

SCIENCE AND SOCIETY

Hundreds Gather for Rally to Defend Animal Research

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA—Last week marked what some hope will be a turning point in the clash of wills between proponents of biomedical research and animal-rights extremists, who've ratcheted up their attacks on researchers in the United States in recent years. On 20 April, a Los Angeles County grand jury arraigned two animal-rights activists on 10 felony charges each, including stalking and threatening two researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The following day, the Federal Bureau of Investigation added an animal-rights activist—Daniel Andreas San Diego—to its Most Wanted Terrorists list for his alleged role in bombing two San Francisco-area office buildings in 2003. This is the first time a domestic terrorist has been added to the list that includes the likes of Osama bin Laden. And on 22 April, hundreds of people turned out for a pro-research rally on the UCLA campus.

It's too early to tell whether these events will help diminish the recent spate of attacks on researchers at UCLA (*Science*, 21 December 2007, p. 1856) and elsewhere (*Science*, 8 August 2008, p. 755). Since 2006, animal-rights extremists have claimed responsibility for at least 10 acts of arson, attempted arson, and other vandalism at UCLA. Researchers there report being intimidated by death threats and harassed at their homes by people in masks who show up in the middle of the night.

Although no charges have been filed in any of the arson or attempted-arson cases, the indictments announced last week charge Linda Faith Greene, 61, and Kevin Richard Olliff, 22, with stalking and threatening UCLA researchers Lynn Fairbanks and Dario Ringach. That announcement follows the arrest on 22 February of four activists in connection with incidents targeting researchers at the University of California campuses in Santa Cruz and Berkeley. The FBI alleges the four violated the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act, a 2006 law that carries penalties of up to 5 years in prison for using force, violence, or threats to interfere with research or other activities involving animals. "The message has now been sent pretty clearly that law enforcement is invested in this, that they're expending resources to stop the violence," says Frankie Trull, president of the Foundation for Biomedical Research in Washington, D.C.

A visible police presence may have helped discourage any bad behavior last Wednesday when proponents and opponents of animal research gathered at UCLA. In the morning, several dozen animal-rights advocates set up shop on a street corner bordering UCLA's medical campus, carrying posters with images of bloody animals and slogans decrying animal experimentation as torture and fraud. Several protesters said they oppose animal experimentation, period. Others saw shades of gray but har-

bored doubts about whether lab animals are treated as humanely as possible, whether the benefits to human medicine are as great as scientists say, and whether researchers are doing too many redundant experiments or trying hard enough to find alternatives. The recent firebombings and other violence have distracted attention from such questions and made it harder for nonviolent activists to get their message out, said 3rd-year UCLA law student Jill Ryther, a member of the campus Animal Law Society. Those tactics "are giving animal-rights activists a bad name," she said.

Meanwhile, a much larger crowd assembled as part of the Pro-Test rally organized by UCLA neuroscientist J. David Jentsch, who woke up the night of 7 March to find his car in flames. With the help of British pro-research activist Tom Holder, Jentsch modeled the rally on protests at the University of Oxford that were widely credited with helping to turn the tide of public opinion against animal-rights activists. Pro-Testers carried homemade signs with slogans such as "Science saves lives" and "Stop bombing us." The group marched to the science quad for a series of short talks. Fairbanks, the first researcher targeted in the recent string of incidents at UCLA, said she spoke not as a researcher but as the mother of a son who had juvenile diabetes. "Animal research saved my son's life," she said. "It's not true when they say it doesn't work."

Others offered refutations to claims made by animal-rights activists—that animal research is unnecessarily cruel, that it's unregulated, and that it reveals nothing that couldn't be learned from tissue culture experiments, computer modeling, and other methods. The public's limited understanding of these issues has been exploited by extremists to justify their actions, said John Young, the director of comparative medicine at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles and chair of the board of the pro-research group Americans for Medical Progress. He urged scientists to speak up. "The public wants to hear our story," he said.

Jentsch and Holder said the turnout exceeded their expectations. Jentsch hopes the Pro-Testers sent a strong message to the public as well as those behind the attacks: "I think putting our faces on what we do humanizes the effort and makes it harder to write obscene things in the middle of the night and to brutalize people."

—GREG MILLER

Read more detailed coverage of the rally on *ScienceInsider* at <http://is.gd/v8MV>.



Speaking out. Biomedical researchers and supporters took to the streets at UCLA last week.