

The Battle Against Bayer: The End...or is it?

2004

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The facts of the anti-GM movement in the UK would seem to be this: Inspired by anti-GM actions, the first of which took place in California in 1987, followed by others all across the world, people in the UK began to take action against GM crop trials 6 years ago. This mostly consisted of very simple night-time activity: groups of people pulling up the crops. There were also some open and accountable actions, some successful and some failed daylight raids, some other sabotage of GM facilities and companies plus a lot of pressure from lobby groups.

In summer 2003 at an EF! gathering, with commercialisation looming and the last of the crop trials fled from Britain, the largest genetic company in Europe, Bayer AG, won itself the attention of a national campaign. 6 months later the government gave a half-arsed handshake to the biotech industry by saying yes to GM maize and no to rape and sugar beet. Bayer, battered and bruised by the combined efforts of the antiGM actions and lobbying said thanks but no thanks.

And the happy ending is that no GM crops are to be grown in Britain in the foreseeable future... not for the next 4 years at any rate.

This is undeniably excellent news, and whilst Bayer's parting comment was one of commercial unviability, all those with sore knees from pulling crops, or quick metal still stuck under the finger nails, we knew different. But what went on behind the scenes, and is it really over?

The campaign against Bayer saw over 50 actions in a few months. Offices were occupied, spraypainted, blockaded, glued up and smashed, directors were harassed at home, scientists were pied, events attended by their speakers were ruined, and in the last month the Boycott Bayer campaign was launched with stickers, leaflets, posters and a website.

As with all struggles though, the tensions were not only between biotechnology and its enemies. Within the anti-GM ranks there was also painful conflict. Some of these tensions were to be expected as people were in the battle for different reasons – from consumer pressure groups to green anarchists, and obviously, the motives and moves of each were ragingly different.

The anti-Bayer campaign was sprung from the ecological direct action movement but this didn't mean a smoother ride. People fell out massively over tactics: in particular the issue of home visits, and the promises of regular actions fell to the wayside with a shockingly tepid commitment to activism. (The vast majority who swore they would do regular actions just didn't.) There was an injunction against several individuals and several groups which seemed to floor the campaign's ability to do anything which wasn't strictly legal in the first place. There were, of course, some tasty bonuses; such as the sacking of Paul Rylott as head of Bioscience, and when Michael O'Brien (company director) resigned, the injuncted groups got a letter from his solicitors telling us, effectively, to now leave him alone please. But by

the time Bayer announced it was packing up and going home it felt as much like relief as victory.

The direct action campaign against Bayer was succesful because there was such a hefty anti-GM lobby and because of the dislike of the British public against anything new. A hatred of immigrants and a hatred of GM seem to stem from the same vile conservatism and commitment to western civilisation AS IT IS... making uneasy bedfellows with the ecodirect action movement. The ecological direct action movement so happened to be on the same side for once. The disappointing truth is the ecological direct action movement is not strong enough or committed enough to have beaten Bayer out of this tiny island otherwise. The campaign was marred by broken words and general softness and we are lucky that the feisty few who stuck their necks out didn't in more trouble. But hey, we didn't co-opt our politics and we didn't go to prison and it was certainly the best thing going on over the last year... and we still haven't given up.

"We do expect GM oilseed rape to be harvested in the fields of Cambridgeshire before the end of the decade" Julian Little, spokesperson for Bayer Cropscience.

We too expect GM to be planted before the end of the decade. Biotechnology is essential for the growth and expansion of the totality and that's the mammoth battle we've taken on. The Boycott Bayer part of the campaign is still going, and there isn't a reason in hell to NOT continue to target Bayer as major players in biotech. Bayer will be back here but we're waiting for them. And hopefully the ecological direct action network will be mad enough and bad enough to walk the walk not just talk the talk. See you on the frontline.

www.stopbayergm.org

Bayer Actions

29 April 04 – Bayer Cropscience subsidiary, HC Starck, was visited at night. A message: Bayer -STAY out of GM, was spraypainted on the front wall. This was one of a few gentle warnings to Bayer that if they do carry on trying to bring GM Crops in, we will target them again.

