerned. Caught unprepared, it got itself into an untenable position as a result of ambiguous statements regarding addiction studies with cats conducted by researcher Michiko Okamoto. Following sustained pressure from animal activists, the university in September turned down a government grant for continuation of the studies (*Science*, 18 November 1988, p. 1001).

Cornell officials are widely perceived as having exercised unfortunate judgment. Several professional organizations, including the Society for Neuroscience, have written in protest to Cornell. The society, in a letter to President Frank Rhodes, said "your action is certain to have a profoundly disruptive effect on her [Okamoto's] career, and . . . strikes at the heart of the principle of academic freedom." It urged Cornell to "do whatever is necessary to restore her scientific freedom. . . ."

The Cornell episode, and a contrasting case at New York University (NYU) where authorities have firmly defended a research project targeted by activists, have focused more attention on the responses of research institutions in the face of a steady drumfire of attacks from animal rights groups. The word on everyone's lips these days is "proactive."

At NYU last April, during what has become the annual World Laboratory Animal Liberation Day, officials felt that they successfully dealt with a demonstration of 1000 people mustered by Trans-Species Unlimited, the same group that successfully intimidated Cornell. Their target in this case has been "glue-sniffing" experiments with macaques conducted by investigator Ronald Wood of the Department of Environmental Medicine. Wood says that the activists, after attacking Cornell, "decided they had their syllogism together." So they "looked around" for another, similar, project, and "found me." Wood does low-level toxicity testing with household and industrial solvents.

Owing to advance preparations by the university, negative publicity seems to have been kept to a minimum. NYU spokesman John Deats says that a consensus was reached some years ago among the faculty, administration, and medical school that "the issue is not primarily a scientific but a communications issue." They further realized that they needed to reach the general public and that there was little purpose served in trying to reason with the activists—"we believe they are not about to be convinced."

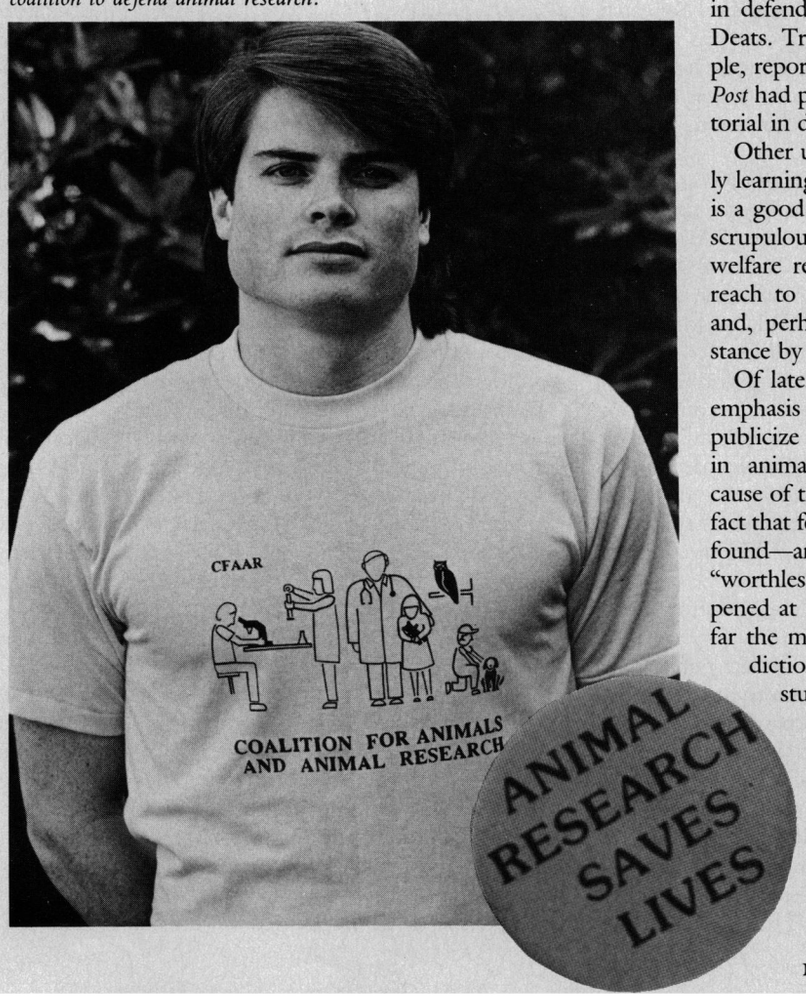
In advance of the April demonstration, the university assembled a group of scientists, a young patient, the patient's mother, the patient's physician, and other supporters of animal use for a "preemptive" press conference. Wood was present to answer questions, but, he says, the burden of explanation was on the others since "the accused shouldn't rise to his own defense." The experiments were explained in detail, including the fact that the animals do not become addicted and their lives are not jeopardized. The university also opened laboratories to tours by the media, and sent letters explaining the research to all their local and national political representatives. On the day of the demonstration, says Deats, "the scientists stayed home" and the publicity people went into the crowds. "Thus far we think we have been successful" in defending the research, says Deats. Trans-Species, for example, reported that the *New York Post* had published a "smear editorial in defense of vivisection."

