

Taking a stand on animal-rights violence

Governments must not turn a blind eye to intimidation and violence by animal-rights activists. A more resilient approach is needed.

Two months ago, the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) was set to list the shares of Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS), a British research company whose bankers and advisers have been constantly hounded by animal-rights activists. When the NYSE announced at the last minute that the listing had been shelved, HLS executives weren't the only ones to be dismayed.

At a hearing of the US Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works last week, the NYSE failed to shed much light on the reasons for the withdrawal. Senators James Inhofe (Republican, Oklahoma) and Frank Lautenberg (Democrat, New Jersey) expressed exasperation that a major national institution could leave itself exposed to allegations that it folded in the face of intimidation.

The committee is supporting legislation that would close several loopholes in an existing law that was designed to protect animal researchers. The changes would, among other things, make it easier to prosecute those who encourage violent attacks on employees of companies that don't do animal research themselves, but have business links with firms, such as HLS, that do.

This legislative approach is likely to prove more fruitful than the aggressive pursuit of precisely what happened when the NYSE pulled the plug on the listing. Inhofe had previously written to the exchange and begged it to show some moral backbone. "It seems to me unimaginable that this country's worldwide symbol of the integrity of the capital markets, the NYSE, would capitulate to threats, or even the mere threat of threats, from a single-issue extremist group," the senator said last week. "Appeasing these groups only validates the effectiveness of their tactics and inspires them to replicate this model of activism in some other venue."

Few would disagree with that, and it is appropriate that the Senate committee should try to shed light on a decision that has received very little play in the US press.

HLS is understandably frustrated. Its lawyer, Mark Bibi, described the NYSE's decision as "perhaps the most shameful apparent capitulation to date". He added that the company has received no feedback from the NYSE about the reasons for it — which the NYSE

says are confidential — or about any information that HLS could now provide to help it secure a listing.

But the inclination to blame NYSE and its president, Catherine Kinney — who withdrew from testifying before the Senate, letting her top lawyer take the heat instead — should be resisted. Like other clients and advisers who have shunned HLS, in both Britain and the United States, the NYSE is in a tough position, having had its own staff threatened on the Internet and elsewhere.

Even so, the public mood in the United States could support a more resilient stance by the NYSE and other institutions. There is less latent sympathy for animal-rights activists than in Britain, and more appetite for a vigorous clampdown on their criminal activities. Inhofe and Lautenberg should be applauded for their robust public stance on this issue. It contrasts with an occasional tendency in the United States to wish away hundreds of documented instances of animal-rights-related violence.

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But the issue isn't going away. The intellectual leadership of the animal-rights movement is shifting to the United States, and the committee took testimony from Jerry Vlasak, a California-based surgeon, who declined to repudiate previous statements defending violence, and even murder, against researchers. Again, the senators did well to confront the thinking behind animal-rights violence. The committee is now pursuing legal remedies. There is some public fatigue with new laws specific to the motivation of particular crimes, but in this case such laws are needed. Animal-rights activists are exploiting loopholes that, for example, prevent the use of extortion law unless the extorter seeks personal gain. British laws specifically designed to protect animal research were introduced this summer and have had a positive effect. Scientists and national institutions must stand united against animal-rights violence, and legislators should support them by passing Inhofe's proposal. ■

Turkey's evolution

Admission to the European Union can benefit Turkish science.

Turkey is engaged in negotiations for membership of the European Union (EU), and the first such talks, which opened on 18 October, were centred on science and technology. But they took place at a time when many Turkish scientists are at loggerheads with their government, led by the mildly Islamic Justice and Development

Party. They say the government is, by stealth, allowing Islamic influences to infiltrate the constitutionally secular academic system.

When the Turkish Republic was founded by national hero Kemal Atatürk in 1923, it could boast only a few dozen trained physicians and engineers. Its citizens were dirt-poor, and education available to but a few. This legacy of the sultan-caliph was put into sharp reverse by Atatürk. His modernization programme was unmistakably Western, and could almost have been conceived with membership of the EU in mind.

He changed the alphabet to Latin script that would be readable by Europeans. He introduced education for all, forcing the literacy rate

up from less than 10% to 33% within 15 years. Now 86.5% of Turks are literate. He also abolished the wearing of the veil by women (but not the headscarf), and introduced a constitution solidly anchored in secularism.

