

Fighting to Win

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You start with six albino rabbits. You take each animal and check that the eyes are in good condition. Then, holding the animal firmly, you pull the lower lid away from one eyeball so that it forms a small cup. Into this cup you drop 100 milligrams of whatever it is you want to test. You hold the rabbit's eyes closed for one second and then let it go. A day later you come back and see if the lids are swollen, the iris inflamed, the cornea ulcerated, the rabbit blinded in that eye.

That is the Draize test, named after John H. Draize, a former official of the Food and Drug Administration of the United States. It is the standard test applied to every substance, from cosmetics to oven cleaners, which might get into someone's eye. It is responsible for the suffering and death of hundreds of thousands of rabbits each year.

This test has been the target of the Coalition to Stop Draize Rabbit Blinding Tests, a coalition of more than 400 animal rights and animal welfare groups, which I initiated. The Coalition has been unusually successful for an animal rights campaign, in that it compelled the commercial giants of the cosmetics industry – companies like Revlon and Avon – to respond to our pressure for the development of alternatives to the Draize test. For this reason the story of this campaign is worth telling; there are lessons to be learned about the strategies which work for the animal liberation movement.

THE BACKGROUND

To explain the thinking behind the Draize Test campaign, I need to say something about earlier campaigns in which I was involved, and

also about my background before I entered the animal liberation movement. That background is not one normally associated with concern for animals, but it has helped me to bring a fresh approach to problems which have faced animal welfare groups for a century or more.

I was born in Belgium in 1927. At sixteen I left home and became a seaman. I worked on European and American ships, and eventually became an American citizen. At that time the maritime union was corrupt and cared little for the interests of the seamen. I was active in the struggle for union reform but was forced off the ships during the McCarthy period, when loyalty was equated with unquestioning acceptance of the status quo.

In the 1960s I worked on an automobile assembly line. I kept up my political activities by marching for civil rights in the American South and writing for small, leftist publications. Among my writings was a series of twelve articles on J. Edgar Hoover's Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which was then considered sacrosanct. This work gained me the experience of FBI surveillance, which much later gave me some amusement when I obtained my file under the Freedom of Information Act; but it also taught me that careful research can often turn up internal contradictions in what a large organization says and does.

When the McCarthy period was over I returned to the ships. Joseph Curran was boss of the maritime union. While his unfortunate union members were lucky to earn \$5,000 a year, his annual salary was \$100,000, and his boast was, 'I've made mine'. To hammer the point home, seamen were forced to use the back door in their own union headquarters, appropriately named the Joseph Curran Building. I became editor of a union paper which challenged Curran. Although our alternative candidate for union president had his skull fractured by lead-pipe-wielding thugs, our small group was instrumental in Curran's eventual resignation and indictment.

At that point I settled for the relatively quiet life of a New York high-school teacher. I still had no inkling of animal welfare as a political issue, although a friend foisted a cat upon me, and I soon began to wonder about the appropriateness of cuddling one animal while sticking a knife and fork into others.

It was then that I came across Peter Singer's essay on animal liberation, published in the *New York Review of Books* in 1973. Singer described a universe of more than 4 billion animals being killed each year in the USA alone. Their suffering is intense, widespread,