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Animal Testing Giant Joins the Vegan Movement

#Daiya

Lara Drew and Daniel Kidby

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On Friday it was announced that Daiya has been acquired by a large pharmaceutical company, Otsuka, who by their own admission conduct animal testing, we at Veganarchy have a few ideas on the situation we wanted to share.

Whilst veganism is a necessary step toward animal liberation, there is a presumption that buying products marked “vegan” or “cruelty-free” is the end game of the animal advocacy movement, but veganism on its own is limiting and not sufficient by itself to bring about animal liberation. The acquisition of Daiya is a reminder that corporations have no ethics, and that there are ethical implications when consuming anything within an economic system that encourages unlimited growth and views the earth, animals (both wild and domestic) and humans as mere resources to profit from and exploit.

Daiya were a \$326 million dollar company. It would be naïve to assume that in order to grow into a corporate giant they didn’t compromise their vegan values or develop a supply chain which in-

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cluded destructive monocultures, habitat and wildlife destruction and exploited farm workers. In this society there is no such thing as a vegan company.

It is the nature of capitalism that successful brands, whether marketed as 'ethical' or not, wind up being bought by a bigger, badder company. Pretty much all successful brands eventually wind up coming under the ownership of a few behemoths through mergers and acquisitions.

Whilst we do not support a multimillion dollar corporation that actively supports and conducts animal experimentation this boycott is motivated by 'moral purity', a desire to do no harm. But consumer capitalism is so destructive to this planet that we can't avoid causing harm. Unless you want to escape to your own off-grid veganic farm and live self-sufficient then you will be somewhat complicit in the violence of our system. If we want an ethical society, we should fight for a social revolution. A social revolution is needed otherwise veganism will remain entrenched in a capitalist system that reinforces vegan lifestyle-ism rather than making veganism part of a movement to oppose the political, economic and social systems which oppresses all life.

This boycott is also motivated by the belief that we have power as consumers, that we can change society with our consumption habits. But there is never such a simple, easy answer to overturning oppression. Relying on maxims like "change the world we must begin with ourselves" is too simplistic as it risks seeing individual consumer choice as the only solution to global problems.

The urge for vegans to boycott Daiya goes to show how many of us have been making use of this global processed factory product. This strongly highlights the strong reliance we have on global brands, and showcases our society's addiction to consumer capitalism. We shouldn't have to wait for an animal testing giant to take over Daiya before we question our support of the business. Did we really all believe that Daiya were super ethical before this acquisition anyway?

This whole boycott discussion highlights a confusion of what it means to fight for animal liberation which is rooted in Donald Watson's definition of veganism. Watson defined veganism as a "*philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude — as far as is possible and practicable — all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals...*". This definition denotes veganism as a 'lifestyle' rather than a justice movement. It places a burden on people to strive for purity in the here and now, rather than fighting to overturn the society which makes animal abuse possible. It places a boycott tactic at the centre of animal liberation with the underlying message that vegan capitalism will save animals. As a community we boycott in reaction to everything! No tactic, boycott or otherwise, should be the focal point of a movement strategy, any tactic is just a single weapon in an strategic arsenal and should be used when appropriate and effective.

To change the enormous and complex problems we face we must think creatively. Audre Lorde's well known phrase captures this the best: 'the masters tools will never dismantle the master's house'. In other words, we need to agitate for new spaces of resistance and liberation and move beyond a consumer boycott only approach.

It is worth noting that the outrage and opposition to this acquisition and the resulting boycott by both individuals and businesses (see for instance the Cruelty Free Shop) has the possibility, at least in the short term, to be picked up by the mainstream media. And hopefully it can result in a few news stories which register our opposition to Otsuka's animal testing practices.

As far as a long-term permanent boycott goes, some might feel that boycotting a multi-billion company that supports animal experimentation is more ethically consistent with the philosophy and practices of a compassionate and just world. And of course if we can do better then there is no reason *not* to act.

We certainly are not in agreement with the camp of people who think that we *ought to* continue to buy Daiya products, and other

vegan consumer goods, in order to promote a vegan consumer market and give corporations new ways to profit from expensive middle-class consumer goods. This kind of argument shows a misunderstanding of the workings of capitalism and its ability to co-opt justice movements. In this case, it has the effect of inviting an animal testing corporate giant into the animal liberation movement.

But overall it is your decision whether you decide to boycott Daiya based on what feels right for you and your own values, but regardless what your decision is, make sure that boycotting is not *all* that you do.

But let's be honest, how many of us will remember this in six months time?