

facilities need \$11 billion annually to replace aged equipment and comply with Federal regulations;

- Wastewater: Some of America's 16,000 wastewater systems are 100 years old. There is a \$12 billion shortfall in annual funding for replacement.

- Bridges: In 1998, some 29% of the nation's bridges were listed deficient or obsolete. It will cost \$10.6 billion annually for 20 years to bring all bridges up to standard.

Rail transport creates entire corridors of development. For railroad upgrades worldwide (see Senate testimony, page XX), 3,170 miles of new double-tracked rail are needed in North America, which would require 2.8 million tons of steel. American steel produces only 500,000 tons of rail a year. This does not meet domestic requirements, let alone the worldwide additions which require 28.6 million tons of steel. The new technology, magnetically levitated trains for 200-300 mph travel, require 5,000 tons of steel *per mile*.

Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.V.), Chairman of the Congressional Steel Caucus, called on President Bush in a March 6 Open Letter, to work with him to pass legislation for the government to take over the health and pension benefits of 600,000 steel worker retirees. But Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) stated that he will oppose any such legislation.

Since 1997, bankruptcy has claimed 32 steel companies, 17 of them liquidated. While the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation pays a portion of the pension, all health benefits are lost. The health benefits of 100,000 retirees and their surviving spouses have been lost already. On March 31, 85,000 retirees of bankrupt LTV, formerly the third-largest integrated steel producer in America, will lose theirs—despite LTV's takeover by WL Ross & Co. LLC. Rockefeller's legislation is expected to be introduced shortly.

Meanwhile, Bethlehem Steel, which declared bankruptcy in October, held an emergency meeting on March 13 to discuss finding a joint venture partner or selling itself piecemeal. CEO Steve Miller explained that Bethlehem had abandoned the idea of a U.S. Steel merger, because "They made it plain that they could not continue without legacy cost relief. Because we can't count on legacy cost relief, we are going to proceed with other alternatives."

The Free Trade Area of the Americas negotiations—co-chaired by Brazil and the United States with an October deadline—may be doomed, according to Brazil's ambassador in Washington, Rubens Barbosa. The FTAA is a scheme for kind of North American Free Trade Agreement in Ibero-America. But such a sane shift away from "free trade" is feared many quarters. Nationally syndicated neo-conservative George Will snarled in a March 7 column, "This [tariff] policy reflects the triumph of the Bush political advisers who trumpet their admiration for President William McKinley, that paragon of Republican protectionism. . . ."

After McKinley's 1901 assassination, those policies were next resurrected by Franklin Roosevelt.

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## Britain and HMD

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# One Year Later: Many Questions, No Answers

by Rosa Tennenbaum

Great Britain on Feb. 20 commemorated the first anniversary of the outbreak of hoof and mouth disease, the world's most devastating and longest HMD outbreak. It is by no means certain whether this nightmare is finally over, as new suspected cases became known right on the occasion of the anniversary. Nor were they the first to be discovered after Sept. 20, 2001—the day that the last new outbreaks were officially registered.

Until Sept. 20, HMD had been diagnosed on 2,030 British farms; 3,306,000 sheep, 594,000 cattle, 142,000 pigs, 2,000 goats, and 1,000 deer had been slaughtered; 12,400 farmers and farm workers had lost their jobs; 3,000 farmers had been forced to get other jobs to make ends meet; it had cost the taxpayer £7 billion; the tourist trade had lost £4.25 billion (\$6 billion). These are the official figures.

Unofficial estimates by private organizations speak of 11 million culled animals and total economic damage of £20 billion.

The plague cost one minister his job; the Prime Minister postponed the national elections.

The country was cut off from all trade in milk, meat, and live animals worldwide; many regions were totally isolated for several months; rural areas were put under quarantine for weeks; personal liberty to travel was reduced, and movements of animals and equipment were suppressed; public and economic life came to a standstill. Great Britain experienced militarization of public life as if in wartime. The Prime Minister convened a top-secret body called COBRA, which is only supposed to become active in wartime or civil upheaval, and about which the public never learned anything.

One year later, the British public is still asking what the government wanted to achieve. Why the police-state measures? Why was no effective action taken against the disease over weeks? Why did the government rely exclusively on mass killings? Why could not even the Prime Minister carry out a policy of vaccination against HMD—who prevented him? Why did the government pursue a policy of maximum damage to the country and to agriculture? And finally: Why does Blair's government refuse to hold any public hearing on these occurrences?

