

Criminalizing protests about animal abuse. Recent Irish experience in global context

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Criminalizing protests about animal abuse. Recent Irish experience in global context. Roger Yates.

Abstract Supporters of the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (2006) label as “terrorists” mainstream animal welfare corporations such as the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PeTA). Animal advocates fear that conventional forms of protest, such as boycotts and street demonstrations, are being redefined within such legislation as potential “acts of terror.” Meanwhile, in Ireland, peaceful grassroots animal rights campaigners have begun to be arrested and jailed for standing outside fur shops with an information table. Is Ireland next in line in terms of the apparent global criminalisation of animal advocacy?

When one thinks of dissent and dissenters on the island of Ireland, it is likely that examples such as resistance to British rule, hunger strikes, dirty protests, and striking workers and farmers immediately come to mind (see Herlihy 1995, Smith 1997, Morrison 2006, Bartlett 2010, Volcansek & Stack 2010) but probably not the activities of animal liberationists. However, the first decade of the 21st Century has witnessed a growth in general animal advocacy in Ireland, mainstream and grassroots, involving report writing and lobbying, picketing and demonstrating, marching and rallying, and which has included some activities that have been noisy, obstructive, or militant - and sometimes illegal. As a consequence, a small number of Irish animal advocates are finding themselves for the first time charged and prosecuted in ways familiar to their British counterparts whose militancy grew much earlier in the 1970s and 1980s (Henshaw 1989, Ryder 2000; Mann 2007) following a time, from the mid-1960s onwards, when British animal advocacy had “grown into a large-scale, well-publicised and theoretically informed social movement” (Beirne 2007: 65).

This paper sets out to examine this recent social phenomenon in Ireland, and asks to what extent the Irish experience can be fairly put into a global context in which mainstream animal advocates and environmentalists feel their activities, however orthodox and conventional in nature, are increasing condemned, criminalised, and even labelled “terroristic” (Best & Nocella 2004; 2006). More particularly, I explore the view that the Irish state is keen to clamp down on relatively weak animal advocacy groups in order to prevent their development and expansion mirroring that of the British animal movement. Would such a clampdown serve as a deterrent to other protest groups and advocacy mobilisations in Ireland?

A leading Irish criminologist, Aogán Mulcahy, notes (2007: 120-121) that when researching issues such as crime, policing, and social control, the sociologists of crime focus on three things; levels and forms of crimes; how societies – particularly the different aspects of the criminal justice system – respond to crime and deviance; and they look with particular intensity at the nature of the criminalisation processes prevalent in a given society. They look, therefore, at how particular actions become defined as “crime;” how a behaviour is criminalised by identifying it as socially harmful; and how certain behaviour and activities become seen as something that warrants a “legally imposed sanction” (2007: 120). [For a historical account of criminalisation in Ireland which involves the treatment of nonhuman animals rather than protestors, see Beirne (2009: 27-33)].

Methodological note

Ireland is a small country and distinct “communities,” such as those involved in animal advocacy and/or environmental action, can be close knit and “tight.” For this reason, and following the lead of scholars who investigated environmental social movements and other activism in 2003 (Kelly 2007; Tovey 2007; also see Lee 1993), I have taken steps to try to disguise the “voices” of the respondents who assisted in the production of this paper. I have not, for example, included long passages from any interviewees, or identified gender (or at least not always the correct gender identification) or their geographical location, since any of these details could reveal to others in social movements - and beyond - the identity of particular speakers.

For this qualitative research paper (see May 1993; Berg 2007; Matthews & Ross 2010), I contacted and corresponded with a number of grassroots animal advocates, in Ireland, Britain, mainland Europe, Australia and the US. I directly interviewed a few, conducted an informal “focus group,” and had contact with people via social networking websites such as Facebook and via the technology of Skype. I also spoke with others not directly concerned with animal advocacy but with academia, other social movements, and political activism in Ireland.

