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British Animal Rights Activists Jailed

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UK: March 7, 2007

LONDON - Three British animal rights activist were jailed on Tuesday for a total of more than seven years for their part in a campaign of intimidation to stop companies dealing with a firm conducting animal experiments.

Mark Taylor drove protesters around the country to companies which either supplied or dealt with Huntingdon Life Sciences, a company that conducts tens of thousands of tests on animals per year.

During three months over the summer of 2005, workers were terrified as animal rights protesters, led by Taylor, invaded their offices shouting "murderers" and other insults, London's Old Bailey criminal court heard.

Taylor, 39, his wife Suzanne, 34, both of Wakefield, West Yorkshire, and Teresa Portwine, 47, of New Addington, Surrey, all members of the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty campaign, had pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy to interfere with a contractual relationship.

The activists caused thousands of pounds worth of damage in their campaign to put Huntingdon Life Sciences out of business.

Mark Taylor was jailed for a record 4 years, his wife was given two-and-a-half years and Portwine was sentenced to 15 months. They were the first to be charged under new legislation.

Justice Goldring told the court the sentence must be a deterrent to others.

"All of the defendants were involved, to a greater or lesser extent ... in deliberate intimidation of innocent members of the public at their places of work because the defendants (thought) the companies they were targeting should not have anything to do with Huntingdon Life Sciences," he said.

After the case, Sir Ken MacDonald, the director of public prosecutions, said: "Everyone is entitled to conduct lawful business, to work and to purchase goods and services without fear of intimidation and disruption.

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"We will not hesitate to prosecute individuals who unlawfully stand in the way of these fundamental rights, whatever their motivation."

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TOP
OF
PAGE

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