

Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty: Case Study

SAM GLOVER

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Introduction

Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) was an animal rights campaign that had the aim of shutting down Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS), a contract research organisation that conducted animal testing. SHAC and other activists that campaigned against HLS were known for extreme methods, although the extent to which their activities were actually extreme is contested. It seems clear that there were a number of people acting against HLS who did employ nonviolent extreme methods, but it is unclear whether or not most of these individuals were associated with SHAC. Similarly, there were occasional violent actions in the campaign against HLS, although these appear to have been fairly rare. It's also worth noting that the nonviolent activity carried out by opponents of HLS was almost certainly significantly less likely to draw media attention, meaning that the media portrayal of anti-HLS campaigners is likely to give a distorted view of both the SHAC campaign and the activities of other HLS campaigners. SHAC were also known for their tactic of targeting not only employees and shareholders of HLS, but also of employees and shareholders of companies that did business with HLS (secondary companies), and even companies that did business with secondary companies (tertiary companies).

This report sets out to discover why SHAC activists were not ultimately successful in their goal of shutting down Huntingdon Life Sciences. It is important to note that this report makes no judgement about whether SHAC's aims were worth pursuing, it is merely an attempt to collect evidence about *why* SHAC failed to shut down HLS, as well as to learn lessons about what they did well and how other activists may be able to learn from their successes. The purpose of this report is to get a better understanding of why social movements generally fail in achieving their goals, and particularly why certain methods and tactics can backfire for social movements and activists. Although they were met with some initial success, SHAC seemed to attract a significant amount of negative attention and repression from governments, as well as significant negative media attention. The methods of anti-HLS activists were highlighted during the trials of SHAC activists, including during the trial of the US-based SHAC 7, which resulted in several SHAC activists being imprisoned.

SHAC was chosen as the subject of this case study for several reasons: firstly, it is an example of a campaign that ultimately failed to achieve its aim, and which resulted in several activists being imprisoned. It also seems likely that given the failure of the

campaign to achieve its primary aim, and led to severe government repression, it seems plausible that the campaign had severe negative consequences for the animal advocacy movement overall. Specifically, it seems plausible that animal rights activity decreased in subsequent years out of fear of government crackdown. We wanted to explore this possibility and gain insights and lessons for non-violent activists. There are likely to be lessons to be learnt by asking the following questions about SHAC:

- Why were they targeted by the governments and politicians?
- Which actions seemed to result in a particularly large amount of negative attention?
 - To what extent was the negative attention harmful, and to what extent did it actually benefit SHAC activists?
- Why did their methods and tactics seem not to work?
- What were their biggest successes and what were their biggest failures?

This report seeks to answer these questions, create a set of recommendations for future organisations and explore the reasons why SHAC failed to achieve its aims.

Key Findings

- To preface these findings, we ought to state that **SHAC ultimately did not succeed in their aim of shutting down Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS)**, the contract research organisation that was accused of various animal rights violations.
- **SHAC's initial actions against HLS were mostly successful.** They resulted in various companies and institutions terminating their association with HLS, including the UK Labour Party, the Royal Bank of Scotland, Marsh Inc, and the New York Stock Exchange.
- **SHAC's laser-like focus on HLS rather than a number of different companies seems to have been extremely beneficial.** By exclusively targeting HLS and companies associated with HLS, SHAC made it very clear what companies and people associated with HLS had to do in order to prevent themselves being targeted by SHAC.
- **SHAC's diversity of tactics allowed different types of activists to get involved, as well as a degree of experimentation about which tactics were more likely to be effective.** Generally, having a diverse tactical portfolio seems to have been one of SHAC's strengths, although specific tactics that were perceived as extreme were likely counterproductive and hurt SHAC's chances of success.

- **SHAC eventually faced a significant amount of government repression against them.** This was likely down to a few reasons, and it's challenging to confidently say exactly what played the largest role. **One reason is that SHAC's campaign of economic targeting was quite effective,** causing HLS to move its financial centre from the UK to the US, as well as pressuring several large institutions to sever ties with HLS. This might have prompted the UK and US governments to crack down on SHAC for fear of these tactics being copied by other groups, or causing further economic disruption.
- **Another reason SHAC received significant negative attention from both governments and media is the most extreme (and sometimes violent) actions against HLS. It seems likely that these actions were counterproductive (although they were not necessarily all committed by active SHAC members).** Extreme actions taken against employees of HLS and employees of companies/institutions that did business with HLS included an attack on HLS' Managing Director Brian Cass in 2001, the firebombing of cars belonging to HLS employees, and home demonstrations against employees of companies that did business with HLS. Some of these home demonstrations involved entering homes with young children, which resulted in significant negative attention towards SHAC.
- That being said, the **negative media attention may have also had some benefits:** the portrayal of SHAC as violent and liable to commit extreme actions against companies may have led to some companies deciding to cease cooperation with HLS.
- **SHAC's methods also resulted in new legislation designed to deter animal protesters being passed in the United Kingdom,** and significant amendments being made to legislation in the United States as a means of preventing further extreme activity by animal rights activists.
- SHAC had a strategy of 'leaderless resistance', wherein activists are encouraged to take action against HLS and associated companies without necessarily corresponding directly with other SHAC members. This was a defensive strategy partially intended to minimise the chance of prosecutions. **SHAC's strategy of leaderless resistance seems largely to have been unsuccessful as a defence against prosecution,** given that SHAC activists were prosecuted even when there was minimal clear evidence that they had personally engaged in extreme or violent activism.

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Methodology

Case Study Selection

The impact that different social movements and campaigns have is extremely variable. Much of the academic literature on Social Movement Organisations (SMOs) focuses on extremely influential and/or successful SMOs. As a result, there is much discussion of the common features of successful SMOs, but relatively less on SMOs and campaigns that failed to achieve their goal. Prior to selecting SHAC as the focus of our case study, we settled on some initial criteria that we believed the ideal SMO or campaign ought to fulfil. We wanted to focus on a SMO/campaign that fulfilled the following criteria:

- It did not achieve its main goal.
- It had clear success criteria - it would be obvious whether the SMO or campaign did or did not achieve its main goal.
- It faced significant negative media attention and/or negative attention from the general public.
- It ended its campaign on the basis that it did not and would not achieve its goal.
- It was mostly based in the United Kingdom or United States.
- It had a number of former activists who would be willing to talk to us as part of our research, as well as other people familiar with the campaign but who were not active supporters or activists.

SHAC fulfilled all of these criteria, and had other features that made it suitable for a case study. Firstly, while there was enough secondary literature accessible to make the task of conducting a case study viable, there were no books and/or other studies of SHAC that we were aware of that aimed to draw lessons from the SHAC campaign, rather than tell a story about the SHAC campaign from a certain perspective. Much of the previous literature and writing on SHAC was written either by former SHAC activists or groups that claimed to be 'exposing animal rights activists for their crimes', or other such clearly partisan sources. While there were exceptions to this, we believed that we could add value to the understanding of the SHAC campaign by focusing specifically on the lessons that could be learned from the campaign, and a discussion of why we believe SHAC failed to achieve its ultimate goal of shutting down HLS.

It should be noted that the case study focuses only on strategy, and is not a normative analysis of either SHAC's goals or SHAC's methods. In other words, we spend no time either praising or condemning SHAC or their actions on the basis of whether we personally believe they were right or wrong. **The purpose of this report is only to assess what lessons can be learnt from the SHAC campaign and why they failed to achieve their goal of shutting down HLS.**

Evidence Collection

We collected evidence relating to SHAC in two different ways: firstly, we reviewed the existing literature that relates to the history of the SHAC campaign and potential reasons for their successes and failures. Secondly, we conducted semi-structured interviews with a number of people with intimate knowledge of the campaign. These people included former activists, academics studying SHAC specifically, and people who work in animal welfare but who have no direct relation to SHAC. We are also acutely aware of the potential biases of the individuals that we spoke to, and to the extent that we could, we corroborated evidence produced in interviews with other sources, or asked for evidence that claims being made in the interviews were true. In most of the interviews, there were two researchers present to conduct the interview, whereas one interview (which was fairly impromptu - with the interviewee making it clear they were suddenly available and for a limited amount of time) only involved one researcher conducting the interview.

Because of the limited amount of literature relating specifically to SHAC, the selection criteria for what ought to be included was fairly minimal. That being said, two books about the SHAC campaign proved especially useful: *'Puppy Killer, Leave Town'* by Jon Hochschartner, and *Muzzling a Movement* by Dara Lovitz. We did not prioritise high-quality academic literature over partisan sources, because we would have been left with only a tiny amount of research to work with, which would not have been sufficient to conduct the case study and produce valuable research. For this reason, we are aware that the case study has significant limitations concerning the extent to which sources are likely to be biased, and we encourage the reader to take account of these biases when reading the report. Specifically, evidence collected from books about SHAC are generally written by former activists, and the conversations we conducted with former activists are likely to be more likely to portray SHAC as successful, peaceful, well-organised, and effective.