22 April 04 – Newbury town centre surrounding Bayer Plc's UK headquarters was flyposted and stickered with 'Don't Buy Bayer' stickers to let them know that although the campaign is ending, they are being watched and any further attempts to grow GM in the UK will be met with direct action.

22 March 04 – This day saw a phone and email blockade aimed at disrupting communications and creating extra hasssle.

11 March 04 – Anti GM messages were sprayed on a wall and sign at the Bayer Crop Science works in Widnes, near Liverpool.

30 January 04 — The Bayer Crop Science building in North Newbalds, North Yorkshire, had its locks jammed with paperclips and superglue.

27 January 04 — Windows were bricked at HC Starck in Sheffield and also an Anti-GM slogan (the specifics of which, this reporter can't remember) was painted on the wall near the main entrance. This action took place as part of the 'Bail out of GM' week of actions.

27 January 04 — W H Hawley targetted during the 10 days of Anti-Bayer action. As one of several actions against Bayer during the 10 days of action the following was reported: W H Hawley (part of the Bayer group) in Burton-on-Trent was visited. A tanker had 5 of its 6 tyres slashed; the 6th had a dodgy valve so the tyre could not be deflated as it is dangerous to puncture lorry tyres under full pressure. Also cables ripped out. The side of the tanker spraypainted with "STOP GM CROPS" also the pipe used to empty the tanker was punctured.

21 January 04 — Paul Rylott, top GM scientist at Bayer Cropscience delivered a stirring speech on how to manage consumer response to biotechnology, at a conference on Managing and Predicting Crisis in the Food Industry. As he took his place in the queue for his buffet dinner a polite call of "Mr Rylott?" brought him face to face with a chocolate fudge cake (skipped and stale) covered with the sweaty rotting whipped cream and the shout "That's for GM!" Before the assualting party fled, some leaflets were given out to the surprised and immobilised crowd and all those protesting left before the cops arrived. The biotech baking brigade stated: "GM Technology is the latest onslaught of a bland and tedious industrial technological society against the planet. We are against monoculture and for biodiversity, against the domestication of people and land, and for the wild. There is no neutral ground: everyone is called upon to choose their side. Whenever They strike — be they government, corporations or greenwash quangos — we will strike back. They have declared war on us and our planet: we will answer it.

28 December 03 — Activists sabotaged Bourne golf course near Cambridge as a protest against Bayer Cropscience, having received information that there would be a Bayer golf tournament there the next day. Turf was removed and slogans expressing anti-GM/anti-Bayer sentiments were both spray painted and etched into the grass of the greens to convey the message that, until they cease their UK GM programme, Bayer representatives will be persued wherever they go.

19 December 03 — Activists visited the offices of PBI Home & Garden, a Bayer owned company in Hertfordshire, stuck up anti-GM posters, glued the locks to the front door and intercom and spray painted "NO GMO".

12 December 03 — Cheshire Against Bayer paid a visit to Bayer's pesticide manufacturing site in Widnes to protest against Bayer's involvement in GM crops.

12 December 03 — Locks were jammed at Dystar, a Bayer subsidiary, in Huddersfield.

5 December 03 — Michael O'Brien received another visit from concerned individuals on the evening of Monday 1st December. At around 10pm, 18 people arrived at Michael's suburban Essex estate to let him know that it really would be a good idea for Bayer to get out of GM. While we made our presence known to Michael (who observed us from his bedroom window) with air horns and shouting, a more permanent reminder of our message was left ... 'NO GM' was sprayed with weed killer on his front lawn. Our time with Michael was brief and after not more than five minutes we vanished into the night as sirens made the sound track for our exit. (ie. the police response time was about 5 minutes and two squad cars were sent — short and sweet visits seem the way forward!) Until next time Michael...

