

Where Reds Meet Greens — Comrade Animals*

By Marinella Correggia

Who knows whether the ongoing “animal Chernobyl” will foment a discussion regarding what has always appeared so obvious: that billions of sentient creatures are brought into this world to be fattened in chains (so they can be turned into carcasses in slaughterhouses and into steaks and hamburgers in butcher shops); or else to be quickly disposed of as undesirable byproducts (such as the male chicks born to layer hens and the calves born to dairy cows); or to be efficiently eliminated from the production cycle (such as the mass-killings of millions of infected animals and animals suspected of being infected with BSE, avian flu, etc.). Farmed animals are regarded as machines, with legs instead of wheels, eyes instead of headlights, and screams instead of grinding gears.

Their numbers are mind-boggling: Every year, 25 billion chickens, two billion cows, hogs, sheep, and goats, and countless fish (in the sense of too many to count individually) are slaughtered for meat and other products, killed for the entertainment of humans, and vivisected in laboratories.

Violence toward animals is related to human greed, consumerism, wartime and natural disasters, destruction of the environment, predators, hardship born of poverty. Some violence is created by humans, some by nature: Picture a sow confined in a stall, a battery hen; a calf chained inside a crate deprived of any and

*“Animal Rights and the Lefts,” Supplement of *Liberazione*, February 25, 2001, p. 3. Translated for *CNS* by Merry Orling.

all comfort, including his mother's milk; a parched stray dog; a rat cut up in a laboratory; a tuna suffocating to death; a fish poisoned by arsenic in the Danube; a farmed salmon resembling a caged swallow; a famished cow in the African desert, a gnu being devoured by a predator, a lizard roasting in a fire somebody has set, a donkey weighed down by firewood — there is no relief from his fatigue just like there is none for the women who carry water jugs on their heads and children who work as stone cutters.

Another source of violence can be traced to the infantile, ignorant presumption that nonhuman animals do not reason, ergo they don't exist and they don't suffer. Lastly, there is cruelty disguised as something else, for example, "witches" and cats burned at the stake. Human exploitation is responsible for much of this mountain of tragedy, both in terms of its quantity and "quality."

Descartes (and before him Galen, the father of vivisection) was mistaken about animals' inability to feel pain: That animals do suffer physically and psychologically is not only intuitive but has also been ethologically demonstrated. Animals are among the oppressed, suffering, and exploited creatures of the planet; their past and present are both horrendous. We might thus deduce that the dreams and battles of the left and communism against exploitation, and in favor of equality, solidarity, and the satisfaction of basic needs should be extended to all sentient creatures, that we would work toward an ecological and equalitarian society respectful of all, that we would reject capitalism's classification of living beings as property.

What happened to prevent the circle of solidarity from expanding? In the recent history of the left, most comrades and environmentalists have not even followed a lifestyle contributing to animal welfare, let alone one attuned to animal rights. The barbecues at Party's summer festivals and the hunter candidates are but small examples. Even when red finally meets green, animal rights continues to be regarded as an oddity. It might not be right wing, but neither is it left wing. When I traveled to India some years ago, I was disappointed to find that the local communists were not necessarily vegetarian, almost as if it was their birthright to choose. Actually, although they loathed the caste system, they refused to respect nonhuman animals, since respecting animals was regarded as a characteristic of their traditional foes, the Brahmins. There were, however, Gandhian socialists faithful to the concept of

karuna, or compassion, for all suffering beings, be they human or nonhuman — a concept which was even incorporated into the Indian constitution.

In more modern times, the Indian critics of globalization are well aware of the danger inherent in the proliferation of the factory farm. In the West, amid the indifference of the left, animal advocates have managed to conquer bits and pieces of animal welfare. And here we must make an important distinction between animal welfare, or lesser harm (a few more inches of room for caged battery hens, anesthesia for animals undergoing vivisection) and animal rights, based on the concept that nonhuman animals should not be brought into this world so they can be fattened and dispatched to the slaughterhouse, and whose objective is to lessen the suffering in the world. *Mutatis mutandis*, it's the same difference between social democratic ideals and socialism.

Animal advocates use two methods to gain acceptance: First, the torture inflicted on nonhuman animals is revealed and then the numerous connections between the suffering of human and nonhuman animals are pointed out. Not only, as Horace writes, is “cruelty to nonhuman animals training for cruelty to human ones,” but in the long run it does not even bring any real advantages to humans — the apparent advantages are either imagined, too fleeting, or acquired under special circumstances (such as self-defense when a person is attacked by a lion). For years, vegetarians have been reiterating the socio-economic-ecological reasons for their diet based on the ethical refusal to be responsible for imprisoning nonhuman animals and causing them suffering and their desire to safeguard the environment, since, in order to obtain meat, dairy, and eggs, human animals feed to nonhuman animals huge amounts of calories and vegetable proteins that could otherwise be consumed directly by people. And to those who object to vegetarianism on the grounds that “plants suffer, too” — animal foods contain far more vegetable proteins than those that could be fed directly to humans, while they both have the same nutritional value. Meat can be likened to the automobile. It's inherently unfair, since there can never be enough for everyone in the world. The same holds for sea animals, as demonstrated by the disastrous overfishing and fishfarms, especially in the south of the planet. Another good reason is the environment. The so-called “animal products” are the greatest polluters of our water and air. And finally

there's health. Vegetarians live better and get sick less. The same holds true for vegans (i.e., those who eat no meat, fish, or animal products including dairy and eggs because they are necessarily part of the farm-slaughterhouse death cycle). In short, why can't we eat our own Italian soya without genetic modification rather than import genetically modified soya from the U.S. and feed it to livestock? And why not harvest algae instead of catching fish?

It's undeniable there has to be a huge transformation in the way we produce and consume if we are to create an agricultural model for animal welfare and, even more so, if we want to grant animals rights. There would be benefits in terms of human health and the environment, as well as in a fairer distribution of the world's food supply, without ruining the balance of payments. We would have to provide billions of lire in subsidies to the farmers. That money exists, but it is being spent on emergency mad cow measures and enabling Cremonini & Co. (Cremonini, McDonald's supplier, runs Italy's, and perhaps Europe's, largest meat production operation) to sell their sickening products at bargain prices. *Nonviolent agriculture should be part of holistic socialism.*

As a first step, we could reconvert production and consumption to smaller amounts of more expensive meat. "Scientific" experimentation on animals is another area in which people imagine conflict between the interests of human and nonhuman animals: *mors tua, vita mea*. There is plenty of evidence that this is not true: Vivisection serves first and foremost the interests of the multinational pharmaceutical and cosmetic companies. Alternatives that are actually better than animal experimentation exist but are being boycotted. Animal advocates can also contribute to another joint red-green effort to do away with luxury items such as designer furs, lizard and toadskin shoes, body parts of exotic animals, and heartless meals of *pate' de foie gras* and lobsters boiled alive. If human and nonhuman animals can be said to share a common destiny of suffering and redemption, we should ask ourselves what else will have to happen before an animal rights-red-green platform — soothing like a balm — can affect political theory and action, people's lifestyles, and the world's socio-economic organization.