

*'They Clearly Now See the Link': Militant Voices**

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Demonstrations, pickets, sit-downs, break-ins, even letter bombs are constantly in the British media, highlighting animal liberation. In November 1983 2,000 antivivisectionists marched on Biorex Laboratories in north London, resulting in a mass sit-down outside the establishment. Clashes with the police led to the arrest of twenty people; police vans were attacked; and eventually mounted police were brought in to break up the demonstration. Twenty-nine demonstrators were arrested in December 1983 after an anti-factory farming picket of the major meat-trade showpiece, the Royal Smithfield Show, in west London. The demonstrations get bigger, the anger more intense. On differing fronts the Hunt Saboteurs Association intervenes on behalf of the hunted animal on approximately fifty hunts a week, and the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) says not a day goes by without their striking out illegally against those who exploit animals.

The Labour Party certainly felt some obligation to take a position on animal welfare. In its 1983 manifesto it intended to outlaw all forms of hunting with dogs, make snares illegal, transform the Farm Animal Welfare Council into a Standing Royal Commission on Animal Protection, review the outdated 1876 Cruelty to Animals Act and give a 'high priority' to the development of alternatives to animals, phase out 'extreme livestock systems' and ban live food animals. Animals kept in zoos, circuses and safari parks would be included in protective legislation. Although political parties are notorious for not keeping to their manifesto promises, this is certainly something for Labour animal welfarists to consider, and it had massive influence on the animal welfare societies. In 1982 a spate of TV documentaries on animals culminated in *The Animals Film* in the first week of transmission of the new Channel Four. It was watched by 1 1/2 million people, more than the popular rock film *Woodstock* a few weeks later. Animal rights groups continue to spring up in every town, and there have even been allegations that the Special Branch is tapping the telephones of the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection, surely a sign that a force is emerging for animal liberation.

Nevertheless, it has not always been like that. Just a few years ago there was a sharp divide between the traditional societies and the radical animal liberationists like the ALF and the Hunt Saboteurs Association. The traditionalists still clung to coffee mornings, polite petitioning and letters to Members of Parliament. Since then the water has really muddied. The British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV) has been entirely taken over by a young, dynamic force of vegetarian animal libbers. The Northern Animal Liberation League has grown, supporting the idea of mass occupations of laboratories. Its militant style owes nothing to traditional animal welfare. The ALF has grown, and the stand of the Labour Party on animals has made all the societies think twice about their own political positions. Inherently conservative organizations urged their members to vote Labour, and now even radical eyes are once again turning their attention to another crack at 'reforming' the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Animal Aid, built by Jean Pink to a 12,000 membership in a matter of seven years, has certainly been instrumental in reviving the large demonstrations and pickets. The talk among animal libbers is now of strategies, directions, relationships with other human campaigns and the first crack in the wall of animal exploitation. But a Conservative Government has recently been elected for another five years, and it is no friend of the direct activist, whether for animals or for humans. With basic trade union rights under legislative attack, can animal liberationists keep up the momentum? Will they fade away like the radical antivivisectionists of Victorian Britain? Will the anger become absorbed by respectable pressure-group politics? Will the frustration felt by some activists lead to violent attacks against actual perpetrators of animal suffering, like scientists and factory farmers? The

* In PETER SINGER (ed), *In Defense of Animals*, New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985, pp. 179-193.

anonymous Animal Rights Militia have already sent letter bombs to the Prime Minister. In this chapter I try to unearth the aspirations, inspiration and agitation of activists to whom animal liberation is an all-embracing passion. There are, of course, many more who are equally committed, equally concerned, but the people I have spoken to will influence, or have influenced, the shape and direction of animal liberation in Britain. They all represent different shades of militancy, especially by comparison with their counterparts of twenty years ago. They are all vegetarian or vegan and strongly opinionated about the correct strategy for the future. They are not always in agreement.