At Turkey's western edge, it borders the EU; at the east it borders Iran. As religiosity has grown in Iran since the 1979 Islamic revolution, political tensions in Turkey have grown too. While pragmatically aiming for EU membership, Turkey has also had to deal with the rising confidence of Islamic groups and their growing numbers.

The academic élite — proud adherents to Atatürk's vision — fear this confidence, and their response has been defensive. When headscarves became more common in the 1980s, the Council of Higher Education banned the wearing of them in universities. As the number of special secondary schools for training imams (religious leaders) grew, the council raised the university entrance qualification requirements for students attending these schools above those for normal state schools. The storm over the arrest of the rector of the 100th Year University in Van (see page 8) reflects the bitterness of the struggle within universities to keep Islamic influence at bay.

The academic élite also resents recent government interference in academic appointments. Since his election in 2003, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has passed two contentious laws that affect universities. One allows the government to appoint members of the

board of TÜBİTAK, Turkey's main research agency, which is a major player in the current EU talks. Critics say that subsequent appointments have been politically inspired, and charge that aspects of the agency's current set-up are unconstitutional. A second law requires government approval of university appointments. The government says this is aimed at ending cronyism in the academic world, but critics fear that it will damage academic freedom.

Given this delicate situation, the opening of negotiations for EU membership offers the best hope for the continuing development of science in Turkey. Turkish scientists have little choice but to place their trust in these negotiations.

The government has, to its credit, doubled the science budget in anticipation of the EU talks, and it already pays for Turks to take part in EU Framework programmes as equal partners. Under the watchful eye of EU negotiators, Turkish science will have to be seen to be open, competitive and democratic.

The negotiations will no doubt be protracted, but if they are successful, science in Turkey will be a winner — and part of Atatürk's dream will also have won through. ■

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Clamp down on copycats

Plagiarism is on the rise, thanks to the Internet. Universities and journals need to take action.

Just how prevalent is plagiarism? At a meeting devoted to the topic at New York University last month, Alan Price of the Office of Research Integrity (ORI), which primarily handles complaints in biomedicine, reported that in the past 16 years, only 5–12% of its misconduct cases each year involved plagiarism. This is defined by the ORI as "the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit".

On the other hand, James Kroll, head of administrative investigations at the US National Science Foundation, revealed that more than 60% of its misconduct findings concern plagiarism. And earlier this year, the National Natural Science Foundation of China reported that plagiarism accounted for about one-third of its misconduct cases in the past six years.

Human nature hasn't changed recently, but reusing with the intent to deceive seems to be on the rise, both in the literature and in grant proposals. The replacement of pen and paper with software makes it far easier to slip in large sections of text. Internet connectivity, online repositories and sophisticated search tools provide almost irresistible accessibility to the polished thoughts of others.

Students trained today have grown up in an environment where access is taken for granted and attribution only loosely enforced. So they need more rigorous instruction than their predecessors regarding the ethical standards expected of them. Mentors must counter the ever-rising promotion and funding pressures that reward prolific publication rather than support creative quests.

Although the development of web-based tools that can recognize text-based plagiarism will eventually help detection, more can be done before that point. Some common-sense guidelines need stressing at the bench, long before the data or grant application are written up. Copying text, even when supplying new data, is not acceptable without clear reference to the process. One duplicate figure in a paper is one too many, if attribution to the original paper or grant is not noted. Oblique reference to a method in a previous publication in an attempt to hide the paper's intellectual precedents is still deceitful and a form of plagiarism.

Editors have an obligation to act if concerns are raised about improper attribution. If authors do not supply satisfactory explanations, their employers and funding agencies must be notified. It is the responsibility of institutions, who have a legal mandate, to initiate a formal investigation.

Timeliness can be difficult if institutes are reluctant to taint their reputations with negative findings, or if international boundaries are crossed. Editors should nudge investigations that drag, and draw attention to incidents where no satisfactory progress is made.

Where plagiarism is found, the author's previous publications must be examined. The evidence shows that an act of misconduct is usually part of a pattern of behaviour rather than an isolated incident, says Richard Smith, former editor of the *British Medical Journal*.

Journals should proceed promptly to correct the literature where discovery of misconduct necessitates it. Plagiarized text or figures should be clearly indicated as such within the original content. *Nature* will play its part where necessary, as will other *Nature* titles. One might hope that such public humiliation will act as a deterrent to those inclined to pass off another's work as their own. ■

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