

*" On Saturday 20 April, the day of a national march against "vivisection" in Italy, five members of the " Fermare Green Hill" group broke into the University of Milan Department of Medical Biotechnologies and Translational Medicine, which also houses the Milano section of the National Research Council's Institute of Neuroscience. The five activists occupied the animal quarters and, after some had chained themselves to the doors, prevented the police and research personnel from entering. With the aim of avoiding any harm to the people involved, university staff members began a long and intricate process of negotiation that ended with the activists leaving the department accompanied by a rabbit and about one hundred mice. However, the damage caused (which is difficult to quantify but in the order of hundreds of thousand of euros) goes beyond the loss of the unlawfully removed animals insofar as the demonstrators removed the labels from all of the cages, which means that the animals can no longer be identified and years of scientific work (and the related financing) has gone up in smoke. Our research is mainly related to currently incurable nervous system diseases for which we desperately need to develop treatments (autism, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, multiple sclerosis, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, Prader-Willi syndrome and nicotine addiction), and is financed by national and international Institutions and Charities such as CNR, Telethon, the Italian Association for Cancer Research, NIDA, the Cariplo Foundation, the Mariani Foundation, the Multiple Sclerosis Foundation, the European Union, the Ministry of Research, the Ministry of Health, and Regione Lombardia, Fondation Lejeune. The financing is obtained after the proposals have been rigorously evaluated, and the results are published in leading international journals.*

*Saturday's incident creates an extraordinarily serious precedent. The activists arrogated to themselves the right to block research projects approved by the competent offices of the Ministry of Research, conducted in accordance with all of the national and international regulations governing the treatment of experimental animals, and financed not only by public institutions, but also by non-profit organisations supported by the donations of generous citizens interested in questions of public health. The animal housing at the Department of Medical Biotechnologies and Translational Medicine respects all of the requirements of the current European legislation, and the animals (mice, rats and rabbits that are bred solely for research purposes and incapable of surviving in anything but a laboratory environment) are treated with the greatest care.*

*It is undeniable that animal experimentation is a delicate ethical issue, and that the sensitisation of public opinion in recent years has led to the approval of legislation that regulates the use of research animals, and has consequently enormously improved their housing conditions and eliminated any useless suffering to which they might be exposed. However, it is equally undeniable that it is only by using laboratory animals that we have been able to make the medical advances and therapeutic progress of the past, and that this will also be necessary for further developments.*

*We imagine that your readers will understand our frustration and disappointment about what has happened. The people responsible for the events of Saturday have committed an outrage not only against the scientific community, but also against everyone who believes in and supports the importance of research at the service of human health. We call upon this community and public opinion as a whole to make a clear stand in order to ensure that the perpetrators are made to respond to the judicial authorities, as well as to the agencies, private citizens and patients' families financing our research.*

*We also hope that what has happened will contribute to clarifying the difference between "vivisection" and basic research designed to discover treatments for the still incurable and severely disabling diseases afflicting our society" .*