

The Fox-Hunting Debate In The United Kingdom: A Puritan Legacy?¹

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Abstract

This article is based on extended fieldwork carried out in the United Kingdom and particularly in Kent between 1997 and 2001. The discussion addresses key social and cultural issues highlighted by the contemporary British debate on hunting with hounds and their political, legislative and economic significance. As social anthropologists with a research interest, and subsequent participation, in hunting with hounds in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, we find this debate fascinating. It must be understood in the context of the Judeo-Christian ethic and its influence on Western views of nature and on the relationship between humankind and the natural environment. Western attitudes toward hunting belong to a historically identifiable process; from the mediaeval view of nature as an object of romantic conquest — hence, hunting as a ‘noble sport,’ a special rite of passage into manhood — to the 17th century Puritanical condemnation of hunting as morally and socially debasing, to the 19th century Evangelical concern for animal rights.

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Introduction

Today we are all civilized — which is to say that we have all left the fold of nature and live from the funds of human artifice. But, ... we lack culture, and therefore lack the ready awareness of our condition (Roger Scruton 1998, 68-9).

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interest, and subsequent participation, in hunting with hounds in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, we find this debate fascinating. It must be understood in the context of the Judeo-Christian ethic and its influence on Western views of nature and on the relationship between humankind and the natural environment. Western attitudes toward hunting belong to a historically identifiable process; from the mediaeval view of nature as an object of romantic conquest — hence, hunting as a ‘noble sport,’ a special rite of passage into manhood — to the 17th century Puritanical condemnation of hunting as morally and socially debasing, to the 19th century Evangelical concern for animal rights.

Our analysis of the present situation is fully aware both of the continuing significance of these issues and of the fact that the attendant long-lasting debate reflects the political climate of our age. An anthropological monograph on the comparative issues raised by hunting is in preparation. Here, we shall summarize the problematic framework underlying this topical debate and address some central questions that have both specific and more general sociological significance to our understanding of the democratic process. While stag- and hare-hunting do take place in the U.K., it is fox-hunting that attracts the largest number of followers, takes centre-stage in the political debate and almost completely monopolizes the attention of both the media and the public. Within the limits of this short article, the discussion focuses on this specific hunting activity. We look at its supporters and opponents and examine their arguments. We ask why the debate has become so central in British society and how it is influencing political discourses. Then we examine the implications of the recently imposed legal ban, which brings about the criminalization of hunting, and of the socially diversified people who are involved in it. The discussion builds towards the argument that the debate whether to criminalise this activity appears to be at once absurd and worrying. It both raises the question, what is all the fuss about?, and points to a serious difficulty of the ruling élite in linking legal and political responsibility to legitimate authority in the exercise of democratic power.

Hunting and Anthropology

The centuries-old, divisive diatribe on hunting with hounds has failed to provide scientific reasons in favour or against this practice. In particular, opposition appears to be based on strongly held emotion and on moral concerns rather than on hard facts, which both brings out the sociological significance of the heterogeneity of morality that marks the debate and underlines the moral arbitrariness of imposing a ban, however legal it may be.

Surprisingly, despite the centrality of the issues raised by this debate, hunting has attracted relatively little academic research. The few works produced by social scientists (See, e.g., Garner 1993; MacDonald 1984; MacDonald and Johnson 1996; Thomas 1983; Woods 1998) have largely failed to address fully the significance of hunting from the point of view of the rural population (see Cox and Winter 1997) and, more generally, its role in the socio-cultural context of the countryside. Empirical studies appear to have focused mainly on the symbolic and ritual aspects (Bell 1994; Cox et al. 1994; Fukuda 1997; Marvin 2003) and their relationship to social class (Howe 1981). More generally, mainstream anthropological literature deals with hunter-gatherer societies and, despite obvious differences with hunting in Britain, studies such as those of Willis (1974), Tapper (1988), Kwon (1998) and Brody (2002) do invite comparative considerations, particularly as the conflict between suburbanites and rural people currently encapsulated by the hunting debate brings to mind the conflict between settled people and hunter-gatherer nomads. While in a later section we look, also in such a light, at the town vs. country issue, extended comparative analysis will have to be done in separate works. In this article we address two complex and interrelated reasons why the British situation is particularly significant to anthropologists. First, the hunting debate highlights today's cultural relationship between humankind and the natural environment. Second, it points to a problematic relationship between citizens and the state's political and legislative bodies, raising issues of legitimacy of the law and of responsibility, trust and accountability in contemporary democracy.

Recently, opposition to hunting has been stirred up by the Private Member Bill proposed in 1997 by the Labour Backbencher Michael Foster. The electoral campaign that led to the rise to power of Tony Blair and his New Labour Party received a considerable sum of money from the League Against Cruel Sports. Not surprisingly, once elected, New Labour tried to fulfil the expectations of their generous supporters. In addressing what has become a significant political debate, our working hypothesis has been that what has become known as the 'Foster Bill' appears to be part of a broader political project of social engineering, whereby the élite in

power have shown considerable determination, and spin-doctors' skills, in attempting to define what is moral and what is not, therefore what is good and acceptable and what is not, and to legislate accordingly. We address this issue at length in a later section. For now, let us look at the extent to which representations of nature are culturally specific, taking into account the different positions of the actors involved.

Differences quite apart on the meanings of culture and constructionism (James et al. 1996), anthropologists would generally agree that our knowledge of the world in which we live, how we experience and classify it, is culturally constructed. If we accept a view of the "human being as a cultural agent and as a culturally formed subject of experience" (James et al. 1996, 105), it can be reasonably argued that the approaches of those who oppose fox-hunting and of those who support it are a product of their different experiences of nature. On a similar line, Kwon has suggested that "hunting is not a unified category reducible to predation but should incorporate culturally-specific representations of predation" (1998, 116). Looking at ethnographic cases of 'non-predatory' hunting, Kwon offers a critical assessment of different anthropological approaches to hunting, arguing that, with or without killing, hunting itself is an 'ideological construct' (1998, 116), and points to the fact that in most of the existing literature hunting is treated as a kind of armed confrontation between humans and nature. Such a view has led to analyses of hunting as a metaphor of war (e.g., Cartmill 1993). Ignoring that hunters know and come to terms with nature through hunting as a game of escalating wit, hunting is thus described as a symbolic quest and a mode of perception of nature, as opposed to a metaphor of war. Our ethnographic experience would appear to endorse the view that hunters are true conservationists endowed with a high cognitive ecology and a practically based awareness of the complexity of the relationship between the hunter and the hunted (See, e.g., Oldfield et al. 2003). It is of course true that, as Fukuda suggests (1997), the experience of hunting differs between those who hunt for 'sport' and those who hunt for 'food'.⁵ Generally speaking, however, hunters are bearers of an ethical view of nature that is absent in those who have never hunted. Hunting as a human activity may well have begun as a search for food but, having developed into a more complex activity through cultural processes which are well known to anthropologists, it has placed animals at the heart of a human symbolism which is often reflected in art and mythical narration.