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I asked Kim Stallwood, 29-year-old campaigns officer of the BUAV, whether his organization, formed in the nineteenth century, was militant:

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In my definition the BUAV is a militant organization. It's prepared to run risks and prepared to challenge and question. I've had to organize three large national demonstrations now. In April 1982, at the Porton Down Ministry of Defence experimental research station, we had 6,000 people demonstrate and the first example of mass civil disobedience, the biggest ever animal rights demo, with 2,000 going through the fences of the station. In April 1983 8,000 marched to Carshalton in Surrey from south London, some 10 miles, to oppose the BIBRA Laboratories. In November 1983 we had 2,000 people from a much localized appeal who marched on Biorex Laboratory in north London. Obviously BUAV has taken over the role of organizing the big national demonstrations . . . [and is] more confrontational than in the past. We see this as part of our general political campaigning. We see things as they really are: we are up against big business; we are not a sentimental organization wringing our hands, saying how awful animal cruelty is. . . . I want to see the BUAV absolutely polarize the Tory Government, to be specific and personal. I want posters, leaflets, propaganda which has a photograph attacking Government Ministers who are anti-animal like David Mellor, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Home Office, responsible for animal experimentation, photographs of experiments saying if you voted for the Tories last June, you voted for this. . . . I would like to see civil disobedience directed towards local Conservative Party offices.

How active is the B U A V?

When I first joined the organization in 1978 it was appallingly archaic and Dickensian. It had a paper membership of 4,000, with hardly any active members. Head office supplied no facilities, not even leaflets! The situation has now been completely reversed. We have about 120 local contacts with a membership of 16,000. We are pioneering the use of computers to supply our activists with printouts of members, MPs and laboratories in their area. We don't want a passive membership - you can't change society that way. We now have specialists in all areas, politics, our revamped newspaper *Liberator*, defence funds for those arrested and with legal costs, scientific research, all wound together.

Do you support the illegal or almost illegal direct-action animal liberation groups?

Our policy is to support the activists in their direct action tactics morally but not in a physical or financial way. We give them space in our newspaper because we think they have a very important role to play.

How did the last general election result effect you?

We were very disappointed that Labour didn't get in. The movement on its own will not achieve animal liberation. We've got to take the issue out into the trade unions, political parties, women's groups, professional organizations and so on. That's how we should use the time until the next election. We will then have a much bigger impact. It's tough because we've got to get over the human prejudice that we are a superior species. But animal liberation gives you an enormous insight into the working of society because when people actually grasp the issues, they start to question their own motivations and values. There's an awful lot at stake in animal lib, a drastic readjustment. People who have just joined the movement on gut reaction will be a bit scared by that description because you are challenging an awful lot of established views, prejudices and ways of life. We are asking people to rebel basically. . . . Our political work is vital, we really have got to slot the issue alongside disarmament, unemployment, and its going to be very difficult and take a long time.

People have really got to start bringing this issue up in the trade unions. If we could get two or three unions to support our campaign against the Government's White Paper on animal experimentation (viewed as pro-scientist, anti-animal), we could see shop workers refusing to handle cosmetics or the lorry drivers refusing to transport materials. The possibilities are endless. . . . It's not only a moral question but has vital social, political and economic aspects to it. The movement only sees it in moral terms, but it's got to understand that the drug companies, for example, are making hundreds of millions of pounds out of abusing animals and making people sick, and it's in their interests we are ill.

But aren't you expecting activists to agitate for perhaps another decade without any reforms?

It depends on what you mean by reforms. We have had concrete reforms like Islington and Newham Borough Councils accepting the Animals' Charter and the outlawing of Club Row animal street market in East London. They are rare, very rare. But we have had real success, in that in the last five years the movement has radically changed. God knows what it will be like in five years' time. That's how you measure things. I'm much more optimistic. . . .

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Certainly one of those recent rare success stories has been the campaign for animals initiated by Val Veness as deputy leader of Labour's Islington Council. Way back in 1976 Val Veness, as a councillor, was approached by some local residents who were opposed to the circus that was coming to local council-owned free space. She started reading their literature, agreed with them and ensured that the circus was banned from council-owned land in the borough forthwith. Along with the present local Labour MP, Jeremy Corbyn, she read on the subject: It started off with horror of what was happening to animals, but eventually I started to look at the problem as a socialist. I thought that those who share this planet with us have the right to a life free from pain, distress and exploitation. . . . As a woman, I am oppressed, at the bottom of the pile and just stamping on the next lot down, which in those terms were the animals. . . .

