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The Mad Cow of the Market

Anarchist Communist Federation

1996

Whatever the long-term effects of BSE, whether or not a mass epidemic of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) does break out, some things are clear.

Regulations for the production of animal feed were changed, with no safety regulations and above all to cut costs.

Professor Richard Lacey- who was ignored and portrayed as eccentric- has for years been warning that between 5,000 and 500,000 people may die of the infection over the next 20-30 years. Similarly Dr. Harash Narang who devised a test to detect BSE in live cows was castigated by the government as a crank. Public health experts were kept off the government committee set up to look into the crisis. Scientists who were investigating BSE, who began by talking about the dangers of eating British beef, have been silenced. Independent scientists have been denied information on the CJD outbreak which so far has claimed 12 lives.

Research to find out how widespread BSE is in the British herds has been refused funding by the Government, which up till now is still hedging its bets about slaughtering herds where BSE has been found.

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The Government keeps repeating that British beef is safe, when there are strong indications that this is not so. Ironically, the beef scare has reduced prices, so that some poorer working class families who ate it as a luxury once in a while, have been buying it. At the same time, the prices of pork, lamb and poultry have been raised to cash in on the scare.

Meanwhile 6,500 workers in abattoirs have been laid off, with the possibility of redundancies on the farms and in the processing plants. These workers will be added to the millions already out of work.

The Conservatives intend standing by the farmers. As their electoral support dwindles in sectors of society that have traditionally voted Conservative, they believe they can still count on the support of the farmers and landowners. Membership of the Conservative Party among these is high. However, the Conservatives are under pressure from the National Farmers Union and the Country Landowners Association, as well as the food producers, to provide compensation. The potential millions that could be forked out would mean that they would find it very difficult to grant tax cuts as a vote-buying ploy.

Labour have, as usual been pathetic in offering no serious criticisms of the beef crisis. Their eyes too are on getting some of the rural vote. They don't want to go out of their way to alienate the farmers, and in the process be labelled as "unpatriotic".

As crisis after crisis appears, whether it be pollution of the rivers, water shortage, traffic congestion, the return of diseases like TB on a mass scale or food contamination, it becomes abundantly clear that the filthy system of profit is effecting every sphere of life.