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## Pressure Politics: A Challenge to Democracy?

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### **A widening gap**

In a major contribution to the literature on failing democratic politics and the need for more effective and purposive citizen engagement in the political process, Gerry Stoker sees pressure groups and social movements as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. He identifies three major problems that arise from the activities of the new generation of citizen group advocates. The first of these is labelled here as *participatory failure*: 'it is not engaging directly many citizens – its way of operating is through staff-heavy organizations and media-based campaigns'.<sup>1</sup> The second problem can be labelled as *the reinforcement of bias*: 'the new-style groups may have opened up opportunities for representing neglected interests, but many of these interests reflect the concerns of the already privileged educated and professional classes'.<sup>2</sup> The third problem can be described as *undermining effective governance*: 'the style of advocacy of citizen groups tends to magnify polarized voices'.<sup>3</sup> Stoker thus summarises the key problems posed for a modern democratic polity by group activity, a rather different set of problems from those of pluralist stagnation or corporate bias identified by earlier analysts. He provides a focus for the intellectual agenda that should underpin a much-needed public debate on this subject, although sometimes he seems a little too negative and pessimistic about the role of groups.

### **Participatory failure**

The general trend in group membership is upwards at a time when electoral turnout and political party membership have been declining, but what does this represent in terms of opportunities for participation and engagement? Stoker notes:

When individuals do fight for wider causes, it is also clear that the terms of their engagement are changing, and moving towards an attenuated form of involvement.' ... 'Supporting causes can just become part of a wider identity statement expressed through the sending of an occasional cheque and attendance at a pop concert-based rally.'<sup>4</sup>

Studies by Grant Jordan and his colleagues have shown that advocacy groups often have supporters rather than members.<sup>5</sup> 'What is emerging is a pattern of campaigning groups run by professional staffers – effectively advocates without active members.'<sup>6</sup> One aspect of this is the use of celebrity endorsements by advocacy groups, presumably thought to carry more weight than the views of the ordinary citizen, even if the person concerned has no expertise in the area.

#### **The reinforcement of social bias**

The reinforcement of social biases by pressure group activity has long been a theme of the pressure group literature. As Schattschneider observed: 'The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent.'<sup>7</sup> Social class formations are less important than they were and higher education and the skills it provides is often the best predictor of involvement. However, for socially excluded groups, such as the long-term unemployed and lone parents, the outcome is much the same. They are increasingly the target of government policy, yet if they have spokespersons at all they are professionals speaking on behalf of their 'clients'. What is the case is that as class has declined in importance as a social formation: 'The evidence suggests that more *collectivistic* forms of participation have declined and that more *individualist* forms have come to the fore.'<sup>8</sup> This matters because individualistic politics leads to a relative neglect of the impact on the polity or society as a whole as a result of the emphasis on demands for gratification of immediate personal needs.

#### **Undermining effective governance**

This links with the third key problem identified by Stoker, that of undermining effective governance. Stoker argues that citizen groups 'may be in part to blame for a negative culture aimed at getting "the government" to do more'.<sup>9</sup> He thinks that this is a particular risk when groups switch into 'outsider' mode and start heaping blame on the government or the bureaucracy. 'Demands to keep sponsors "on side" lead to citizen groups too often taking a populist line in which they blame the government or politicians for their failures and difficulties.'<sup>10</sup> The consequence can be further to undermine citizens' confidence and trust in government, making it more difficult for government to implement policies effectively and creating a vicious circle of underperformance and reinforced disappointment. This may be exacerbated by the

tendency of 'Different factions inside government [to] wage a "policy war" through competing interest groups.'<sup>11</sup>

Stoker acknowledges that 'The contribution of these citizen groups to the democratic process is substantial.' And that they have, in particular, 'had some successes in challenging and checking the privileged power of business'.<sup>12</sup> But he is overstating the case when he argues that 'the professionalisation of protest activism and the role of the media have created a world of spin-doctoring and manipulation to rival that of the formal electoral and representative politics that protest activists so often purport to despise'.<sup>13</sup> Admittedly, the media, like many of the general public, often treat the positions taken by protest groups too uncritically, too readily accepting their version of events. In a highly competitive media market, protest groups provide dramatic, emotional and highly visual stories, not just for the broadcast media but also compelling photographs for the print media. The media is often simply reacting to market imperatives.