Ambiguity and Marginality: The Fox and the Hound

Two main characters in the hunting drama, the fox and the hound, are tellingly anomalous animals. The fox chal-

lenges the taxonomic boundary between the family of the canids, to which it belongs, and the family of the cats (or felids), with which it shares some hunting habits. Moreover, it lives at the edges of two habitats, town and country, and, crucially, crosses the lines separating them. In virtue of such an ambiguous status, the fox has become the embodiment of some of the less attractive human characteristics, such as thieving and cunning. In the folktales of both Europe and the Orient (e.g., 8th century China), as well as in poetry and literature, the fox is often portrayed as a schemer and deceiver; a rascal with divided loyalties. Stressing the ambiguity of foxish attributes, political thinkers of Machiavelli's calibre (1988 [1532]) use the fox as a metaphor of a specific, highly successful, political character that in Pareto's work (1935 [1915-19]) becomes a major player in the circulation of the elite.

References to the evil attributes of the fox recur in Biblical texts. In the Song of Solomon, for instance, foxes, "the little foxes that spoil the vines" (Song of Solomon 2:15), symbolise the corruption of the young by cynical, sensual, selfish adults. In particular, by referring to the vixen as a metaphor for a malicious woman, the text provides a vivid account of the Solomonic attitude towards nature and women (See also Judges 15:4-5). Accordingly, the hostility towards the fox as a boundary form which we find in Judeo-Christian cultures is reflected in the attitudes of European hunters towards it.

The dog, the quintessential opponent of the fox in hunting, has been seen for centuries as an incarnation of the devil, and of chaos released on earth. Not surprisingly, in Goethe's narration (2001 [1808; 1832]), the devil first appears to Faust in the form of a dog. Dogs are associated with human evil and sickness. As Shepard (1997) points out, our closest friend among animals is also a most uncanny embodiment of ambiguity and liminality. It is both a household occupant and an outsider; it is both noble and incestuous. In contrast to the fox, it is loyal but has filthy habits. It can be both protective and destructive. Most significantly, in many representations of the underworld the hound embodies a link between this world and the other world (See, e.g., Zoroastrianism, but also the Christian imagery of Cerberus). While the fox lives at the edges of two mundane habitats, the dog crosses two ontological conditions. As a consequence, it embodies the kind of dangers that are symbolically associated with the liminal and its disordering role in the moral set up of human existence (See, e.g., Douglas 1975; Pardo 1996, Ch. 5).

In the Judaic tradition (See, e.g., Leviticus), the dog is at the same time unclean but all right to touch. Such ambiguity is expanded in the casuistry of both Christianity and Islam. Because of it, the dog plays a satanic role in both religions. Nevertheless, quite consistently with such ambiguity, both

Arabs and Christians love their hunting hounds; the Arabs even grant them central casting in the religious imagery of the holy conqueror. The hound, along with the horse, is a key companion in the myth of the messiah (Shepard 1997), the symbolic hunter who lives beyond death and will be the ultimate rescuer of humanity. Of course, here we are immediately reminded of the expectation, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, of the arrival of the messiah on horseback (though Jesus rides in Jerusalem on a donkey as a sign at once of humility and contempt of the high priests). In its aforementioned variations this myth is a final irony, portraying the hunt as a holy quest whereby the chase becomes a quest for immortality itself (Shepard 1997, 249). It is also significant, however, that the patron saint of hunting, St. Eustace, is often portrayed as a mounted hunter facing a cornered stag in whose antlers appears the crucified Christ. Commenting on this imagery, Shepard (1997) suggests that the final pause of the stag could be seen as a form of self-sacrifice symbolising Jesus Christ's sacrifice for humanity. Interestingly, during our preliminary fieldwork in France, we observed that, before the kill, hunters ritually play their horn, paying tribute ('honouring,' they say) to the nobility of the cornered animal, which is reminiscent of the respect fox-hunters have for their quarry.

The Fox: From Beast of the 'Chase' to Beast of 'Venery'

The fox has long been 'hunted' in one form or another. In England it has been seen, and hunted for centuries, as vermin. Until the early 19th century, foxes were hunted mainly with sticks in a way very similar to rat-catching.⁶ Hunting foxes was considered a menial activity usually carried out by poorer people, who could claim the price paid by the parish for each fox killed. The fox was merely a beast of the chase (Carr 1976). This hot-scented, low-cunning, stinking creature certainly did not compare favourably with the deer or even the hare. The deer has right of place in all hunting treaties up to the 16th century, where the deer is considered the noblest quarry, the 'beast of venery.' Similarly, for the English country gentleman in the 17th and 18th centuries, hare-hunting was the supreme test of his and his hounds' skills.

In Britain, fox-hunting as a fashionable sport is thus a relatively recent activity. In its modern form, it can be traced back to the late 1600s (Ridley 1990; Carr 1976), when the decline of deer-hunting caused by the combined effects of the use of firearms in hunting and the destruction of forest coverts and deer parks gradually encouraged the development of fox-hunting as a sport. The destruction of woodland, which had started with the confiscation of private land during Cromwell's Interregnum, gained momentum to meet the demands of the shipbuilding industry, the increased need for

pasture and arable land, and the growing need of the towns for building material and charcoal. By 1800, fox-hunting had become a widespread 'public' activity, leading to significant changes in the hunting field. Above all, with the advent of the railway in the mid 19th century, it gained unprecedented popularity (Itzkowitz 1977). This development deserves some expansion because it turned out to carry great significance in the evolution of this activity as it is known today.

