

ANIMAL WELFARE

Our 1979 Election Pledges

The Conservative Manifesto, after commenting that the welfare of animals was an issue that 'concerns us all', went on to promise immediate action 'where it is necessary'. It then outlined certain specific actions which a Conservative government would take:

1. The Cruelty to Animals Act 1876 governing the use of animals for the purposes of research would be revised and updated.
2. Full support would be given to the European Economic Community proposals for improving the welfare arrangements for animals being transported.

The rules and methods of enforcement relating to the export of live animals would be re-examined. There should be a halt to the export of cows and ewes recently calved and lambed.

3. The recommendations of the 1964 Brambell Committee on the welfare of animals where intensive farming methods were being used would be updated.

Conservative Action

Reviewing the 1876 Act: This Act, passed by Disraeli's Government, provides that experiments on animals must be licensed and carried out in registered premises. The Act states that experiments 'may be performed with a view to the advancement by new discovery of physiological knowledge or of knowledge which will be useful for saving or prolonging life or alleviating suffering'.

The Act contains provisions to reduce pain and suffering to the minimum with, for example, requirements about the use of anaesthetics, and places special restrictions in the case of experiments on dogs, cats, horses, asses and mules.

The Government has carried out a review of the operation of the 1876 Act and a draft Convention of Europe on this question has been agreed by the Council of Ministers. **Mr David Mellor**, the Home Office Minister concerned with animal welfare, has stated (*Hansard*, 5th May 1983, Col. 391) that proposals for amending the 1876 Act will be brought forward 'in the very near future'.*

In the meantime, the reconstituted Advisory Committee on Animal Experiments is initiating the use of alternatives to animal experiments wherever practicable; and there is a continuing and welcome fall in the number of experiments with the 1981 figures (the latest available) being the lowest for 18 years.

Transportation of Animals: From June 1979 all cows and ewes that have calved or lambed within 48 hours have been banned from movement or export. From 1981 a consignment of farm animals cannot be exported without a licence from the Ministry of Agriculture, and Government officials supervise and record the loading of each consignment. The Government also introduced a code of practice for the care and feeding of farm animals in approved export lairages.

Mrs Peggy Fenner has said (*Hansard*, 17th February 1983, Col. 256) that the Government would shortly be issuing codes of practice on the care of farm animals and horses during their transport on roll-on/off ferries, and by air. All countries within the EEC now have similar arrangements for the welfare of animals in transit and Britain has banned the export of live food animals to countries outside the EEC.

Methods of Slaughter: All food animals except those used by ethnic minorities for religious reasons, are required under existing regulations to be stunned effectively before slaughter. Conservatives believe that certain slaughter procedures for religious reasons should be permitted, subject to the avoidance of suffering. This matter is currently being reviewed by the Farm Animal Welfare Council.

* Proposals were published on 12th May, after this Briefing Note went to press.

Intensive Farming: All the codes of conduct governing the welfare of animals under intensive farming are being reviewed and many improvements have been made and apply throughout the EEC. It is hoped shortly to increase through the EEC the minimum size of cage to be used for laying hens. It has been estimated that to return to free-range egg production, an area equivalent to the size of Berkshire would be needed to satisfy present consumer demand. While the Brambell Committee made a number of recommendations for improving the welfare of animals under intensive farming, it concluded that 'these (intensive farming) methods do not in themselves necessarily involve cruelty'.

Field Sports: The question of field sports is not one on which there should be an official party policy, since it raises matters of personal conscience and cuts across party politics. So the Party allows a 'free' vote whenever this question is debated in Parliament. But the Labour Party now favours banning hunting with dogs, but somewhat inconsistently would not ban angling.

Seals: The Government introduced a voluntary ban on the import to Britain of the products from seal pups, started as from 1st March 1983. The effectiveness of this ban is being monitored. Our partners in the EEC have now followed our example.

Our view is that seal cullings should be carried out in the most humane way possible and kept to the minimum necessary to preserve fish stocks and so protect the interests of our fishing industry. The Conservation of Seals Act 1970 provides that any culling of seals must be carried out under licensing arrangements and specifies that the method used should be a high velocity rifle, on the grounds that this is the most humane means known in the light of available evidence.

Wildlife: The 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act provides increased protection for rare species and their habitats.

Pet Animals: The Government facilitated the passage of a Private Member's measure, which has just received the Royal Assent. This Act, in effect, bans the sale of pet animals in street markets.

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