

OPERATION ACHILLES

A concise history of the Government conspiracy to eradicate the SHAC campaign

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Introduction

Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) formed in 1999 following an undercover investigation of Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS) which was broadcast by Channel 4; it exposed extreme animal cruelty and breaches of the law, resulting in the temporary loss of their license.

Whilst some activists committed criminal actions against HLS, SHAC itself was an explicitly lawful organisation.

Throughout the duration of the campaign, legislation was routinely amended and enacted with the intention of criminalising the lawful campaigning tactics employed by SHAC. Determined to remain lawful, the SHAC campaign evolved and took measures, including having their newsletters and website regularly checked by a barrister, having legal observers present on protests, and liaised with the police to create the 'Parameters of Protest' guidelines to ensure protests remained lawful.

Nonetheless, on May 1st 2007, 30 people were arrested in dawn raids carried out by over 700 police officers in the UK and Northern Europe. Over the following three and a half years, ten activists were convicted and sentenced to between four and 11 years in prison for conspiracy to commit blackmail, and another three were convicted of s.145 SOCPA. Of those 13 campaigners, only three were accused of illegal direct action.

The signatories of this document were amongst those convicted, but not involved in illegal direct action. The evidence provided in this document shows a deliberate and targeted operation, at the heart of the British government which intended to eradicate SHAC due to fears that the success of the campaign could undermine New Labour's economic plan.

Timeline

In **1996**, Labour leader **Tony Blair** signed the *Plan 2000* pledge to end animal research¹. In part due to his commitment to animal welfare reforms, including the promise of a royal commission into animal testing, he won a landslide victory in the **1997** election.

Following a decision by the **National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE)** in **1999** not to make a Glaxo Wellcome (later **GSK**) flu drug available for NHS prescription, **GSK's** chief executive **Jean-Pierre Garnier** warned that it could not “be taken for granted that the UK would remain an attractive location for pharmaceutical R&D”². As a direct result of this threat, **Tony Blair** announced that he was setting up the **Pharmaceutical Industry Competitiveness Task Force (PICTF)**, consisting of pharmaceutical executives and government ministers.³ **PICTF** met regularly and reported to the **Prime Minister** on the steps that needed to be taken to retain and strengthen the competitiveness of the UK business environment for the innovative pharmaceutical industry⁴.

In **November 1999**, **Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC)** was formed with the aim of closing down Europe's largest animal testing laboratory **Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS)**, based in Cambridgeshire, UK. The campaign was launched following an undercover exposé which documented repeated breaches of the Animals Scientific Procedures Act and horrific animal cruelty inside the laboratory.

By the general election of **2000**, the promised commission into animal research had still not been established, and as a result over 50% of MPs signed a **Naturewatch** petition calling for it⁵. Their request was ignored, and instead chancellor **Gordon Brown** unveiled a new budget and economic plan which was predicated upon growing the research and development (R&D) sector, including the animal research industry which accounted for 23% of that sector^{6,7}.

In **September 2000** Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS) were exposed following a series of xenotransplantation experiments conducted on behalf of Novartis subsidiary Imutran. Over the next two years, the government conspired with Novartis and HLS to cover up hundreds of breaches of the law.⁸

When the **Royal Bank of Scotland** withdrew a loan to **HLS** in **January 2001**, **Lord Sainsbury** stepped in on behalf of the British government and brokered a deal with **Stephens Inc**, a US equity company. The move prevented the otherwise inevitable closure of **HLS**, and **Lord Sainsbury** publicly declared that his motivation was to prevent any R&D jobs moving overseas⁹.

In **March 2001**, **PICTF** published their report. The document stated that “Decisions and actions taken by Government will have a major influence on future investment decisions made by the industry and thereby on the contribution it makes to the UK economy. It is against this background that a new partnership between UK industry and Government has been formed. The importance therefore of the **PICTF** initiative cannot be overstated.” Most of the demands from the pharmaceutical industry appear to have been met, such as sweeping tax cuts and regulations regarding animal testing licenses being relaxed. In a section of the report chaired by **Lord Sainsbury**, the industry also demanded amendments to the Criminal Justice and Police Bill, the Malicious Communications Act and the Companies Act, with the intention of criminalising previously lawful protest by animal rights activists¹⁰. The government began work on these amendments almost as soon as the report was published. It was also decided that senior government ministers and pharmaceutical executives would meet annually as a **Ministerial Industry Strategy Group**, and three times a year as an **Industry Strategy Group**¹¹.