Country gentlemen and squires had long supported fox-hunting to the point that, in many towns, Hunt Clubs had become the centre of social life. Then, as now in large measure, hunting played a central role in the social calendar of many country people, including those who did not ride and followed on foot. Many packs of harriers were transformed into foxhounds and a large proportion ceased to be private packs and became subscription packs. Packs of foxhounds were also established anew, expanding the territory over which fox-hunting took place. Moreover, fox-hunting became popular among Britons who had no roots in the countryside. In spite of strong opposition from many radical politicians, who regarded hunting as an occupation of the 'idle,' landed class, an increasing number of people who started following hounds in that period were members of the new urban bourgeoisie who had not developed a true urban culture of their own, but were rather imitative of the lifestyle of the English country gentleman. Surtees has immortalised these *nouveaux riches* in the Jorrocks series (See, e.g., 1911; 1952) portraying them as urban invaders, as sort of anti-heroes who had no real knowledge or true enthusiasm for hunting. This 'invasion' was vividly illustrated by John Leech, an artist and keen fox-hunter who tried to preserve the true spirit of the sport. His famously satirical sporting cartoons for *Punch* were, however, representative of a losing battle.

In Victorian England the hunting field had become a most suitable arena for social climbing. It became an indirect form of fortune hunting and part of the search for social acceptability, which was often accomplished through marriage. This development contrasted sharply with country folks' approach to hunting and their view of it as a (temporary) social 'equalizer,' a pursuit that ideally saw aristocrats and farmers riding together at the same fence (Trollope 1987 [1883]) and gave "all classes a chance of meeting on terms of equality" (Paget, quoted in Carr 1976, 133). Our experience would appear to confirm that the hierarchy demanded by hunting has little to do with social status but is rather related to knowledge of the country and to mastery of the duties and skills attending the 'proper' performance of this activity. Even today, these criteria determine acceptance or rejection by the hunting community. This is why, in Victorian England, while the new rich became increasingly more represented in the hunting field, many country people continued to resent what they

regarded as their lack of riding manners and unwillingness 'to obey the rules' and, above all, their reluctance to understand the countryside and the problems of farmers.⁷ The qualified, sometimes grudging, acceptance of newcomers in the hunting field that can still be observed today was thus explained, at least in part, by the different attitudes toward hunting and the countryside of country people, on the one hand, and town people, on the other.

Among the factors that contributed to the alteration of the social and economic basis of fox-hunting in the 1900s, the increasing replacement of tenant farmers with owner-occupiers played a significant role. Originated by the establishment of the National Farmers Union in 1908, this process brought about the fragmentation of private land. Such a process received new impetus from the expropriation of land to build new roads and expand the railway system in the aftermath of WWII. In addition to this, new agricultural policies radically transformed rural life contributing, among other things, to inject new money into hunting. In such a situation, many farmers demanded a greater say in the running of their local Hunt; after all, they reasoned, the Hunt needed farmers' permission to ride on their land. Since then, farmers have played an increasingly relevant role in the running of local Hunts, by gaining access to the balance sheets and having their representatives serve on the Hunt committee. It is in this social and economic landscape that today's Hunts operate.

Hunting as a Social and Cultural Activity

Raymond Carr has aptly observed that "the social roots of English fox hunting have always been deeper and broader than the aristocratic hunting of the Continent" (1976, 241-42). He also points out that the ability to absorb newcomers and to adapt to new circumstances has guaranteed its survival. After WWII, there were two hundred packs of foxhounds hunting in Britain. In spite of the difficult post-war economic conditions, fox-hunting flourished, and has continued to do so, also through the institution of a large number of Hunt Supporters Clubs. These Clubs play a fundamental role in raising funds for the Hunt and, although most of the people involved do not ride to hounds (they follow on foot), they are among the most enthusiastic members of the pro-hunting community. Pony Clubs also contribute strongly to hunting. Pony Clubs, which appeared after WWI, have grown in numbers since the 1950s and most of their members (mainly girls) eagerly participate in hunting, motivating many Hunts to organise special meets where they are especially welcome.

The British Hunts among which we did our research are subscription packs. This means that, apart from occasional donations and fundraising events, the necessary funds for

running the Hunt come from subscription fees. Fox-hunting is regulated by the Masters of Foxhounds Association and all hounds must be registered. As a rule, the hounds have a long pedigree, cannot be bought or sold, but can be donated from one Hunt to another, and are selectively bred according to the kind of territory to be hunted. Each Hunt has its own Constitution and is run by a committee elected by Hunt members⁸ at the annual general meeting and is usually composed of an equal number of farmers, landowners and subscribers. The committee appoints a qualified auditor and elects the master (or joint masters), a chairperson, a secretary to the Hunt, a treasurer and a secretary to the point-to-points. The committee delegates to the master the responsibility for the management of the kennels where hounds are kept, for the up-keeping of Hunt property and for the employment of the Hunt staff; that is, the huntsman and the kennel people. Other central people in the Hunt are the whipper-in (usually an amateur who helps the huntsman with the hounds) and the terrier-men, who are in charge of flashing out the fox with terriers when it 'goes ground' and killing it with a shot in the head.

Although the hunting season is officially defined as the period between the 1st of May and the 30th of April, the fox is hunted between November and March.⁹ Some Meets are also traditionally well attended by the non-hunting local community. For instance, we have repeatedly witnessed the huge popularity of the Boxing Day Meet, on the 26th of December, throughout Kent and elsewhere in England and Wales. For the Hunt members, this Meet is as important as the Opening Meet, which marks the beginning of the hunting period. For the local community at large, it represents a traditionally pleasant way to be out on the morning after Christmas, socializing and generally enjoying the jolly atmosphere. Regardless of the wintry weather, the hundreds of people who turn up include entire families, from grandparents to parents and their children of different ages, who intermingle with the hunting field chatting, asking questions, approaching hounds and horses, and so on.

As we have mentioned earlier, the Hunt organizes social and fundraising events throughout the year (e.g., charity rides, auctions, the ball and other functions) to which hunting and non-hunting people from all walks of life participate. They are farmers, land owners, carpenters, as well as, secretaries, accountants, clerks, estate agents, solicitors, driving instructors, civil servants, occasionally school teachers, and many who operate in the equestrian business. Indeed, today, as in the past, the social aspect of hunting plays a central role in the popularity of this activity.¹⁰ For many older people, hunting is an interesting way to stay active. Others, in spite of a busy life, simply enjoy the socializing and the fun. Everyone that we have met speaks of the hunting world as a true community where people still care for each other and enjoy

the comradeship and the sharing of values which, some say, are lost in contemporary society. Bringing to mind Xenophon's observations on the benefits of hunting for the young (Marchant and Bowersock [transl.] 1925), parents who take their children hunting say that the children learn to respect nature and, more generally, engage in a healthy lifestyle, both morally and physically. "Of course," as an informant put it, "these young people are not a breed apart. They enjoy equally well their fair share of video games and pop music, but they learn values which for many may be old-fashioned but do make them reflect on important aspects of life, such as care, respect, duty and responsibility, which in today's world appear to be on the wane."

