



Left: Workers on the Oxford laboratory wear masks to conceal their identity from animal rights activists. The government is funding security protection at the site

Below: Some of the 300 animal rights protesters who attended the demonstration in Oxford on 25 February



RUNNING SCARED

It began with protests against the building of animal research laboratories in Cambridge and Oxford. Now those protests have mushroomed to target any construction firms connected with Oxford University, Oxford city or the entire pharmaceutical sector. Sarah Richardson reports on the campaign that turned into a war – and how the industry is trying to fight back

IT'S SATURDAY, 25 FEBRUARY, IN OXFORD. THE streets are swamped by animal rights activists accompanied by police cavalry. Four hundred protesters have gathered outside the site of the Oxford University animal testing laboratory to hurl abuse at the 10 ft security fence separating them from the building, and the masked construction workers within. The message is concise and simple. "ALL MURDERERS MUST FACE THEIR CRIMES EVENTUALLY. IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME. WE'LL FIND OUT WHO THEY ARE. AND WHEN WE DO, THEY WON'T IGNORE US."

Saturday, 25 February, London. The senior director of one contractor thinks he knows how these workers feel. Although he is 56 miles away, and has no involvement in the Oxford scheme, he is considering ending one of his firm's staple sources of work: building offices used by pharmaceutical companies. He has never constructed an animal laboratory, but this does not matter. The clients are almost as nervous. "They've told us not to use their projects for marketing as their directors have been approached by rights activists. Otherwise, they said, we will get their attention."

The director, who does not want to be identified for fear of reprisals, is one victim of what has become a virtual siege of the construction industry by animal rights activists. What began as a targeted protest against Montpellier, the original Oxford contractor, in 2004 has turned into a witch hunt against much of the industry.

Beyond Oxford

Last week, *Building* revealed that rights activists had sent warning letters to firms with no connection to Oxford, the laboratory, the university or even the city, including Sussex-based pensions provider B&CE. It was also revealed that prime minister Tony Blair has begun a programme of secret meetings with the industry as part of an international strategy to combat the threat. Since

then it has emerged that the entire building programme of the pharmaceutical industry is in jeopardy because contractors are reluctant to retain links to the sector.

It all started when Montpellier was forced to quit the first attempt to build Oxford's animal research laboratory in July 2004 after a campaign by animal rights extremists. Earlier in the year, Cambridge University had been forced to ▶

Who's who: Armies in the war against construction

SPEAK

Lawful protest group, and the main voice in the campaign against the Oxford laboratory. Formed in 2002 as Stop Primate Experiments At Cambridge, the group switched its attention to Oxford in 2004.

Actions Regular demonstrations outside the site of the laboratory in Oxford – 300 protesters attended its last demonstration in February. Letter campaign detailing alleged animal abuse to deter firms from working on the project. Intelligence work to expose the names of firms involved with Oxford project.

Key player Mel Broughton is the activist leading the campaign. US campaign group Win Animal Rights (WAR) has also pledged resources to Speak's Oxford campaign.

ANIMAL LIBERATION FRONT

The Animal Liberation Front is not a formal organisation. It is a name used by activists who carry out illegal actions. ALF activists say they will carry out attacks against property but will not physically harm individuals. They operate worldwide, usually as part of small groups.

Actions The ALF threatened to forge documents falsely exposing staff from Montpellier, the original Oxford lab contractor, as sex offenders. Activists conducted a similar campaign against the executives of pharmaceutical firm GlaxoSmithKline last month. Recent operations claimed by the ALF include an attack on the car of an employee of Oxford Architects, which is carrying out work for Oxford University unconnected to the laboratory. In July, the ALF carried out an arson attack on an Oxford boathouse. The organisation says anyone in Oxford is a legitimate target.

Key players ALF activists are anonymous.

Defending the industry

Prime minister Tony Blair is holding a series of secret meetings with construction industry leaders to consider ways to protect firms from animal rights extremists. The meetings also include senior figures from universities, pharmaceutical companies and the police.