During a **March 2001** debate in the House of Commons between, Dr **Ian Gibson** (former animal researcher and Dean of the School of Biological Sciences) and **Tam Dalyell** (columnist for *New Scientist*), Home Secretary **Jack Straw** stated that he was working with the animal research industry to confront animal rights activism, and declared that he had held a meeting with HLS CEO

Brian Cass in Parliament¹². He later admitted that he was personal friends with some of those targeted by protests¹³.

This meeting appears to have been an attempt to leverage support for changes to the Criminal Justice and Police Bill, which would prevent protests near people's homes. **Lord Rodin** was the primary advocate for the changes in the House of Lords. He was president of the Foundation for Science and Technology and deputy chairman of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund. Discussions on the bill continued into May, with **Lord Cope** and **Lord Renton** joining the calls for harsher legislation. **Lord Cope** admitted that he had been lobbied by **HLS** and the **Research Defence Society (RDS)**. **Lord Renton** was the minister who originally signed off on HLS opening, and he stated that he has visited the laboratory on numerous occasions, claiming that the animals were kept as well as any pets. Fears that pharmaceutical companies choosing to leave the country would undermine **Gordon Brown's** economic blueprint were also raised at this time.¹⁴

In what was declared a deliberate political statement by the **RDS**, in **June 2002 Brian Cass** was awarded a CBE¹⁵.

With Gordon Brown's strategy struggling due to funding into R&D dropping by £100m between **2002-2003**¹⁶, in **March 2003**, **Dr. Ian Gibson** brought the debate back to parliament, this time joined by **Dr. Stephen Ladyman** (ex-animal researcher and Pfizer employee), **Dr. Brian Iddon** (ex-scientist in pharmaceutical industry), and **Mr. Bob Ainsworth** (Under-Sec of State for the Home Department). One of the issues they discussed was their view that the press ought to be more demonising of animal rights, and they suggested trying to divide SHAC from mainstream animal rights groups. Once again the fear of the industry moving overseas was raised¹⁷.

In **April 2003**, the director of an unnamed Japanese pharmaceutical company called for tougher laws against animal rights activists. Apparently inspired by the fears for **Gordon Brown's** economic plans, as well as the ongoing **Ministerial Industry Strategy Committee (MISC)** meetings, they leveraged the idea of leaving the country if protests against them weren't halted, it was the first time a pharmaceutical company had tried this tactic since the **PICTF** report. To reinforce the threat, **Tony Blair** was sent a letter from the Tokyo-based **Japanese Pharmaceutical Manufacturers' Association**. The threat worked, and **Lord Sainsbury**, the Science Minister, was tasked to work with the Metropolitan Police and meet company representatives to help tighten security¹⁸.

At the end of **April 2003**, on advice from the government, HLS sought and were granted an injunction, limiting lawful protests against them¹⁹.

Inspired by SHAC's efficacy, the Anti Social Behaviour Act was Amended in **July 2003**, following a debate in the Lords led by **Baroness Sharp of Guildford** (Science Policy Research Unit at the University of Sussex). This allowed protests of two or more people to be dispersed, and extended aggravated trespass to cover trespass in buildings, criminalising protests which up until then had been carried out regularly by all kinds of non-violent activist groups²⁰.

