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Hey, Steve, I just heard about your courage. I've been a vegan for fifteen years, a vegetarian for fifty years. Thanks for your great strength on behalf of us all.

About the time I began refusing to be a graveyard for the flesh of helpless animals, in 1960, I was arrested for an antiwar protest in New London, Connecticut. I was sentenced to ten years in a federal joint. Okay, the judge suspended my sentence after three months. (On the street, I refused to cooperate with the conditions of probation. The probation dude tried to send me back to finish the nine years and nine months, but the libertarian judge, Robert Anderson, just let me go my way.)

While I did the ninety days in the federal joint, I went on a hunger strike — a very public hunger strike. They threw me in the hole, all the while trying to tempt me with heaping platters from the kitchen. After about two weeks they moved me to the on-site infirmary. They force-fed me with a tube through my nose into my stomach. They sent a liquid protein supplement down my gut.

The thick liquid probably had cow's milk products.

It was sheer torture the first day. At least a half inch in diameter, the tube caused almost unbearable painful gagging. Descriptions of water-boarding recall my first day of force-feeding. It was all I could do to refrain from screaming for them to stop. I rather think the meds enjoyed it. Well, the second day, it was somewhat easier. On the third day, I barely noticed what had begun as an ordeal.

My point is, if you can get by the first few times, force-feeding becomes easy and comfortable.

Okay, I know they'll probably pour dairy products down your gut, but, quite possibly, they may find that all-soy protein supplements are cheaper and more easily available. Whatever they use, you are not responsible. You are not willfully consuming the product.

If they force any tortured-animal product into your gut, it's without your consent.

I respect and admire you, Steve. If you think you can handle it — the hunger, the terror, the pain, the abuse, the absence of gustatory satisfaction — you may find a hunger strike a viable alternative to the flesh-filled dining room.

But make your hunger strike public. Be sure your allies, as well as the hacks, are well aware that you are refusing all nourishment. Post a letter to the warden.

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