

Mrs. Robinson told how she and her husband, Samuel Boynton, began to work in the 1930s to improve living conditions for the poor blacks who lived on plantations; to help them find a home and land, and to teach them how to register to vote. She went through the events which led to the explosion of the voting rights campaign in Selma in the mid-1960s, and the moment when she gave part of her house and office as the headquarters for the activity of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Mrs. Robinson's husband died from being beaten, and she herself was attacked and left for dead on the Edmund Pettus Bridge at the outset of the march from Selma into Alabama's capital of Montgomery on "Bloody Sunday" 1965—events indelibly recorded on film and photographs of that historic march for the right to vote.

To Move Institutions, Not Destroy Them

In conclusion, she told her primarily young listeners that they must have the courage to challenge injustice, to fight for their rights as defined by the Constitution, and to confront fear.

The audience was clearly moved, and many participants came to the speakers' rostrum to ask questions and thank Mrs. Robinson. Notable among the many interventions, was a barrage of questions about the situation in the United States today, and worries about the direction of the Bush Administration. In addition, there were several comments about the necessity of working "from the bottom" to change things, which came from Catholic professors trained in the concept of "subsidiarity," and from sympathizers of anti-globalization street gangs known as the "Seattle movement."

Mrs. Robinson responded by reminding people that the fight for civil rights, and the fight for economic justice today, is not based on the destruction of the current political system. In the United States in particular, the fight is to guarantee the rights and principles which are at the basis of the U.S. Constitution. Thus, she said, we are fighting to get the institutions to fulfill their responsibility, not to destroy them.

LaRouche in the Press

A very important effect of Amelia Robinson's trip to Italy was the unusual amount of press coverage of her Milan visit and message. Besides *Avvenire's* extensive interview, there were reports in at least four other newspapers, and segments on the regional news of TG3 (Italy's third TV network); Telem Lombardia; the Catholic Church-linked Telenova network; Milano 6 television; and the Radio Radicale station.

Some of these publications even dared to mention the fact that the famous civil rights heroine is now, and has been for years, a leader of the Solidarity movement and political collaborator of Lyndon LaRouche. This was a kind of breakthrough for the Italian Solidarity Movement; it is known in Italy and its initiatives are often mentioned in the press, but they are usually presented without mentioning the broader movement which is behind them, nor its leader, LaRouche.

Hoof and Mouth Plagues Britain's Elections

by Rosa Tennenbaum

Four weeks ago, Great Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair declared that the hoof and mouth epidemic (HMD) which has been ravaging Britain for three months, was over, and he fixed the election date on June 7. The government ignored the disease; if HMD was mentioned at all, it was happy news, spread by the Ministry for Agriculture, Food, and Fisheries (MAFF), about decreasing numbers of new outbreaks. Unfortunately, the epidemic did not listen to Blair, but resurfaced with several outbreaks in the famous Yorkshire Dales in mid-May, in the middle of the election campaign.

A new, second center of the epidemic developed mostly unnoticed by the public, until it finally occurred to someone that, according to the MAFF website, the number of animals slaughtered daily was hitting 83,000, three times as high as the alleged peak of the epidemic two months ago. When people started to raise questions, the MAFF stopped publishing new figures. Officials did not want the election campaign to be disturbed by discussions about anything in the real world such as poverty, the collapse of infrastructure and the health care system, or HMD. Suddenly, the MAFF discovered that it had to protect the "privacy of farmers," and invoked the Data Protection Act to hide the figures.

'Hideous Abuse of Power'

It seems to be indeed what the *Sunday Times* calls "the greatest political cover-up of modern times" and a "hideous abuse of power." While the MAFF is listing 3.1 million animals as being culled in this epidemic, newspapers such as the *Sunday Times* and *Sunday Telegraph* calculate that the number has already topped 6 million. In several articles, they accused the ministry of "cleaning up" the figures every day, making it impossible to estimate the true scale of the epidemic, and of bringing down the numbers of new cases by "not confirming those that would previously have been listed." Also, young animals, including lambs, piglets, and calves, are not being counted when massacred, which accounts for 1.5 million alone.

The cull has become "a mindless bloodbath, clearing vast swathes of the countryside of animals," wrote the May 20 *Sunday Times*. There are unbelievable scenes of cruelties being reported. Overstressed slaughterers, mainly soldiers, often shoot into herds with high-powered rifles from up to 60 feet, and farmers report that they have found animals still alive three days after the killing, when the cattle were burned.

Soldiers talk about how they are being involved in “hand-to-hand combat with lambs,” and the Army admits that many soldiers have been “traumatized.”