It is tempting to believe in a 'golden age' when there was more effective democratic engagement by citizens. 'People are engaged but in a relatively thin and sporadic way with the political system.'<sup>14</sup> However, it was ever thus. Political participation was always a minority taste. The big change is the decline in party membership. As a consequence, 'Parties are struggling to deliver the political functions of aggregating and cohering interests.'<sup>15</sup> Politicians are faced not only with more demands, but demands that appear in a rawer and unprocessed form, with little regard to their opportunity cost. As Whiteley puts it: 'Unlike parties, interest groups aim to obtain benefits for the people they represent while transferring the costs to the rest of society.'<sup>16</sup>

### **The example of health**

Patient health offers a good example with 'Patients' groups ... growing sharply in strength and influence.'<sup>17</sup> The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) was supposed to provide a rational and informed mechanism for balancing the cost-effectiveness of alternative treatments within a finite National Health Service (NHS) budget. However, it is relatively easy to attract media attention for an emotional campaign demanding that patients suffering from a potentially terminal illness, such as breast cancer, should be given an unproven treatment. Funds then have to be found from elsewhere in the NHS budget, possibly from conditions that attract less sympathy, such as mental health. Moreover, it would appear that campaigns by patient groups can be used by pharmaceutical companies who wish to promote sales of a particular drug. A study by Patient View found only 11 per cent of the UK's 530 largest patients' groups state publicly that they receive support from the pharmaceutical industry. However, 'In recent years companies including Eli Lilly, Merck and GlaxoSmithKline have been criticised for giving support to patient and professional medical groups that have been associated with publications designed to encourage the sales of their own drugs.'<sup>18</sup>

### Seeking a solution

The contours of the problem are evident, but what can be done to tackle it? Any prescriptions must follow a thorough public debate. This has yet to occur, as commentators concentrate on more fashionable topics such as proportional representation, compulsory voting and deliberative democracy. Occasionally, a public figure does make a critical speech about pressure groups, as did Sir John Krebs on retiring after five years as chairman of the Food Standards Agency. He said 'that groups such as Greenpeace and the Soil Association are unaccountable, partisan bodies with agendas as slanted as those of industry lobbyists ... I see pressure groups as businesses – they have a constituency of people who pay their subscriptions to buy their magazines.' He warned: 'Some of these groups that have single issues to pursue tend to be selective in using the scientific evidence.'<sup>19</sup> Such interventions attract instant publicity, but they do not lead to any continuing debate.

There are three groups of actors who need to reflect self-critically on their conduct in relation to single-issue pressure groups. First, citizens themselves need to consider their role in relation to such organisations, although that is unlikely to happen without some outside assistance. Second, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) need to think more systematically about how they conduct their business in a democratic polity. Third, the government needs to think about its stance towards such groups.

Because the emphasis is on feasibility, this approach leaves out three other actors (the media, the parties, the Opposition) who might be considered to be relevant. A number of charges can be made against the media, including confusing fact, speculation and opinion, and an overly adversarial stance towards politicians that encourages 'a culture of contempt'.<sup>20</sup> However, given the market imperatives that drive the media, it is unlikely to put its own house in order anytime soon, although Oxfam has claimed that NGOs are increasingly getting hostile media reporting.<sup>21</sup> As for the political parties, although they could be reinvigorated, the decline in their traditional social bases and the rise of individualised politics makes such an effort unlikely to succeed. The much-canvassed suggestion of state funding is actually likely to make parties more of a creature of the political class and less mindful of their activist base. Turning to the Opposition, the fact that the Conservative Party is rethinking its stance on a wide range of issues might seem to offer an opportunity for reviewing the role of single-issue pressure groups, about which some Conservatives have expressed disquiet from time to time. However, the party is unlikely to want to do anything to alienate potential support. Indeed, the 'Vote blue, go green' slogan presupposes a reluctance to offend the biggest subdivision of advocacy groups, environmental and animal protection organisations.

