

Two Bomb Attacks on Scientists in the U.K.

Animal rightists have stepped up a campaign of violence against British scientists who do experiments involving animals

TWO RESEARCHERS IN THE WEST of England narrowly escaped injury last week in linked bomb attacks. The Animal Liberation Front, a nebulous grouping of animal rights activists, claimed responsibility for the attacks, which represent a serious escalation in an ongoing campaign of terror that has involved more than 80 bombings in the last 5 years. Previous bombs have been incendiary devices, but the two recent attacks employed plastic explosives.

Margaret Baskerville, a veterinary surgeon at Porton Down, the Ministry of Defense's chemical and microbiological research establishment near Salisbury, threw herself through the window of her Suzuki jeep when a bomb exploded beneath it on 6 June. Five days later a bomb went off under the car of Max Headley, another veterinary surgeon who works at the University of Bristol. Headley was unhurt, but a 13-month-old boy was severely injured.

Police said later that the two bombs had been intended to explode at the same time. Headley drove his car for 5 days before the bomb fell off and exploded.

No warning was given. "The attack came out of the blue," said Headley, who studies the transmission of signals in nerve pathways. "I have no idea why I was attacked. I am proud to admit that I work in medical research, working towards relieving pain and suffering in animals as well as in man." Headley added: "Ironically, one practical application of my work is the development of better anesthetic agents, the very drugs that would have been used in treating the unfortunate little boy who was injured by the bomb."

The Animal Liberation Front (ALF) offered no explanation of why it had chosen Baskerville or Headley for the attacks, beyond saying that anyone who "abused and tortured" animals was a target. Those comments about Headley's research angered Bristol University's information officer Don Carleton: "The university deeply resents the suggestion that where there has been a public act of terrorism, the people who have been placed in the dock are the university researchers who devote their lives, indeed risk their lives, to carry out medical research

on behalf of mankind."

The ALF is loosely organized into a series of cells that act independently without any central coordination. It claims to carry out six "actions" a night in Britain—mostly nuisance acts such as breaking windows, supergluing locks, and daubing graffiti. Targets have ranged from butchers to department stores that sell furs and shops that display posters advertising the arrival of the circus. The front has released animals from research buildings, stolen documents, and set fire to laboratories. The cost of damage caused by the ALF is estimated to run into millions of pounds a year.

A spokesman for the police said he sees a "sinister trend" in the actions of animal rightists in the United Kingdom—fewer but more violent deeds. New Scotland Yard is sufficiently worried by animal rights to have set up an Animal Rights National Index, which collects information about activists, sympathizers, and their activities. And those figures show a decline in overall activity, but a rise in the use of incendiaries.

Mainstream antivivisectionists condemned the bomb attacks. Angela Smith, speaking for the League Against Cruel

more, professor of physiology at Oxford University, says that it was after the mainstream charities singled him out that "more sinister and subterranean" threats against him and his family began. The mainstream organizations, however, deny that such a connection exists.

Mark Matfield, director of the Research Defense Society (RDS), which puts the case for medical research, advises targeted scientists to keep their heads down. "The more you defend yourself," says Matfield, a biochemist by training, "the more you fuel the animal rights campaign against you." But what is right for the individual, he argues, is wrong for the research community as a whole. "For the whole scientific community the best defense is for as many as possible of us to stand up and tell the public what we do, why we do it, how we look after the animals, how we make sure they don't suffer unnecessarily."

Ian Silver, professor of pathology at Bristol University and dean of the medical faculty, has tried to educate the public by showing people what goes on in his laboratories, including work on better biocompatible materials designed for heart pacemakers, but doubts the value of such exercises.

After one such visit, two activists painted a ghastly picture of the lab in a newsletter—a picture that is completely false, according to Silver. "Openness doesn't necessarily mean that people actually appreciate what's being done," Silver says, "or if they do appreciate what's being done, they don't necessarily say so."

The escalation of the animal rights campaign at this time has a certain ironic element, because animal experimentation is declining in Britain. Animal experiments there are controlled by strict legislation, updated in 1986. Every research establishment is inspected to ensure it meets standards of animal care and welfare; each scientist requires a certificate of competence; and every research project is licensed in an effort to guarantee that it uses the smallest number of animals compatible with the aims of research and

inflicts as little distress as possible. Partly as a result of that legislation, the number of animal experiments began falling in 1987.

Although some scientists have acknowledged modifying their personal behavior in the wake of attacks, none will admit to having changed his or her research. "Medical researchers are a pretty dedicated lot," says Matfield. "They don't frighten easily." The RDS has offered a reward of up to 10,000 pounds for information leading to the conviction of the bombers.

■ JEREMY CHERFAS

Animal Rights Terror In The U.K.

Year	Animals used in experiments	Animal Liberation incidents	Bomb attacks
1986	3.1 million	947	16
1987	3.6	708	33
1988	3.4	338	16
1989	not yet available	422	44

Sports, described the bombers as "idiots." "Their convoluted logic appears to be that they are prepared to maim people because people are hurting animals." Richard Mountford, chairman of Animal Aid, another charity campaigning to abolish vivisection, added: "It is ridiculous to use violent means when aiming for a nonviolent world. It is morally wrong and it does not achieve anything for the animals anyway."

But some British researchers say legitimate organizations provide moral and financial support for the extremists. Colin Blake-