The power of HLS lobby group the **Research Defence Society (RDS)** became increasingly apparent during an **October 2003** debate on animal research in the House of Lords. **Lord Taverne** (head of the **RDS**) hijacked the discussion and called for the deregulation of animal research, before declaring that, 'It is just as important to guard against these terrorists, who are actual terrorists, as against the hypothetical terrorists of Al'Qaeda.'²¹

Also in **October 2003**, **Lord Goldsmith** launched a **National Forum** for 'the police and prosecution of animal rights,'²² to hold regular meetings between the **CPS**, **court officials**, **ACPO**, the **Home Office** and the **DTI** in order to coordinate responses and reactions to animal rights activists.²³ The Attorney General (**Lord Goldsmith**) stated that his reason for creating the forum was his concern for the 'deliberate targeting of businesses engaging in perfectly lawful commercial pursuits.' Part of the forum's remit was to encourage court officials to persuade magistrates and the judiciary to take the entirety of national animal rights activity into account when sentencing, regardless of the specifics of the individual case.²⁴ When deciding on a definition of 'animal rights extremism,' the only suggestions relate to actions targeted against animal research.²⁵ Attendees

were encouraged to be 'radical and proactive in thinking of new ways to deal with [animal rights activists]'.²⁶

The **RDS** continued their lobbying into **January 2004**, when their spokesperson **Mark Matfield** publicly warned that 'a brain drain to the US was likely unless the Government created criminal offences specifically aimed at curbing animal rights extremism, along the lines of football hooliganism legislation.'²⁷ The following month, amid claims that GCHQ had started monitoring SHAC phones²⁸, the Government set up the **National Extremism Tactical Coordination Unit (NETCU)**²⁹.

In **April 2004**, a new lobby group was launched at a reception in Parliament called **Victims of Animal Rights Extremism (VARE)**. Their launch was organised by **Dr. Ian Gibson** and they were formed and funded by the **RDS**³⁰.

Inspired by the success of their Japanese counterparts the year before, British pharmaceutical giants **Glaxo SmithKline (GSK)** and **Astra Zeneca (AZ)** began to have regular meetings with government ministers, and in **May 2004** they threatened **Tony Blair** during a private meeting that they would leave UK if he didn't capitulate to their demand to stop animal rights protests against them. The Times noted that, "If GSK and AstraZeneca stop investing in research and development in the UK, it would be devastating for **Gordon Brown**."³¹

In **June 2004**, members of the **National Forum** were invited to look for 'gaps' in legislation that should be filled to stop effective animal rights protests. These include changes to the 2001 laws against home protests, and tightening of civil injunctions. It was also decided that the forum would be 'performance driven ... based on monthly reports of arrests.'³² References are made to recent changes in the Anti Social Behaviour Public Order Act (1986) in order to deal with 'disruptive protestors.' 42 specialist animal rights prosecutors had been trained to take 'difficult to prosecute' cases to court.³³

In **July 2004**, MP and ex-animal researcher **Jacque Lait** declared in the commons that Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) should be used against animal rights campaigners³⁴. This call was supported by **James Paice**, who had been lobbied by **The Bio Industry Association**, and a few weeks later the first ASBO was handed out to a SHAC activist³⁵.

In **July 2004**, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State **Caroline Flint** admitted being heavily influenced by discussions with pharmaceutical industry representatives, and was impressed by the 'American approach' to dealing with animal rights (the **SHAC 7** had been arrested, pending trial).³⁶

In **2004**, a coalition of Japanese pharmaceutical companies contracted private investigation firm [REDACTED], who employed a security analyst named **Ian Farmer** to monitor SHAC using public domain material.³⁷ By **July 2004**, whilst researching SHAC, Ian had come across a document called ABIX/Cracker which listed targets for militant animal rights activists. He passed the document to the Times, telling them, without evidence, that it was created by 'a hard core of militants who have been previously jailed for violent offences.'³⁸

According to his former colleagues, Farmer was desperate for money and on a crusade. By the time of the International Animal Rights Gathering in Kent in **September 2004**, **Ian** had decided to infiltrate SHAC as a police informant. Attending the event, he quickly befriended SHAC co-founder **Natasha Avery**, and soon became involved in the day-to-day running of the campaign³⁹. A week later, having found no tangible evidence of criminality, Ian re-sent the same copy of the ABIX/Cracker list to **Nick Fielding** at the Times who reprinted the story with a more sinister tone⁴⁰. At around the same time, MI5 were reported to be considering infiltrating SHAC⁴¹.

In **October 2004**, HLS used their injunction to attempt to seize an activist's home⁴². Following this, in **November 2004** **Ian** passed some information about **SHAC's** fundraising to the **Times**. The tactic of cutting off **SHAC's** revenue became official police policy⁴³.