The heart of Stoker's argument is that citizens should become more competent amateurs: 'Politics is a place for amateurs, but we need to design

institutions, structure processes and develop support systems so that amateurs can engage and improve their skills.<sup>22</sup> This is no easy task when they are relatively unengaged in the first place, distrustful of the political process and hence not inclined to improve their political understanding or skills. Stoker has a whole raft of suggestions which go well beyond the scope of this chapter. However, his suggestion of consultative innovations would provide a range of settings in which citizens could express their views other than through single interest groups, and thereby become aware of the alternatives to, and possible costs of, apparently straightforward solutions.<sup>23</sup> Information and communications technology also offers new opportunities for interactivity in an ongoing political conversation.<sup>24</sup>

NGOs also need to take more responsibility for their role as intermediaries, promoting transparency and accountability. Codes of conduct have an important role to play here. In June 2006, 11 non-governmental organisations, including Amnesty International, Greenpeace and Oxfam, signed a voluntary 'accountability charter'. Signatories 'recognise that transparency and accountability are essential to good governance, whether by governments, business or non-profit organisations'.<sup>25</sup> They must provide transparent bookkeeping and regular assessments of the organisation's environmental impact and its ethical fundraising standards. Mechanisms are required enabling 'whistleblowers' to report malpractice within organisations. The six-page charter is largely silent on the questions of relations with government. However, Oxfam states: 'In our advocacy work, we may challenge others – for example governments, institutions and companies. If concerns are raised that our claims are inaccurate or unfounded, we will investigate and respond appropriately.'<sup>26</sup>

The Association of British Pharmaceutical Industries has also launched a new code of practice, which will require members for the first time to disclose their support to patients' groups. It also forbids companies from supporting groups with the aim of promoting their drugs. 'However, the new code stops short of requiring companies to disclose publicly either the amount of funding they give to patients' groups or to define the nature of any support in contracts.'<sup>27</sup>

The difficulty with such codes of conduct is that only some groups sign up to them and, even for those that do, there seem to be no mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement. This is why codes need at least to be endorsed by government and perhaps made a condition of consultative access. As Stoker has pointed out: 'The central insight of much rational choice work is that politics requires good *institutions* to frame the process of strategic interaction between different interests.'<sup>28</sup> Although a further extension of the regulatory state through an agency to regulate pressure group activity would be a step too far, there might be a case for extending the remit of the Electoral Commission, given that many organisations registered with it as 'political parties' are, in fact, pressure groups. However, what is needed as a

first step is government support for codes of conduct and insistence on the importance of adhering to them.

More generally, government needs to be prepared to stand up to pressure groups, even if it brings media criticism. The signs are not altogether discouraging. A very effective campaign on the issue of bystander exposure to pesticides led the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution to investigate the issue. Its report was not unsympathetic and proposed a five-metre buffer strip where spraying took place near to dwellings, schools, and so on.<sup>29</sup> This could have been a politically attractive solution, but the government stood firm, saying that it was determined to diminish regulation, not to increase it, and that there was no firm scientific evidence of a health problem. As a result, it received considerable criticism in the media and from pressure groups.

One example does not establish a trend, but it does suggest that government can pay the political price of facing down single-issue pressure groups if it wants to. Instead of such groups obtaining a spurious legitimacy on the basis of apparent popular support and media sympathy, it would be preferable if they earned legitimacy by demonstrating they meet appropriate standards of internal governance. Government, for its part, needs to act on its professed belief in evidence-based policy-making and not be swayed by vociferous campaigns.

### **Business and government**

Tony Blair's aspiration to make Labour the natural party of business looked increasingly under threat as the government entered its third term of office, but business received cold comfort from the new Conservative leadership. Some in business argued that the government's decision in the autumn of 2005 to allow existing public sector workers to continue to retire at 60 was a tipping point in relations between business and government. This was seen as giving way to union pressure in order to avert a strike and a breach in the implicit bargain between business and government that the private sector would sort out its pension funding deficits and the government would resolve the same problems in the public sector.

Another dispute erupted with a warning by Sir Digby Jones, the then Director General of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), of power cuts in the winter of 2005/06 that could force companies to shut down production. The Energy Minister, Malcolm Wicks, accused Sir Digby of talking 'nonsense' and 'scaremongering' with his claims that Britain risked a return to the three-day working weeks of the 1970s. He took the unusual step of summoning Sir Digby to a meeting at the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) for what he said would be a 'cool' discussion.<sup>30</sup>

In July 2006, Sir Digby was succeeded as CBI Director General by Richard Lambert, former editor of the *Financial Times* and subsequently a member of

the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee. His selection represented a return to the rather cooler, more intellectual style of CBI leadership represented by Sir Digby's predecessors. Sir Digby's outspoken style went down well with the CBI's grassroots membership, but was less welcome in the corridors of power. Nevertheless, this did not prevent the CBI enjoying strong channels of communication with government, and Lambert made it clear that he wanted the CBI to be more robust in its dealings with government. He also wanted the CBI to be more proactive and forward-looking in the way that it handled issues.