For those who ride, hunting clearly carries different meanings. The mounted field roughly includes two kinds of riders; those who 'ride to hunt' and those who 'hunt to ride.' Those who ride to hunt regard fox-hunting as a form of pest-control, though they do enjoy both the chase and the battle of wits with the fox and, more subtly, draw great pleasure from watching hounds work. Those who hunt to ride basically see hunting as an opportunity to socialize and to ride on land that is usually restricted to the public. Perhaps above all, for many riders, whether they admit to it or not, riding with the local Hunt is plainly a way of testing or — for some — showing off their equestrian skills. Today, as in the past (See, e.g., Whyte-Melville 1984 [1861]; Trollope 1987 [1883]), hunting is a challenging, and for some a competitive, form of riding. In a similar line, parents may encourage children to ride to hounds to improve their riding skills. Others still, want to train their horses in order to participate in equestrian events. There are however, other more specific motivations, relating to the interaction with nature, that need attention.

Following Willis's (1974) comparative analysis of the meaning of animals in different cultures and production systems, Shepard criticises Ingold's argument that hunters are interested only in dead animals. According to Shepard (1997), wild animals pose a challenge to their thinking process. In particular, he argues, the meaning of animals and their power as symbolic signifiers emerge from the time spent "watching, speculating, and discussing animal ways" (1997, 294). In an endorsement of this argument, during our research we have found that many followers draw great pleasure from watching the interaction between foxes and hounds. Although all hounds may look the same to an outsider, Hunt followers proudly show their knowledge of each individual hound and praise their ability. At times, their comments appear to be remarkably in line with the criteria set out by Xenophon (Marchant and Bowersock [transl.] 1925), as they discuss the choice of hounds for the specific hunting day, the weather conditions, and the state of the country to be hunted.

For Isaacson (2002), rural and hunting minorities (including fox-hunters) across the world are an important element in defending and nurturing what remains of our natural space. Our experience of British fox-hunters clearly suggests that they have a deep-rooted interest in hunting as a way of conserving and interacting with nature,¹¹ and in acquiring a first-hand knowledge of it which, they say, is lost in contemporary daily life. For instance, the knowledge often includes such things as, how the wind blows and how it affects scent, how to estimate the behaviour of animals — both wild and domesticated — and ‘listen to’ and ‘understand’ hounds’ voices. Many comment on the behaviour of hounds as a pack and of horses as a herd. The relationship between horses and riders in particular is often the object of scrutiny. While some among the hunting field tend to comment on the look of horses and to point out the fact that seasoned hunters remember and behave accordingly, sometimes anticipating the riders’ commands, others focus on the way in which the horses are turned out and are managed by the riders; although it is clear to all that, as a herd, horses behave differently, riders’ skills are nonetheless judged on the basis of their horses’ behaviour.

Another interaction which is very much at the centre of attention is the relationship between the fox and the hounds; between, as many followers say, a wild animal and a pack of semi-domesticated animals. The former has to make complex decisions while the latter generally obey the commands of the huntsman. It is true that hounds are those who pick up the scent, follow it, and eventually corner the fox, but they are also led by their human masters. These observations lead many to believe that the fox is indeed cleverer than the hounds.

Hunting as Pest Control: Farming and the Management of the Land

Whether they hunt or not, most farmers who support fox-hunting, like many hunt-followers, see it as a practical necessity, to deal with vermin, and stress the key role of local Hunts in the disposal of carcasses of dead stock. When questioned about allegations of cruelty, they say that hunting is the most effective and least cruel way to control the fox population,¹² certainly not more cruel than most of today’s farming practices. They describe the attitude of urban people to nature as romantic and unrealistic, pointing out that most often the complex relationship that human beings have with nature is necessarily not a peaceful one. They regard the campaign against fox-hunting as an interference of misinformed town people in their lives. In line with a point made by Fukuda (1997), they resent the expansion of the urban environment into the countryside and, above all, ‘the intrusion of “townies” in the countryside.’ According to some of the farm-

ers with whom we have spoken, “town people do not understand and fully appreciate nature. They know nothing about farming and country life, come to the country ill-equipped for a day out in contact with nature, have a walk in the fields, become upset if they get dirty, leave their litter when they go back home and think they know and should tell us how we should live our lives.”

Farmers’ attitudes remind us of Tapper’s (1988) argument that animals differ as metaphors in different production systems. To three basic economies (foraging, herding and village agriculture), he adds a further category: urban people. These people, he suggests, are locked to surplus agriculture, though their dependence on it is obscured from them. The meaning of animals for urban people is obviously different from that given to them by farmers. For instance, while for urban people ‘pig’ and ‘swine’ carry the worst possible connotations, for farmers they represent wealth in so far as they become pork. Clearly, farmers are closer to nature than their urban counterparts. It is equally clear that their relationship with nature is strongly informed by the issues of growth, control and marketing. When production was limited to small farms, these issues did not raise ethical problems. As many farmers have pointed out, the situation has changed dramatically with the advent of industrialism and the attendant transformation of agricultural and farming practices, whereby animals are often kept in small enclosed spaces in appalling conditions.

To put it briefly, farmers are generally aware that industrial farming, while making life easier for them, has brought about the ill-treatment of animals. They are equally aware, however, that both the people engaged in animal rights campaigns and the many urban dwellers who demand ‘kindly reared’ free-range products do not realise that the caring and kindness they advocate for ‘our animal friends’ necessarily involves human control over nature in terms of vaccination, feeding and, especially in the case of free-range animals, the protection of livestock from predation from wild animals, such as the fox. Supporters of hunting note that the way in which many animal lovers treat domestic animals, especially pets, is not more humane than hunting. “It is domestication that goes against nature not hunting,” they argue. In a way reminiscent of Shepard’s (1997) argument, they go on to say that domestication is after all a form of slavery, an unnatural imposition of our human rules, needs, morality and sentiments upon animals. Paraphrasing Shepard, it could be said that domestic animals are thus treated as deficient beings. On one occasion, having observed throughout the day the different behaviour of hunting hounds and of the pet dogs brought along by foot followers, a Hunt member pointed out to us that “hounds were obviously enjoying themselves, running, playing with each other and, during the non-hunting moments,

playing with children. The domestic dogs, on the other hand, were only apparently better off and pampered, while they were in fact almost exclusively focused on their owners' commands."