Conversely, media depictions of SHAC were often (in our view) unreasonably negative. There are three likely reasons for this: firstly, the media has clear incentives to focus on particularly extreme events, and reports of arson attacks make for more interesting reading than do reports of bake sales. Secondly, the sources that the media uses (such as reporting on statements from government officials, HLS executives, and so on) disproportionately are more likely to be those which emphasise the negative qualities of animal rights activists. Thirdly, according to R. Ellefsen (personal communication, September 26, 2022), the UK police employed an active media strategy whereby they pushed their own narrative about SHAC activists by working directly with media outlets,

in relation to trials, arrests and police raids. While we have tried to base our claims and recommendations only on what we believe to be facts about the history of SHAC, we caution the reader of this report that it is was not at all possible to collect wholly unbiased evidence in relation to this campaign, and so we have often had to make use of evidence that is clearly partisan.

Limitations

- **Causal inference is extremely difficult when looking at a single case.** While some metrics can give us an indication of SHAC's degree of success (such as HLS' stock price or the number of companies disassociating with HLS), these are by no means definitive. Because we cannot look into some counterfactual world in which SHAC did not exist, we can never say with certainty that 'SHAC caused outcome X'.
- As already discussed, **there is only a limited amount of literature relating to SHAC**, and much of it is likely to be biased either in favour of or against SHAC activists.

History of Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty

Early History of SHAC

In 1997, Channel 4 broadcast *'It's a Dog's life'*, an Undercover Britain investigation into animal abuse at Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS), Europe's largest animal testing laboratory. The broadcast, filmed by the undercover laboratory technician Zoe Broughton, showed puppies and older dogs being brought into the laboratory, tested on, and killed. Other video evidence captured by Broughton showed HLS staff hitting and shaking puppies as they experimented on the dogs. Two technicians at HLS were convicted of cruelty to animals, and were sentenced to 60 hours of Community Service in addition to a fine of £250¹.

In November 1999, Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) was established by Animal Rights activist Greg Avery, Natasha Avery, and Heather Nicholson. Greg Avery's previous activity had included membership of the Northern Animal Liberation League,² whose tactics included mass invasion of animal laboratories in order to obtain evidence of animal abuse. Natasha Avery's background before joining SHAC in a senior managerial position was as an employee for the RSPCA.³

¹ Broughton, Z. (2006, November 22). Cagey questions. *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2006/nov/22/freedomofinformation.animalrights>

² Topping, A. (2008, December 23). Profiles: Heather Nicholson and Gregg Avery. *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/dec/23/ukcrime-animalwelfare1>

³ *ibid*

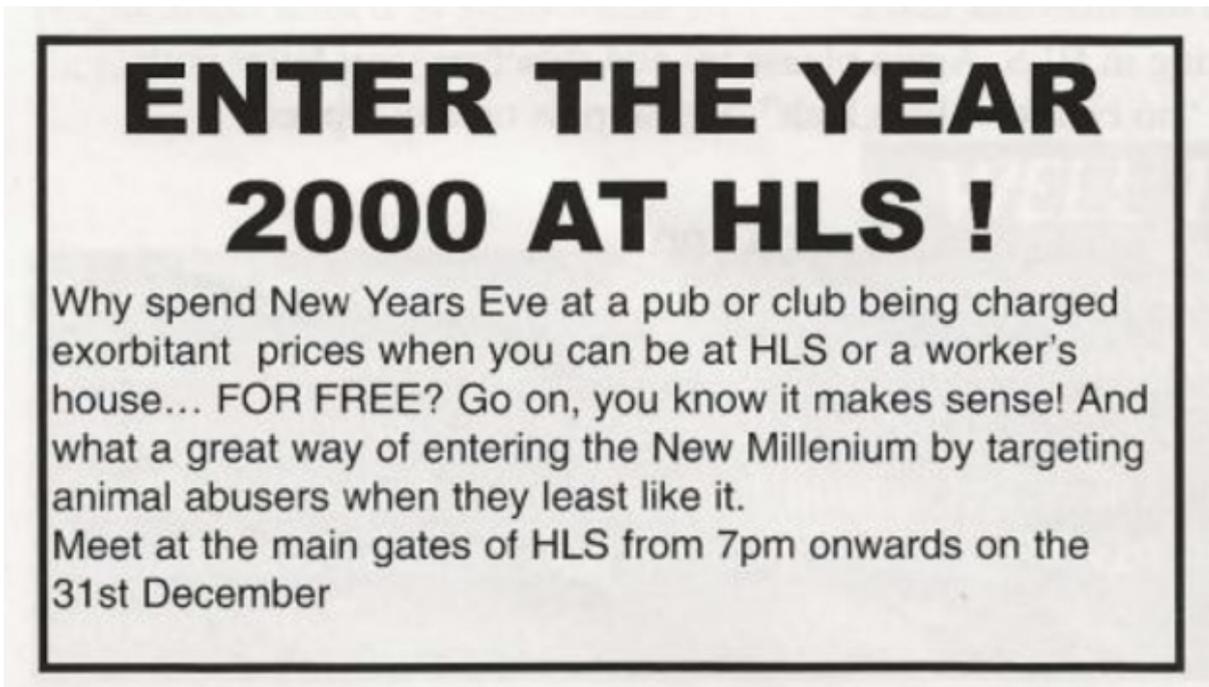


Figure 1: A SHAC newsletter encouraging activists to either protest directly at HLS or at the houses of their employees.

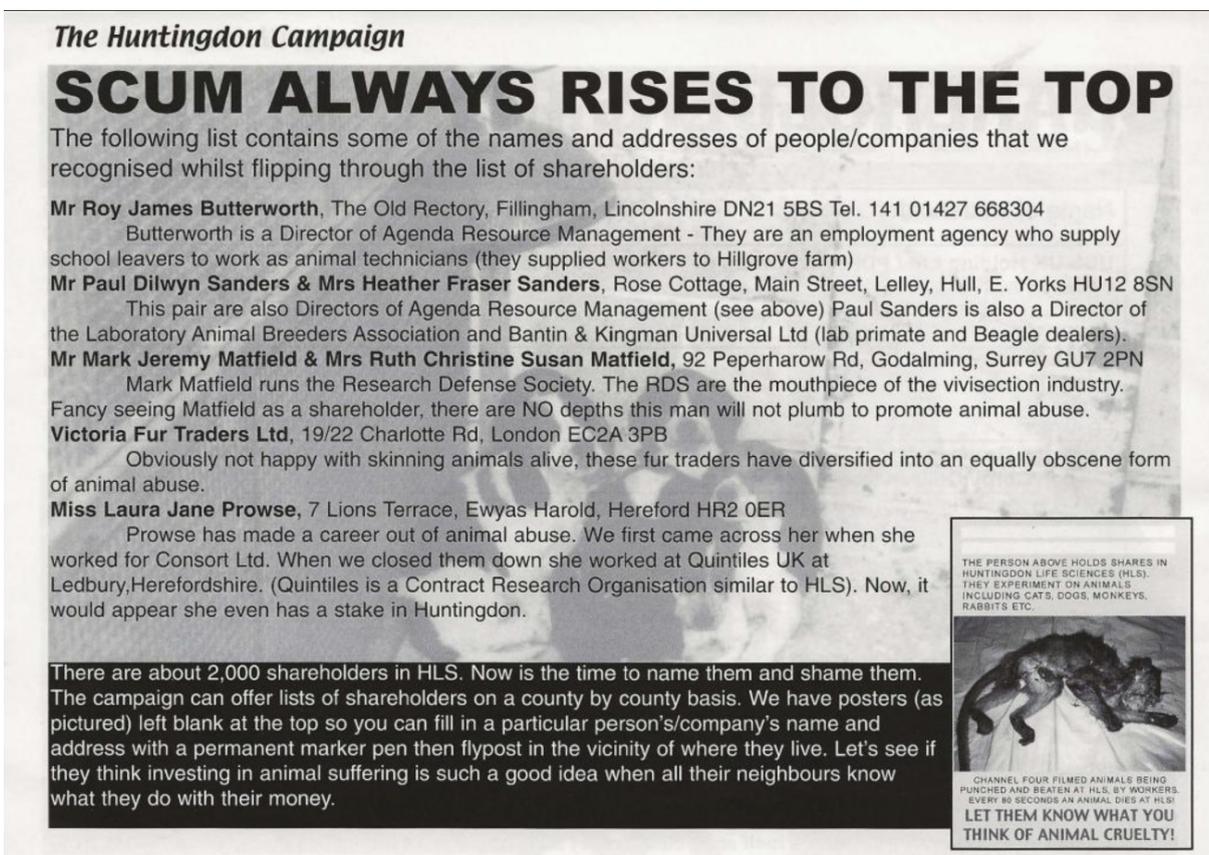
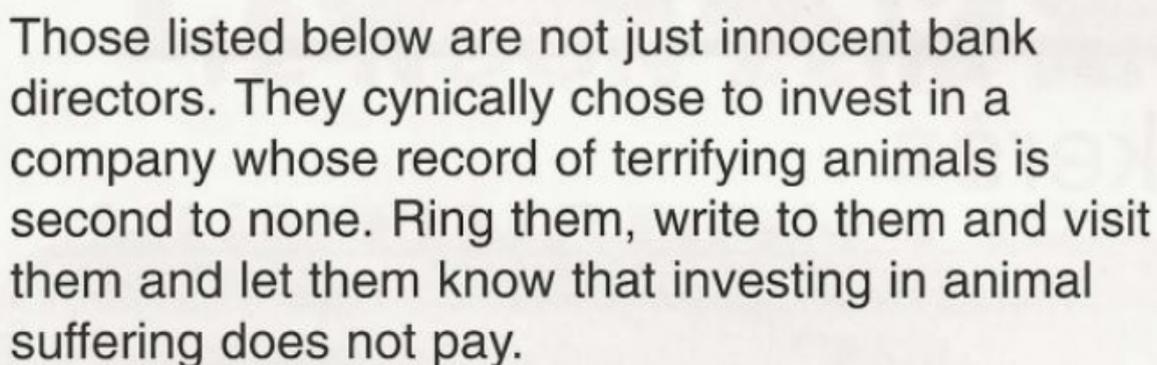


