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Culture

Animal Rights Activists Have 'No Choice' but Violence, Spokesman Says

By Jeff Golimowski
 CNSNews.com Senior Staff Writer
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(CNSNews.com) - Radical animal rights activists will likely use "any means necessary" to stop what they consider the torture of animals, according to one of the movement's most prominent spokespeople.

"Nothing else works, and these people are torturing animals to death, and they should be stopped," said Dr. Jerry Vlasak, a press officer with the North American Animal Liberation Press Office. "If they won't stop after using every other [peaceful means], they should be stopped using any means necessary."

In what would represent a major departure from the movement's traditional ban on violence against individuals, Vlasak said Americans can expect to see more violence done against "animal abusers," including university scientists who participate in animal testing.

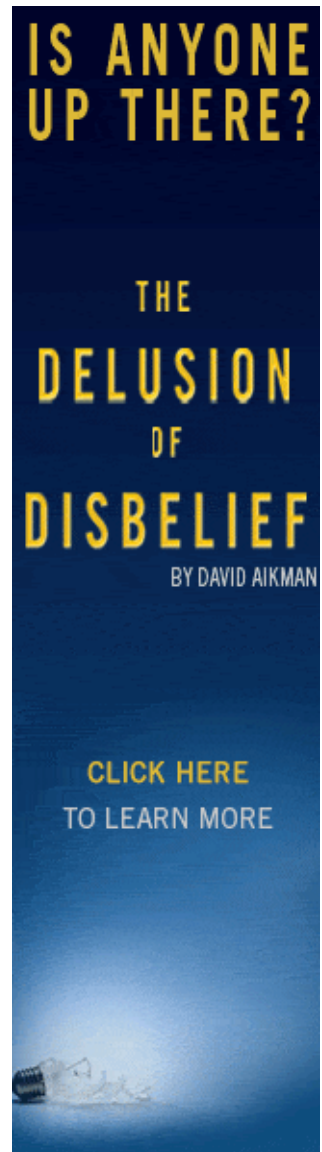
The North American Animal Liberation Press Office operates as a clearinghouse for the movement and says it has no links to groups the FBI identifies as "eco-terrorists."

Until relatively recently, animal liberationists have focused their efforts on economic damage, taking steps to avoid harm to humans or animals. But some activists, like Daniel Andreas San Diego, [wanted](#) for two bombings in 2003, are beginning to target individuals.

"Other organizations say the reluctance to use violence is a failed tactic," said Vlasak. "[African National Congress leader and former South African President] Nelson Mandela said the use of nonviolence is not a moral principle but it's a strategy, and there's no moral goodness in using an ineffective strategy."

It's rhetoric like that which has observers of the radical animal rights movement growing nervous and demanding action.

"Violence stems from the ideology of the animal liberation or animal rights movement," said Wesley J. Smith, a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute, a conservative-leaning think tank. "If you come to believe an



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animal's existence is of equal moral worth to a human existence ... then they consider a leather couch equivalent to a lampshade made of human skin."

Smith said such groups in the U.S. are taking their cues from Britain, where threats and intimidation against those who work for companies involved in animal testing have been increasingly common. Smith believes it's only a matter of time before someone is killed in a violent incident in the U.S.

"It has not led to murder yet, but there has certainly been some discussion," he said.

Vlasak doesn't deny that those discussions take place. Indeed, he views the animal liberation movement as an increasingly revolutionary struggle -- one in which violence against humans may well play a role.

"99.9999 percent of the use of violence is used by those who are abusing animals," said Vlasak, referring to animal testing in research laboratories and the treatment of livestock.

"As soon as somebody starts talking about fighting back and using force or violence in self-defense on animals' behalf ... then all of a sudden, they're quick to apply this terrorism label."

Camille Hankins, another press officer with the North American Animal Liberation Press Office, said it was no accident nobody had been hurt in the U.S. by an animal rights activist.

But, she said, there may come a time when activists are forced to take a more violent stance.

"The movement is a movement of compassion and caring, but we're also people who want to get a job done because we care deeply about what's happening to animals," Hankins said. "If you take away all the peaceful methods of protesting and having an impact, then people are going to turn to other ways to get the message across."

The Discovery Institute's Smith believes that day will come sooner, rather than later. He noted that even more mainstream organizations, such as the controversial animal rights group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, takes an ambiguous stance on violent actions.

"PETA, for two years, even though they are not a violent group themselves, they do refuse to condemn [violence]," said Smith. "They don't do it themselves, but it seems to me they praise it with no condemnation."

Repeated calls and emails to PETA for comment on this story went unreturned. However, the group's 24-page "Animal Liberation Guide," available on its website, lays out a moral argument asserting the need to avoid causing pain or suffering to all living creatures, animal and human. The [guide](#) specifically refers to non-violence as leading to the highest ethics.

(CNSNews.com Correspondent Katherine Poythress contributed to this story)

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