Other universities are similarly learning that the best defense is a good offense. This includes scrupulous adherence to animal welfare regulations, active outreach to the press and public, and, perhaps above all, a firm stance by top administrators.

Of late, activists have shifted emphasis away from attempts to publicize inhumane conditions in animal labs—probably because of tighter security and the fact that fewer bad labs are to be found—and toward attacks on "worthless" research, as happened at NYU and Cornell. By far the most vulnerable are addiction and other behavioral studies using dogs, cats, or primates.

One of the most recent demonstrations occurred on 12 December at Emory University and its Yerkes Regional Primate Cen-

Counteroffensive. *Faculty and students at Berkeley have formed a coalition to defend animal research.*



ter, where about 35 protesters gathered to inveigh against primate research. This one was organized by In Defense of Animals, a California group that is now beginning to extend its campaign to other parts of the country.

Emory reacted by holding a press conference the Friday before the Monday demonstration that featured the university provost, two addictionologists (one of them a former cocaine addict), a researcher, and an official from the Incurably Ill for Animal Research. Yerkes director Frederick L. King, who has been an outspoken defender of animal research, says the university made extensive efforts to prepare the news media with explanations of the research, its benefits, and relevant regulations—"it's important to reach the medical and science writers in advance," and "not someone on Sunday morning who's just written up the flower show."

King, like many others, says he has learned from experience that attempts to communicate with the activists themselves are fruitless. "We are not going to convince these people of anything."

In the West, where animal rights activism has taken on a particularly virulent form, universities have developed organized responses with the formation of associations such as the California Biomedical Research Association. A similar group was recently formed in Washington. Oregon has developed a network of its six major research institutions to share information, arrange tours, and supply speakers.

In Seattle, the University of Washington and its Regional Primate Center have been beleaguered by a group called PAWS (Progressive Animal Welfare Society), which of late has been campaigning against a proposed research project by Hans Ochs of the university's school of medicine.

Last summer, says Ochs, a former secretary at the university leaked a copy of his proposal to investigate the transmission of simian AIDS virus from female macaques to their fetuses. PAWS generated a great deal of publicity over the proposal with the aid of a 50-page pamphlet, thousands of copies of which were mailed to people at the university. The action spurred inquiries from NIH and from the state's senators.

Ochs says that although the public relations department has been trying to get the facts out, there has been no organized response on the part of the university. He fears the negative publicity may affect funding decisions on the project, which is still under review. "You suddenly realize that it's totally irrelevant to them [the activists] what you say," says Ochs. "The university has had no experience defending itself . . . we are just very helpless. We really don't know how to deal with this kind of problem."

In California, university responses to activism have gotten more organized as animal rightists have increasingly been making common cause with environmentalists to disrupt the construction of new animal facilities (*Science*, 11 March 1988, p. 1229). Stanford University has spent $1.8 million in a battle over construction of a new animal facility and a new biology building. Court suits based on the alleged inadequacy of environmental impact statements have also been brought to halt the expansion of facilities at the university in Berkeley and San Francisco. [The California Supreme Court recently allowed San Francisco to proceed pending a new environmental report (*Science*, 16 December 1988, p. 1500).]