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If you want real socialism, then other species must be liberated. The whole thing just fell in and linked up. The one things that really clicked with me, and the reason why I attended the Porton Down demonstration to begin with, was the plastic bullets used in Northern Ireland, and the Porton Down tests on ballistics — animals being used to exploit and keep down another section of humans.

The Animals' Charter is a detailed document intent on eradicating animal abuse in one

borough, but how did it come about?

When we returned to council office in May 1982 I began to think out the whole issue. I thought, if you can ban circuses, there must be other things local government can do. I built up a good relationship here with my environmental health officers, and we found a whole lot of legislation that we could use in connection with feral cats, companion animals, pet shops, circuses and even factory farms and hunting. We went to the Co-operative movement because of the junky food in Co-op supermarkets these days. We looked up the Rochdale Pioneers, one of whose demands is to stop the bosses' adulteration of food. So we are trying to shift the whole food policy on factory farming. I want to do something about the dissection of animals in O- and A-level examinations. Did you realize that if you are an ethnic vegetarian, you can't do home economics at O-level because you would be in contact with meat? Now, that's racism. . . . On the practical side we now have a very good feral cat policy: trapping, neutering, vaccination, returning to site and homing the kittens. We have properly trained animal wardens, not dog catchers, and we are looking at establishing our own dog kennels and a clinic where animals can be spayed and neutered cheaply. We have also turned down applications for two further pet shops.

What has been the response from your fellow councillors and from local people?

Our fellow councillors thought it a bit strange at first and used to call us the 'Cat Food Brigade', but I have constantly argued the political link, and Victor Schonfeld's *The Animals Film* has been *the* thing. It actually shows the political links. We have shown the film to the Coop Party. The councillors have now seen it; we have discussed the issues, and the overwhelming majority here clearly now see the link. Once I go out and argue the point I have no trouble. It's very popular. For example, local people who have been feeding the stray cats are now coming out of the woodwork to talk to us because they know the animals will not be put down. Of course, the press has tried to discredit us, saying that it is birth control on the rates; in fact, it's a saving.

Another Labour Government is needed then?

In terms of political philosophy I can't see a Tory Government making any major reforms in animal welfare. It attacks the very class of people they represent. . . . We fought hard for that commitment to animal rights in the Labour manifesto. I think we can expand it by the next manifesto and then really get some major reforms through.

It can be argued that compared with the plight of animals in experimentation and factory farming, blood sports are a far lesser cruelty. But the anti-blood sports movement attracts many thousands of activists. The Hunt Saboteurs Association was formed way back in 1964 and has always attracted the most militant of animal libbers, offering them a direct, albeit non-violent, approach to stop animals' suffering. With the growth of the movement in the last few years the Hunt Saboteurs have not been left behind. They do not hit the headlines as much as they did in the early to mid-1970s because their activities have become much more accepted in the media's eyes. But they are still out in the field throughout the foxhunting season. They have a membership of 5,000, established local groups and a working relationship with the larger League Against Cruel Sports, which has led the parliamentary campaign to outlaw hunting with hounds. Lin Murray has been an active Hunt Saboteur for the last two and a half years, and she spoke about the state of the art of hunt sabotage:

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There's been a really big upsurge of people who want to go out lately. It used to be the same

old people, but loads of new people are coming in. There are three new groups in London alone, and a couple of new groups in Essex, which is my area. . . . In Essex we are sabotaging up to four hunts a week, with groups going out mid-week.

What tactics are favoured now?

To me the most important thing is the distraction of the hounds. Some people say we are just a load of yobs who go out screaming around the countryside, but it's not the case. Hunt Saboteur tactics are very complicated. We are not interested in the riders; we are interested in what will kill the fox - the hounds and the huntsman -so the sole purpose of hunt sabotage is to sab the hounds. For example, we go on to the 'line' of a fox, and we use our horn-blowing to call hounds over to us rather than the quarry. The fox is a clever animal, and if it can be given just a few minutes, that could mean its life. . . . We pre-beat the area before the meet to scare away animals, lay false trails to confuse the hounds and so on, but we never do anything that could harm animal or human. That would be completely self-defeating and wrong.

Why do people become hunt saboteurs?