They are a direct response to the escalating threat from animal rights extremists, which the government has described as "terrorist activities". The meetings are part of an international strategy to crack down on animal rights extremism. As part of this strategy, *Building* has learned that the government plans to:

- Share intelligence on animal rights activities with other GB countries
- Work with trade associations from targeted industries, including construction, to pass advice and information to companies
- Disrupt the internet activities of animal rights extremists
- Step in to help targeted companies in UK and abroad protect their business
- Increase firms' legal protection against the activities of animal rights extremists.

A spokesperson for the DTI said: "The government is committed to protecting those companies directly or indirectly involved in the use of animals in research."

Oxford University has secured a series of injunctions to prevent activists gaining access to the site of the laboratory project or to the individuals involved with the scheme. Laws protecting those involved with construction of the project include:

- A temporary injunction, granted last week, against the use of megaphones, sirens, whistles, and other means of noise amplification in the vicinity of the laboratory site. There are also restrictions on the use of cameras and video cameras in the area.
- An injunction banning named animal rights activists and groups from coming within 50 yards of Oxford animal laboratory and the premises of any contractors, subcontractors and suppliers working on the project.
- Protesters are prohibited from picketing, demonstrating or loitering within 100 yards of the homes of those protected by the order.
- There is a media injunction against naming contractors working on the project.

There will be a High Court hearing on 3 April, at which Oxford University is seeking:

- The extension of the temporary injunctions and the current exclusion zone.
- To designate all contractors and suppliers to the university as protected persons.
- To designate all donors and funders of the university as protected persons.

David Holmes, Oxford University's registrar, said: "Returning to the High Court is not a step we have taken lightly, but it is necessary given that extremist elements have identified anyone with a connection to Oxford as a legitimate target for direct action."

► abandon plans for a primate research lab, and the activists were hoping to repeat their success.

Some of the tactics were extreme. One group of activists, acting under the banner of the Animal Liberation Front, warned Montpellier executives that they planned to publish documents that "proved" Montpellier staff had been convicted of sex offences. The activists threatened to circulate these to neighbours of the firm's workers. Under the circumstances, Montpellier took a pragmatic decision to walk away from the contract.

The project then lay dormant for 16 months while the university searched for a replacement contractor. The activists maintained their vigilance and did what they could to pre-empt the reopening of the project. Speak, a legal protest group, began writing speculative letters to firms that were known to have links to the university. But it was only after a contractor was appointed in November last year that the protesters stepped up their campaign. Thames Valley Police revealed last autumn that it was investigating more than 30 threatening letters sent to building firms working in the Oxfordshire area, many of which had no links to the university or its work. The campaign against Oxford's firms has not relented since.

Two months ago, extremists attacked the premises of Oxford Architects, a practice that has no connection to the animal laboratory but works on other projects for the university. Activists caused thousands of pounds worth of damage, covering the premises with graffiti and damaging a car belonging to one of the workers.

Partner Brian Sopp said the practice received no warning it was about to be attacked. He said: "We can only assume they saw some of our boards around the university. We aren't downplaying the incident, and have received advice from the local police force, but the attack was pretty arbitrary. The car they damaged belongs to a Polish migrant who has had no involvement on any of our university work. He's incredibly angry and bemused." The practice has stepped up security since the attack, but believes it will be a one-off.

This week, two large firms with offices in the area revealed that they have been part of a mass email campaign targeted at a huge number of firms in the Thames Valley. One of the firms works for the university but not on the lab, but as a result of this has removed its hoardings from university sites. A senior source at the second company said: "There has been indiscriminate targeting. There is no rhyme nor reason for the selection of companies on the list."

The targeting may be random, but it has created a sense of collective insecurity in the industry. "It's the initial reaction that gets you most," says the source. "We are deeply concerned, given what happened to Montpellier. We feel we've been

tarded with a brush aimed at a project we've had nothing to do with. It was sent to a number of staff within the company. We have no idea where our addresses were obtained from."