Larry Horton, vice president for public relations at Stanford, says Stanford is now bending over backward to be "forthright" to the public and demonstrate adherence to animal welfare regulations. "We will talk to anybody, and anybody can make an appointment" to be shown animal facilities.

"We are not going to convince these people [activists] of anything," says King of Yerkes.

The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee has not one outside representative as required, but three. Horton says the most important factor is having top institutional leadership that fully supports researchers and understands the nature of the opposition. Stanford president Donald Kennedy has been particularly vocal, going so far as to remind people that antivivisection was one of the policies of the Hitler regime.

In Palo Alto, whose humane society joined in the fight against the new construction, members of the public have mobilized to defend the university with the formation of a group called Citizens for Life Education and Research.

At Berkeley too, the counteroffensive is well developed after repeated demonstrations over the past 5 years, a lawsuit (on which a final decision is expected in the spring) over a new $14-million animal facility, and a sustained attack on cat optical researcher Russell DeValois as well as attacks on "every member of the psychology department who uses animals," according to spokeswoman Judith Pacult. "We are proactive and we weren't," says Pacult. Things changed during the court fight in 1987. At Berkeley, she says, "we learned we do not allow unsubstantiated or misstated charges to float around. We try to respond to everything even if it's very outrageous."

Many universities have student animal rights groups, but Berkeley has become the first California campus to launch a pro-research group, according to Berkeley physiologist Charles Nicoll, who last March started the Coalition for Animals and Animal Research. The faculty-student coalition has about 350 members and is the second largest campus organization, says Nicoll, exceeded only by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance. It holds symposia, buys advertising, sells T-shirts, provides speakers, and held a "celebration of life day" on lab animal liberation day in which participants outnumbered the animal rights demonstrators.

The California Biomedical Research Association takes much of the burden off individual institutions by preparing voluminous educational materials, supplying speakers, and answering media queries. But, points out its director Sandra Bressler, the threat of environmental challenges now means that every institution in the state is going to have to perform costly environmental impact statements for new construction whether or not they are legally required.

Meanwhile, the trend everywhere is toward increasing physical security at animal laboratories and toward including information about the relevance of animal research in routine press releases about scientific developments. But one of the most important factors, says Bressler, is the need for a "united front" by an institution when research is coming under attack. Albert A. Barber, vice chancellor for research at the University of California (Los Angeles) points out that functions are so decentralized at large institutions that "you have to have strong support from the top."

Professional societies are becoming increasingly, if belatedly, active in the counteroffensive. According to Joan Hartman Moore of the Association of American Medical Colleges, that group is currently preparing "a support notebook for communications people." Kathleen Conaboy of the University of Nevada Medical School researched the project by writing people all over the country. She concluded that defense of animal use "absolutely positively has to be an administrative priority" if activism is to be successfully countered. Medical schools are to be advised to have a "crisis communication plan" and to make sure everyone on the campus of an institution understands the issues—"most break-ins are an inside job."

"All of us have been waiting for somebody else" to take action, says Moore. The same can be said of some other research

Harry Wohlstein, ORPRC

Rhesus monkey. *Prime targets are behavioral studies involving dogs, cats, and monkeys.*

institutions. "Many still believe if they keep their heads down things will be all right," says Frankie Trull of the Foundation for Biomedical Research. This attitude is understandable for individual investigators, many of whom have been terrified by death threats and other forms of intimidation. An official of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) emphasizes that defense of research is primarily the responsibility of institutions. "Only an institution, not individuals, have the resources to do what is necessary." Cornell, he says, took "a completely ostrich-like posture . . . it behaved like a person and not an institution."