In **February 2005**, the **SHAC 7** went on trial in America; they were not accused of organising or carrying out any criminal activity, but of publishing information which could be used by those who did⁴⁴. At the same time in Britain, **Ian** formed a new Animal Liberation Front (ALF) cell, convincing two activists to join him as he attacked five homes connected to people involved in laboratory animal importation⁴⁵. **Ian** later claimed that his targets were selected by the police as ones which would have maximum political impact. According to **Ian**, the police believed that by picking a target such as **BAA**, 'People get serious, it gets political, more resources are dedicated against it and eventually or very quickly, you'll see people getting rounded up.' Under police orders, and in a serious breach of their own guidelines, **Ian** organised, researched, surveilled, planned, bought equipment, and acted as getaway driver for the crimes.

Due to the increase in criminal activity, caused by **Ian**, the Home Office publicly suggested that pharmaceutical companies should pay towards the cost of policing. The pharmaceutical industry had learned the power of their hollow threat, and once again threatened to leave the country⁴⁶. **Ian** later admitted that the biggest fear of the government was not any physical threat from activists (who he acknowledged had no intention of causing physical harm), but that investment would move overseas⁴⁷.

Shortly after his attacks took place, **Ian** presented a newspaper article about it to activists at an animal rights meeting, including **Tom Harris** and **Nicola Tapping**. All those present informed him that they weren't interested in that kind of activism.

Failing to find anything more compelling, in **March 2005** **Ian** fed a fluff piece to **Nick Fielding** at the Times about **James Gorman**, a wealthy activist. **Ian's** own crimes were detailed as proof of SHAC's criminality⁴⁸.

During his involvement with **SHAC**, **Ian** used what he called, "Ingenuitive and creative ideas about how to take the campaign forward⁴⁹," to organise increasingly lively protests, introducing a tactic of renting hotel rooms in buildings where pharmaceutical conferences were due to take place in order to circumvent police cordons, as well as arranging mass run-ins at airports and the Japanese embassy⁵⁰. As a result of these actions, which **Ian** described as being planned, 'At a very strategic level,'⁵¹ in **April 2005**, section 145 of the **Serious Organised Crime and Police Act (SOCPA)** began to be discussed in the House of a Lords, intended to limited otherwise lawful protests. The debate was led by ex-animal researcher **Lord Soulsby**, **The Earl of Selborne**, and **Lord Drayson** (who was the CEO of a biotech company, and Chairman of the BioIndustry Association). Highlighting their distain of lawful protest, they complained that laws didn't exist to deal with this kind of effective campaign, suggesting that **SHAC** was operating in a grey area, exploiting the 'freedoms that democracy provides'⁵². As concerns began to be raised about the effect of these laws on otherwise lawful protests, the **RDS** arranged a meeting between **VARE** and **Liberty**. During the meeting, victims of crime were presented to Liberty, and despite those crimes already being covered by existing legislation, and without speaking to **SHAC** or any their animal rights campaigners, Liberty fell in line with the **RDS**⁵³. Later requests for assistance were firmly ignored or rejected, and Section 145 of **SOCPA** was made law.

In **July 2005**, **Ian** attended his second annual animal rights gathering in Kent. He called an early morning meeting between international **SHAC** activists, which he again attempted to use to rile people to criminal actions. Despite the rest of the assembly moving away from such discussions⁵⁴, he reported to **Nick Fielding** at the Times that people were told to "get ready to get globally active, and that "on the fringes of the same gathering, hardliners decided to include violent harassment in the campaign abroad."⁵⁵

During the gathering, a group of **SHAC** activists were the first people arrested under the new **SOCPA** law. They were accused of carrying out protests which would have been minor public order offences in pursuit of any other cause or campaign. The result was three people receiving sentences of between 15 months and four years⁵⁶.

In an attempt to prove that the **SOCPA** legislation was not intended to curtail otherwise lawful protest, in **January 2006** **Dr. Joseph Harris**, a molecular scientist who had carried out criminal damage attacks on HLS suppliers was arrested and charged under the legislation. Due to maximum sentencing differences between SOCPA and Criminal Damage he received a shorter sentence than had he been convicted of criminal damage⁵⁷. He remains the only person convicted solely of s.145 **SOCPA** who hadn't been engaged in protests which would have been legal, or at worst minor public order offences, in pursuit of any other campaign or cause.