For all their complaints about what they see as the growing burden of taxation and regulation, business has enjoyed a close and constructive relationship with New Labour. Business leaders are grateful to Gordon Brown for providing a climate of macroeconomic stability. The uncertainty surrounding the succession to Tony Blair was unsettling and concerns have been expressed about a return to a more 'Old Labour' style of leadership should Gordon Brown become Prime Minister. Nevertheless, business relations with Labour governments have often been more comfortable than those with Conservative governments because Labour thinks that it needs business support while the Conservatives often not only take it for granted but see a need to differentiate themselves from big business.

The new Conservative leader, David Cameron, created concern in his first few weeks in office when he criticised big business. Newspaper advertisements quoted him as saying that he would 'not just stand up for big business, but stand up to big business when it's in the interests of Britain and the world'.<sup>31</sup> Business was urged to shoulder more social responsibility with reviews of party policy to consider industry's duties in such areas as the environment, transport and waste disposal, in line with the 'Vote blue, go green' slogan. This stance appears in part to have been driven by research showing that the Conservatives are seen by voters as too close to large corporations and therefore out of touch on issues such as the environment, global warming and poverty that are important to women and younger voters. Some business commentators saw this stance as public relations with very little substance attached to it, but there was a concern that the increased emphasis on issues such as climate change could create public expectations that would make it more difficult to implement business-friendly policy.

In the context of the 2006 Conservative Party Conference, Oliver Letwin, the party's head of policy, tried to address some of these concerns by unveiling what he described as 'the deal we're putting to business'.<sup>32</sup> He pledged that a Conservative government would seek to address factors seen to damage UK competitiveness, such as excessive and intrusive regulation, lack of skills and poor infrastructure. In return, business would be expected to show greater corporate responsibility in areas such as family-friendly employment policies and environmental impacts in the broadest sense of the term. This would be achieved by a mixture of persuasion and coercion, a difficult balance to

maintain. Business remained concerned about exactly how the Conservatives would promote greater competitiveness.

There was also concern in business organisations about the support from the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats for dismantling the Department of Trade and Industry. The Liberal Democrats have a policy of scrapping the DTI, while David Cameron has said that it is 'possible' that the Conservatives could axe the department. Nevertheless, a survey of 550 employers commissioned by the British Chambers of Commerce found that 89 per cent thought there was a future need for the DTI, principally to act as the voice of business within government.<sup>33</sup> The fact that business considers that it needs such a voice indicates that not all trade associations representing sectors of business are perceived to be fully effective.

The pledge to stand up to big business won support from a traditional constituency of the Conservatives, small businesses. However, such businesses remain relatively less well-organised and vulnerable to the lobbying power of bigger businesses. This was demonstrated in the summer of 2006, when the government watered down its own policy of requiring sellers of houses to prepare home information packs that were intended to provide additional protection to consumers. The government was put under pressure on the issue from mortgage lenders and estate agents, who were able to use the argument that house prices might be affected and could undermine the government's electoral popularity. The real losers in this decision were the self-employed individuals who had invested considerable sums of money to train as 'home inspectors'. A number of companies had also entered the market and they were represented by the Association of Home Information Pack Providers, but the individual operators were not effectively represented and had to hire legal advice to seek compensation.

Despite complaints about particular policies, business has enjoyed an effective working relationship with the Blair government. Business associations are usually more effective at working with the executive than lobbying Parliament, whichever party is in power.