Figure 2: Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty's first newsletter (1999), highlighting shareholders in Huntingdon Life Sciences and the companies that the shareholders are associated with.

Early issues of the newsletter⁴ published by SHAC show their initial direct action tactics, which involved targeting both HLS employees (See Figure 1 above), as well as shareholders in SHAC and companies that did business with SHAC (see Figure 2 above). SHAC encouraged activists to flypost in locations near to where shareholders lived in order to inform neighbours about the details of their investments.

The early tactics of SHAC included encouraging activists to do the following (as outlined in issue 2 of their newsletter):

- Phone the three known phone numbers for HLS in order to overwhelm their capacity and leave them unable to take phone calls.
- Go flyposting - leave graphic photographs of animal abuse by HLS in high traffic areas.
- Hold public meetings - choose large venues to attract people who care about animal suffering, and encourage people to take home leaflets, t-shirts, videos, and other campaign materials.
- Advertise cheap and attractive goods for sale, and include the phone number of HLS itself or HLS employees as a contact number.
- Send a black fax to HLS' fax machines in order to waste their ink and resources.
- Collect advertisements for commercial goods and apply on behalf of HLS employees, thereby damaging their credit rating and forcing them to spend time sending items back.
- Go to HLS directly - daily demonstrations took place between 7am and 5pm every day in the early days of SHAC's activism, designed to reduce the morale of HLS employees.



Those listed below are not just innocent bank directors. They cynically chose to invest in a company whose record of terrifying animals is second to none. Ring them, write to them and visit them and let them know that investing in animal suffering does not pay.

Figure 3: SHAC's second newsletter encouraged activists to ring and visit Natwest bank directors. Natwest had made a loan of £24.5 million to HLS.

⁴ *Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty UK Newsletter #1*. (1999). Retrieved 26 May 2022, from https://issuu.com/conflictgypsy/docs/newsletter_1

SHAC's strategy also involved targeting people and businesses who cooperated with HLS - this is a tactic called 'secondary targeting', and is explored in more detail in the 'Methods and Tactics' section of the report. This included Natwest, who had made multi-million pound loans to HLS. SHAC's early tactics against Natwest specifically included demonstrations and protests outside the offices of Natwest, blockading Natwest's freephone lines in order to make receiving calls more difficult, and visiting the homes of Natwest's directors (See Figure 3)⁵.

First Achievements

SHAC's initial tactics did result in some meaningful achievements, and their early activity led to a number of businesses severing links with HLS. In 2000, the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) made the decision not to renew their deal with HLS after SHAC's campaigns against Natwest (which had been taken over by RBS in February 2000)⁶. Huntingdon's corporate broker WestLB Panmure also severed ties with the group, and the Labour Party's staff pension fund also ordered its fund managers to get rid of its 11% stake in HLS. Other groups that severed ties with HLS included Merrill Lynch, Charles Schwab, and Winterflood Securities.

In March of 2000, activists associated with SHAC from the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection Reform Group (The BUAV Reform Group) wrote to 1,700 HLS shareholders, threatening to picket randomly selected HLS investors if they didn't sell within a week. They received scores of letters from former HLS shareholders who wrote to say that they had sold their shares, with activist Niel Hansen claiming that 'We were surprised to receive many lovely letters, thanking us for bringing the cruelty to their attention'⁷.

In their fifteenth newsletter, SHAC declared that 2001 was 'the year HLS got smashed', and that 2002 would be 'the year to finish them off', noting that future activity would involve a new campaign against financial institutions including Bank of America, Stephens Inc, and Barclays for their financial connections to HLS. SHAC claimed that they would be able to emulate their activity against Natwest to pressure other financial institutions into severing their links with HLS.

⁵ *Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty UK Newsletter #2 by TalonConspiracy—Issuu.* (1999). https://issuu.com/conflictgypsy/docs/newsletter_2

⁶ Treanor, J., & editor, deputy city. (2000, June 10). Bank pulls plug on 'cruel' animal lab. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/jun/10/jilltreanor>

⁷ Hochschartner, J. (2020). *Puppy killer, leave town: A history of Huntingdon Animal Cruelty* (First Sunbury Press edition). Sunbury Press.



Figure 4: SHAC confirms their intention to focus more on HLS' US operations, after HLS relocated their headquarters to the United States in order to avoid anti-HLS activists⁸.

SHAC was also able to expand internationally, with SHAC USA organising demonstrations against the HLS lab in New Jersey, as well as directors, employees, and shareholders of businesses that had associations with HLS, such as the Bank of New York and Oracle Inc. HLS had moved its headquarters to the United States as a defensive measure against activists based in the United Kingdom, but SHAC's international activity had involved keeping up pressure against HLS even after it had relocated to the United States (See Figure 4).

Extreme Tactics

In February 2001 in the United Kingdom, Brian Cass, the managing director of HLS was attacked by anti-HLS activists who carried heavy, wooden objects (identified in different media sources as either baseball bats or pickaxe handles)⁹. David Blenkinsop, a member of SHAC UK, was jailed for four years for his role in the attack, after admitting unlawfully wounding Brian Cass¹⁰. The SHAC activist Natasha Taylor released a statement in response to the attack, saying: "We unreservedly condemn any act of violence be it against animals or humans. The campaign will go on until Huntingdon is closed."¹¹ In a similar attack that took place in December 2000, Andrew Gay, Cass' marketing director, was confronted on his doorstep with a spray that left him temporarily blinded¹².

Heather Saunders, a scientist who worked for a company that did business with HLS, was sent a package in the post that contained explosives sufficient to kill the recipient in

⁸ *Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty UK Newsletter #10 by TalonConspiracy—Issuu*. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from https://issuu.com/conflictgypsy/docs/newsletter_10

⁹ *Jail for lab boss attacker*. (2001). BBC News. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/1494924.stm

¹⁰ Laville, S. (2004). 'I won't give up until I die' | UK news | *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/jul/29/science.highereducation>

¹¹ Kelso, P. (2001, February 24). Animal lab boss attacked. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2001/feb/24/paulkelso1>

¹² From *Push to Shove*. (n.d.). *Southern Poverty Law Center*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20031019135845/http://www.splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/article.jsp?aid=42>

2001¹³. In August 2000, five cars belonging to HLS employees were firebombed in Cambridgeshire¹⁴, and an anonymous SHAC member defended the bombings. They claimed that even though SHAC was an advocate of non-violent methods, the destruction of property did not amount to violence (and paled in comparison to the violence against animals carried out by HLS employees)¹⁵. *The Washington Post* further reported in April 2001 that eleven cars belonging to HLS employees had been firebombed in the United States¹⁶.

It should also be noted that there was likely an informal alliance between SHAC and the Animal Liberation Front (ALF). Kevin Kjonaas, the President of SHAC USA, stated his 'unequivocal support from the Animal Liberation Front'¹⁷, and the Southern Poverty Law Center wrote in 2002 that the ALF was likely involved in SHAC's campaigns. Notably, ALF claimed responsibility for direct violent action against HLS and those associated with HLS, including igniting a bomb under the car of Canaccord Capital's director Michael Kendall¹⁸. Canaccord Capital was acting as a broker for the British biotech company Phytopharm, who were associated with HLS.

Chiron, an American company that had signed contracts with HLS, was also subjected to extreme action. In August 2003, two pipe bombs exploded in Chiron's campus with no casualties. Initially, nobody took credit for the blasts, although a group called the 'Revolutionary Cells - Animal Liberation Brigade' eventually claimed that they were responsible. Although SHAC claimed they were not associated with this group, they featured news coverage of the bombings on their website¹⁹, which was later criticised as implicitly endorsing the action. Other actions taken against Chiron included putting thirty stuffed dogs in a Chiron's employee's garden, with the words 'Puppy killer' scrawled on them, and in another incident a tombstone was left at an employee's

¹³ 21 'illegally' collected for animal rights terror. (n.d.). This Is Local London. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from <https://www.thisislocallondon.co.uk/news/1209501.21-illegally-collected-for-animal-rights-terror/>

¹⁴ BBC News | UK | Arsonists target lab staff. (n.d.). Retrieved 9 August 2022, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/899764.stm>

¹⁵ Hochschartner, J. (2020). *Puppy killer, leave town: A history of Huntingdon Animal Cruelty* (First Sunbury Press edition). Sunbury Press.

