

Snout 20.9 SHAC 7

DOMESTIC TERRORISM ACT TAKES ON NEW MEANING.

In March 2006, the Bush administration dealt yet another blow to the First Amendment (which guarantees freedom of expression) as the SHAC 7 were convicted of conspiracy to commit animal enterprise terrorism and interstate stalking for running an e-mail campaign to shut down the notorious animal-testing laboratory Huntingdon Life Sciences. This is considered to be a demonstration of the erosion of free speech protection and is part of a politically motivated attack on the animal rights movement in particular. It is also the first time anyone has ever been tried under the Animal Enterprise Protection Act of 1992 (formerly known as the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act) and the convictions set a nightmarish precedent for animal protection campaigners. Many industry hacks hope that convictions under the AEPA will clear the way for the government to go after any activist that campaigns against big business and is successful, regardless of the legality of their tactics.

The Red Scare

During the “Red Scare” of the 1940’s and ‘50s, government propaganda campaigns convinced the public that membership of the Communist Party represented an imminent threat to the United States. Through the use of fear mongering (in South Africa we also had the “Swart gevaar” or Black Scare) those who did not agree with the government were able to be branded Communist or Communist sympathiser.

During the 1960’s, conspiracy charges were used to target anti-war protestors and resulted in the conviction of Dr. Benjamin Spock merely for speaking out against the draft and supporting resistance to the Vietnam war.

The Green scare

Today we see a return of these tactics. In hearings last year, FBI deputy Assistant Director John Lewis labelled the animal liberation and environmental movements the biggest domestic terrorism threats facing the country. A newspaper article also referenced U.S. Senator James Inhofe indicating that since the government could not find the people who engaged in the underground activities, it must go after the above-ground activists in these movements!

Some fear that this could clear the way for government to go after any activist that campaigns against big business and is successful, regardless of the legality of their tactics. Others point out that in present form, after redrafting by Senator Diane Feinstein, who has had one of the best pro-animal records in U.S. politics over the past 30 years and was mayor of San Francisco when the city went to no-kill animal control, it isn't going to hit anyone doing anything that is presently legal.

The Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled that threats of physical violence are not protected speech, going all the way back to some of the first Supreme Court cases, and that's what the SHAC7 was convicted of.

The SHAC7

This term refers to 7 activists who started an e-mail campaign (Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty) to shut down the Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS), one of the world’s

largest animal-testing labs. It operates two facilities in England and one in East Millstone, NJ. Animals are forced to inhale and ingest excessive amounts of chemicals such as pesticides, coffee sweeteners, diet pills and genetically modified organisms (GMO's), for weeks or months on end. Then they are killed and dissected. A daily average of 500 are said to have died there.

The HLS has been exposed in five undercover investigations revealing vicious animal cruelty and sloppy, fraudulent science. Among other atrocities, workers were exposed punching 4-month-old beagle puppies in the face, dissecting a live monkey, falsifying scientific data and violating Good Laboratory Practice laws over 600 times. Undercover agents who recorded these were persecuted, whereas they should have been applauded, if Huntingdon was indeed serious about its ethics.

The Indictment

The government's case centred around the idea that aboveground organizers of a campaign are responsible for any and all acts that anyone engages in while furthering the goals of the organizers. Thus, whilst the SHAC 7 defendants were not actually accused of having personally engaged in terrorist or threatening acts, under the Animal Enterprise Protection Act, they were accused of having conspired to incite others to break the law in pursuit of the goal of shutting down HLS.

Fair trial?

The chips were stacked against the defendants from the start, by having their defence capabilities limited. They could not introduce their own computer expert (but government could introduce theirs) and there could be no anti-vivisection expert (but government witnesses could carry on about the benefits of animals research.) Government witnesses testified ad lib about activities that had nothing to do with the defendants and it became clear that the government's strategy was to "throw in every action that had ever happened in the campaign and then insinuate that the defendants were somehow involved."

Although legal precedents are clearly on the side of the SHAC7, appealing the verdict will be a lengthy and costly process. For the defendants, this means potentially being imprisoned for years before it is possible the verdict could be overturned.

Fair punishment?

While the SHAC7, who were not personally involved in any terrorist- or threatening acts, start their prison sentences ranging from 12 – 72 months, the Huntingdon technicians who were caught on camera punching 4 month old beagle puppies in the face were merely sentenced to community service and costs of £250 each. Not to mention the unpunished abortion clinic bombers who were allowed to cloak their actions under the guise of "Christianity."

Terrorists or Freedom fighters?

So one person's liberation movement is another's terrorist organisation, depending on which side of the fence you are - as our own Nelson Mandela will attest.

Meanwhile, the SHAC7 trial appears to have lost sight of the fact that the real terrorists are in the laboratories, torturing animals.