Background

The Republic of Ireland, as self-stated by Cromwellian generals in the seventeenth century, and nowadays claimed to be the most deforested area in the European Community (Solnit 1998: 100), is heavily involved in

animal use, for example, in the meat, dairy, and fishing industries, horse racing and breeding, fox hunting and “fisheries” interests, and greyhound racing, all of which enjoy substantial political support. Although there has been a complex and uneven shift in recent years from the agricultural to the service sector, and from the rural to the urban (Tovey 2007), Ireland’s main businesses remain agriculture-based with dairy products and “livestock” being major exports.[1] The dairy industry is particularly important in Ireland, as a “Strategic Development Plan for the Irish Dairy Processing Sector” makes clear: “The importance of the Irish dairy sector has long been recognised by successive Governments, who have been supportive in facilitating the development and expansion of the industry.”[2] In Ireland, even dishes such as lobster and stews tend to feature dairy products, while the favourite Irish stout, Guinness, is not vegan or vegetarian due to the bladders of fishes being used in the production process.[3]

Tovey (2007: 285) suggests that the statistics about social change relating to Irish agricultural workers “are complex and not easily interpreted.” For example, there is evidence of contraction and decline in agriculture, along with “a complicated pattern of restructuring and reorganisation.” Ireland has been subject to forces of industrialisation and urbanisation, but later than in most other countries of mainland Europe (Tovey & Share 2003: 42). Tovey (2007) says that, from the 1970s onwards, farming practices in Ireland have been to a large degree intensified, and have also become science-based, resulting in the development of larger farms (often known as “factory farms” in the animal advocacy movement) involved in “dairying, tillage, or cattle finishing” (2007: 285). In Ireland in 2003, research respondents said that they believed that “small farming is dying” (Kelly 2007: 94), seen as part of a process of rural decline and “depopulation, and a recognition of parental acquiescence in the departure of their children from the land” (2007: 95).

In terms of animal advocacy, and across the spectrum from “moderates” to “militants,” and large and small mobilisations, most Irish groups and organisations are modelled on existing British ones. For example, the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ISPICA), a traditional animal welfare organisation founded in 1949, has “very close relations” with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty (RSPCA) in England and Wales, and with the Scottish counterpart, the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA), while Compassion in World Farming–Ireland, founded in 1992, is part of larger Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) organisation based in England.

The more “activist” groups, representing the grassroots organisations, such as the Alliance for Animal Rights (AFAR), founded in 1989, the Association of Hunt Saboteurs, formed in 1989, the National Animal Rights Association, formed in 2007, and ALiberation, formed in 2007, tend to be Irish versions of English grassroots organisations. The notable exception is the Animal Rights Action Network (ARAN), which was formed in 2000, and is modelled closely on People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PeTA) in North America (although PeTA do have a fairly inactive British branch). These grassroots activist groups, again with the exception of ARAN, regularly publicise the direct action activities of groups such as the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), prisoner support groups, and are affiliated in some way to organisations such as Shut Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) and the Coalition to Abolish the Fur Trade (CAFT).

Compared with Britain and North America, the incidents of direct action in Ireland (currently known as “MDA” – Militant Direct Action – in the activist movement) have been few, sporadic, and low key. For example, there have been a series of attacks on circus billboards and circus direction signs over a number of years, and the spraying of slogans and locks glued, typically in relation to butchers and to fur shops. However, actions bound to be regarded as more serious by the Irish authorities have been carried out also, including releasing hundreds or thousands minks from mink farms, and attacking the vehicles of butchers, hunters, and shooters with paint stripper.