Opposition to Hunting: Old Wine in New Barrels?

Shepard says, "At the heart of the ideal of animal protection is their 'right to be,' or their 'right to be let be,' to serve no human end. Its best expressions are magnificent pieces of rhetoric which perfectly express the detached ethos of the educated, urban mind" (1997, 319). Such rhetoric is coloured by a belief that sympathy to animals is central in Christianity. Christians would therefore be at their kindest when leaving animals alone, except from studying them. This illusory ethics of 'distance,' of 'let be' idealizes a kind of nature in which humans do not belong. Such passion can reach interesting extremes. To cite an example, Maureen Duffy (1972) furiously attacks hunting, describing it as thinly disguised rape. A radical feminist and animal lover, she regards hunting as a (sexual) build-up to an orgasm, claiming that it is not hard to see a phallus in the body shape of the fox, a traditionally sexy beast that dwells in holes. It seems to us that such imaginative extremism reflects a fear of participating in a world where life inevitably thrives on death, as opposed to a bucolic ideal unpolluted by the realities of organic processes, where nature is only a silent, neutered backdrop. Opposition to hunting and its history are nonetheless marked by a complexity that deserves attention.

Major opposition to fox-hunting developed during the 19th century. There were internal quarrels within the sporting world, but the strongest attacks came from outsiders. External opposition originated from two different sources. On the one hand, it became part of a general campaign against cruelty to animals. Initially, such a campaign was not concerned with wildlife *per se*. It essentially targeted experimental science, ill-treatment of domestic animals and the increasing application of technology to animal farms. Interest in animal welfare was a later development of urban bourgeois pet-lover's concern for cruelty to cart horses and abhorrence of such entertainment as bear- and dog-fights. On the other hand, opposition to fox-hunting developed among radical politicians who regarded it as the past time of the rural establishment and used their attacks on this activity to undermine what they identified as the landed interests of a parasitic class. Though separate in their origins, these two kinds of opposition mingled in the Evangelical movement which, reminiscent of the Puritanical stand on hunting and on leisure more generally, stigmatised hunting as a sinful activity of the idle.

The basic aspects of such opposition can be traced back

to the 17th century. In spite of Cromwell's enthusiasm for the chase, the Puritans argued that such sports as hunting degraded those who practised them. In their view, those who engaged in such activities lost their humanity and became savages. More generally, there was Puritanical prejudice against sport *tout court* because it gave pleasure. As Raymond Carr (1976) points out, only in part was 17th century Puritanical objection based on the conviction that the sport was cruel; above all, Puritans believed that as they engaged in sport people withdrew from serious and more worthy activities. They also objected to sporting activities because they often took place on Sundays. They were particularly resentful of people who hunted and their resentment continued well into the 19th century. To sum up, Puritanical opposition to hunting was not so much concerned with the welfare of animals as it was pointedly directed against leisure, pleasure and private property. Not surprisingly, their arguments cut little ice at the time.

On the other hand, Victorian opposition to hunting was a by-product of a generalized feeling against the cruel treatment of animals that had become popular in the mid-18th century following a large number of publications on this issue. Such feelings later developed into arguments against vivisection and experimental science, and into philosophical and theological debates on whether animals were passive reactors to external stimuli or could reason and feel. Attempts were also made to develop a legal argument. For example, Jeremy Bentham (1790) argued that the point was not whether animals could reason or talk but whether they could suffer, and that the law should protect all sensitive beings. As many jurists observed, however, such an argument implied the introduction of a new principle of criminal law that was (and remains) impossible to define; the principle, that is, of animal rights.

Shepard (1997, 308) provocatively says that animals, especially wild animals, "do not have rights; they have a natural history." He objects that rights exist as a universal, natural rule independently of any agreement among those who observe them. After all, even those rights that we consider as pre-existing legislation — the so-called natural rights, such as the right to life and to freedom — are culturally defined and determined. Shepard (1997, 309) explains that in philosophical terms animal rights exist as legal abstractions. We legislate on behalf of animals on the basis of moral standards defined by us, to satisfy our moral obligation to them, *not* on the basis of a claim made by the creatures on behalf of which legislation is made. In legal terms, rights cannot be separated from an understanding, by both parties, of the claim that is being made and of the duties and the demands of accountability that are involved in the proposed legislation. Animals obviously do not have such an understanding. It is us, humans, who create rights, or deny them.

These complicated speculations on animal rights should not, however, be confused with the principle of animal welfare. It should be stressed that the 19th century campaigns were more concerned with issues such as welfare and moral obligation than with legal rights. Such a concern is evident in the various legislations passed since 1822, which punished cruelty to domestic animals. It is of course interesting that some prominent fox-hunters were among the most active campaigners on animal welfare.¹³ Many members of what would later become the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) enjoyed hunting, shooting, fishing and were tenacious campaigners against bull-baiting and the ill-treatment of cab horses.¹⁴ Similarly, many radical politicians who supported the RSPCA were keen fox-hunters and game-shooters. Those people would find it difficult to believe that the RSPCA have now become vociferous opponents of hunting.

The major attacks on fox-hunting came from the Humanitarian League and from the Evangelical movement. Their moral and religious objections were directed against fox-hunters, rather than against fox-hunting. Reminiscent of the Puritanical condemnation, they were not so much concerned with what fox-hunting did to the fox, but rather with what such an activity might do to the fox-hunter. Nevertheless, Evangelicals, as well as Methodists, were tolerated because they were said to foster morality in the lower classes. They claimed that fox-hunting was a reproachful pursuit as much as theatre-going, though some did concede that it was difficult to oppose it totally unless a satisfactory method of controlling foxes was devised. Prominent public figures such as Gladstone associated horses with actresses; both starred in what he saw as sinful activities, such as racing and acting (Carr 1976, 210). On a different line, Oscar Wilde (1999 [1894], 471) famously dismissed fox-hunters as “the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable,” which, as Scruton (1998) points out, is untrue on both counts, noting that the fox was uneatable only to “fastidious aesthetes” such as Wilde.¹⁵ In response to these attacks, it was argued that most hunting people were ordinary decent folks standing above the moral norm; they were in fact so much so that J. S. Mill found rural society brutal, limited and tedious (Carr 1976, 210).