¹⁶ Rights Group Goes to Scary Extremes To Close Down a U.K. Lab Company—WSJ. (2001). *The Washington Post*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB988317596965918093>

¹⁷ Doward, J., & Townsend, M. (2004, July 31). Beauty and the beasts. *The Observer*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/aug/01/animalwelfare.world>

¹⁸ Grant, T. (2005, June 23). Canaccord quits after attack. *The Globe and Mail*. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/canaccord-quits-after-attack/article20423366/>

¹⁹ *Animal rights group claims responsibility for Chiron blasts*. (2003, August 29). SFGATE. <https://www.sfgate.com/news/baycitynews/article/Animal-rights-group-claims-responsibility-for-2559559.php>

house²⁰. In September 2005, the New York Stock Exchange gave notice to HLS that it would not be able to list on the NYSE²¹.

Governments Take Action

The governments of the United Kingdom and the United States took notice of SHAC's activism fairly quickly after the intimidation of HLS employees started. In a speech by Tony Blair in November 2000, he said that he would not allow intimidation by animal rights activists to prevent scientific progress²². Greg Avery also claimed that the British government was attempting to infiltrate SHAC, alleging that special branch officers had offered to pay one activist's mortgage in return for becoming an informant²³. The Sunday Times reported in 2004 that GCHQ had been monitoring the phone calls and emails of SHAC activists²⁴.

Ellefsen (2018) notes that a decisive change in SHAC's ability to damage HLS came in the second half of their campaign efforts, when there was an apparent shift from 'ineffective to effective repression'²⁵. Specifically, the degree of action taken by the British government against SHAC UK increased dramatically in the mid-2000s, with legislation introduced in order to curb the activities of anti-HLS activists. In 2005, the UK government introduced the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act (SOCPA), which was partially created in order to make much of the activity of animal rights advocates illegal. As noted in *The Guardian* in 2005²⁶, the legislation included:

- Giving the police the ability to ban demonstrators from specific properties for three months.
- A new offence of 'economic damage through campaign of intimidation'.
- Giving police the power to ban people from the vicinity of a target's house for three months.

²⁰ When animal rights turns ugly. (2008). *Nature Biotechnology*, 26(6), 603–605.

<https://doi.org/10.1038/nbt0608-603>

²¹ Adetunji, L. (2001). Huntingdon forced to postpone NYSE listing. *The Financial Times*.

<https://www.ft.com/content/6098087c-1fb4-11da-853a-00000e2511c8>

²² Woolf, M. (2000, November 18). Blair tells violent eco-warriors they can't stop science. *The Independent*.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/blair-tells-violent-ecowarriors-they-can-t-stop-science-621793.html>

²³ Hochschartner, J. (2020). *Puppy killer, leave town: A history of Huntingdon Animal Cruelty* (First Sunbury Press edition). Sunbury Press.

²⁴ Grimston, J. (2004). *Rise of suburban terrorist has British scientists on the run*. *The Times*

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/rise-of-suburban-terrorist-has-british-scientists-on-the-run-fbglxrv3zh>

²⁵ Ellefsen, R. (2018). Deepening the Explanation of Radical Flank Effects: Tracing Contingent Outcomes of Destructive Capacity. *Qualitative Sociology*, 41(1), 111–133.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-018-9373-3>

²⁶ Tempest, M. (2005, January 31). Crackdown on animal rights extremists. *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/jan/31/immigrationpolicy.animalwelfare>

- Giving police the power to arrest anyone who demonstrated outside of the homes of scientists.
- A five year prison term for anyone found guilty of causing harm to an animal research organisation.

There was also extreme concern in the United States about the actions of SHAC USA. Between November 2002 and April 2003, the FBI made a series of requests to judges that allowed it to monitor the emails and phone calls of several SHAC members, including Greg and Heather Avery, Natasha Taylor, in addition to Robin Webb²⁷.

In May 2004, The US Senate held a hearing on animal rights activism, titled 'Animal Rights: Activism vs. Criminality', which focused largely on particularly extreme actions by animal rights advocates, with Senator Orrin Hatch classifying animal rights advocates as engaging in 'vandalizing and pipe-bombing research facilities, credit card fraud, threatening employees of businesses and research companies, terrorizing children of employees, and posting death threats against employees, as well as employees' names, addresses and phone numbers, on the Internet'²⁸. SHAC activists Jacob Conroy, Darius Fullmer, Lauren Gazzola, Josh Harper, Kevin Kjonaas, John McGee, and Andrew Stepanian were arrested by FBI agents one week later²⁹.

In October 2005, the United States Senate's Committee on Environment and Public Works held a hearing on eco-terrorism with a specific focus on SHAC's activities. SHAC was described by United States Senator John Inhofe as 'a radical animal rights organisation that relies on crimes of violence and a campaign of fear to convey their message of animal liberation'³⁰. In March 2006, a federal jury in New Jersey found six members of SHAC USA in addition to the organisation SHAC USA (together known as the 'SHAC 7') guilty of using their website to incite attacks on people and businesses who did business with HLS, on account of the SHAC website containing the home addresses of people who associated with HLS³¹. They were convicted for conspiring to violate the Animal Enterprise Protection Act (AEPA)³². The Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA), an amendment of the AEPA, was passed in the United States Congress in 2006 in

²⁷ Doward, J., & Townsend, M. (2005, April 3). FBI monitored British activists. *The Observer*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/apr/03/animalwelfare.usa>

²⁸ Link: [- ANIMAL RIGHTS: ACTIVISM VS. CRIMINALITY](#)

²⁹ Lovitz, D. (2010). *Muzzling a movement: The effects of anti-terrorism law, money, and politics on animal activism*. Lantern Books.

³⁰ Link: [OPENING STATEMENT BY CHAIRMAN INHOFE Eco-terrorism Hearing: SHAC - Press Releases - US Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works](#)

³¹ Kocieniewski, D. (2006, March 3). Six Animal Rights Advocates Are Convicted of Terrorism. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/03/nyregion/six-animal-rights-advocates-are-convicted-of-terrorism.html>

³² Lovitz, D. (2010). *Muzzling a movement: The effects of anti-terrorism law, money, and politics on animal activism*. Lantern Books.

response to the actions of SHAC USA and lobbying by companies involved with animal testing, and made it easier to prosecute individuals involved with targeting the operations of companies involved with animal testing³³.

Later Activism and Further Repression

In 2006, governments stepped up their campaigns against SHAC and other animal rights activists. British Prime Minister Tony Blair publicly signed a petition supporting the 'silent majority' who supported animal testing, writing the Sunday Times that 'Many millions more will be spared an early death or a life of pain because of the research now underway. They deserve our support. And they should get it.'³⁴ The pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKlein received a High Court injunction to stop animal activists from releasing the details of their shareholders, and Blair again promised to protect 'decent people' from the activists³⁵.

In July 2006, Heather Nicholson and Natasha Avery were sentenced to 16 months in prison for attacking a family who had a Countryside Alliance sticker on their car³⁶. The media coverage of the incident focused on the fact that a 75 year old woman had been present during the attack, and that they had shouted "scum" and "perverts" at the family³⁷. In the USA, six members of the SHAC 7 were sentenced to prison. Kjoonas, the President of SHAC USA, received six years. Approximately 100 supporters of the SHAC campaign were in the courtroom, and an additional 40 were waiting in the hallways of the court³⁸.

In August of 2006, Spiked Online reported that Britain had been declared the 'Afghanistan of Animal Rights terrorism' by a security analyst, and that Blair had personally presented US President George Bush with a progress report detailing the actions taken against animal rights activists³⁹. More SHAC activists in the UK started to receive prison sentences amid a sense that additional scrutiny was being placed on the group's activities. In March 2007, Mark Taylor was sentenced to four years in prison, and

³³ Pilkington, E. (2015, February 19). Animal rights 'terrorists'? Legality of industry-friendly law to be challenged. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/feb/19/animal-rights-activists-challenge-federal-terrorism-charges>

³⁴ Williams, C. (n.d.). *Blair backs animal testing petition*. Retrieved 7 July 2022, from
https://www.theregister.com/2006/05/15/blair_petition_sign_up/

³⁵ Costello, B. S. F. and M. (2006). *Glaxo braced for animal rights protest at AGM*. Retrieved 7 July 2022, from
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/glaxo-braced-for-animal-rights-protest-at-agm-hlwj8rh03l>

³⁶ Hochschartner, J. (2020). *Puppy killer, leave town: A history of Huntingdon Animal Cruelty* (First Sunbury Press edition). Sunbury Press.