In **March 2006**, the **SHAC 7** were convicted in the US under the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act, despite none of them being accused of carrying out or organising any specific crimes. Following the guilty verdict, the FBI agents who had investigated them worked with British police to help replicate their success on British soil⁵⁸. Within weeks, activists from **Save the Newchurch Guinea Pigs (SNGP)** were arrested and charged with conspiracy to blackmail⁵⁹.

The **SNGP** activists were convicted and sentenced in **May 2006**. Despite the blackmail initially relating to accusations that they had exhumed the body of a family member of the farm's owner, their involvement in that action could not be proved. A precedent was set that blackmail conspiracy charges could be brought against those running controversial campaigns, regardless of their individual culpability in the organisation, or involvement in any specific crime⁶⁰. Buoyed by their success, the police almost immediately moved on to arresting 13 activists from **Stop Sequani Animal Testing (SSAT)** for running a website similar to the SHAC 7; it reported on lawful protests, which could have also been used by more militant activists to identify targets⁶¹. Six people were charged under SOCPA legislation, and two were convicted⁶².

After once again being criticised in the press by GSK for not doing enough, and warned once more that the UK economy was at stake⁶³, in **May 2006** **Tony Blair** very publicly signed a petition, which he acknowledged was highly unusual for a serving prime minister. The petition was not against unlawful actions in support of animal rights, but instead it was to declare his unwavering and unquestioning support for animal research. Despite his claims that it was an essential and publicly supported action, which he ensured had a great deal of press coverage, the petition attracted less than 22,000 signatures⁶⁴. Following meetings with **Blair**, he offered an assurance that the animal rights problem was being dealt with (underlined by his petition), and **GSK** decided that they would not leave the UK. They did however leave the spectre of the threat hanging as they suggested that they would be demanding an increase in R&D funding⁶⁵.

At the **June 2006** Animal Rights gathering, **Ian** ran a workshop on security and surveillance, during which he shot down activists who wanted to discuss how these tactics could benefit legitimate protest, and instead attempted to focus on avoiding criminal detection. He also hinted to activists that he was somehow involved in direct action in Northern Europe⁶⁶.

Following the gathering, Ian visibly disappeared from the movement, telling activists that he was suffering with a terminal illness, which was being made worse by his campaigning⁶⁷.

The only known sightings of Ian took place a few months later, when he became suspected of burgling the houses of activists including **Tom Harris** and **Nicola Tapping**, and **Mr & Mrs Roxborough**⁶⁸.

With his attack on the animal rights movement well underway, **Tony Blair** met **George Bush** to discuss his 'war on animal rights extremism' in the hope that it might encourage more American pharmaceutical companies to invest in British research⁶⁹.

In **February 2007** the police arrested 21 street stall collectors. In order to demonise the peaceful campaigners, they falsely reported to the media that their petitions were never sent anywhere⁷⁰, despite the fact that over two million signatures had already been handed to Downing Street. Later audio surveillance also proved that all petitions were counted and collated in preparation for being delivered to parliament.

In **April 2007**, the homes of campaigners including **Gerrah Selby** and **Dan Amos**, and **Jason Mullen** were broken into by the police⁷¹.

On **May 1st 2007**, 30 **SHAC** activists were raided and arrested on charges of conspiracy to commit blackmail. Over the next nine months the first trial took place, with the prosecution relying heavily on threatening phone calls made by a man named **Paul**, who they claimed was **Gregg Avery**, but audio recordings show to be **Ian**. They also relied on a spreadsheet of targets, which **Ian** later admitted having access and editing rights over, as well as carrying out at least some of the attacks recorded on it. They also spoke of important ‘three month review’ meetings, which in reality were two social barbecues with a wide variety of people—including children—present. **Ian** had been at one of these barbecues, and knew that nothing criminal was discussed. Based on evidence planted by **Ian**, lies he told the police and actions that he had taken, and without knowledge of his real identity or ability to question his narrative, (or that of other spies who **Ian** has referenced, but who remain unknown⁷²), 13 activists were ultimately convicted. It was reported to one of the activists by their solicitor that **Gordon Brown** had taken a personal interest in the progress of the case.