### **Government consultation**

Government consultation of various interests during policy formulation is not, of course, a new phenomenon, but it has become more widespread, systematic and public in recent years, particularly under the Blair government. In November 2000, the government published a Code of Practice on Consultation which all government departments and agencies are expected to observe.<sup>34</sup> Consultations are normally subject to a minimum period of 12 weeks, with a shorter period being permissible for reasons such as deadlines imposed by EU negotiations or cases of reconsultation following an earlier full consultation. Consultation documents are available on departmental and agency websites, but additional means may also be used to reach particular



interests. For example, on the Department for Education and Skills' Youth Green Paper, teachers, other professionals and voluntary workers were used to encourage and facilitate responses from young people aged between 13 and 19, resulting in more than 20,000 responses. Formal consultation is sometimes preceded by seminars, as happened in 2005 and 2006, in considering additional powers for the Greater London Authority.<sup>35</sup>

In 2005, the latest year for which figures are available, government departments and agencies carried out 583 formal consultations, 80 per cent of which lasted 12 or more weeks.<sup>36</sup> Government departments are responsible for most consultations, with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the Department of Trade and Industry, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Department of Health, and Department for Transport the most frequent users. Among agencies, the Food Standards Agency and the Health and Safety Executive are the most regular users.

Individual departments and agencies publish details of their consultations and a limited perusal of departmental websites demonstrates the considerable involvement of pressure groups in the consultation process. A DEFRA consultation in 2006 on badger culling and the spread of bovine tuberculosis involved 32 pressure or interest groups, 55 per cent of those responding,<sup>37</sup> while in 2005 another on the environmental impact of agricultural assessment regulations produced a response from 199 groups, 62 per cent of the total.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, 54 per cent of response to a DTI consultation on additional paternity leave and pay and a massive 80 per cent to draft employment regulations on age equality were from groups.<sup>39</sup>

### **The hunting ban: the saga continues**

More than eight months after it came into force, the Hunting Act was successfully used to prosecute a huntsman.<sup>40</sup> However, it took a private prosecution by the League Against Cruel Sports to achieve it: from the moment it came into force, the League claimed that illegal hunting was widespread, but the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) refused to mount any prosecutions. In August 2006, Tony Wright of the Exmoor Foxhounds was convicted and fined £500.<sup>41</sup> However, in October the CPS prosecuted two members of the Devon and Somerset Staghounds.<sup>42</sup> Earlier, in the year, Kate Hoey, the pro-hunting Labour MP and now chair of the Countryside Alliance, claimed: 'All hunts have far more people going out with them', and an anonymous Cabinet minister was quoted as saying that the Act had been a 'complete waste of [parliamentary] time'.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, fears that other field sports and fishing would increasingly become the targets of animal activists, now that hunting with dogs was illegal, were fuelled by an attack on anglers at a fly-fishing centre in Lancashire. It took place on 12 August, the first day of the grouse-shooting season, and it appeared that the initial target of the activists was a shoot which had been cancelled. According to the Lancashire police, attacks

on anglers have increased, but it remains to be seen whether, having secured a ban on hunting with dogs, activists are not so much opening another front as extending an existing one.<sup>44</sup> The national umbrella organisation for fishing, the Fisheries and Angling Conservation Trust, demanded a meeting with the Home Office to discuss the safety of anglers. A new organisation, the Lobster Liberation Front, dismantled 60 lobster pots in Scotland and spray-painted slogans on fishermen's sheds, also slashing nets belonging to Dorset fishermen.<sup>45</sup>

### Direct action

Media reports of various forms of direct action – some legal, others illegal – were plentiful in 2006, with animal rights activity again figuring prominently and Fathers 4 Justice being replaced by a more militant Real Fathers 4 Justice. However, unusually, the business community also became involved in a form of direct action when protesting against the extradition of three businessmen to the United States.

#### 'The NatWest Three'

US prosecutors sought the extradition of three employees of the National Westminster Bank on fraud charges relating to the financial collapse of the Texas-based Enron Corporation. Business interests objected because, under a new extradition treaty and unlike earlier arrangements, no prima facie evidence need be presented to a UK court, only that charges had been brought. In May 2005, an Early Day Motion in the Commons was signed by 163 MPs from all parties,<sup>46</sup> but protests did not get fully underway until 2006. In conjunction with the *Daily Telegraph*, the CBI and the Institute of Directors (IoD), as well as a number of individual businessmen, organised a campaign to oppose the extradition, involving an open letter to the Home Secretary, John Reid, signed among others by the Directors General of the CBI, the IoD, the British Chambers of Commerce, and the British Retail Consortium and the Chairman of the London Stock Exchange. Other protests were made by the civil liberties group, Liberty, and the legal reform group, Justice. The *Telegraph* invited its readers to add their names to the letter, via its website, and 7,400 did so.<sup>47</sup> Business leaders also joined a protest march on 29 June. Subsequently, the House of Lords sought to suspend the extradition arrangements with the United States, by passing an amendment to the Police and Justice Bill, but it was subsequently rejected by the Commons.<sup>48</sup> Before that, however, the Speaker allowed an emergency debate on 12 July.<sup>49</sup> In the event, these protests were unsuccessful and the 'NatWest Three' were extradited, as were several other businessmen.<sup>50</sup>