³⁷ Murray-West, R. (2006). Animal activists threatened family with pro-hunt car sticker. *The Telegraph*.

³⁸ Hochschartner, J. (2020). *Puppy killer, leave town: A history of Huntingdon Animal Cruelty* (First Sunbury Press edition). Sunbury Press.

³⁹ O'Neill, B. (2006). *The truth about 'animal rights terrorism'*. Retrieved 7 July 2022, from
<https://www.spiked-online.com/2006/08/10/the-truth-about-animal-rights-terrorism/>

his wife Suzanne Taylor was sentenced to two and a half years⁴⁰. Another activist, Teresa Portwine, received a sentence of 15 months. The activists were jailed under new legislation that had been passed in an attempt to deter extremism and intimidation.

In 2009, Avery and Nicholson received nine years in prison at Winchester Crown court. The judge, Mr Justice Butterfield, called the campaign "urban terrorism" and a "relentless, sustained and merciless persecution", and five other activists also received jail sentences⁴¹. In October 2010, five other SHAC activists received sentences ranging between fifteen months and six years⁴². This marked the beginning of the end for SHAC - although the campaign continued activities until 2014, the sentencing of its most prominent activists in both the United States and the United Kingdom meant that the group was much less active than it had been prior to the arrests.

Methods and Tactics

Leaderless Resistance

SHAC was well-known for its use of 'leaderless resistance' as a tactic to inflict damage to Huntingdon Life Sciences and its supporters while incurring minimal costs. Leaderless resistance is a social resistance strategy in which independent groups campaign against institutions (in this case, Huntingdon Life Sciences), without being part of any official movement or group. The strategy involves multiple independent activists working towards a common goal without clear unified leadership, in order to minimise the chance that the whole movement faces arrest or other repression⁴³. However, SHAC did also have a centralised group that ran the website, and was heavily influential in the role of overall campaign. SHAC local groups (who mostly conducted legal actions) often operated independently of one another, although they were aware of other groups and their actions (via the central website).

SHAC used its websites to call for people to engage in their own direct action against HLS, allowing them to encourage people who weren't in direct communication with other SHAC activists to take action against HLS. However, the centralised SHAC group didn't seem to explicitly specify that local groups or individual activists *should* target specific entities, and that was left down for groups to activists to decide. In the trials

⁴⁰ Gillan, A. (2007, March 7). Animal activists jailed under law on extremism. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/mar/07/animalwelfare.world>

⁴¹ *Animal rights activists jailed for blackmail*. (2009, January 21). The Independent. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/animal-rights-activists-jailed-for-blackmail-1475952.htm>

⁴² *Animal rights activists jailed*. (2010, October 25). Channel 4 News. <https://www.channel4.com/news/animal-rights-activists-jailed>

⁴³ Michael, G. (2012). Leaderless Resistance: The New Face of Terrorism. *Defence Studies*, 12(2), 257–282. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2012.699724>

against the SHAC 7, the defendants argued that they were not personally responsible for the crimes committed against HLS employees. On the SHAC 7 website, the activists note:

“While the charges themselves sound alarming, the defendants are not actually accused of having personally engaged in terrorist or threatening acts. Instead, the government's case centers around the idea that aboveground organisers of a campaign are responsible for any and all acts that anyone engages in while furthering the goals of the organisers. In this case, the claim is that the SHAC 7 should be imprisoned because underground activists took illegal actions against companies with ties to H.L.S.”⁴⁴

This speaks to the logic of leaderless resistance - by sharing information with other animal activists, SHAC 7 claimed that they should not be prosecuted for their actions with the SHAC campaign, as they were not *personally* involved with many of the crimes that they were prosecuted for. SHAC was, by definition, a legal and “above-ground” campaign, and SHAC activists argued that they should not be punished for the actions of “underground” or anonymous activists whose tactics involved illegal actions. As they were prosecuted and ended up serving jail time, it seems like they miscalculated the extent to which leaderless resistance and the separation of above-ground and underground actions would provide them with a workable defence in court. However, it’s also quite plausible that their prosecution and subsequent jail time was due to their willingness to post all actions, violent or otherwise, taken against HLS or those associated with HLS, on the main SHAC websites.

⁴⁴ URL: <https://www.shac7.com/case.htm>

Secondary and Tertiary Targeting

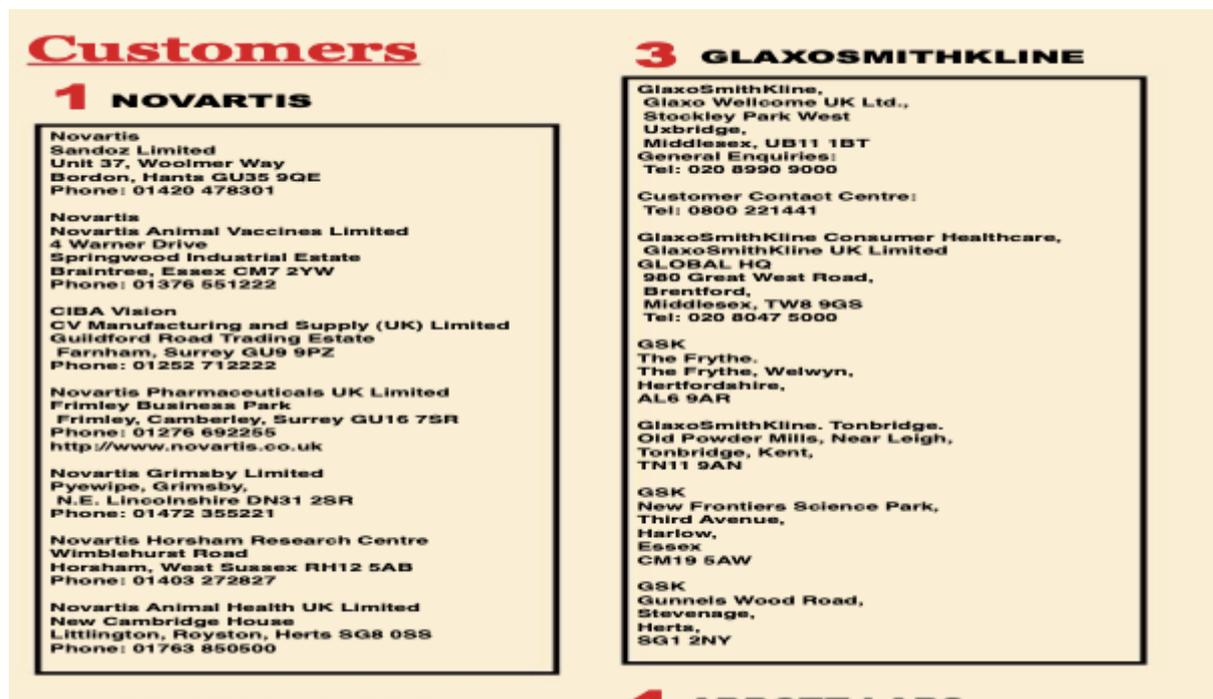


Figure 5: SHAC's newsletter gives an example of targeting companies associated with HLS, in this case Novartis and GlaxoSmithKline.

SHAC were well known for using 'secondary and tertiary targeting', in which they not only targeted employees and shareholders in HLS itself, but also targeted employees and shareholders of companies that did business with HLS, *and* those companies' business associates and shareholders. Figure 5 above shows an extract from SHAC's newsletter in which they make clear to supporters that they should target pharmaceutical companies that were customers of HLS. Many of the high-profile actions taken against people who were being targeted by SHAC were actually against people who didn't work for HLS directly. For instance, employees of Marsh, an insurance broking firm, played a key part in the trial against the SHAC 7.

There are quite a few examples of SHAC's secondary and tertiary targeting:

- SHAC targeted the Royal Bank of Scotland and other banks that had been loaning money to HLS. It picketed the bank branches of RBS and further put pressure on senior managers. RBS ended up 'pulling the plug' on HLS, and writing off the £11m overdraft owed by HLS⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ Treanor, J., & editor, deputy city. (2000, June 10). Bank pulls plug on 'cruel' animal lab. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/jun/10/jilltreanor>

- SHAC targeted pharmaceutical companies associated with HLS, including GSK, Novartis AG (both of which can be seen above in Figure 5), Eli Lilly & Co, and Roche⁴⁶.
- SHAC targeted other financial institutions that were associated with HLS, including Marsh (which insured HLS), and Stephens Inc.
- SHAC targeted other institutions (not businesses) that were associated with HLS, such as the Labour Party. The Labour Party's pension fund held 75,000 shares in HLS. The Labour Party ended up selling its shares⁴⁷.

Peaceful Protests and Non-violent Activism

If you look through any Sunday supplement magazine you will see adverts for companies offering to sell you goods, but they will send you the goods before have sent them any money. Simply fill out the names and addresses of one of the workers listed below and send off the slip to the company. If everyone does this then each worker will have mountains of unwanted mail which they have to pay to send back.

