

Contributors

Asylum seekers ...

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Eye docs ...

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Iain Bamforth is currently recuperating in Strasbourg before hiding from mosquitoes in the primal forest south of Jayapura in Indonesia; his essay collection *The Good European* is published in October 2006.

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James Willis is presently directing *Under Milk Wood* for the Alton Fringe Theatre — details at <http://www.jarwillis.fsnet.co.uk/UnderMW.htm>

Julian Tudor Hart first described the inverse care law.

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Laurie Pycroft

The story of the schoolboy who faced down the self-styled 'animal rights' terrorists is the stuff of legend. Here was a real-life, modern-day teenager pointing out that a group of self-righteous and threatening pontificators weren't wearing any clothes. Pointing out that calling Oxford University's unfinished purpose-built animal research facility an 'animal torture laboratory', as SPEAK currently does on its website (have a look — www.speakcampaigns.org.uk) is ludicrous nonsense. And mischievous, malicious nonsense at that.

Anyone who has the slightest desire to find the truth of this argument quickly discovers that animal testing in these islands is among the most carefully regulated and humane in the world. And anyone who wants to argue that animal testing is completely unnecessary for medical research will have to do better than simply assert that statements to the contrary are 'lies', again as SPEAK currently does on its website. Especially when they are contradicting some of the best and most dedicated medical scientists in the world. That isn't the way science proceeds, SPEAK, and thank your lucky stars that it doesn't, or we'd all still be back in the dark ages.

If Laurie Pycroft has shamed the terrorists, partly by eliciting from them some dim-witted abuse and at least one crudely-worded death threat, then he has also shamed the rest of us. Our society has been extraordinarily slow to rally behind the good men and women whose lives have been made a misery for years by the activities of these misguided zealots. The medical profession in particular ought to have responded unequivocally long ago. Over what other issue in the whole of life could the entire staff and students of Oxford University be openly declared 'legitimate targets' without visits from the police and arrests immediately following?

There is no doubt that we as a society are uncomfortable about the use of animals in medical research. It seems to excite us in a different way from the mistreatment of animals in agriculture, for example, which is so many orders of magnitude greater. It may well be that the

UK's status as having one of the best records in the world for the care of laboratory animals may be partly, or even largely, the result of pressure from activists in the past. There is equally no doubt that it is essential for this issue to be the subject of open and continuous debate and that, as Jonathan Wolff and Kenneth Boyd argue in *New Scientist*,¹ this debate should not be allowed to become polarised. But it is an entirely different matter for society to allow concerted campaigns of disinformation and intimidation, amounting, as I have said, to terrorism and blackmail, to influence the outcome one jot. These people are fundamentalists, like so many other groups disfiguring the face of the modern world, look at their websites and you will see the pathognomonic signs. Fundamentalists will not listen to reason and will never be satisfied.

There will always be aspects of our care of animals that fall short of perfection in somebody's eyes. Indeed experience suggests that the better standards become the more the remaining imperfections will rise into prominence. If we allow ourselves for one moment to think that this is an area in which law-abiding citizens can be legitimately targeted with threats and violence in order to further a particular point of view, then we are heading for very big problems indeed.

And it took a 16-year-old to lead the way. What a wonderful example this is. What a wonderful story. And as his Pro-Test website (www.pro-test.org.uk) tells us, 'The entire protest (... his initial demonstration which produced an avalanche of support and started the whole thing off ...) cost a total of £1.98 and raised public awareness of our cause, as well as securing us an interview with BBC Radio Oxford.' In purely medical terms this could well turn out to be the most cost-effective intervention in history. It would be nice to see the nipper get an OBE. But the least the rest of us can do is follow his example.

REFERENCE

1. Wolff J, Boyd K. Animal rights and wrongs. *New Scientist* 2006; 11 March: 20.