#### Fathers 4 Justice transmutes

Since its formation in 2002, Fathers 4 Justice has achieved considerable publicity through various stunts, but following internal disputes in 2005, between 30

and 40 members were expelled and a more militant group, Real Fathers 4 Justice, was formed. Late in 2005, some members of the latter were reported to be planning to kidnap Tony Blair's son, Leo, leading Matt O'Connor, the founder of Fathers 4 Justice, to disband his organisation.<sup>51</sup> Undeterred, Real Fathers 4 Justice embarked on its own campaign, involving hitting Ruth Kelly, the then Education Secretary, with an egg when she appeared as a witness in a court hearing involving an earlier egg-throwing incident during the 2005 election campaign,<sup>52</sup> interrupting a men's quarter-final at Wimbledon,<sup>53</sup> and a protester dressed as Father Christmas, but carrying a shotgun, climbing onto the roof of a circuit judge's house.<sup>54</sup>

### **Farmers for Action**

Farmers for Action (FFA), one of the more long-standing direct action groups, has faced increasing difficulty in mobilising farmers despite continuing problems in the dairy industry, its main base of support. There were no direct actions organised by the group in the six months to August 2006 because farmers failed to turn out. When the leading dairy company Arla cut its milk prices, Farmers for Action joined forces with the National Farmers Union to protest, but out of 4,000 producers contacted, only 31 turned out. This does not mean that direct action in the farming community has come to an end. However, it has so far done nothing to halt the downward trend in milk prices. When those called on to protest have to work long hours to maintain their livelihood, it becomes increasingly unattractive to devote long hours at night to blockades, and protest fatigue sets in. The calculations about the costs and benefits of direct action are rather different for an economic group compared with the animal rights groups discussed next.

### **Animal rights**

Following the strengthening of legislation against animal rights extremists using violence or intimidation, the British Pharmaceutical Association reported that attacks on its member companies, individual directors and employees had declined from more than 500 in 2004 to 200 in 2005, with the downward trend continuing in the first two quarters of 2006.<sup>55</sup> In May, three activists were sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment and one to four years' for their part in digging up and removing the body of a relative of one of the owners of a guinea pig breeding farm in Staffordshire. Then, in August, Donald Currie, described as the Animal Liberation Front's (ALF's) 'leading bomber', was found guilty of arson and the possession of firebombs, and in December was sentenced to 12 years in prison.<sup>56</sup> Also in August, more than 30 protesters were arrested for disrupting a degree ceremony in Oxford and sent for trial in January 2007.<sup>57</sup>

Nonetheless, attacks against a variety of targets continued, including two of the activists' major quarries – Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS) and the Oxford University animal experiments laboratory that has been under construction

for several years. According to the ALF's website, Bite Back, there were 12 HLS-associated attacks in the UK, 11 in other parts of Europe, and four in the United States. Attacks also took place in the UK and elsewhere against GlaxoSmithKline and Roche;<sup>58</sup> Glaxo shareholders received anonymous letters threatening to reveal their names and addresses unless they sold their shares,<sup>59</sup> and a Glaxo director's home was attacked.<sup>60</sup>

The ALF opened its 2006 campaign against the Oxford laboratory by extending its targets beyond the builders and others directly associated with the project by issuing a statement on the internet: 'We must target professors, heads, students, investors, partners, supporters and ANYONE that dares to deal in any part of the university in ANY way.'<sup>61</sup> In March, for example, Vodafone, which was funding projects at the university, had some of its transmitters damaged, even though the projects were unrelated to animal experimentation.<sup>62</sup> This led to the setting up of a counter-group, Pro-Test, which organised a march in Oxford on 25 February, the first major public response to the Oxford activities of the ALF and other animal rights groups, such as Speak.<sup>63</sup>

