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An Unnatural Alliance? Political Radicalism and the Animal Defence Movement in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain*

Chien-hui Li

Department of History, National Cheng Kung University
No. 1, Da-xue Road, Tainan 70101, Taiwan
E-mail: li.chien.hui@gmail.com

Abstract

This article explores the still understudied relationship between nineteenth-century political radicalism and the animal defence movement by examining, respectively, the relations between the movement and the secularist and socialist strands of political radicalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It points out that although positive secularist and socialist support existed for the animal cause, the relationship between them and the animal defence movement was far from smooth and cordial due to ideological differences. Nonetheless, from the late nineteenth century onward, with the efforts of freethinkers and socialists in the animal defence movement

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to draw on radical political ideas in reaction against the ideologies of the mainstream animal defence movement, sections of the movement underwent radical change in terms of character, ideology and objectives. The article regards the change as a move away from the moral reform tradition and towards political radicalism, and argues that this transformation helped sustain the movement into the twentieth century as it struggled to keep apace with the progressive currents of the new age.

Key Words: anti-cruelty movement, anti-vivisection movement, animal rights, secularist movement, socialist movement