Figure 6: SHAC's newsletter encourages activists to sign HLS employees up to buy goods so that they will be deluged with unwanted mail.

We believe that most of SHAC's campaigning in the United Kingdom was largely peaceful and would be accurately categorised as fairly typical nonviolent protest activity, although this is difficult to verify or falsify empirically. Because of the incentives of journalists, much of the media coverage of the SHAC campaign focuses only on extreme events, such as arson attacks and home demonstrations. When looking at newsletters from the SHAC campaign, there is a clear emphasis on actions that are disruptive but not violent. For instance, one SHAC tactic involved signing up HLS employees to buy goods from Sunday supplement magazines in order to deluge them with unwanted mail (and possibly require them to pay to send the goods back), as can be seen in Figure 6⁴⁸. While this tactic clearly isn't violent, many people would likely consider it to be slightly more extreme than a peaceful march or other classic nonviolent action.

Many of SHAC's newsletters make reference to peaceful protests and other tactics that are standard in the repertoire of non-violent activists, such as setting up stalls giving information about the treatment of animals at HLS, handing out leaflets, and so on. It is clear from the media coverage of SHAC's activities that these standard non-violent actions received significantly less media attention than more extreme action. As one

⁴⁶ Brown, D. (2001, February 12). Pharmaceutical firms attacked. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2001/feb/12/2>

⁴⁷ Ward, L., & Correspondent, P. (2000, January 24). Labour pension fund to sell shares in vivisection firm. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2000/jan/24/labour.labour1997to99>

⁴⁸ Issue 4 of the SHAC Newsletter. Link: https://issuu.com/conflictgypsy/docs/newsletter_4

activist put it, 'Obviously bake sales and peaceful protests don't make newspaper headlines'. That being said, it seems plausible that SHAC newsletters are more likely to highlight successful activity that is not regarded as extreme by most people, in pursuit of a more attractive image to those who are turned off by extreme activity.

Property Damage and Violence

A large number of SHAC activists were opposed to violence as part of the campaign, although it should be noted that the understanding of 'violence' is contingent on the specific activist. As Ellefsen and Busher note, many activists who were ostensibly opposed to violence were supportive of property damage, arson, threats, and intimidation.⁴⁹ Ellefsen and Busher argue that one of SHAC's key innovations (in contrast to previous, violent animal rights activists) was the pivot *away* from violence in both the initial phase of the campaign and towards the end of the campaign. Ellefsen and Busher also note that there was a period of sustained increased violent activity between 2001 and 2007, which they label the 'peak of the campaign'.

There was some ambiguity about whether SHAC supported property damage - for instance, on August 28th 2000, five cars belonging to HLS employees were firebombed. While a SHAC representative went on record saying that he believed that the campaign ought to remain non-violent and that property damage was not one of the tactics of the campaign, he also said that firebombing was not comparable to the violence inflicted on animals at HLS⁵⁰.

Some Animal Liberation Movement (ALM) activists used 'grave desecration', a tactic wherein the buried remains of the loved ones of targeted individuals were stolen from their graves. The extent to which SHAC activists were involved in grave desecration is unclear - one activist we spoke to was explicit about the fact that grave desecration activity was not committed or endorsed by SHAC. It is almost certainly the case that act led to some backlash against SHAC, as the fact that three animal rights activists had been involved in this act was widely reported in the media⁵¹.

⁴⁹ Ellefsen, R., & Busher, J. (2020). The Dynamics of Restraint in the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty Campaign. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 14(6), 165–179.

⁵⁰ Hochschartner, J. (2020). *Puppy killer, leave town: A history of Huntingdon Animal Cruelty* (First Sunbury Press edition). Sunbury Press.

⁵¹ Morris, S., Ward, D., & Butt, R. (2006, May 11). Jail for animal rights extremists who stole body of elderly woman from her grave. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/may/12/animalwelfare.topstories3>

Successes

Companies abandon HLS

The major successes of the SHAC campaign largely occurred in the first few years of SHAC's existence. For instance, in 2000, the Sunday Telegraph published a list of HLS' shareholders obtained by SHAC, resulting in many of HLS' largest shareholders selling their shares. In December 2000, Philips and Drew of London sold millions of shares, and they were followed by HSBC, Merrill Lynch, and several other large shareholders⁵². The Labour Party, which held shares in HLS as part of its pension fund, sold its shares in January 2000 in response to activism from SHAC campaigners⁵³.

As noted in the section on the history of SHAC, there were many successes in 2000 and 2001 relating to companies pulling their money out of HLS. On June 6th, WestLB Panmure resigned as the corporate broker of HLS. SHAC staged multiple protests against the Royal Bank of Scotland, and in January 2001 they did cut their ties with HLS, although activists responded negatively to the fact that this included writing off half of HLS' debt. In an extremely rare intervention in 2002, the British government stepped in to insure HLS as no private insurers were willing to do so, as well as giving Cambridgeshire police a £1m grant to cover the costs of demonstrations at HLS' premises⁵⁴. HLS also moved its financial headquarters from the UK to the US in 2002, following pressure from SHAC. The New York Stock Exchange also delayed listing of HLS' new entity in the US, Life Sciences Research Inc., for up to 15 months after it was intended, due to worries about SHAC US.⁵⁵

Tactics and Methods

The SHAC campaign was innovative in its use of technology and internet communication. In an interview with the writer and academic Dara Lovitz, she argued that the SHAC campaign's use of encrypted messaging and the internet as a means of spreading a message was an impressive feat given the lack of communication infrastructure at the time. She noted that while the advent of social media has made it much easier to get significant numbers of people involved with a campaign, the fact that SHAC was able to get the attention that it did get and the amount of support without

⁵² Lovitz, D. (2010). *Muzzling a movement: The effects of anti-terrorism law, money, and politics on animal activism*. Lantern Books.

⁵³ Ward, L., & Correspondent, P. (2000, January 24). Labour pension fund to sell shares in vivisection firm. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2000/jan/24/labour.labour1997to99>

⁵⁴ *Government insures lab firm*. (2002, December 18). <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/2585889.stm>

⁵⁵ Adetunji, L. (2005, September 7) Huntingdon forced to postpone NYSE listing. <https://www.ft.com/content/6098087c-1fb4-11da-853a-00000e2511c8>.

using social media websites (as they largely did not exist when SHAC was formed) was an impressive feat.

Dr. Rune Ellefsen, who has conducted research on SHAC through qualitative interviews and data analysis, made several points about why SHAC was often extremely effective in getting companies to disassociate with SHAC:

- They were extremely adaptable in their tactics. When either HLS or the government made attempts to weaken SHAC, activists were often able to adjust their tactics in order to combat the attempts.
- The laser-like focus on HLS specifically was useful for the SHAC campaign. Other animal rights campaigns often had more diffuse goals, but the singular focus on HLS meant that they could ensure that they always knew what the priority was for their next activity and who exactly they needed to target to maximise the chance of impact.
- The fact that there was an above-board and completely legal aspect to SHAC's activity as well as a more disruptive and extreme aspect meant that activists could do whatever they felt most comfortable doing, maximising the number of people who were likely to get involved in the campaign.
- The fact that SHAC had 'small wins' during their campaign meant that activists felt motivated to continue with protests and other activities. Seeing companies disassociate with HLS and the stock price fall encouraged activists to continue even when progress became significantly slower.

SHAC's laser-like focus on HLS also appears to have been a key factor in its successes. By targeting companies associated with HLS (as well as shareholders in HLS and employees of HLS), SHAC made it extremely clear how companies/people could avoid being targeted. This meant that the incentive for ceasing business with HLS was clear, and resulted in many companies ending their association with HLS.

Stock Price

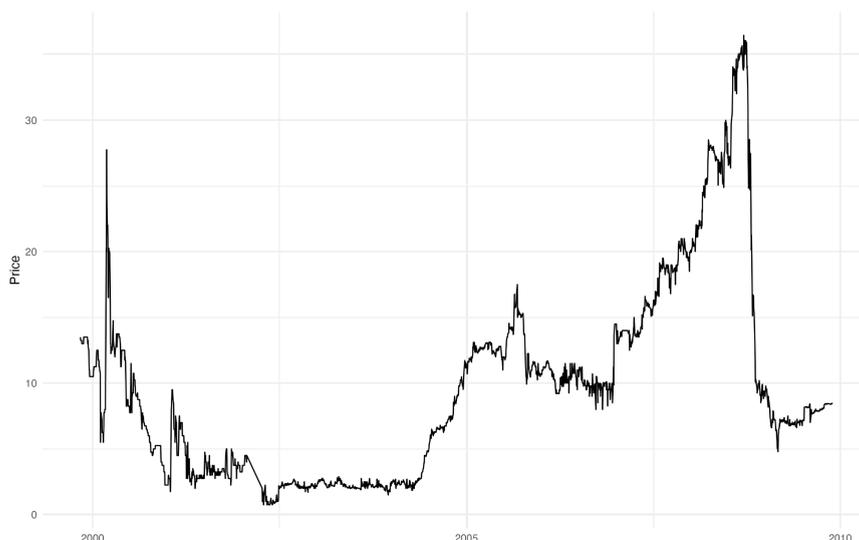


Figure 7: Stock price (USD) of Huntingdon Life Sciences (listed on the London Stock exchange until January 2001 and then subsequently the New York Stock exchange)⁵⁶.

