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Observer

Animal libbers poised for fresh assault on colleges

Barry Hugill

MILITANT anti-vivisectionists are planning a new year offensive against universities and academics conducting research on animals. The Animal Liberation Front gave advance warning of its intentions on Christmas Eve with a raid on research laboratories at Oxford University.

The university lost 60 cats and has increased security for fear that attempts will be made to free more animals. Attackers targetted Professor Colin Blakemore, Waynflete Professor of Physiology at Oxford, a well-known defender of animal experimentation.

Professor Blakemore said last night he would not be silenced. 'Many scientists are afraid to speak out. Universities are having to spend a fortune on security and there is a determined attempt to stifle debate. The Christmas Eve raid was aimed at me and more is threatened.'

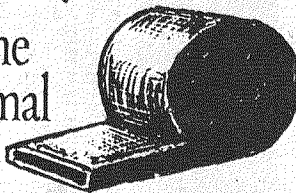
Mark Matfield of the Research Defence Society accused animal activists of intimidating scientists. 'Colin was a predictable target and they are trying to frighten him and others. But it won't work. More and more doctors and scientists are beginning to realise they must speak out.'

The Animal Liberation Front is a shadowy group prepared to use violent methods, including physical attacks on research scientists.

Non-violent pressure group Animal Aid also plans a January campaign. Students are to be challenged to 'blow the whistle' on professors conducting animal experiments.

When term starts early next year thousands of undergraduates will be handed specially

Time to blow the whistle on Animal Experiments?



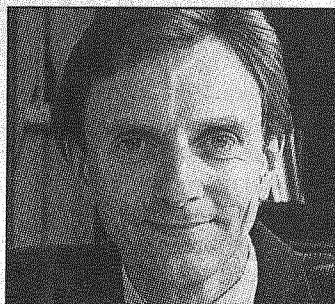
Animal Aid's call to students witnessing lab cruelty.

prepared 'whistleblower' cards and asked to inform on academics responsible for 'cruel or negligent practices in animal research laboratories'.

The cards give a telephone number for students to ring in confidence. Anonymity is guaranteed and a £250 reward will be offered for information.

Campaign director Mark Gold believes few students will claim the cash. He says many agree to help out in laboratories, often as part of their course work, without realising what is taking place.

'We get a steady trickle of information from students shocked at what they see. Our problem is the secrecy surrounding experiments and the fear of those working in labs that they will be in trouble if they speak out. That is why we guarantee anonymity,' he said.



Colin Blakemore: A target.

Cards will be distributed by Animal Aid supporters to biology, psychology and veterinary students. Also targetted will be administrative, clerical and support staff working in the labs.

Animal Aid insists it is a non-violent group and is at pains to distance itself from anti-vivisectionists who have physically attacked academics. Last summer Professor Ian Silver, Dean of Bristol University's School of Medicine received threats from the Animal Liberation Front. Dr Max Headley, a researcher at Bristol, had his car bombed.

Whistleblowing was pioneered by activists in the United States who mounted a successful campaign against Benetton after receiving insider information that the company was using rabbits in cosmetic tests. Benetton subsequently rejected all animal experimentation.

The decision to launch the New Year campaign was taken after a pilot run at various universities.

At Liverpool a 17-year-old girl attending an undergraduate interview was allowed to inspect the animal house. She phoned Animal Aid to tell of rats with 'blood-stained coats'. Staff told her that pharmaceutical companies paid the university to test new drugs. She witnessed a monkey have drug-splanted in its brain.

Animal Aid will use any information gathered to mount publicity campaigns against the university involved. The group denies that this can place academics in physical danger. Mr Gold insists the intention is to make the public aware of the work carried out.

'Public opinion is turning against animal experiments and it is increasingly likely that some people within laboratories will be disturbed by what they see and hear. It is these people we hope to reach through the campaign,' he said.

Scientists claim the activities of Animal Aid, and the violent Animal Liberation Front, are fuelling severe research cut-backs. Faced with massive bills for security against sabotage and strict laws governing the housing of animals, universities are resigned to scaling down experimentation.

The most serious cuts will be at Cambridge, which needs about £9 million to bring its animal houses up to legal standard, and at Oxford, which needs about £6m.

Cuts will affect the type of animal research conducted with a reduction in the use of larger mammals, mainly cats and dogs. Many scientists fear this will hinder vital research into heart disease, respiratory ailments and kidney failure.

Tim Biscoe, Professor of Physiology at University College, London, accused anti-vivisectionists of impeding crucial medical research. 'They are creating a climate where it is very difficult for us to get work funded.'

'British scientists are working on cures for leprosy and malaria, the world's biggest killers. Does Animal Aid really want their work to stop?'

The greening of the friendly wellie

Geoffrey Lean

Environment Correspondent

ARDENT environmentalists with their hearts in their boots need despair no longer: they can now recycle their wellingtons.

In a move that adds new meaning to the 'green wellie', Britain's largest manufacturer of gumboots is setting up the world's first recycling scheme. It hopes to establish 'wellie banks', and even claims that its plan could help offset the effects of the Gulf crisis.

Dunlop, which makes almost

a third of the seven million pairs of gumboots sold in Britain each year, is already planning to import worn-out wellies from Norway.

Once, when wellingtons were made of rubber, they were impossible to recycle. But over the past two decades, the PVC wellie has come to dominate the market. Dunlop explains that this makes it possible to 'use the incentive of colour' and introduce Teenage Mutant Hero Turtle wellies and other monstrosities, heedless of the Iron Duke spinning in his tomb

under the dome of St Paul's.

PVC wellies are also recyclable, and Dunlop has installed plant to strip out their linings, chop them up, and remake them, proving that old boots are not as tough as once thought.

Trevor Bates, a senior Dunlop executive, says: 'Recycling wellies is not a dream, but a fact. Dunlop will take your boots and recycle them. We can do this an absolutely infinite number of times.'

He hopes to persuade local authorities to set up wellie banks, and is considering offer-

ing schools cash for collecting their pupils' old gumboots. Until a collection scheme is in place, keen recyclers can go to the expense of posting their boots to Dunlop in Liverpool.

Mr Bates claims that the scheme has 'a strategic side', because PVC is made of oil. 'If we get into a serious oil crisis again in the Gulf, Dunlop can keep going longer, on recycled products, than any competitor anywhere else in the world.'

It remains to be seen whether this will make Saddam Hussein tremble in his boots.