By the mid-1800s, as the Evangelical movement came to represent respectability, hunters were portrayed as heavy drinkers and gamblers. It is worth noting, however, that heavy drinking affected all Victorian society and that, at the time, horse racing and gambling, along with such activities as pugilism and cock-fighting, were either illegal or far from respectable. The counter-argument that many fox-hunters did not drink or gamble and were regular church-goers was dismissed with the claim that, like Alpine climbing, theirs was a foolhardy activity anyway, involving risking one's life and an

implicit disrespect for human life. On a different line, people like Surtees and Whyte-Melville were concerned, respectively, with separating hunting from gambling and racing and with making the world of hunting respectable in the Victorian sense. Thus, Whyte-Melville (1984 [1861]), who was a temperate man,¹⁶ strove to reconcile hunting with conventional Victorian morality. As Carr (1976) points out, he was not naïve about the world of hunting and was aware of the presence of doubtful characters in the hunting community but was nonetheless adamant that, in spite of such characters, fox-hunting was a school of moral and social values. As for drinking, he pointed out that no one could drink heavily and be able to control their horses and ride at fences.¹⁷

Apart from the Evangelical moralising campaigns, intellectual objections were also put forward. Perhaps, as Carr (1976) notes, the first intellectually respectable attack against fox-hunting came from the secular humanitarianism developed by the historian Freeman, which informed a complex debate, particularly involving Trollope, in the *Fortnightly Review* (1869). Freeman did not attack fox-hunting because it was a wasteful pastime of an idle upper class, but because he felt it involved elements of cruelty. He accepted that without hunting the fox would become extinct. He could not understand, however, how fox-hunters would readily condemn bull-baiting while ignoring the cruelty of their own sport. He described them as respectable people but also as ‘bad logicians’ biased by selective localized feelings. While unable to prove scientifically that the fox did not suffer, supporters of hunting tried to refute Freeman's argument, observing that people are ready to protect animals but they do not care for their own kind, not even their relatives. It was also observed that hunting was significantly distinct from bear-baiting and that no fox-hunter would take pleasure from the pain inflicted on other creatures.

The campaign against fox-hunting continued with added arguments on whether animals can feel, or can even reason and have a soul. The conservationist defence that hunting kept foxes from extinction was reluctantly accepted by some members of the opposition, who maintained however that it was wrong to inflict suffering on other creatures for what was, after all, a leisure activity. Following the failure of a bill to control field sports introduced in 1908, further attacks were launched, mainly by the Humanitarian League. The Humanitarian League's campaign tried to bring together all sorts of arguments against hunting, from moral to political to economic. Salt's collection of essays, *Killing for Sport*, published in 1915 for the League, reiterated old arguments. It portrayed fox-hunting as a ‘blood sport’ and, as such, degrading to those who practiced it.¹⁸ The contributors revived both the 19th century attack on ‘landlordism’ and the agrarian radicalism that cast fox-hunting as the ruin of agriculture,

because tenant farmers were terrorized by their fox-hunting landlords and because landlords had opposed the movement for small holdings in order to preserve game and be able to hunt over large farms.¹⁹

Thus, from animal rights and moralising campaigns the attacks became focused on the class issue. It was argued that field sports were the expensive recreation of a wealthy minority which was over-represented in Parliament and that it was not true that hunting was beneficial to the country's economy. In contrast, apologists of hunting claimed that this activity played a key role in the rural economy, which in turn benefited the economy of the country as a whole (See, e.g., Carr 1976, 211). Economic activities associated with hunting included money spent on hunters, fodder, covert hacks, the management of coverts, stud grooms, huntsmen's and stable boys' wages. It was maintained that, were hunting to be abolished, all this money would be diverted from rural areas. The conservationist aspect was also stressed, pointing to the fact that without the attraction of hunting, many squires might leave their houses empty and their land unattended; as a consequence, the British great estates would fall in disrepair along with the skilfully landscaped countryside. The economic significance of hunting continues to be disputed (Ward 1999). Following what has become known as the 'Burns Inquiry' (See endnote 20), it has been estimated that between 5,000 and 8,000 jobs will be lost as a consequence of the legal ban. Hunt supporters claim that these figures underestimate the significance of hunting to rural life, pointing out that a considerable amount of hunt-related activities and satellite jobs, particularly in the management of the land and in the equestrian and racing businesses, would be affected by a legal ban. Most important, they argue that hunting is a key aspect of rural culture and society and represents a way of life for many country people.

The Legal Process: The Dubious Legitimacy of Criminalizing Hunting

On the 18th of February 2005 hunting with hounds in England and Wales became illegal and those who pursue this activity became liable to criminal prosecution. Over time, the current British rulers' determination to impose a ban on hunting with hounds (Pardo 2000c) has vividly exemplified their broader and far-reaching difficulty in reconciling their ideology of 'right' and 'wrong,' their sense of moral superiority with the morality and sense of legitimacy of a sizeable minority of ordinary Britons. For a while, these dominant élite's rhetoric of 'caring' may have predictably enjoyed popularity in a society that has begun to feel the moral, social and economic burden of a version of capitalism that seems to have lost any appearance of humanity. Nevertheless, as their neo-

Puritan ethics and many of their 'caring' policies of social engineering²⁰ have become open to question, the credibility of the very institution of democratic government is seen to be at stake. A cynic might conclude that these rulers are stuck in a crisis of their own making. The new broom that, back in 1997, promised to sweep cleaner has been repeatedly seen to be soiled by expedient deals, cronyism and spin. It could be said that, given the prejudice they have contributed to seed, this is the harvest they deserve. This, however, would be cold comfort, considering that the implications of their approach are becoming widely recognised. Hunting has proved to be one of their stumbling blocks. It will be useful to outline briefly the course of the legislation to ban hunting.