28 November 03 — Martyn Hargreaves, company secretary of Bayer CropScience was visited tonight. A tin of paintstripper was poured over his 2 cars in the drive and "No GM" was sprayed on the drive and the walls of his garage.

28 November 03 — A visit was made to the flat of Joachin Schneider. These flats have communal entrances with CCTV cameras, so activists sprayed "Stop Bayer's GM Crops" on the brick walls outside the entrance.

27 November 03 — An electricity supplying station in Bergamo, Italy, was subject to a pipe-bomb blast. Also some unexploded incendiary devices have been found on site. On the wall a spraypainted message: "Bayer leave the GMOs market — No to Biotechnology" Near this electricity supplying station is a Bayer industrial site, including the Bayer Crop Science department, which is heavily involved with the development and use of GMOs in agriculture.

The communiqué left on site and published by local newspapers stated that the action was done to stop the works inside the factory and as a direct attack against the genetic engineering projects of multinationals, addressing to Bayer Crop Science a responsibility in all of this.

The explosion led to a black out for 3 small towns in the area for a couple minutes, until an emergency generator switched on. As a response to the action Bayer said they have no links with GMOs!

In the last 5 years in Italy many multinational companies dealing with GMOs had to face not only protests but also direct action, that resulted in millions of euros of damages altogether, with crops destroyed, seeds stores torched, machinery sabbed, labs raided and trucks torched. Nestlé, Monsanto, Aventis, Syngenta, Nunhems, Pioneer Hi-Breed, Bayer and various universities have all been subject to extensive direct action against genetic engineering.

23 November 03 — 15 people paid a visit to Michael Gerad O'Brian (Director of Bayer CropScience) at his suburban Essex home.

25 November 03 — Bayer CropScience HQ in Hauxton, near Cambridge, was invaded on Thursday 20th November by over 40 people opposed to genetic engineering.

20 November 03 — Around 100 antibayer campaigners gathered outside Bayer HQ in Newbury and made a horrible racket.

17 November 03 — Fence damaged at bayer cropsience factory in Norwich.

13 November 03 — 15 people paid a visit to Martin Newson, Company Secretary of Bayer PLC. They confirmed with a neighbour that he was definitely resident at the property and then proceeded to hold their own noisy demo outside his house.

11 November 03 — The british crop protection council iwere having its conference from the 10th until the 12th of november in Glasgow, followed by a corporate game of golf at turnberry, one of the “best golf courses in the world”. Bayer were one of the main contributors to this international conference. Anti-Bayer activists visited the course. They damaged four areas where the holes are and two teeing off areas by digging up the turf, spraying weed killer and spraypainting messages on the turf proclaiming: bayer — no gm, and “BCPC — no gm”. Nobody was arrested. we hope actions like this will help make it difficult for bayer to appear at corporate events as well as ruining the good time of the wealthy.

5 November 03 — Activists entered the Bayer Crop Science chemicals facility in Widnes, Cheshire with the minimum of hassle by merely scrambling under a gate. As soon as they had entered, the alarm was raised. “Intruders have entered the facility — secure all doors and windows — do not make contact with the intruders” blasted out of the tannoys. They wandered around, with security in pursuit, and were given a guided tour of sorts by a security officer called Homer — apparently, Bayer are a company who conform to all the government standards, and in fact care about the environment more than activists realise. As proof of this assertion, the intruders were shown the gold fish pond in the facility.

31 October 03 — Fence damaged at bayer cropsience factory in Norwich.

30 October 03 — Offices of Symrise in Marlow, Buckinghamshire were visited by around 6 people.

28 October 03 — Martyn Hargraves has been consistantly targetted over the past few weeks, with junk mail blockades by post and by email. His details have also mysteriously been appearing on internet sex chat and dating sites...

15 October 03 — The Bayer Cropsience site at North Newbalds in North Yorkshire was targetted. Locks had had liquid metal squirted into them, graffiti was sprayed and fencing was damaged.