The warning letter sent to B&CE marks an escalation in the campaign against construction firms. *Building* understands that the letter was part of a batch of about 20 sent to construction firms in the South. The letter warns anyone to do with construction to stay away from the project. Brian Griffiths, the chief executive of B&CE, said he felt the organisation had been targeted purely because it has the words building and civil engineering in its full title.



Protesters are indiscriminately targeting building works around Oxford University

The mail has been very carefully worded, probably by someone with a legal background

Source at a targeted company

The emails and letters sent to these firms often appear, at first glance, to be innocuous. The source at the Oxfordshire company that received an email this week says: "The mail has been very carefully worded, probably by someone with a legal background. There's nothing there that would stand up in court as threatening, but there is a very clear underlying meaning."

Beyond laboratories

Despite a police investigation and government intervention, this "underlying meaning" has had an impact on the amount of firms prepared to undertake work that could make them a target. Tim Holt, the estates director at Cambridge University, gives an insight into the effect that the protesters can have. According to Holt, concerns over finding a contractor contributed to the university's decision to abandon its own project in 2004. He says: "Security costs would have increased the cost of the project from £20m to more than £30m. But we never got as far as appointing a contractor, and the concern that we wouldn't find someone prepared to do the work was one of the considerations in our decision."

Oxford University managed to attract a contractor, but only with a guarantee of anonymity and the promise of government-funded security precautions, including police escorts for workers. But the pharmaceutical industry says it is struggling to find contractors prepared to undertake even ordinary building work, unrelated to laboratory projects.

A spokesperson for the Association for the British Pharmaceutical Industry, the trade body for the pharmaceutical industry, said: "Virtually every pharmaceutical company has experienced a problem at some point with its supply chain not being prepared to undertake work for it." The Construction Confederation confirms that there is an issue with companies not being prepared to work for clients that could increase their exposure to animal rights threats. A spokesperson for the confederation said: "You wouldn't deny there is an issue. But estimating the extent of the problem is difficult because of the way these projects are carried out."

The ABPI sees the situation as so desperate that it has issued a direct plea to the construction industry for help to defy the activists. "We call on other groups, including the construction industry, to stand shoulder to shoulder with us. It is time we stood up for our ability to carry out perfectly legitimate work."



The view from the ALF

The Animal Liberation Front forced contractor Montpellier to abandon the Oxford laboratory project in 2004. ALF supporters sent a letter to directors at the firm warning that activists would forge records claiming the firm's staff and directors were guilty of sex offences, and would circulate them to neighbours. Robin Webb, a spokesperson for the ALF, says the group is gearing up for a similar campaign against the current contractor. This is what he had to say:

"The new contractor has not yet been identified, but when it is, lawful actions and ALF activities will be aimed at it in the same way as the organisation acted against Montpellier. The mainstream campaign, Speak, is doing a great deal of investigative work to identify the contractors involved. It is only a matter of time before the company is identified, in spite of the level of security.

"There are a growing number of people who are prepared to go outside the law in support of animal rights. As the government has outlawed several forms of previously legal protest, people are increasingly prepared to use not only these forms of action but also further unlawful action, including ALF activities.

"At the moment, the ALF only targets those associated with the university. But the attack on Oxford Architects is an indication of how wide-ranging the targets are perceived to be. The ALF will not carry out a general attack on supply merchants, but ALF activists will target companies that it knows are servicing the university, or any that could put pressure on the university to end the contract.

"However, although the only type of action the ALF would claim is firm action, letters [to other construction companies who do not have a known connection to Oxford University] are sent out from lawful protesters, and these come from people connected to Speak and the Animal Liberation Front.

"I imagine once the contractor is identified the campaign will run along the lines of the successful Cambridge campaign. Cambridge University dropped its plans as it recognised that not just the university, but the whole city, would face unnecessary disruption.

"It is an indictment of the project that the workers have to be anonymous to carry out their work. There is enough work in the construction industry for firms to profit from without building a concentration camp for animals."