The legal process has proved to be rather tangled. As we have pointed out earlier, in recent times it started with the so-called Foster Bill proposed in 1997. The Bill failed on the first reading, but it triggered a remarkable series of events, involving repeated and prolonged Parliamentary debates, a large investment of Parliamentary time and a series of mass rallies. In 1998, MPs gave the Bill a second reading but it ran out of time and was dropped in March, after pro-hunting MPs tabled hundred of amendments. That second reading provoked a furious reaction and a large demonstration in London, as an estimated 250,000 people joined a march to protest what they saw as a threat to rural customs and way of life. In July, PM Tony Blair announced that he still planned to outlaw hunting.²¹ Ever larger rallies followed.²² In February 2001, MPs voted by a majority of 179 for an outright ban as a new Hunting Bill cleared the Commons. A month later, the House of Lords voted by a majority of 249 against this Bill, which ran out of time when the general election was called. In 2002, Parliament was asked to choose between a ban, the *status quo* and a system of licensing. The Commons voted by a large majority for a complete ban, while peers voted equally overwhelmingly for the *status quo*. Again, the measure ran out of Parliamentary time. In September 2004, the Commons passed the third reading of the Hunting Bill by 339 votes to 155. Also on this occasion, a large rally took place in Parliament Square; only, this time, a worrying precedent was established, as the protest degenerated into violence.²³ Peers were expected to reject the law. Nevertheless, in November, the House of Lords were by-passed through the application of the Parliament Act, a device that, since it was passed in 1949, had been used very rarely and only on extremely important issues. This development brought to a head complex political and Constitutional issues. In February 2005, the Countryside Alliance lost their High Court challenge to the legitimacy of the Parliament Act.²⁴ Nevertheless, not only is the hunting lobby planning an appeal; it is also opposing the law in the British Courts on the ground of human rights, and plans to bring the case to the European Court of Justice.

While the debate on hunting has stirred up unnecessary trouble, widespread resentment, and huge rallies by people previously unaccustomed to such course of action, its legal outcome raises very serious issues. It jeopardises the coexistence of different moralities in civil society, as it denies moral weight and legitimacy to the motivations and way of life of a large part of the population basically because they fail to meet the project and morality of a dominant élite. Criminalization makes it imperative to ask to what extent this kind of legislation undermines the interplay between the production of law, the imperatives of legal and political authority, the perceived legitimacy of the institutions and representatives of the state and the dynamics of people's trust in them.

As we have argued elsewhere with reference to other ethnographies (Pardo 2000b, Prato 2000), in politics, as in most other cases, building trust is a rational, long-term process. To work at all, trust must work both ways, between the parties. As the dominant élite have chosen to run roughshod over such an important aspect of associated life in Britain, they have endangered their legitimacy as rulers, further justifying distrust among people who have to live with the everyday effects of their rule but feel unjustly distrusted in their values, needs and way of life.

Of course, the quality of law and politics is crucial to the developing relationship between the individual and the state. With direct reference to the theoretical framework of morals of legitimacy (Pardo 2000a), it is equally obvious that law, like politics, cannot afford to obey some absolute morality, for establishing forms of legal and political leadership that are recognisable and acceptable to civil society remains a condition of modern politics. And yet, as we have seen, the problematic of hunting is clearly identified as a moral one: there is no scientific basis to justify a legal ban. Legislation is therefore necessarily based on moral, as opposed to strictly legal, considerations. A sophisticated analysis of this situation demands that we ask what moral legitimacy will such legislation enjoy, as it is observably informed by a partial morality to which the dominant rhetoric of power has managed to attach a momentary popular aura of superiority. We must also consider that it has indulged in an ethically dubious restriction of civil liberty, operating well beyond a customary degree of arbitrariness of law, and has conceded defeat to the highly contentious principle of law as imposed law (Burman and Harrel-Bond 1979; Pardo 2000a). Perhaps above all, we must recognize that such legislation has *de facto* set a precedent in codifying law against the principle that the needs and values of the individual, including the non-aligned individual, should be recognised by the law.

Turning what so many people regard as a legitimate part of their culture and lifestyles into a criminal offence inevitably dooms the rule of law to be resented as illegitimate

and the rule-maker to be regarded as an impostor. Over the years, such mismanagement of responsibility in the exercise of the power to govern has extended to many other issues that matter to ordinary Britons. These political and legislative choices and the attendant dominant élite's moralizing about 'the right things to do' (and, indeed, to feel), have enjoyed the support of a large part of the media, which has guaranteed circulation at the expense of independence and informed opinion. Nevertheless, as the impact of such policies has begun to be felt in everyday life, the relationship of trust between the ruled and their elected rulers has inevitably suffered. Of course, the power of those who rule is not necessarily weakened. Power — not authority, and even less trust — may be won through astute management of favourable circumstances, in which careful manipulation or misrepresentation of ordinary people's values may play a role. Power is not lost because citizens fail to be drawn to the dominant élite's visions of what is best for them. It is lost because these élite fail credibly to link to ordinary people, favouring superimposition (of culture and modes of behaviour) in their relationship with them.

Conclusion

The history of kindness to animals is parallel to a process of anthropomorphization that patronizes life and nature and confuses civilization with a sentimental fiction. Such an attitude feeds on a misplaced drive to control nature, which points to an interesting paradox, for when it comes to butchering animals to eat, humans suddenly become very different from animals; they suddenly become morally superior and intellectually distant. We have examined how the debate on fox-hunting brings out a dilemma in humans' relationship to nature that cannot be solved by ethics, logic or charity. Hunters feel surrounded by nature; they interact with it and hunting is an aspect of such an interaction. In contrast, despite their need to control nature, opponents see hunting as a perversion. We have studied complex reasons why hunting the fox seems to disgust some animal lovers. We have seen how the ecological concern of modern hunters is ignored by a vociferous opposition that casts hunting as outdated and barbaric. The descriptive analysis offered here of hunters' understanding of, and relationship with, nature has exposed 'bonding' to animals as the Disneyan dream of people who, as Shepard aptly puts it (1997, 320), "have never watched wild animals closely and patiently, have little notion of their intelligence, otherness, or the complexity of their lives, cannot imagine combining holiness as killing them or celebrating them...or perceive animals as a means of speculative thought, referential analogy, or immanent divinity."