British animal activists who support legal and illegal direct action trace the serious clampdown on their activities to the formation of the Animal Rights National Index (ARNI) in the mid-1980s (Webb 2004; Mann 2007). This is seen as a response to increased militancy within the British activist community from the late 1970s onwards – not only had the Animal Liberation Front, with its policies of not harming human or nonhuman animals, stepped up its animal rescue raids and its “economic sabotage” attacks, new pro-violence groups and organisations, such as the Hunt Retribution Squad, the Animal Rights Militia, and the Justice Department, emerged either in the 1980s or early 1990s, all declaring a willingness to harm “animal abusers” (Gold 1997; Stallwood 2004; Webb 2004). Present-day activists in Britain are monitored by National Coordinator Domestic Extremism (NCDE), established in 2004, which describes its aims as that “of reducing, and where possible, removing the threat, criminality and public disorder associated with domestic extremism in the UK, and working with police forces to ensure the facilitation of peaceful, lawful protest.” National Coordinator Domestic Extremism (NCDE) is “the national lead on domestic extremism, on behalf of ACPO [Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland] Terrorism and Allied Matters (TAM), for the UK.” The NCDE is made up of three units working “collaboratively to coordinate the police response to domestic extremism: Intelligence – NPOIU (National Public Order Intelligence Unit); Investigation – NDET (National Domestic Extremism Team); Prevention – NETCU (National Extremism Tactical Coordination Unit).”[4] (see figure 1.)

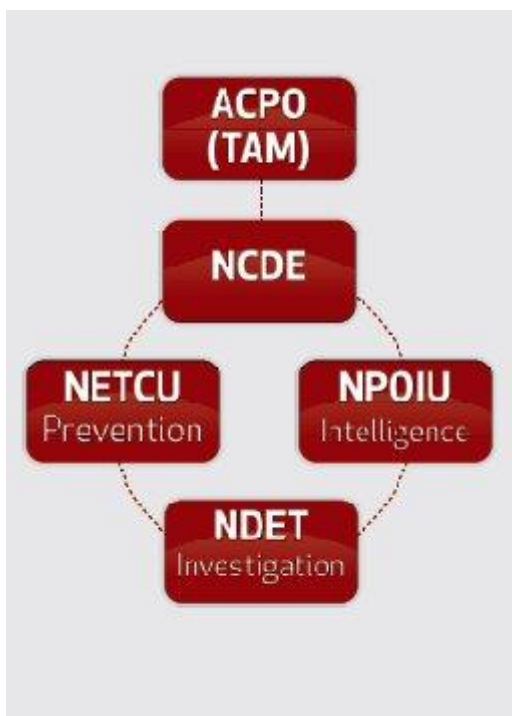


Figure 1. The Association of Chief Police Officers TAM (Terrorism and Allied Matters) structure.[4]

Defining terms, the ACPO web documents state that, “Unlike terrorism, which is defined in the UK by the Terrorism Act 2000, there is no equivalent legal definition for domestic extremism. This is because the crimes committed by those considered a domestic extremist already exist in common law or statute,” and that, “The term [domestic extremist] is generally used to describe the activity of individuals or groups carrying out criminal acts of direct action to further their protest campaign,” and “Domestic extremism is most commonly associated with ‘single-issue’ protests, such as animal rights, environmentalism, anti-globalisation or anti-GM crops.”[5]

The National Coordinator Domestic Extremism (NCDE) document states that the police support and are committed to facilitating peaceful protest but not the “tactics used by extremists” which include “public disorder offences, malicious letters and e-mails, blackmail, product contamination, damage to property and occasionally the use of improvised explosive devices.” Stating that, “Domestic extremist campaigns rarely cause a danger to life,” the document suggests that the campaigning is done to generate, “a climate of fear or a climate of hate.”[5] British animal advocates and political activists have responded to the National Extremism Tactical Coordination Unit (NETCU) with their own websites, such as “NETCUWATCH” [6] and “Fitwatch.”[7]

It is interesting to note that, although the ACPO web documents go out of their way carefully to define “extremist” and “terrorist,” and concentrate on the former term, countermovement organisations and opponents of “animal rights” tend to always use the latter term.[8,9] Guither (1998), described an emerging “counterforce” to animal advocacy in the USA, one which involves, “animal interest groups, scientists and consumers,” who often label animal advocacy as involved in extremism and terrorism, and describe the “critical difference between animal welfare and animal rights” (1998: 140).