At the federal level, the Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration (ADAMHA) in particular is trying harder to bring its case to the public. ADAMHA's new director, Frederick Goodwin, who earned the ire of activists last year with a memo calling for a more "proactive" stance by health officials, has initiated efforts to devise ways of educating the public without falling afoul of laws prohibiting lobbying. NIDA's outraged response when Cornell turned down its grant (NIDA director Charles Schuster called it a "disastrous precedent") is an example of the new stance, says an ADAMHA spokesperson. The National Institute of Mental Health, which regards clinicians as best suited to defend the research, has a network of articulate ones available for referral to members of the press. It has also prepared a videotape portraying the use of animals in noninvasive research.

The NIH, although its campus has seen many a demonstration, has so far kept a low profile on the research animal issue. However, NIH and ADAMHA will be holding a day-long conference next spring for health and mental health associations which will feature scientific presentations and other information for them to pass on to their constituencies.

There is not yet any sign that the animal rights movement is abating. Says Horton of Stanford: "There is no evidence whatsoever of any diminution in its efforts and success." Groups do not like to advertise their plans too much in advance but Elliot Katz, founder of In Defense of Animals, says his group plans four more demonstrations in the coming year in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Ohio. (He said they were targeting a study involving heroin and dogs in Toledo, but NIDA says it knows of no such project.) Many observers believe that the movement may have plateaued—at Berkeley, for example, Pacult says the numbers seem to have stayed the same over the past 5 years. However, observers say the movement is getting more sophisticated in its tactics, and richer. An impressive roster of movie stars now identifies with the animal rights movement.

One of the more startling developments in this decade is the degree to which extremists have succeeded in taking over previously moderate groups. "The moderate elements have either disappeared or become passive sheep-like followers of the movement," says King. The Humane Society of the United States is seen as having gotten radicalized and the New England Antivivisectionist Society (NEAVS) is now headed by writer Cleveland Amory, founder of the Fund for Animals. NEAVS has close ties to People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the group that started it all with its infiltration of Edward Taub's Silver Spring, Maryland, monkey laboratory in 1981.

More money has become available as older humane societies have become radicalized. Newer groups are not doing badly either. PETA now reportedly has a budget of $3 to $5 million. In Defense of Animals, one of several California groups, reported an income of $362,000 in 1987, more than the entire budget ($250,000) of the California Biomedical Research Association.

As tactics become more sophisticated, the question arises as to whether activists will increasingly intervene in regulatory processes as they have in California. Horton of Stanford believes this may be the case, citing two examples: one is a suit brought unsuccessfully by PETA against the federal government, in which it attempted to claim that grants to 17 research institutions in the Bay Area were causing an array of environmental problems. The other is the formation of a group in Athens, Georgia, to block construction of a new veterinary facility at the University of Georgia. The group, the League for Animal and Environmental Protection (LEAP), recently got a $15,000 grant from the New England society and has formed a student group called SLEAP.

Observers say that it has become increasingly clear that the aim of activists is not humane conditions, but the elimination of animal use in research. To many, it also appears that the ultimate strategy is not the unattainable goal of legislating animal research out of existence but of making it too costly.

Thus, scientists have real concern that Congress may pass one of a number of bills introduced in recent years that would inhibit research. These include a bill to give citizens standing to sue for enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act; a measure requiring that any research with animals be first ascertained to be nonduplicative of other research; and measures outlawing the use of pound animals in research.

Like the right-to-life movement, with which it bears much resemblance in all but philosophy, a minority has succeeded in gaining the lion's share of the publicity and hence political clout disproportionate to their numbers. University and government people say that people who shower them with letters and phone calls are rarely interested in facts—an NIDA official says that of the thousands of letters (most of them, interestingly, from women) that agency has received, "one in a thousand" asks for more information.

The animal rights movement, says King, "is not only an anti-science movement but an anti-rational and anti-intellectual movement." Said Kennedy in a speech last summer, activists often pursue their goals by "impugning the values, integrity, and validity of science and its practitioners." That, he said ominously, may be "the most serious, long-lasting legacy" of today's activism.

It now seems apparent that any research institutions that try to keep their heads down until the storm blows over contribute to the vulnerability not only of research using animals but of biomedical research in general. ■ CONSTANCE HOLDEN