In March 2009, **Ian** came out to the Times, and declared that he was writing a book about his role in SHAC with **Nick Fielding**⁷³. Aware that this book would hold information that would prove the innocence of those convicted of their involvement in SHAC, we suspect that the police moved immediately to halt its publication. It has never seen the light of day.

Home Secretary **Theresa May** announced an Inquiry into Undercover Policing in **2014**. Several of the convicted SHAC campaigners are named victims in the inquiry in the miscarriage of justice category, however it has been decided that evidence relating to **Ian Farmer** will not be considered as he was a private investigator contracted by the police, rather than a serving police officer⁷⁴. Shortly after the inquiry was announced, in direct contravention of a request made by the inquiry, the National Domestic Extremism and Disorder Intelligence Unit (**NDEDIU**) destroyed large quantities of paperwork⁷⁵. It was reported to solicitors working on the inquiry that most of the documents were related to undercover investigations into animal rights campaigning.

Conclusion

The motivation for a clampdown on the lawful SHAC campaign has been laid out by senior members of the New Labour government. Following threats from the pharmaceutical industry that they would leave the country if their interests weren't protected, Prime Minister Blair repeatedly stated his resolve to do everything in his power to help them. Chancellor Brown rested his entire economic strategy on the R&D sector, to the point that the risk of losing just 400 R&D jobs overseas compelled Science Minister Lord Sainsbury to step in and broker a deal that prevented the closure of HLS in 2001.

The SHAC campaign presented a significant problem to the New Labour strategy:

The pharmaceutical sector disliked any form of protest being taken against them, and as long as there were protests of any sort, the industry would threaten to leave the country, sending the UK into recession. The only way for the Government to secure their R&D investment was to stop the protests.

As a result of the the pharmaceutical industry blackmailing them, the government conspired with lobby groups such as the RDS and VARE, and the police to stop the SHAC campaign. Our research suggests that their strategy evolved over time, and up until May 2007 came in three phases (the strategy continued after 2007, but is not covered here).

Phase 1:

On the direct instructions of the pharmaceutical industry, the government amended existing legislation that made previously lawful demonstrations illegal. These involved criminalising protests near homes, and trespass on commercial property.

Phase 2:

As the SHAC campaign adapted to remain within the law, the pharmaceutical industry put further pressure on the government in order to persuade them to go further and introduce specific legislation aimed at criminalising SHAC.

Without the grounds they needed to bring about such legislation, the police instructed undercover agent Ian Farmer to organise and carry out actions such as attacks on the homes of BAA executives, and a mass invasion of Heathrow Airport. As a result of these actions, and with lobbying from the RDS and VARE, they were able to push through s.145 SOCPA which made minor, and even civil offences into serious crimes if aimed at companies involved in animal research.

Phase 3:

Whilst some campaigners fell foul of the new legislation, SHAC itself continued to adapt and remain within the law.

The pharmaceutical industry continued their threats against the government, until suddenly in 2006 Tony Blair met with GSK's CEO and reassured him that he was dealing with the animal rights problem. Whatever that assurance was, it was enough to persuade him to publicly state that the company had no interest in leaving the country.

A year later 30 SHAC campaigners were arrested, and eventually 13 were convicted, in a trial which Gordon Brown was personally monitoring, of conspiracy to commit blackmail or s.145 SOCPA on evidence connected to Ian. His phone calls to companies, under the pseudonym "Paul" constituted the "unwarranted demands with menaces" which underpinned the prosecution case, and he created or at the very least had access and editing rights to most if not all of the items taken from the SHAC office which went on to be used as evidence. To this day the prosecution refuse to confirm or deny whether he worked for the police, despite his public testimony, and have never deliberately disclosed any evidence relating to him. This evidence, in conjunction with the opportunity to cross examine Mr. Farmer would have undermined the case against many of those convicted and lead to acquittals.

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