In the US since 1990 there have been several attempts “by industry front groups, PR firms and conservative think-tanks...to associate environmental activism with terrorism.”[10] This resulted in the use of the term “eco-terrorism” - widely suggested to have coined by Ron Arnold of the “Wise Use” movement (see Arnold 1997) - which “would be defined into law by draft legislation as the Animal and Ecological Terrorism Act,” proposing provisions to target those deemed to have “encouraged, assisted or financed offences under its extraordinarily broad definition of ‘terrorism.’” Investigative journalist Karen Charman claims that the draft legislation would “effectively ban environmental and animal rights advocacy.”[10] Eventually, these characterisations of activist groups and social movements became reflected in attempts to enact legislation and in successful moves to create new laws. For example, in 2003 the Animal and Ecological Terrorism Act, supported by the US Sportsmen’s Alliance and ALEC – American Legislative Exchange Council, a group with connections with the private prison industry, came into force (Hall 2006: 48). Also in 2003, The Oklahoma Farm Animal, Crop, and Research Facilities Protection Act [11] was passed. A similar bill in Texas that year was not enacted. This proposed another version of the Animal and Ecological Terrorism Act which included a definition of an “animal rights or ecological terrorist organisation” in the following terms: “two or more persons organised for the purpose of

supporting any politically motivated activity intended to obstruct or deter any person from participating in an activity involving animals or an activity involving natural resources” (Hall 2006: 49).

With the language in proposed legislation as vague and ambiguous as this, the growing concern even within the mainstream animal advocacy community became focused on where the growing emphasis on “animal rights=terrorism” was leading to. For example, John Robbins [12], a well-known figure in the animal advocacy movement due to his ground-breaking books, *Diet for a New America*, and its follow-up, *The Food Revolution*, reports in *The Huffington Post* that the “Pennsylvania homeland security office” had been distributing anti-terrorism bulletins to state police and other public officials. However, the “terrorist activities” highlighted by the bulletins have included “anti-BP candlelight vigils, peaceful demonstrations by anti-war groups, gay and lesbian festivals, a screening of the documentary ‘Gasland,’ and an animal rights protest at a Montgomery County rodeo.” Animal rights philosopher, Tom Regan (2004), suggests that there has been a concerted effort to socially construct, not only the “out-of-touch-with-reality extremist,” but also the “animal rights terrorist.”

Like Guither (1998), Regan (2004: 11-15) argues that the animal advocacy countermovements, busily engaged in “special interest politics,” frame a contest between “animal welfare moderates, who favour ‘humane treatment and responsible care of animals,’ and animal rights extremists who, like the criminals who blew up the twin towers of the World Trade Center, resort to ‘terrorist tactics’” (2004: 15). An entire movement is being painted as comprised of “terrible people,” he claims, with an alleged movement-wide mindset which says, “believe what I believe...or else” (2004: 15).

Regan states that

The origin of the most recent chapter in this story is not hard to find. It begins in 1989, with the publication of the American Medical Association’s white paper, “Use of Animals in Biomedical Research: The Challenge and the Response.” Among the AMA’s recommendations: People who believe in animal rights “must be shown to be not only anti-science but also (a) responsible for violent and illegal acts that endanger life and property, and (b) a threat to the public’s freedom of choice.” ARAs must be seen as people who are “radicals,” “militants,” and “terrorists,” who are “opposed to human well being.” By contrast, sane, sensible, decent people must be shown to favour animal welfare, understood as humane, responsible use of animals by humans, for humans (2004: 12).

Sorenson (2009) argues that, “Animal exploitation industries, public relations companies and lobbyists, and corporate media emphasise violence by activists describing them as terrorists and extremists.” He claims that the attacks on “9/11” has provided “a pretext for government crackdowns on dissent and provided new rhetoric to demonise animal advocates,” and outlines in detail mainstream mass media and countermovement characterisation of animal advocacy as terrorism, noting a common theme of suggesting that animal activists may be linked to Islamic extremism, for example, by calling the ALF, “the al-Qaeda of the animal rights lobby.”