But public opinion does not come into the equation for militant activists. A YouGov poll in May showed a substantial majority of respondents in favour of animal testing for medical purposes. Although overwhelming majorities regarded various forms of peaceful protest as 'reasonable', only 10 per cent similarly regarded threatening individuals via the internet, 2 per cent damaging property, and 1 per cent issuing death threats.<sup>64</sup> The same month, the Coalition for Medical Progress organised a petition against animal rights extremists which, by October, had been signed by more than 21,000 people, including the Prime Minister.<sup>65</sup> But in May, Speak revealed where builders working on the Oxford laboratory site were being housed and threatened to demonstrate outside their quarters, although the High Court extended the scope of an injunction to ban such demonstrations.<sup>66</sup>

The attacks by the ALF and other animal rights militants take a number of forms. Persons directly involved are attacked, their vehicles and other property damaged. The suppliers of the main target organisations are also threatened and attacked: for instance, letters are sent to the individuals' neighbours alleging that they are paedophiles. Growing use is also made of electronic means of communication – inundating targets with e-mails, setting up automatic telephone calls, and hacking into websites and credit card records.

### **The use of the internet**

The internet is now a regular and well-established tool in pressure politics, not least as a means of organising direct action. For example, a week-long climate change protest at the Drax Power Station, the UK's largest coal-fired power station, in Yorkshire was largely organised via the internet. Though

only small in numbers, the demonstrators succeeded in securing much media attention.<sup>67</sup> Almost all pressure groups now have websites and they are especially useful for umbrella organisations. These bring together an often wide variety of groups focusing on a particular issue or policy area, such as the environment, with some concerned specifically with the issue or policy area and others whose interest are wider but include the same specific concern. Stop Climate Chaos is one such umbrella organisation, comprising a coalition of some 30 groups, including established environmental groups such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Transport 2000 and the World Wide Fund for Nature, aid groups such as Oxfam and Christian Aid, at least one major trade union – Unison, and long-established groups like the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Women’s Institute. In 2006, it organised a wide range of meetings and demonstrations; some local or regional, others national; some on specific climate issues, others broader in scope.<sup>68</sup> Another similar umbrella organisation is Rising Tide.<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at the more established groups that represent business and a variety of direct action movements seeking to advance a variety of causes. These two types of group are only part of a much wider array of group activity, ranging from large-scale organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, with more members than all the political parties combined, to spontaneous examples of local action concerned with such issues as the location of mobile telephone masts. This particular form of ‘Not in my back yard’ (Nimby) group illustrates some of the difficulties that pressure groups pose for modern democracy. On the one hand, it illustrates that a capacity for spontaneous sporadic intervention by citizens still exists and in that sense is indicative of a healthy democracy. However, if the phone mast is not located in one place it may have to go elsewhere where the citizens are more disadvantaged and less well-organized, so that the objectors to the original location can continue to use their mobile phones. The fragmentation of society leads to highly individualised forms of protest which can flare up and then die away. This makes the task of governance more difficult, but government has not sought to tackle the issues this poses in any systematic way. Extending the regulatory state to regulate pressure groups might be a step too far, but the underlying issues need to be debated more widely.

## Notes

1. G. Stoker, *Why Politics Matters* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 111.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*