Figure 7 shows the stock price of Huntingdon Life Sciences from the beginning of the SHAC campaign in November 1999. The price reached a nadir in April 2002, but recovered quite substantially after 2004. While we cannot directly causally attribute all changes in stock price to the actions of SHAC, the stock price gives *prima facie* evidence that the SHAC campaign had moderate success in the first few years of its existence, but failed to significantly damage HLS in the late years of its activity. It should be noted that the large fall towards the end of Figure 7 largely coincides with the global financial crisis and is likely to be largely unrelated to the actions of SHAC activists.

Failures

SHAC ultimately failed in their goal of shutting down Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS). Although their initial campaigns were met with some success, they did not achieve the goal that they set out to achieve, and attracted an immense amount of attention from security services in both the United Kingdom and the United States. This attention, and subsequent repression from the state, was largely the cause of SHAC's failure. When leading SHAC members Gregg Avery and Heather Nicholson were sentenced to nine years in prison in 2009, the activists reduced the extent of their activities, and officially ended their campaign in 2014.

⁵⁶ Data retrieved from Bloomberg terminal

Why did SHAC attract state repression?

There is a widespread view that SHAC's failures largely resulted from increased repression from the governments of the United Kingdom and United States, which was partially in response to the attempts from both HLS and its associates to fight back against the actions of activists. As Ellefsen (2018) notes: 'The range of broad criminal justice efforts launched by the British government reflects the level of priority given by the state to curbing the SHAC campaign. This increased priority resulted largely from counter-mobilization by a coalition that HLS was central in organising'⁵⁷. In 2005, the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 (SOCPA) was introduced, partially in an attempt to crack down on the activities, with explicit reference to 'intimidation of persons connected with [an] animal research organization'⁵⁸.

In the early 2000s, a general attitude of crackdown on dangerous groups was emerging, partially caused by the fear in the aftermath of the terror attacks in September 2001. In fact, American Congressman Don Young actually claimed that there was a strong possibility that the 9/11 attacks were perpetrated not by Islamic terrorists but by eco-terrorists based in Seattle⁵⁹. The introduction of the PATRIOT Act in 2001 allowed for much more surveillance of individuals thought to be involved in illicit activities, and Dara Lovitz claims that it 'provided the framework for various state eco-terror bills designed to criminalise speech activity of environmentalists or animal activists that would otherwise be constitutionally protected'⁶⁰.

Pharmaceutical companies cooperated with the governments of the United Kingdom and United States. Activists we talked to (as well as the writer and academic Dara Lovitz) expressed a strong view that pharmaceutical companies had an influence on the behaviour of governments towards SHAC activists. They also believed that this was a more important factor in the decisions of governments than the general atmosphere of anxiety around activism leading to eco-terrorism. Both governments and companies might have seen SHAC, or groups that might be inspired by SHAC's campaign, as a threat to commercial and national interests. As a result of this, it's quite likely that the governments inflicted severe repression towards SHAC activists to both stop the campaign and act as a deterrent for future activists.

⁵⁷ Ellefsen, R. (2018). Deepening the Explanation of Radical Flank Effects: Tracing Contingent Outcomes of Destructive Capacity. *Qualitative Sociology*, 41(1), 111–133.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-018-9373-3>

⁵⁸ Ellefsen, R. (2016). Judicial opportunities and the death of SHAC: Legal repression along a cycle of contention. *Social Movement Studies*, 15(5), 441–456.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2016.1185360>

⁵⁹ Lovitz, D. (2010). *Muzzling a movement: The effects of anti-terrorism law, money, and politics on animal activism*. Lantern Books.

⁶⁰ Ibid

One particularly prominent example of influence of pharmaceutical companies is the role of Lord Sainsbury, who served as the minister of science and acted to prevent HLS failing, likely on the grounds that he believed that pharmaceutical companies would withdraw from the UK if HLS shut down. In 2004, he made a commitment to bring in legislation to protect pharmaceutical companies from animal rights activists⁶¹. One anonymous activist believed that this was the largest reason for SHAC's failure, claiming that the actions of the pharmaceutical companies against SHAC were highly effective, and that the government crackdown on SHAC was largely a result of the actions of the pharmaceutical companies.

State repression was also somewhat a response to the perception of SHAC activists as violent and extreme. This became confounded as part of the repression towards SHAC activists was the previously mentioned media strategy employed by the law enforcement agencies, who would attempt to depict the legal and public-facing aspects of the SHAC campaign as militant and violent as the underground anonymous groups. While this is discussed in more detail in the section below, it is worth outlining some of the actions that likely resulted in the British government clamping down on SHAC activists:

- The attack on Brian Cass, while perhaps not carried out directly by SHAC, likely led to a greater focus on SHAC from the British government. An Early Day Motion was tabled in the House of Commons explicitly condemning the attack, and received 55 signatures from Members of Parliament⁶².
- In response to SHAC's actions relating to the RBS loan to HLS, Tony Blair claimed that he was 'on the side of science', and a Downing Street spokesman referred to the 'intimidation, thuggery and violence' of animal activists - likely referring to actions such as protesting on the doorstep of pensioners who held HLS stock⁶³.

Bad Optics

In conversation with a former former SHAC USA activist, he mentioned two actions specifically that he believed to have particularly bad consequences for SHAC. Firstly, home demonstrations (defined as 'protests at the personal residences of targeted individuals'⁶⁴) were often negatively received, largely due to the occasional presence of children at the demonstrations. According to the activist, the purpose of home

⁶¹ Curtis, P. (2004, May 12). Government to defend scientists from animal rights extremists. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2004/may/12/highereducation.uk2>

⁶² ATTACK ON BRIAN CASS, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF HUNTINGDON LIFE SCIENCES - Early Day Motions—UK Parliament. (n.d.). Retrieved 15 September 2022, from <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/19252>

⁶³ Treanor, J., & editor, deputy city. (2000, June 10). Bank pulls plug on 'cruel' animal lab. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/jun/10/jilltreanor>

⁶⁴ Melendez Badillo, J. A. (2013). *Without borders or limits: An interdisciplinary approach to anarchist studies*. Cambridge Scholars.

demonstrations was largely to be able to interact *directly* with people involved either with HLS, or with people involved with companies that did business with HLS.

If a home demonstration occurred and the families of the targeted individuals were present, and especially if the children of targeted individuals were present, the protests were received extremely negatively both by the public and in court. The activist claimed that although successful home demonstrations were effective at interacting with influential individuals who may actually be receptive to the arguments of activists, the risk of something going wrong is high, and the consequences can be extremely bad: *'It can go real bad, real fast'*.

The view that home demonstrations were probably a mistake was echoed by writer and academic Dara Lovitz, who claimed in an interview with Social Change Lab that it made convictions of the SHAC 7 more likely than they would have otherwise been, as many of those giving testimony were able to point to significant harm that had occurred as a result of home demonstrations. One particularly salient example was the testimony of one mother who claimed that her child had said they wanted to carry a knife in their home because they were so afraid of SHAC activists.

Secondly, the activist alluded to the fact that because the SHAC campaign employed leaderless resistance, it would occasionally be the case that some activists would go too far in their activism, and he claimed that the lack of a culture of 'inner critique' meant that sometimes the people who went too far were not convinced to refrain from taking actions that reflected badly on SHAC and the animal rights movement more generally.

One example that the activist gave of an activist going too far involved someone breaking into the house of a vet technician who worked at HLS and stealing (and subsequently selling online) her underwear, as a means of humiliating her. Ordinarily, SHAC had a policy of putting all activism against HLS on their website rather than only action they 'approved of', as a means of showing that they weren't picking and choosing which activities they would cover. In this instance, they placed a disclaimer alongside their coverage of this action in order to distance themselves from an activity that they believed was counterproductive.

Similarly, the attack on HLS managing director Brian Cass seemingly resulted in members of the public and the media believing that SHAC were largely a violent and extreme group. Despite the statement released by Natasha Taylor denouncing the attacks, many media pieces linked the attacks on Cass to SHAC. This perception of SHAC being a violent or extreme organisation was aided by the fact that several prominent US

animal rights activists, such as Jerry Vlasak and Lauren Gazzola, spoke out in support of controversial actions.^{65 66}

Many particularly extreme tactics by animal rights activists were highlighted in the prosecution cases against individual activists. For instance, one employee of Marsh Inc spoke about how activists came to her office, and screamed threats at her including saying that they knew her home address and that they would call her home phone at night and ask 'Are you scared? Do you think the puppies should be scared?'.⁶⁷ Nine activists were charged with third-degree stalking of the employee.