More worrying for some in the animal movement is the apparent evidence that animal advocates are being set up by *agents provocateurs* to be trapped by the new laws against protest and protest groups. Indeed, Regan (2004: 16) claims that the past president of the US Surgical Corporation, which carried out vivisection experiments on dogs, financed *his own* murder, deliberately arranging for an animal advocates with mental health issues, and described as an “unstable loner” (Jasper & Nelkin 1992: 50), to attempt to kill him. Regan claims (2004: 16) that the only reason this plot failed was the discovery of tape transcripts implicating the conspirators. Robbins [12] highlights the case of Californian Eric McDavid who is said to have been set up by an FBI agent posing as his girlfriend, “Anna.” It is claimed that she goaded McDavid into more and more extreme and illegal actions, supplied him with materials provided to her by the FBI, and told him he was “all talk” when he expressed doubts about his growing involvement in direct action. McDavid is currently in prison serving a 19 year 7 month sentence after being convicted of the single charge of “conspiracy to damage and destroy property by fire and an explosive.” Robbins says that a juror in McDavid’s case issued a complaint ([a “formal declaration to the court” [13]) about not being told the truth about “Anna” being a government agent. She says McDavid was “led on” and being told that “Anna” was working for the FBI would have changed her verdict and, she believes, the verdict of other jurors.

The Irish experience

There appears to be no equivalent “animal extremist” or “eco-terror” legislation in the Irish Republic. There is nothing on the Irish state book remotely similar to the legislation in Britain and the US seeking to identify animal advocacy as a major criminal, extremist, and “terroristic” threat.

One respondent suggested that the nearest to such legislation in the Irish Republic is the Offences Against the State Act of 1939.[14] Although an Irish animal advocate was detained briefly under this legislation in the last year or so, this is a general and dated law found in most nation states, and it is clearly not specifically aimed at

the animal advocacy movement. The 1939 Act provides for the banning and “suppression” of organisations, forfeiture of their property, and provisions for internment. Obviously, it was not drawn up or enacted with animal or environmental advocacy in mind. Calls for “animal extremist” and “eco-terror” legislation can be found on Irish public forums (such as “Politics.ie” and “Boards.ie”) rather than in political circles, suggesting that few in the Irish parliament currently equate animal activism with extremism or terrorism. The fact that countermovement individuals are active on such forums, and closely monitor and comment on any coverage of grassroots Irish animal advocacy, is another reason I took the “security” steps as outlined in the “methodology note” section above.

According to their various websites, and mainstream and alternative media coverage, the Irish activist groups are engaged in a range of banner demonstrations and other forms of nonviolent protest. They are pictured outside fur farms, zoos, fishing tackle shops, embassies, government buildings, circuses with “performing animals,” clothing shops, laboratories, and fast-food restaurants. They hold “information tables” in the major Irish cities, although usually in Dublin. Demonstrating their PeTA-style credentials, ARAN take part in “nude” events, with slogans such as “I’d rather be Naked Than Wear Fur,” as well as organising annual marches and rallies in Dublin city centre. When an estimated 4500 “hunting enthusiasts” from the RISE (Rural Ireland Says Enough) organisation marched through the streets of Waterford in 2010 to protest against a bill to ban stag hunting in Ireland [15], Animal Rights Action Network (ARAN) mounted a small counter-demonstration, chanting “there is no excuse for animal abuse” as the line of hunters walked by.

These activities are generally nonviolent and pass off without a great deal of incident or controversy, although they can be noisy. For example, some groups use megaphones or bullhorns and chant slogans during their pickets and demonstrations. Most grassroots organisations in Ireland report that they have little trouble from officers of the Irish police force (Garda Síochána). However, in the last two years, a number of Irish animal advocates in one organisation have been arrested several times during their weekly demonstrations outside a fur shop in the heart of Dublin centre. They have not been charged under the 1939 Act relating to offences against the state but under various sections of the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act, 1994 [16], and, in particular, sections related to “threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour in a public place,” “failure to comply with a direction from a member of Garda Síochána,” “wilful obstruction,” “assault or obstruction of a peace officer,” and “arrest without warrant” (the failure to give personal details). Even so, one respondent told me that Irish animal rights activism in general is “a long way behind” what goes on in Britain and, therefore, there is no reason to believe at the current time that there will be anything like the clampdown seen across the Irish Sea. This person felt there was no threat, “as yet,” of a process of criminalisation aimed at controlling and labelling animal advocacy in Ireland at anything like the scale seen in England, suggesting that “animal rights activism here is not important enough yet to be on [the state’s] agenda.”