Frustration. Going out on a hunt sab, you really think you are doing something. It's your chance to get out there and actually stop it physically. The Hunt Saboteurs Association is also a breeding ground and starting point for animal rights.

Is there a feeling of dispiritedness in the HSA at the failure of the Labour Party in the last election?

No, not at all. You are never going to get a total ban on hunting. Although a Labour Government might put it out, the Tories would stick it back in again. The Hunt Saboteurs are the direct action part of the banning blood sports; the League are more Parliament-orientated, and we leave that up to them. Although we do film shows, talks, leafleting, we are very much involved in the field, saving individual animals.

The thing that does not change is the violent response of the hunting fraternity towards the sabs. As the 1983 season opened, Lin talked of current cases of aggression on the part of hunt supporters. As sabs keep strictly to their non-violent tactics and attempt to avoid confrontation, they can be badly battered.

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Although movements are not really about individuals, there are two people who have kept anti-blood sports a vibrant movement while others have stagnated: David Wetton, the Hunt Saboteurs Association secretary for over fifteen years, and Dick Course, now executive director of the League Against Cruel Sports. After accidentally coming across a hare-coursing event in the early 1970s, Course vowed to get involved in its abolition and joined the League Against Cruel Sports. His fight since then has had two goals, to radicalize the society he joined, and to ban blood sports. He has also played a leading role in getting the Labour Party to make a manifesto commitment to outlaw blood sports. Under his influence the League has been transformed from a very polite anti-blood sports society, with titled people sitting on its committee, to a much harder, campaigning organization, as he acknowledges:

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As late as 1978 the vast majority of the animal welfare societies - in fact, all of them - were

totally controlled by Conservatives, people who cared deeply about animals, I think, but didn't give a damn about people. They're the kind who lavish a lot of money on a pet poodle while an old tramp might be abused in their own street. I found those people offensive, and the biggest offence, as far as I was concerned, was that although the Labour Party was making sympathetic noises about animals, they didn't give a damn; they were only interested in noises from the Conservative Party. . . .

How different is it now?

Totally different. It's not 'Let's drink tea with the vicar and be "terribly nice" to the mayor' - that's gone. There is now a very high degree of political awareness and, of course, a different type of person. It's very encouraging to see young people involved. All the societies are now radical, even the RSPCA has shifted ground. Many criticize it for being reactionary and Tory, and certainly it is very conservative. But some of the things they are now campaigning for were unthinkable ten years ago.

What was the League's role in the 1983 general election?

Back in 1979 we were out for as many party manifesto commitments as we could get. We did support the Labour Party with a donation of £80,000 from League funds, £30,000 to inform people that anti-blood sports policy was in the manifesto and £50,000 to help Labour win. We demonstrated to the Labour Party that if it was prepared to do what we wanted, we would certainly do everything in our power to get it elected. The same thing needed to apply in the 1983 general election. The 1983 Labour manifesto commitment was the best we could have hoped for in our wildest dreams. It wasn't totally pure, but you've got to bear in mind the difference between philosophy and politics.

The League was in fact one of the groups that broke away from the General Election Coordinating Committee and formed the more radical Animal Protection Alliance (APA). In October 1982 the APA placed advertisements in the national press asking people to promise their vote to the party that was best for animal welfare. Course claims an 'unbelievable feedback', with up to half a million people pledging their votes for animals before the June 1983 election. The APA was also enthusiastic as a national public opinion poll had declared between 5 and 15 per cent of the population was willing to have the animal issue decide which way it would vote. This would, of course, make all political parties look very closely at this issue if they thought up to 15 per cent of the total votes were in the offing. But the election came a lot earlier than people thought, and other issues decided the outcome of the election. The APA did claim some minor victories, however. Paddy Ashdown, a Liberal and pro-animal, was elected in Yeovil in the West of England. (The APA recommended that Labour voters should switch to Liberal in safe Conservative seats, and they claim that this resulted in a Liberal victory.) Also Robin Corbett, a veteran Labour MP and pro-animal, took a marginal Birmingham seat by a few votes, and he thanked the animal libbers for his very close victory.

If Labour had been elected in 1979, what do you think would have been abolished by now?

Stag hunting and hare coursing. They are tiny, minority activities. In 1983 we would then have seen the end of foxhunting and the phasing out of factory farming and of certain experiments on animals.