14 October 03 — 15 activists occupied the foyer of Allianz-Cornhill, London, who are one of the main shareholders of Bayer.

13 October 03 — Activists went to Aizlewoods Mill, Nursery Road, Sheffield. This is the building in which HM Starck, a company wholly owned by Bayer, have their offices. With sedcurity guards oblivious inside the building people spraypainted walls and doors with anti-gm crops slogans, and with this web address.

13 October 03 — A second 'e-blockade' was held. People were encouraged to phone, fax and email Bayer Crop Science letting them know what people thought of their plans to grow gm crops in Britain.

10 October 03 — Bayer Plc's headquarters in Newbury was visited in the night and had flyposters pasted up on walls, doors, sign posts and bins all around the site.

6 October 03 — Since the beginning of September, various key individuals within Bayer had recieved an ever increasing number of unwanted comemorative plates, holiday brochures, book club subscriptions and so on through the post. Many of these are recieved on a 'buy now, pay later' basis, meaning they have to cancel the order or pay, tying up yet more office time that could have been spent on increasing Bayer's productivity! Bayer office phone numbers have also found their way into free ad papers, attached to 'company going bust — bargain rates on office furniture and supplies' type notices.

2 October 03 — A demonstration was held at the Leamington Spa branch of Sainsbury's in which customers were informed over a megaphone that Sainsbury's milk is contaminated with GMOs. Hundreds of leaflets were given to interested customers and scattered all over the store. These leaflets explained the issues and also named BayerCropScience as the company most likely to be growing GM animal feed in this country, giving their number for customers to ring up and tell them what they can do with their GM crops.

2 October 03 — 13 anti-GM activists occupied the offices and warehouses of W Hawley & Son, Burton upon Trent, a wholly owned subsidiary of Bayer AG — the UK's GM number one!

1 October 03 — Was National Forage Maize Day: exhibitions in conjunction with Shepton Mallets Dairy Show. (One of the biggest in the country, over 8000 farmers). Three people went, intent on embarassing Bayer, only to find that they already seemed to be running scared — and had decided not to come. The website had advertised a seminar by a pro GM academic on the 'GM Debate'. We arrived to find that even this had been cancelled a month before, because (according to both rumours in the press room and from some of the organisers) the issue was regarded as 'too controversial'.

30 September 03 — In the last couple of weeks the bayer cropsience factory in Norwich was graffittied and had one of its fences trashed.

25 September 03 — A group raised their own anti-GM flag at the Bayer Crop-Science factory in Widnes, to hammer home the message given by the British public in the government's recent consultation: NO to GM crops in the UK!

25 September 03 — We originally panned to occupy the head office of Bayer Cropsience, but after an insider informed us there would be a large police presence

we went to our plan B: The house of Martyn Hargreaves, company secretary at 15 Coppice Ave, Great Sheldon, Cambridge.

17 September 2003 — Bayer were targeted as they held a stall at the dairy industry's national 'Dairy Event' near Coventry. Two protesters held a banner, and gave out leaflets, telling the farming community about Bayer's poor record as a responsible pharmaceutical company, and warning of dangers of them leading the way in the commercialisation of GM crops.

17 Sept 2003 — Dystar in Huddersfield, partially owned by Bayer, was visited again. Walls windows and frames were liberally spray painted, including with the address of this website, while the only door had its lock sealed up with super glue.

4 September 2003 — A daylight raid resulted in £5000 of criminal damage at York university. The action was aimed at a Bayer presentation at a Genomes conference which the company was also sponsoring.

3 September 2003 — Anti-GM Protestors Wreck The Bayer Stand At British Potato 2003 Event

29 August 2003 — Dystar is a textiles company partialy owned by Bayer. On the evening of the 29th of August their offices in Huddersfield were visited. "Bayer — Stop GM" was spray painted on two walls, and "no gm" on several windows. The only door had its lock sealed up with liquid metal.

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