Does this raise the possibility that some groups in Ireland are “managing” their relations with the Gardaí better than others? Does that explain why one group in particular are having the most trouble from the guards and, therefore, its members are spending the most time detained in Gardaí stations, along with enduring many weeks and months involved in the court process? I explored this question during my contact with respondents. The opinion of many was that this could well be the case, and this view was held by some members of the group in question including those who have been arrested during their demonstrations. Views about the “proper” and “practical” relations with the Gardaí differed markedly among the full range of respondents involved in this research. For example, some felt that often the most sensible course of action when dealing with Gardaí requests and orders, such as to move back or move away from “target” premises, or to move on or move away from a particular shop or entrance, is to negotiate on the spot, or to comply in many cases and then complain by letter after the event if it was felt that particular orders were unreasonable. Others suggested that advocates should actively resist being “pushed around” by the authorities. One said that it was perfectly possible to gain some measure of control over the policing of demonstrations, even the noisy ones. Another interviewee stated that the Irish police force is not used to acts of resistance and, therefore, tend to over-react to them, however “mild” they are. One said that some members of the Gardaí were quite supportive of some aspects of their campaigning, for example, by expressing their personal opposition to the wearing of fur coats. Other officers, however, seem totally baffled and confused as to what values an animal advocate is likely to hold, the same respondent said. For instance, while being searched and eventually arrested, a garda found circus demonstration literature in this interviewee’s pocket and assumed that they were pro-circus advertising leaflets rather than protest literature opposing the circus. The officer remarked as to whether the activist was working “on the side” for the circus. While most of the animal advocates responded to this question of Gardaí-protester relations as a stand-alone issue, the political activists thought as a general matter that there is something rather more serious and draconian going on in Ireland in the relation to the State’s overall responses to expressions of dissent.

Irish people are “passive.”

Most respondents expressed agreement with the proposition that Irish grassroots animal mobilisations were “lagging behind” their British counterparts, and the vast majority also agreed with the view that the Irish

population can be described as extremely “passive” in nature. I was told: “Irish people are far too willing to sit back and say nothing, and I think that’s the root of the problem.” In fact, many advocates say that this is one of their most difficult problems in terms of gaining support and gaining more activists members. Academic respondents suggest that the present student body is not as politicised as it once was, and this certainly applies to Irish students. One respondent, for example, suggested that even the recent European Community bailout of the failed Irish economic system, the fact that politics and the banking sector have been exposed as “corrupt to the core” in Ireland, and the reality that the poorer sectors of society are disproportionately paying for the greed of elite members of society, and their “political stooges,” cannot bring out to the street more than a moderate number of demonstrators.

When I pointed out to many of the respondents making this sort of point the research data suggesting the long history of struggle and dissent in Ireland, several stated that the modern manifestation of this is not radical action, as such, but rather moaning, grumbling, and “buckling under.” When Hilary Tovey (2007 – a companion publication with Kelly 2007) interviewed environmental movement activists in the Irish Republic, she found largely similar views about Irish society. She found this significant because she argues that

Social movements in general are vehicles for particular understandings of citizenship, civil society, and the potentialities of, and boundaries to, democratic participation in shaping the social world in which we live (Tovey 2007: 4).

