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When animal rights activists attack

No longer content to target empty laboratories, animal rights groups in California are becoming more violent



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The charred remains of a car sitting outside the home of a UCLA neuroscientist last weekend is one more indicator that California has a domestic terrorism problem on its hands. The rationale for torching the neuroscientist's car in front of his home? He uses primates in his research.

The culprits are fringe elements within California's animal rights movement who for nearly three years have taken their campaign to stop animal research from corporate and university laboratories and offices to the front doors of scientists across the University of California system.

Once upon a time, animal rights activists adhered to a policy of not harming any sentient being, humans included. But there's every indication that the path of non-violence has become a frustrating one in California. Two days after the car was ignited outside the neuroscientist's home, a message from the Animal Liberation Brigade appeared on the North American Animal Liberation press office's website:

On Friday night March sixth we burned a vehicle at the home of [redacted] in Los Angeles. [Redacted] is a peice of human shit who addicts monkeys to methamphetamines and other street drugs at the University of California at Los Angeles. He associates with other pieces of human shit like [redacted] who is addicting and experimenting on monkeys. The things you and others like you do to feeling sentient monkeys is so cruel and disgusting we can't believe anyone would be able to live with themselves.

[Redacted], here's a message just for you, we will come for you when you least expect it and do a lot more damanage than to your property. Where ever you go and what ever you do we'll be watching you as long as you continue to do your disgusting experiments on monkeys.

No doubt some animal liberationists and their fellow travellers would argue this is free speech, but the warning also sounds ominously like a death threat.

Militants now routinely terrorise not only the scientists that conduct animal research experiments but anyone associated with them. It's a tactic British readers should be familiar with because it was imported from the UK activist group Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty, which almost shut down Huntingdon Life Sciences because it conducts product testing on animals.

But constant harassment and vandalism carried out during "home visits" has transmogrified into serious attacks that may eventually kill someone. Last August, militants firebombed the home of a UC-Santa Cruz researcher before dawn. Inside, the researcher, his wife and his two small children slept. As the fire consumed their home,

they escaped from a second floor window. Since July of 2006, animal liberationists have used incendiary devices or arson seven times to attack UC researchers' homes. In another attack in February 2008, black-clad militants performed a home invasion during the birthday party of another UC-Santa Cruz researcher's child, assaulting the researcher's husband in the process.

Four animal rights activists have been arrested for that crime and other offences under the never-before-used federal law, the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act. The law, signed by President George Bush in 2006, gave organisations that use animals in business special protections against animal liberationists' harassment and intimidation.

By upping the ante, however, the law may have actually backfired and made militants even more radical. Attached to the end of their recent communique, the Animal Liberation Brigade let the US government know that their recent arrests have only hardened their resolve: "And a special message for the FBI, the more legit activists you fuck with the more it inspires us since we're the people whom you least suspect and when we hit we hit hard."

Destroying businesses or laboratories with no one inside is certainly criminal but it's not terrorism when every precaution is taken to not harm a human's life -- motivation matters. However, when the struggle for animal rights leads militants to intimidate people by threatening or endangering the lives of researchers and their loved ones in the comfort of their homes, there's no more argument: They've entered the realm of terrorism.

Simply put: Terrorists harm human beings to further their ideology. The three-year campaign of firebombings and arsons against UC researchers meets that criteria.

Yet like most fanatical left-wing movements, animal liberationists like to paint their detractors as collaborators or fascists, forever forgetful that ideologies are more like a circle than a spectrum.

How ironic is the fascism trope when it is the animal liberationists who have embraced the totalitarian mindset, resorting to intimidation and violence rather than the debate and civil disobedience characteristic of a liberal democratic society. They present their movement as following in the same heroic vein of American abolitionists and the anti-fascist resistance in Europe, thereby insinuating that an African-American or a European Jew is morally equivalent to a rat or a rabbit or a dog.

Never do they think that looking outside your home to find your car alight conjures up night raids from an earlier era, only these thugs have opted for black masks rather than white hoods. Naturally they'll protest and say one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. But we correctly label fanatic antiabortionists that burn down clinics or murder doctors terrorists. Now it's time for animal liberationists and their fellow travellers to explain how they differ.

In their struggle to create their own utopia, animal liberationists have fallen into same trap that has left bloody trails throughout history: They know the truth, and those that stand in the way to its fulfilment will suffer the consequences.

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