These are only some of the questions being posed in British papers; there are no answers. Prime Minister Blair, who declared the fight against HMD his foremost personal responsibility last March, remained in office. All demands for a public inquiry about the government's handling of the crisis were shut down. The High Court in London will rule on whether this will be the last word, since a number of organizations and media filed a lawsuit against the government.

### **Incompetence or Intention?**

Newspaper reports reveal an unbelievable level of incompetence: chaos, confusion, and lack of leadership from top to bottom. In dealing with a highly contagious disease like HMD, every minute counts, and on the continent, all relevant authorities are trained to act fast, in a coordinated and sensible way, in such a crisis. The cooperation of the higher offices with the local institutions is decisive. The local veterinarians, the local police, the municipal administration are key positions, because they know the respective conditions and can intervene decisively, if they have the necessary instructions.

British farmers and veterinarians complain that the lower-level authorities could not act because they did not get any instructions, and the higher bodies did not want to decide. But Great Britain had experience from the big hoof and mouth disease outbreak in 1967, and people should have known better. One farmer, whose farm was among the first infected with HMD, reports that his veterinarian "remained screaming on the phone to London for three hours" to convince them that HMD had broken out on this farm. The only answer he got, was to take samples and to wait for the blood test results.

The *Sunday Telegraph* on Feb. 17 reported the views of Brig. Alex Birtwhistle, who oversaw the massive culling of livestock. Around the end of March 2001, he said, when the plague was spreading rapidly, Blair wanted to hold on to the date for the national elections by any means, and therefore the horrifying pictures of burning pyres of animal carcasses had to disappear from the media. The Prime Minister personally appointed the brigadier to coordinate the mass killings and disposal of hundreds of thousands of carcasses, which often had been left lying on the farms, decomposing for weeks, before they were finally removed, and to cut the time between the discovery of a new outbreak and the disposal of the killed animals to 24 hours. The brigadier was given authority to do whatever was required to do that.

Birtwhistle said there were "extraordinary tensions between the Prime Minister and his advisers and those at the front line of the battle to contain the disease," and an enormous "extent of desperation among ministers." The agriculture department issued the directives: mass killings; extending the contiguous areas in which culling could occur to a radius of two miles from the outbreak; and disposal of the

culled animals within 24 hours. But how? Were the cadavers supposed to be burned or buried? Enormous environmental risks would be created in either case, and no one wanted to take the responsibility. Complete chaos and desperation were the result. "On March 22," Birtwhistle said, "Britain came close to serious civil unrest." Now, the mass cullings—a completely senseless and unnecessary undertaking—were enforced with military power and handled with military precision.

Blair, the brigadier stressed, wanted the photos of burning animals to disappear from the media by any means. To achieve this aim, there was a much easier and much more successful measure: vaccination. It would have cost several million pounds and the nightmare would have ended within weeks. Blair chose martial law, instead. Why was the government ready to spend billions on a policy of mass killings and to enforce it with the help of the army? Why did all employees of the agriculture department have to sign the Official Secrets Act, binding them to absolute secrecy, to protect the measures of the government? These are pressing questions, and they are not being answered.

### **Conspiracy Theories?**

When people get no sensible answers, they develop their own theories. One which you cannot dismiss as "pure fantasy," is that this disease helped the government to reduce the livestock herds. Rumors are coming up again and again, that in 1998, there was a debate at European Union headquarters in Brussels on this issue in general, and the British overstocking of sheep in particular. The European Commission wants economic activities to be distributed among the different member countries (similar to the former Soviet Union): The Netherlands will be the dairy producer; Germany will produce pigs and beef; northern France will raise sheep; and Great Britain should mainly grow grain, turnips, and potatoes, the rumor has it.

Pure conspiracy theory? The government did eradicate 11 million farm animals in Britain; and in the mountainous areas, where sheep have safely grazed for several thousand years, no animals are grazing any longer. In the Netherlands and Denmark, the governments intend to reduce the number of pigs drastically. In Germany, the outspoken aim of Agriculture Minister Renate Künast is to cut the number of farm animals by half. This plague might had been only a terrible misfortune, but the fact that it was not dealt with effectively was intentional, newspapers speculate. And the fact that the policy of non-vaccination is still in effect, re-enforces such ideas.

But there is another important aspect: The epidemic gave Great Britain the chance to test emergency plans on different levels, up to martial law, to train for and improve them over seven months. In these times of general economic and social breakdown, the government could indeed have a big interest in doing that. Or is this also only a strange coincidence?