This research - which began in 2003 in a project entitled “The Making of Irish Environmental Activists” and which culminated in the 2007 publication - is of particular relevance in terms of the views of many of my respondents, especially the chapter “Consequences of Collective Engagement” (2007: 125-157). For example, a local environmental group member suggested in an interview that the Irish are too quiescent, saying “I think Irish people do not fight for their rights;” “it is a question of good people staying silent;” that people, “don’t want to be labelled;” and finally that some members of the public reacted negatively to protestors because protestors, “don’t look cool” (2007: 143). In a section entitled, “Perceptions of Irish society,” an interviewee is quoted saying, “the reality of life in Ireland today is that you have to make money. But I think we are losing a lot of our quality and our understanding of quality” (2007: 144). Tovey remarks that

A common concern ran through nearly all of the interviews was that Irish people felt impotent to do anything about things that they dislike... They were not encouraged by leaders in society to express their views, dissent or objection in public, and in fact Irish society operated in ways that actively discouraged the public from making their views known (2007: 145).

One respondent expressed the view that, “greed and power, I think, are the two greatest enemies” (2007: 146), and Tovey states that three-quarters of their respondents spoke about Irish society operating in ways that “routinely disempower the public” (2007: 147). Attempts to engage relevant authorities were also described as “universally negative” (2007: 148), and one environmental advocate described a Minister of State “railroading and abusing” campaigners, explained how she was passed around from one government department to another until she felt like she was on a “merry-go-round.” Eventually, she says, “I gave up” (2007: 149).

Tovey describes this as a “political-business nexus problem,” citing advocates who contrasted their lack of political influence with the apparent ease of access elite politicians gave to business interests, such as those wishing to open a “fish farm” (2007: 149). This respondent described Irish politics as a “sordid game,” while many others claimed that it was thoroughly corrupt, leading Tovey to note that, “Environmental groups have a long history of finding it almost impossible to get power holders to spent time with them, to listen to their views, or to treat them as having any right to offer alternative analyses” (2007: 150). This last point may explain why some of the animal groups in Ireland, including the grassroots ones, have sought and succeeded in establishing a working relationship with the Irish Green Party, a junior coalition partner in government with Fianna Fáil from 2007 to 2011. The general point about the nature of Irish politics and the population of Ireland was summed up by similar phrases I heard several times from participants in the current research, such as “[t]he Irish people are passive” and “Sadly, Ireland is practically an activism-free zone.”

In Court.

One non-animal advocate respondent expressed the view that the Irish state is especially interested in shutting down animal advocacy groups and, “seemingly in preference to other groups.” This person argued that the Irish are “well ahead of the Britain” in terms of controlling protest and dissent; that there is in fact a generational gap between the two. The sort of activism that goes on in Britain is “way more militant” than that which occurs in Ireland because dissent in Ireland is “mostly neutralised.” This was an across-the-board assessment of the Irish situation. Nevertheless, the respondent believed that State forces would see animal advocates as quite isolated and consequently relatively weak, meaning they had virtual *carte blanche* over how they deal with them.

Animal advocates lack the support networks available to other campaigners who often form alliances with other types of social movement activists.

The authorities, she believed, need not fear repercussions for their suppression of dissent in general, and of animal advocates in particular. Not only do large direct action events “barely make the news” (a view strongly supported by several other respondents in the Irish animal advocacy movement), the cases in which the Gardai overreach their mandate as peacemakers are, likewise, unlikely to make mainstream mass media headlines: even if any did, she said, “there’d be little outrage,” adding, “I see Ireland as one of the planet’s most successful and *efficient* activism-free zones.”

Stating that “dissent will not be tolerated in Ireland,” this respondent claimed that a clampdown on animal advocacy should be essentially regarded as an efficient – and cheap – warning to others involved in larger mobilisations and protests, especially due to the fact that, “the left as a whole doesn’t see this as a direct attack on its own vanguard and as a portent for its own immediate future.” Small isolated groups tend to become radicalised more than others, as a means of surviving, she believed, but this makes them very visible and, in turn, gives the State all the more reason, and the social justification, to close them down. “It’s easy for the State to justify picking on these groups to begin with and they can be efficiently shut down,” she said. The respondent saw what was happening to the arrested and charged animal advocates, those who could successively be criminalised for doing little more than picketing a shop involved in animal use, in a wider political context, arguing that

The State is only looking for easy targets. Everything is measured in cost. Easier targets are more cost effective and eliminating these easier targets cheapens the cost of stopping everyone else.