As noted in the Section on Methods and Tactics, the SHAC 7 relied on a method of leaderless resistance that they believe may protect them from prosecution in court, as the prosecution may not be able to prove that they were personally responsible for the crimes committed by activists targeting HLS. As the SHAC 7 were eventually prosecuted and served substantial jail time, this appears to have been a miscalculation.

It is also worth noting that SHAC USA had a policy of putting every document related to activism against HLS on their website. This was ostensibly a defensive measure - if they opted to put *every single* document related to incidents, they couldn't be blamed for individual acts that were highlighted on their website. For instance, they posted anti-SHAC materials as part of their work highlighting content related to SHAC, posting one article about the 'terror tactics' used by SHAC campaigners. Ultimately, this defensive strategy likely failed - as the 'terror tactics' were highlighted by prosecutors in the United States and were taken as legitimate evidence⁶⁸.

Ellefsen (2018) notes that the SHAC campaign was composed of two distinct factions: the aboveground campaign and the underground campaign. The aboveground campaign mainly relied on legal or semi-legal tactics, whereas the underground campaign was more inclined to using illegal and/or violent tactics. Similarly, multiple SHAC activists we spoke to noted that there was certainly some overlap between activists who were involved with the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and SHAC. The ALF were more well known for their illegal and anonymous actions that involved breaking into various facilities to rescue animals, as well as property destruction of animal testing and breeding facilities. It may well have been the case that much of the scrutiny placed

⁶⁵ Hymon, S., (2005, November 13). Los Angeles Times. Animal Rights Leader Justifies Violence. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-nov-13-me-vlasak13-story.html>.

⁶⁶ Gazzola, L., Page 843, BAD THINGS HAPPENED: METAPHORICAL FINGERPRINTS, CONSTELLATIONS OF EVIDENCE, AND "GUILT FOR ASSOCIATION", <http://lawreview.vermontlaw.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/40VtLRev813-Gazzola.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Lovitz, D. (2010). *Muzzling a movement: The effects of anti-terrorism law, money, and politics on animal activism*. Lantern Books.

⁶⁸ Ibid

on SHAC by both governments and media was in part due to their reported association with the ALF, who were known to be more of an “extreme” group. That being said, the ALF and SHAC were separate entities, with clearly distinct ideologies and views about activism.

Media Coverage

Media coverage of SHAC was often extremely negative, although this was anticipated by SHAC activists and served as part of their strategy for attracting attention and increasing the salience of animal rights issues. That being said, there is some debate about the extent to which negative media coverage is harmful to this sort of campaign. In Ellefsen’s interviews with former SHAC interviews, he notes that one activist claimed that hostile media coverage was actually beneficial to the SHAC campaign. His reasoning was that making SHAC appear particularly dangerous and threatening made the targets of SHAC more likely to acquiesce and stop doing business with HLS:

“In a way the media was helping us. They were making us seem like we were military trained, with unlimited funds, and that we were all psychos and suicide bombers. When target companies saw that in the newspapers, that helped the campaign. A lot of the companies didn’t like us, but then suddenly they were scared of us.”⁶⁹

Ellefsen also quotes a former member of HLS leadership who claimed that the media coverage of the SHAC campaign was a double-edged sword for HLS. On the one hand, making SHAC appear as extreme meant that it was more likely that governments would step in and introduce legislation in order to combat SHAC activism. On the other hand, making SHAC appear as extreme meant that companies that did business with HLS had more reason to break ties out of fear of repercussions. One activist we spoke to was explicit about the fact at the time that the campaign was occurring, that they believed that the media attention that SHAC received was hugely beneficial, but have largely revised their view. They now believe that the media attention that SHAC received was harmful, and that the view of SHAC’s activists at the time was myopic.

Conclusions and Lessons

The extreme actions of both SHAC members and other anti-HLS activists were likely responsible for much of their initial success, but probably ultimately also partially responsible for their failure to shut down Huntingdon Life Sciences. As one activist

⁶⁹ Ellefsen, R. (2018). Deepening the Explanation of Radical Flank Effects: Tracing Contingent Outcomes of Destructive Capacity. *Qualitative Sociology*, 41(1), 111–133. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-018-9373-3>

involved with the SHAC campaign put it: *'Things can go real bad, real fast'*. Much of the evidence presented by the prosecution at the trial of the SHAC 7 relied on relaying information about extreme activism by SHAC to the jury, and the trial resulted in six members of SHAC being found guilty of inciting others to attack people associated with HLS. That being said, there were factors outside of SHAC's control that were also extremely important reasons that they failed to shut down HLS, such as the influence of pharmaceutical companies on legislators. There were several decisions that SHAC (or other actors inspired by SHAC to take action against HLS) made that seem to have been bad decisions in retrospect. However, with hindsight bias, it is much more simple to say that SHAC made some poor decisions, as it might have been the right decision at the time with the limited information available. Despite this, we believe the below factors led to worse outcomes for the SHAC campaign:

- **Many of the actions were "extreme" to the extent that they would predictably lead to government repression**, extremely negative media attention, and a lesser chance of being able to mount a plausible defence at trial. Specifically, actions such as grave-digging, stealing underwear and attacking Brian Cass seem to have caused disproportionate harm to SHAC with little positive returns.
- **SHAC should have been louder about disavowing particularly extreme acts against HLS employees and shareholders and employees of companies that did business with HLS**. This is especially true of actions that were reported in the media as being particularly extreme, such as the attack on Brian Cass. That being said, distinguishing between actions that SHAC approved of and actions that they were disapproving of may have opened them up to prosecution, unless SHAC only explicitly endorsed very mild action against HLS and associated companies.
- **SHAC's method of 'leaderless resistance' and separation of underground and above-ground tactics did not offer them a sufficient defence against prosecution**, as several SHAC activists were prosecuted on the grounds that their website encouraged others to attack employees of HLS and companies associated with HLS.
- In addition, the strategy of leaderless resistance may have made it more difficult to ensure that people attacking HLS did not do things that were clearly either illegal or would obviously result in negative attention from government or the media. For instance, one former SHAC activist I spoke to noted that one person attempting to damage HLS made an obviously bad decision to steal a HLS employee's underwear. This resulted in SHAC being forced to issue a disclaimer about not supporting this sort of action against HLS employees.

- It seems as though **SHAC may have underestimated the extent to which governments were willing to take action against them.** It has been noted that there was a clear shift from ineffective to effective government action against SHAC⁷⁰, and it seems likely that SHAC did not appreciate the magnitude of this shift.

On the other hand, there were some decisions made by SHAC that seems to have played a large role in their success:

- **SHAC's laser-like focus on HLS and companies that dealt with HLS was probably responsible for much of its initial success.** It appears as though SHAC targeting one company specifically rather than a range of companies that they believed to be complicit in animal suffering was a tactical success.
- **The diversity of tactics used by SHAC allowed them to iterate on what worked, while dropping what didn't work.** This seems like a large advantage, as they were able to experiment with a portfolio of tactics and adjust their strategies depending on what seemed to be effective.
- **The fact that SHAC had 'small wins' during their campaign meant that activists felt motivated to continue with protests and other activities.** Seeing companies disassociate with HLS and the stock price fall encouraged activists to continue even when progress became significantly slower.

Some of the reasons for SHAC's eventual failure may have been completely out of their control. For instance, the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks resulted in an especially hostile environment for disruptive activists in the United States, and possibly also in the United Kingdom. Similarly, the relationship between the British government and pharmaceutical companies was not something that SHAC had any influence over, although they possibly should have inferred that action against them was more likely given that this relationship existed.

It is extremely difficult to make counterfactual claims about what would have occurred had SHAC been unwilling to encourage or carry out specific actions against HLS, and there will be significant disagreement about whether they would have been more or less likely to achieve their goals in these cases. However, the evidence collected in this report leads us to conclude that **specific actions taken by SHAC and others campaigning against HLS were counterproductive, such as grave-digging, stealing underwear, and physical violence towards HLS or HLS-associated staff.** It's possible home demonstrations fall into this camp too, but it also seems they played a role in the

⁷⁰ Ellefsen, R. (2018). Deepening the Explanation of Radical Flank Effects: Tracing Contingent Outcomes of Destructive Capacity. *Qualitative Sociology*, 41(1), 111–133. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-018-9373-3>

early successes of SHAC. The government action against SHAC would have been less likely to occur if SHAC had not highlighted and encouraged these actions against HLS employees and shareholders, and the employees and shareholders of associated companies.

It is of course worth noting that **what worked for SHAC may not work for other activist groups**, what did not work for SHAC may work for other activist groups, and factors that impact the chance of activist success are likely hugely contingent on the political context in which the activism is occurring. For example, SHAC's target was an economic actor, whereby SHAC's strategy of economic pressure and economic damage might make sense, however, it is less likely to work for political institutions. SHAC's failure to achieve its ultimate aim of shutting down HLS is almost certainly largely due to at least some constraints that were specific to the circumstances in which SHAC operated, such as the political connections used by HLS to increase repressions towards SHAC activists.