

EIRFeature

Maggie Thatcher's economics spread 'Mad Cow' disease

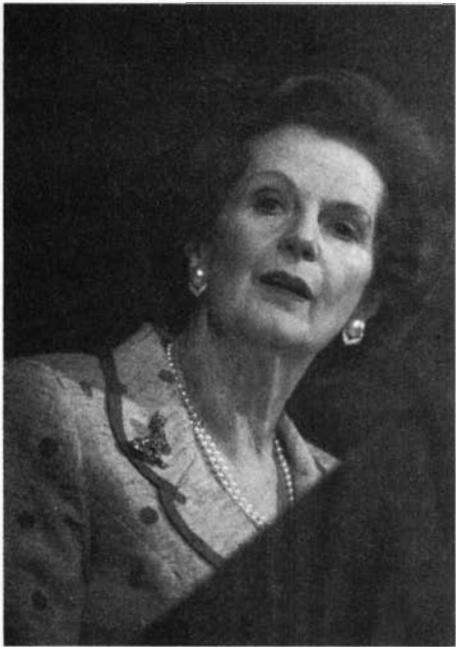
by Marcia Merry Baker and Jonathan Tennenbaum

Seldom do you see such an open-and-shut case of what is wrong with British "free-market" economics. "Mad Cow" disease (bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or BSE, a fatal degenerative condition of the central nervous system) made its first appearance in England in 1985-86; its subsequent spread—affecting 162,000 cows in the British Isles over a 10-year period—is directly connected to the deregulatory economics of the Thatcher policy years.

This disease outbreak is occurring in the context of a general process of destruction of the human race's biological defenses. The unchecked combination of AIDS and drug-resistant tuberculosis, and the return of classical epidemic diseases such as cholera and malaria in many parts of the "Third World," are exemplary. We are witnessing a collapse in worldwide investment into essential water and sanitation systems, public health care, insect control measures, immunization programs, and so forth—parallel with falling material living standards for the majority of the world's population. Radical deregulation and globalization policies, together with the looting of the base of world agriculture by the food cartels, are also very significant factors in the growing danger of a global "biological holocaust." Thereby, we are greatly multiplying the potential routes for spread of plant, animal, and human diseases, while creating epidemiological "weak links" and "forcing cultures," stimulating the emergence of new diseases.

In the *Feature* that follows, *EIR* provides a detailed record, from the 1970s to the 1990s, of what was known about the risk potentials present, including economic cofactors, for disease outbreak in the United Kingdom; and, given the situation, what Mrs. Thatcher and her cohorts did, or did not do, in their free-trade "revolution." Their record shows criminal culpability.

In brief, both before and during the 1979-90 years of Thatcher's prime ministership, infectious animal by-product from British slaughterhouses was recycled—*without being decontaminated*—into the livestock feed chain. The recycled offal included sheep remains, from flocks known to have scrapie (the sheep and goat



Which one is the Mad Cow?

form of transmissible spongiform encephalopathy, TSE), and cattle remains.

In 1986, the first official case of BSE was recorded in England. The consensus among veterinarians and epidemiologists, is that tainted feed was a leading cofactor. Yet, tainted feed mix continued to be distributed, and was exported. In 1990, the first BSE case occurred abroad; by 1996, over 384 official cases were recorded, in 10 countries, where tainted feed, or live cattle, had been exported from Britain.

Only in 1988 did the Thatcher government make BSE a compulsorily notifiable disease. In 1989, six thousand BSE cows were reported in the U.K.; in 1990, thirteen thousand; in 1991, twenty-five thousand; and in 1992, thirty-seven thousand (the peak year). Only in 1988 did the Thatcher government issue a ban on recycling U.K. animal wastes into livestock feed; but it was not enforced. Moreover, after tainted feed products were banned at home, Britain more than doubled exports of bone meal and other abattoir by-products for feed.

This chain of events was set in motion in September 1979, four months after Thatcher became prime minister, when her cabinet decided to set aside 1978 draft proposals for tightening animal feed standards. This deregulation continued when, in 1981, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food Peter Walker signed the "Diseases of Animals (Protein Processing) Order," which allowed tainted feed practices to expand.

The rationale given was straight free-trade dogma: The rendering and feed industry has the right to self-regulate. It must be free to use the least costly methods (low temperatures,

low pressures, low fuel costs). "Market forces" must be free to decide what animals eat.

Exactly who are the "industry" and "market forces" referred to? The prominent companies and individuals involved are all from the top echelons the House of Windsor's financial empire. The companies include: Unilever PLC, the Anglo-Dutch food cartel company, whose subdivision, BOCM Silcock, was a top 1980s British livestock feed merchant; Prosper de Mulder Ltd., which in the 1980s owned over 70% of all rendering in the United Kingdom; British Petroleum Nutrition, one of the world's largest commercial feed companies in the 1980s (and owner of Purina Mills, the largest U.S. feed company, until 1993); Dalgety PLC, now the single largest commercial feed company in the U.K.; its subdivision is food supplier to McDonald's restaurants in North America.

When Agriculture Minister Walker resigned in 1990, he became a director of Dalgety PLC, and joined the board of the newly deregulated British Gas. Thatcher's deregulation and privatization extended to all kinds of infrastructure and vital services, gutting the physical economy. In 1992, Walker was named Lord Walker of Worcester, MBE, PC (royal Privy Council.)

What now? The BSE scandal—with new questions raised concerning possible transmissibility to humans—has provoked new opposition to "London economics" among the European Union countries. There is a resurgence of healthy nationalism over citizens' rights to safe food, and other necessities. Below is a report on this fight.