In the view of this respondent, the only way animal advocates can be freer of the attentions of the Irish State is through networking with other activist mobilisations. The need for support among groups, “should infer a network of solidarity in combating the State’s attempts at nullification.” Being “on the fringe of activism as a whole” is a dangerous place to be, although being relatively isolated seems to be the plight of many animal groups. She said in this respect: “To a large degree it’s a natural tendency.” These views echo the recent calls in the animal advocacy movement to seriously engage in “alliance politics,” along with the stark recognition that most mobilisations one may wish to join forces with are deeply speciesist (see Best’s “13 Ways to Promote Alliance Politics and Total Liberation.”[17]) These support networks are, however, hard to form, my respondent said, despite the obvious benefits that emerge from their establishment. She concluded pessimistically, saying, “The fact that such a network is so hard to form is, I’d say, an indication that we ourselves aid in our own annihilation.”

Few of my other respondents analysed or approached the issues under discussion in this contextualised way, and some gave the impression that such a view would be too conspiratorial for them. For example, when I spoke to a group of advocates who had been subject to repeated arrests, detention, and lengthy court cases, they did not tend to talk about their experiences like this. One said that, far from any suggestion that judges may be part of some move in a criminalisation process, the truth was that many are “just bastards,” who treat *all* defendants unlucky enough to be before them in an equally harsh manner. There was no feeling that members of the Irish judicial system were casting a wary eye towards England and concluding that there may be something to “nip in bud” in the Republic. This suggestion was explicitly denied. A respondent did say that they did end up trying to ascertain whether this or that judge was a hunter or, perhaps, a hunt supporters in order to factor in that possibility into their thoughts about treatment in court.

Another view expressed by this group amounted to, “We take up a great deal of court time.” There was a sense, then, that courts are not used to dealing with people who are not out for personal gain and who are motivated by a set of ethical beliefs about preferred human-nonhuman relationships which go way beyond the usual lip service members of society give to traditional forms of animal welfarism. Dealing with an animal advocate, therefore, is a far cry from dealing with the average pickpocket, drunk driver, thief, or joy rider, who may be generally dispatched routinely and relatively quickly. Therefore, there was a sense that a case involving animal activists takes the whole court and prosecution system out of its comfort zone on the grounds that it lasts a long time and brings up issues that are not the standard fare of the judicial system. The various court cases that these respondents have been involved in were also lengthened due to the fact that they defended themselves with the aid of a McKenzie friend, an assistant to a “litigant in person” in common court proceedings. The Republic of Ireland is one among a small number of nations who allow the employment of a McKenzie friend.

There was some feeling, given this way of proceeding in court, with frequent advise needs from the legal assistant, that the length of time presentation of evidence and cross-examination takes place can irritate a judge and that is not seen as a wise thing to do. Another factor lengthening court cases was the means the advocates had taken of defending themselves once the harassment, as they saw it, and the arrests became frequent events.

It seems that this group felt that some trouble would occur leading to Gardaí involvement and the possibility, and that some members may be arrested, almost every week. Therefore, each of the demonstrators began carrying with them a personal camcorder and/or an audio recording device in order to present visual and sound evidence to the court of the matters that had become central to the cause of their arrests.

Conclusion.

No decisive evidence was found that a process of criminalisation is occurring in Ireland in respect of the activities of grassroots animal advocacy. Moreover, few research respondents see recent arrests, charges, detention, and court appearances as the beginning of such criminalisation in the Irish Republic. The majority view of those involved in this study regard animal advocacy as not enough of a threat to warrant the kind of legal interventions seen in Britain and the US.

The major dissenting voices came from respondents who were not primarily involved in animal advocacy, or not involved at all. Their minority view suggested that it is feasible at least, or likely in one view, that recent events in Dublin may mark the beginning of a clampdown on animal advocacy from forces of social control who see what occurs elsewhere and want to prevent it happening in Ireland, or else may utilise the negative sanctioning of animal advocacy as the more general warning to other social movement activists. In this matter it remains to be seen whether, how, and why, the respective views of movement insiders or outsiders will prevail.

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