

European backlash grows against London

by Rosa Tennenbaum

"The transmission of BSE to human beings can no longer be ruled out." With this statement from British Minister of Health Stephen Dorrell on March 20 to the Parliament, the John Major government kicked off an avalanche, whose effects they obviously underestimated. A healthy nationalism has been provoked on the continent, by the specter of BSE affecting humans, and by the years of inaction, coverup, and belligerence from London.

The media immediately seized on Dorrell's announcement, and twisted the possibility of transmission into a certainty. Headlines such as, "Mad Cow Disease Can Be Transmitted to Humans," and pictures of cows with skull and crossbones symbols, as on poison bottle labels, had their impact on the consumer, who quickly decided to do without the enjoyment of steaks and roast beef. This in turn triggered a collapse of the meat markets, creating a crisis throughout the entire European meat sector, already in deep trouble.

The sudden collapse in meat consumption forced governments into action. On March 21 and 22, France, and then other European Union member nations, decreed a unilateral ban on British beef imports—a heavy-handed rejection of EU rules. The EU Commission in Brussels reacted sharply; on March 21, it sent ultimata to member countries to stick to the rules, and remove import bans. Late on March 22, the EU Commission lost the showdown; for the first time, they bent to the will of the member nations. Brussels declared a worldwide, total export ban for British beef and all beef products.

The British went berserk. In ever more imperious tones, British Agriculture Minister Douglas Hogg, Foreign Minister Malcolm Rifkind, and Prime Minister John Major all demanded that the EU prohibition on British beef be lifted. In their arrogance, the lords of London forgot that no one can order consumers in Italy, Germany, or anywhere else to buy British beef.

Yet that is just what the Major government wants to do. For London, it is the export ban which is grounds for complaint, not the cattle disease BSE. They increased their pressure on the EU, attempting to force member countries to capitulate.

On May 21, Major decreed a policy of "non-cooperation" with the EU Intergovernmental Conference, vowing to block

EU decisions, until and unless the EU Commission back down and remove bans on British beef. Major pledged to "disrupt" the next EU heads of state summit, set for Florence, June 20, and turn it into "an absurdity."

Santer: London's behavior 'absurd'

A good yardstick for how much opinion in Europe has turned against the British, is the interview which the chairman of the EU Commission, Jacques Santer, gave to the London *Observer* on June 9. Santer, an outspoken ally of the British Conservatives, warned London not to further try the Europeans' patience. He called British behavior "absurd" and "irresponsible," and reminded them that "it is the British government that has triggered the crisis."

"I have to say that the British government has been responsible for mismanagement of the whole crisis," he said. "Let us say this in a very friendly way, the crisis was triggered by statements on March 20 in the British Parliament that there could be a new virus." Santer stressed, "The problem can only be solved by measures taken in the U.K."

Santer's tone is not merely unusual because it goes



A German grocery store, March 1996: "We guarantee that our beef does not come from England."

against the enormous influence which Britain has had on the EU Commission. Santer said further, "Europeans are beginning to question Britain's membership of the European Union." The "war atmosphere" which the British have conjured up inside the EU will, of course, provoke counterreactions from other countries, and "that would create an atmosphere of anti-Britishness in Europe." He warned London, "The 'hour of truth' is approaching."

Several of the 14 other EU members are obviously no longer ready to tolerate the attitude of the English. The view that the EU would function better without the British, is being expressed more and more in public.

Left to its own, the EU Commission would gladly comply with the British demands, but it cannot, because there is too much counterpressure. The pro-British Santer excused himself in the *Observer*: "It is not just governments, it is public opinion, consumer organizations, pressure groups and lobbyists," which are forcing governments, as well as the EU Commission, not to buckle under to the British.

In early June, the EU Commission loosened the export ban on a few British cattle products, such as gelatin, but Brussels can't implement this policy. For example, the German federal states demanded that Bonn unilaterally uphold the import ban. The government of Chancellor Helmut Kohl cannot backtrack on this decision. Portugal, France, and the Scandinavian countries are under similar pressure.

Conflict of 'fundamental economic policy'

Behind the theater of the absurd which the Tories have staged over recent weeks, lurks a battle over fundamental principles in economic policy. "There is a gigantic cleft between the economic theories of the British and those of the continental Europeans," said the German chairman of the European Parliament, Elmar Bruck, in a May 9 radio broadcast. "The Europeans want to maintain their socially oriented economy; the British want abolish it, indeed they have pilloried it. They want to tighten investments as a way of reducing social costs. For us that is the wrong way."

His British counterpart John Stephens corroborated this: "The crisis is not over BSE, but over which future policy is correct for the Union. We have to drastically reduce the role of the state in the economy. That is the conflict."

That is indeed the conflict. The European public, already suspicious of anti-nation pacts like the Maastricht Treaty, now see their worst fears confirmed. Supranational institutions are obviously not able, or not willing, to guarantee the basic interests of citizens, such as safe food, and protecting health. Everywhere, you hear people say, "Only national governments have finally taken action and made the borders secure."

Europe is experiencing a true renaissance of national sovereignty. And thus, the tragic story of the BSE cattle disease, will perhaps turn out to be a turning point in European history.

The leading firms during BSE's spread

by Anthony K. Wikrent

During the 1970s-1990s, when sheep scrapie and infected cattle remains were cycled through the British livestock feed chain and exports, one company came to dominate all rendering in the U.K.—Prosper de Mulder Ltd., a private, secretive Dutch-Anglo family firm; and the use of rendered animal protein wastes as supplements to livestock feeds was, in turn, channeled through a small number of pre-mix commercial feed companies—all interconnected with the famous-name British business elite among the Thatcher political circles, such as British Petroleum and Unilever.

Below, we provide corporate profiles of the companies involved, and background on leading board members. These short profiles show that, far from an "accidental" occurrence of contaminated substances entering the feed/food chain at some isolated point of weakness, the years of recycling large amounts of improperly rendered animal proteins into the feed chain was top-level, board policy.

BOCM Pauls Ltd.

47 Key Street, Ipswich IP4 1BX, Suffolk, United Kingdom
1991 revenues=£338.405 million
1991 profit=£3.725 million

Key personnel:

Jonathan Martin Paul, chairman (Pauls PLC, director).

Peter Graham William Simmonds, director (Associated British Maltsters Ltd., chairman; Harrisons & Crossfield PLC, director).

In the 1980s, this firm was BOCM Silcock, a manufacturer and distributor of pre-mix livestock feed, part of the Unilever complex of companies. Unilever is the world's largest producer of ice cream and margarine, one of the top five world exporters of milk powder, second largest producer of soaps and detergents, and one of the top five world processors of edible fats and oils. Unilever owns vast plantations in Africa and is also Africa's largest trading company, through subsidiary United Africa Co., which is comprised of the old British Empire trading firms, Niger Co., and the African and Eastern Trading Co. Unilever is among one of the most important companies in the Anglo-Dutch oligarchy; some of the directors are: Lord Wright of Richmond, former head of Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service, and chairman of the Royal Institute