The anti-hunting themes that we have examined have

been amply reflected in the strategy, pursued in Parliament and outside it, to bring about a legal ban. Under considerable pressure from the wealthy and powerful animal rights lobby, such a strategy has thrived on a mixture of misinformation and pedagogical and strong-arm tactics, betraying a tendency to authoritarianism that sits uneasily with the need for democratic rule to be seen as legitimate. Over time, it has been identified by an increasingly large number of Britons as a clear sign of an elite's contempt for the culture of a minority that feels unjustly persecuted for a pursuit that they enjoy and harms no one. Accused of barbarism and cruelty by animal rights activists, politicians and the media, the hunting community have seen an historical activity, deep-rooted in the culture and tradition of their country, turned into a cartoon-like abomination. Sanctioned as immoral by a lobby that appears to be largely ignorant of the facts, they find themselves forced to bear the legal burden of Alfred North Whitehead's cold reflection on morality; morality in any given time or place, he points out in the *Dialogues* (1954), is what the majority happen to like, and immorality is what they dislike.

Hunting with hounds is now the object of legal dispute in the British and European Courts. The outcome of such dispute is uncertain. Nevertheless, legalism quite apart, for many the ban remains testimony to a critical failure in democratic governance. Against such a problematic background, we must risk sounding naïve in pointing to the essential (if problematic) task of governance meeting the challenge of an open-minded view of the individual in society. More precisely, as ethnographers, we feel bound to eschew cynicism and observe that it is important for democratic rulers to dispense with expedient politics and with attempts to over-regulate individuals' lives in favour of an approach that renders justice to the morality of individuals whose choices and lifestyles enjoy full legitimacy in the culture in which they belong, regardless of the fact that such a culture may disagree with the dominant ideology. Coming to terms with such a task is an absolute priority because rulers' recognition — in policy and legislation — of the fundamental value of (all) citizens' cultures and actions qualifies both participation and representation; two fundamentals of democracy.

Endnotes

1. This article is a revised and expanded version of a paper presented at the International Conference on *Nature, Science, and Social Movements*, University of the Aegean, Lesvos, Greece. 25th-28th June 2004. We are grateful to the British Academy for funding our attendance at the Conference (Grant No OCG-38300) and to an anonymous reader for *Human Ecology Review* for useful comments on an earlier draft.
2. Author to whom correspondence should be directed:
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4. We are now continuing fieldwork, focusing on the aftermath of the legal ban.
5. It should be noted, with Rupert Isaacson (2002), that also traditional hunter-gatherers, faced with the realities of the cash economy and increasing globalization, are campaigning for their right to hunt not just for food but, above all, for cultural and environmental reasons.
6. In the first half of the 16th Century, farmers began hunting foxes with dogs, while aristocrats regarded the fox as vermin and saw this activity as beneath them.
7. In contrast, as Carr (1976) notes, in the past the British aristocracy was very much concerned with the welfare of farmers and their families.
8. Members of the Hunt include hunting farmers, subscribers and landowners. Hunting farmers are described as people who earn their living from farming and permit the Hunt to hunt on their land. Subscribers are individual members, or families, who pay the agreed annual fee. Landowners are people who own land in the country hunted by the Hunt in question and allow the Hunt on such land. Hunts usually have different subscription fees for farmers, families, and, in some cases, for riders and non-rider members. Pony club members usually pay a symbolic fee to ride with the Hunt.
9. Beginning in September, Hunts are engaged in cub-hunting. This is a way to teach young hounds to hunt and, as Isaacson (2002) points out, fox cubs to give chase.
10. Sassoon (1934[1928]) describes his sense of isolation when, as a little boy, he went to live with his aunt and felt excluded from Country society, to which hunting was central.
11. Some of the key principles embedded in the Constitution of English and Welsh Hunts are: 1) maintain an establishment as kennel to breed foxhounds in order to retain their bloodlines and to meet biodiversity responsibilities by undertaking such lawful activities with hounds and equestrian activities as the Hunt Committee may determine to facilitate that end; 2) maintain a controlled and balanced fox population...with a view to achieving environmental balance and conservation of the countryside and providing sport for followers; 3) promote the environmental and conservation benefits associated with the sport and practice of foxhunting to wider communities.
12. Most foxes killed by Hunts are old or diseased.
13. For instance, the Animal Protection Act of 1848 passed thanks to the crucial support of the Duke of Beaufort, whose pack of foxhounds is still today one of the most active in the country. At the time, the Duke of Beaufort was also a supporter of the RSPCA.
14. In 1800 a bill was proposed against bull-baiting, but it was opposed because bull-baiting was regarded as the past time of the poor and it was feared that by criminalizing this kind of entertainment, the populace might turn to more subversive activities. This view was strongly supported by Windham, who was a non-interventionist and believed that Parliament should not seek to regulate the everyday life of men and women (See Carr 1976). Thus, this 'sport of the poor' remained legal until 1835.
15. With reference to what we have said earlier on this issue, these observations raise key religious and, more generally, cultural themes. These themes inform the complex questions, admirably addressed by Noëlle Vialles (1994), about what turns an animal into something edible rather than a repulsive corpse? and, what is 'true meat'? In a

- forthcoming monograph, we offer an analysis of the cultural, symbolic and moral framework of fox-hunting as a sociologically significant activity.
16. Whyte-Melville's novels could be said to amount to a campaign against drinking and gambling and in favour of a virtuous and decorous life.
 17. Nevertheless, the habit of carrying a hip- or saddle-flask to shake off the cold is a British 'tradition.' Interestingly, in France and Italy drinking in the saddle is frowned upon.
 18. The Introduction was authored by George Bernard Shaw, a supporter of the anti-hunting movement and of eugenics.
 19. Referring to the failure of the Smallholding Acts of 1892 and 1907, Carr (1976) stresses the deep ignorance of the real reasons for the depression of British agriculture on which these arguments were constructed.
 20. To cite an example, they have shown a determination to transform British society also through a policy of urbanization of rural and 'green belt' areas, leading to the destruction of delicate ecosystems.
 21. In December 1999, the Blair government also appointed a Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales. The Inquiry (2000) found that the charge of cruelty was unsubstantiated and suggested that there were insufficient scientific grounds to support the anti-hunting position. In short, it concluded that the 'hunting question' was a moral question and recommended not to rush legislation to ban it.
 22. In September 2002 an estimated 400,000 people participated in the 'Livelihood March' in London.
 23. Like the preceding rallies, this event was amply reported in the media. See, e.g., *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, September 16, 2004.
 24. It is basically argued that the 1949 Parliament Act can be challenged as invalid, because it was never passed by the Lords. The Act reduced the requirement to present a Bill to the House of Lords to two successive sessions, instead of three. The Act became law in 1949 because, following the requirements of the 1911 Act, it was passed by the Commons and presented to the Lords for three successive sessions.
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