5. G. Jordan and W. Maloney, *Interest Group Politics: Enhancing Participation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
6. Stoker, *Why Politics Matter*, p.107.
7. E. E. Schnattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People* (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 35.
8. Stoker, *Why Politics Matter*, p.92.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
16. P. Whiteley, 'Just the Best of a Bad Bunch?', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 7 January 2005.
17. P. Jack, 'Few patients' groups admit links to drug companies', *Financial Times*, 1 May 2006.
18. *Ibid.*
19. M. Henderson, 'Friends of the corporate Earth', *The Times*, 12 April 2005.
20. Stoker, *Why Politics Matter*, p.12.
21. H. Williamson, 'Greenpeace, Amnesty and Oxfam agree to code of conduct', *Financial Times*, 3 June 2006.
22. Stoker, *Why Politics Matter*, p.150.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 183–5.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 172–3.
25. Williamson, 'Greenpeace, Amnesty and Oxfam agree to a code of conduct'.
26. <[www.oxfam.org.uk/about\\_us/accountability](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/about_us/accountability)>.
27. Jack, 'Few patients' groups admit to link to drug companies'.
28. Stoker, *Why Politics Matter*.
29. See <[www.recep.org.uk/pesticides/Crop%Spraying%web.pdf](http://www.recep.org.uk/pesticides/Crop%Spraying%web.pdf)>.
30. *Financial Times*, 26 October 2005.
31. *Financial Times*, 5 January 2006.
32. *Financial Times*, 20 September 2006.
33. *Financial Times*, 18 September 2006.
34. See <[www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/consultation/code/index.asp](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/consultation/code/index.asp)>. A revised code was published in 2004.
35. <[www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/consultation](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/consultation)>.
36. The figures were 621, with 71 per cent compliant with the 12-week minimum, in 2002; 622 and 77 per cent in 2003, and 621 and 76 per cent in 2004.
37. <[www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/badgers-tbcontrols/consultlist.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/badgers-tbcontrols/consultlist.htm)>.
38. <[www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/eia2005/consultlist.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/eia2005/consultlist.htm)>.
39. <[www.dti.gov.uk.consultations/page25906//.html](http://www.dti.gov.uk.consultations/page25906//.html)> (and p. 16395).
40. It had earlier been used to convict a poacher hunting with dogs (see *Daily Telegraph*, 19 October 2005).
41. *Daily Telegraph*, 5 November 2005; 31 July, 1 and 5 August 2006.
42. *Daily Telegraph*, 18 October 2006.
43. *Daily Telegraph*, 17 February 2006.
44. See *Daily Telegraph*, 23 August 2006.
45. *The Times*, 26 August 2006.
46. EDM 241 Extradition Act 2003, 26 May 2006.

47. <[www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=news/2006/07/12/natwest12.xml](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=news/2006/07/12/natwest12.xml)>.
48. HL Debs, 11 July 2006 [details needed]
49. HC Debs, 418, 12 July 2006, cc. 1396–447.
50. The legal aspects of the case are dealt with in Chapter 10, this volume.
51. See <[www.guardian.co.uk/uj\\_news/story/0,36044,1502264,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uj_news/story/0,36044,1502264,00.html)> and <[www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4626.stm](http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4626.stm)>.
52. <[www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/manchester/4685496.htm](http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/manchester/4685496.htm)>.
53. *Daily Telegraph*, 6 July 2006.
54. *Daily Telegraph*, 29 November 2006.
55. <[www.abpi.org.uk/press\\_releases](http://www.abpi.org.uk/press_releases)>.
56. <[www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/525774.stm](http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/525774.stm)> and *Dorset Echo*, 14 December 2006.
57. *Daily Telegraph*, 26 August 2006.
58. *Bite Back Magazine* (<[www.directaction.info/news.htm](http://www.directaction.info/news.htm)>).
59. *Daily Telegraph*, 9 May 2006.
60. *Daily Telegraph*, 30 January 2006.
61. Cited in the *Sunday Times*, 29 January 2006.
62. *Sunday Times*, 19 March 2006.
63. *Daily Telegraph*, 25 February 2006; *Sunday Times*, 26 February 2006. Speak (originally Speac – Stop Primate Experiments at Cambridge) successfully campaigned for the abandonment by the University of Cambridge of its proposed animal experiments laboratory in 2003 (see <[www.guardian.co.uk/animalrights/story/0,,1265928,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/animalrights/story/0,,1265928,00.html)>).
64. *Daily Telegraph*, 29 May 2006.
65. <[www.thepeoplespetition.org.uk/sigup/index.cfm?theform](http://www.thepeoplespetition.org.uk/sigup/index.cfm?theform)> and <[www.mdecial-progress.org/news/newsarchive.cfm.news\\_id=147](http://www.mdecial-progress.org/news/newsarchive.cfm.news_id=147)>.
66. *Daily Telegraph*, 31 May and 13 June 2006.
67. *Daily Telegraph*, 1 September, and the *Sunday Times*, 3 September 2006.
68. See <[www.stopclimatechaos/about\\_us/10.asp](http://www.stopclimatechaos/about_us/10.asp)>.
69. See <[www.risingtide.org.uk/about](http://www.risingtide.org.uk/about)>.