Considering the recent arrival of Cruise missiles, isn't it mistaken to be so concerned about animals?

I think Cruise missiles help us explain our case. Someone who is willing to press a button that would blow away millions of innocent people is the same sort of person who would hunt down a fox without any consideration for the morality of what he or she is doing. I think these things are inextricably linked; both entail disregard for, and contempt of, life. This is where I think the animal question is at its most important. Because we are desensitizing society, people are prepared to tolerate animal experimentation, factory farming, blood sports, all involving hideous cruelty. . . .

Recently Roy Hattersley, deputy leader of the Labour Party, said that one of the reasons why Labour lost the election was because of its concentration on what he sees as 'peripheral' subjects, and he did name blood sports. How do you feel about that?

A grave danger. If the Labour people aren't looking for the animal vote, then there is no reason to think any of the other parties will. The animal vote will be fragmented. . . . We can't match our opponents pound for pound. The vivisection industry is a multi-million pound one. Our only hope is the ballot box. There is no other issue that attracts the kind of public support we get. But we've got to mobilize that support effectively. . . .

What about demonstrations, pickets, etc?

Expressions like 'animal liberation' and 'animal rights' are counterproductive to electoral possibilities. . . . Demos in the name of animal protection, the reduction of cruelty and unnecessary suffering are very good, attracting media and public support. But it's a very fine balance. The movement is getting stronger and we are losing the cranky image which prevented it from becoming a political issue in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, but if people pursue the animal rights issue where it comes into conflict with human welfare (which is happening), we could go right back to where we were. So the stronger we get, the greater the threat from our extremities. . . . Sending letter bombs to the Prime Minister doesn't help us at all. The danger is that we will be viewed as a bunch of nutters; we will become a joke. People are going to sit down and eat meat, and we are going to have to accept that, like it or not. People are going to want to have drugs, cures for cancer, arthritis, etc. We've got to accept that as well. If we can't come up with constructive and more positive alternatives, then all we can do is campaign against some of the more outrageous aspects of animal experimentation, such as cosmetics, alcohol and tobacco testing, psychological tests, weapons, etc.

What sustains you?

I want to win, even if it's only the abolition of hare coursing. I don't want to be a flash in the pan. Headlines in Wednesday's papers wrap fish and chips on Thursday.

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Two groups are in the vanguard of radical animal liberation, the Animal Liberation Front and the Northern Animal Liberation League (NALL). The ALF is illegal, whereas NALL's activities are borderline. The ALF believes in destroying the facilities that cause animals suffering: laboratories, factory and fur farms, slaughterhouses, hunt kennels and all allied equipment, especially that used for transportation. It also believes in rescuing the animals involved and re-homing them. It has a national network of ALF supporters who, though not active themselves, give and raise funds. The NALL is opposed to clandestine, middle-of-the-night operations and believes in mass occupations of laboratories in the light of day. It does not remove animals except for immediate propaganda reasons or unless they are in 'extreme, external torture' or

are stolen pets. It concentrates more on obtaining photographic and documentary evidence of animal suffering. Nevertheless, even such tactics may break a myriad of laws, from disturbing the peace to malicious damage. NALL had about eighty arrests in 1982, of which 50 per cent were bound over to keep the peace.

Ronnie Lee has taken some time off from being an active ALF member and is now an ALF spokesman. Lee's personal history of animal protection has run in tandem with the growth of the Animal Liberation Front. He became involved with Hunt Saboteurs in 1971, attracted by their direct approach to saving animals, but he was dismayed at their failure to sabotage the hunting of foxcubs, which occurs before the foxhunting season proper. Thoughts turned to illegal direct action:

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In late summer 1972 a few of us formed the Band of Mercy, named after the youth group of the RSPCA in the 1800s. They used to damage guns that were used on bird shoots, and our first actions were against cubhunters. We used to let down the tyres of their vehicles, put tacks in their locks and leave a note to say why we had done it. Then a couple of us heard about a vivisection laboratory being built near Milton Keynes. I looked at it a few times with Cliff Goodman, and we decided to burn it down: £45,000 worth of damage was caused in two attacks. We started to attack laboratory animal-breeding establishments, damaging and burning their vehicles. I and Robin Howard completely destroyed a seal-culling boat in the Wash in June 1974. The seal hunt was called off and has not taken place since, perhaps an early victory for direct action. Cliff and I were eventually caught in August 1974 trying to break into laboratories near Bicester. We were each sentenced to three years' imprisonment but were released on parole after one year. While we were inside Mike Huskisson rescued the 'smoking beagles' (dogs undergoing tobacco-smoking experiments) from 1C I, and that cheered us up no end! When we came out we met a lot of people who wanted to get involved in that sort of action, and about thirty of us formed the Animal Liberation Front in 1976. The attack on the Charles River Laboratories was the first ALF activity: vehicles were damaged, and several thousands pound's worth of damage was caused. Then in February 1977 I was caught again after taking mice out of an animal-breeding centre in Carshalton, Surrey. I was imprisoned for twelve months.

What's happened since then?

It's just grown: there is now one ALF action every day. There are ALF groups all over the world - in the USA, Canada, Holland, Germany, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and France — and we don't always hear of all of them. I reckon we've got between 500 to 1,000 active members who are also involved in more traditional campaigning. ALF groups meet informally, in small cells. Some operate in their locality; others travel 50 to 100 miles for a raid.

What are the aims of the ALF?

To save animals from suffering here and now. To inflict an economic loss on people who exploit animals, resulting in less profit for them to plough back into their animal exploitation business. (For instance, if you damage a lab, they have to increase their security and that's less money spent on animal experiments.) That's the short-term aim. The long-term aim is to increase activities, to escalate events to a point where all of these industries are under threat and can't operate.

What's wrong with traditional campaigning methods?

Well, people have tried them for over a hundred years and they haven't worked. The situation of animals in vivisection labs and factory farms in particular has got worse. All the campaigning hasn't alleviated it. But I don't think direct action is the opposite of parliamentary change; I think it will help it. Parliament will legislate when there is so much pressure in the country, so much trouble, that it will have to legislate. But I can't say when that will be. Direct action has been the main reason why the manifestos of political parties, in particular the Labour Party, are so much better.

Isn't the Animal Rights Militia (ARM) just a logical extension of the ALF? In The Animals Film you did say that you could foresee a time when a cruel professor could be shot on his doorstep. Is the ARM connected with the ALF?

No. We don't know who the ARM are. A lot of people suspect that they might not be genuine animal rights people at all. We certainly don't agree with what they did.

Have the ARM letter bombs caused you any lasting damage?

The damage hasn't been as bad as we thought it would be. It was big news at the time, but it seems to have gone very quiet, and I hope it doesn't happen again. I was surprised that the police didn't make more inquiries than they did. Do they know more about who actually did it than they have let on?

How many animals have been saved by the ALF?

Many thousands. This year several thousand rats and mice alone. Through damage, hundreds of thousands.

Have you ever threatened someone who works in a factory farm or lab? Do you see a difference between those who own one and those who work in it?

It really depends on what they do. It would be a bad policy to threaten ordinary workers because they can be a great help to us. We've had quite a lot of inside information from people in labs, for example. We are really after the people who are actually cruel to animals. It's not our policy to threaten people.

Isn't it all hopelessly Utopian?

Why demand tiny little changes when you can demand something so much better? Most animal cruelty is caused by the profit motive. If the profit motive did not exist, the pressure for people to treat animals cruelly would be greatly reduced. But I don't think that's the only reason why animals are mistreated. One of the main reasons is the attitude of people who think that animals are of no consequence.

Aren't you encouraging people to end up in prison?

I think it's the other way round. If I wasn't doing that, I'd be allowing the animals to remain in intolerable conditions. Going to prison for a year, say, is very little by comparison with what a laboratory rat or a battery chicken goes through.

What sustains you?

It's the gut reaction. The philosophical part is very important to explain why it happens, but you've got to have some sort of gut reaction to keep going. A concept that keeps turning over in my mind is that of human imperialism. Although we are only one species among many on earth, we've set up a *Reich* totally dominating the other animals, enslaving them. Thought of in those terms, it produces an even stronger feeling for radical change than people are currently demanding. . . . Animals are so defenceless, unable to fight back, that it makes me very angry.