A study of the culling policies by the Imperial College, London, published on May 22, reveals that 15% of the farms that were “killed out” did not have the disease at all; 22% of culling on farms outside infected premises, often distant from recorded outbreaks, were unnecessary, and had no effect on the spread of the disease. Even people in the ministry are estimating that “70 to 80% of livestock were unnecessarily killed,” which means almost 4 million animals—the result of the insane decision by the MAFF back in March to “slaughter on suspicion,” which meant that animals were being killed before proof of being infected were delivered. During the big “backlog” of killings, animals were destroyed even two weeks after an outbreak, which is longer than any incubation period.

There were questions raised, and there were protests against this policy by veterinarians, scientists, farmers, and even the rural population. They were “routinely sidelined,” wrote the May 24 London *Times* in a six-page supplement under the headline “Wrong, Wrong, Wrong, Wrong”: “Cooperation has been refused to those who have offered to help with testing, and independent expertise has been rejected.” As during the outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or “Mad Cow Disease”), everyone who challenged the MAFF’s policy was silenced. Farmers who protested were accused of “willfully spreading the disease.” “The picture that emerges is of a government machine driven by ideology rather than by expertise,” the *Times* lamented. It stated that it was only possible for the MAFF to hold on to this mindless policy of mass culling because “it has the farming unions on its side.”

Indeed, the National Farmers Union (NFU) and its president Ben Gill are widely seen as the main obstacle that prevented the use of vaccination. At the beginning of April, Blair suddenly switched to favoring vaccination, and Britain applied for a vaccination program at the European Union Commission in Brussels; that was agreed to. But, this plan never went into operation, despite the fact that the Prime Minister pressed for it, in order to secure the early election date. There was strong resistance by some influential elements in the MAFF and the NFU.

‘A Blue-Blooded Revolt’

Lady Emma Tennant, daughter of the Duke of Devonshire, has been organizing what the *Times* called “a blue-blooded revolt” against the NFU’s Gill and his resistance against vaccination. Her husband used to work with the vaccination program against HMD in Argentina in the 1960s; today, both keep 12,000 Cheviot sheep at their farm on the Scottish Borders. In a letter to the NFU head on May 9, she raises some pressing questions concerning Gill’s motives, and gives a short listing of the most important developments in the fierce battle for vaccination against HMD, also called foot and mouth disease (FMD):

“In early April we were told that the Prime Minister. . . ,

the Chief Scientist, and the Commons Select Committee on Agriculture were all in favor of vaccination round the worst-affected areas, namely Cumbria and Devon.

“On 11th April, David Maclean, MP for Penrith and the Borders, conducted a poll by fax of his farming constituents. Eighty percent of the farmers and 95% of the vets replied that they wanted vaccination as soon as possible. The *Cumberland News*, a highly respected paper, carried on April 20th the headline ‘Desperate Cumbria Pleads With Blair To Vaccinate Now.’

“How is it, then, that [Agriculture Minister] Nick Brown could say in the House of Commons on April 26th that ‘the government accepts the case for vaccinating cattle . . . but only if the vaccination program is supported by a substantial majority of the farming community, by vets, by the wider food industry, and—I believe this to be crucial—by the consumers.’ He went on to say ‘that level of support is simply not there, and the signs are that it will not now be achieved.’

“Professor [David] King [chief scientific adviser to the Prime Minister] also said, in late April, that farmers in Devon and Cumbria do not want vaccination and that ‘the concern of farmers is that they are stepping into the unknown.’ The reason for this is that over the last 2.5 months they have been misinformed by MAFF, the NFU, and the Minister himself, about the case for vaccination. Mr. Brown, for instance, said on Radio 4 that vaccination would be quickly followed by slaughter, a nonsensical position. No wonder farmers are confused.

“The NFU attaches great importance to Britain’s FMD-free status, but that has now been lost anyway. . . .

“The NFU has said that vaccine is ineffective, which is untrue, as is the statement that several shots are needed. Another NFU myth is that a vaccination program is a huge and expensive logistical operation. In fact, it could be implemented in a few days by farmers using their own staff. Vets and specially trained operatives are not necessary. . . .

“Please, Mr. Gill, answer my question. Why do you refuse to accept the case for vaccination, the scientific, modern, well-proven, and humane method of controlling this epidemic?”

Gill did not answer her letter, and Britain is still not using the vaccine. “The priests of the Golden Calf” have been driving “the caravan of death” all around the country, wrote Simon Jenkins in the May 23 *Times*. “As long as the ‘Golden Calf policy’ [protecting meat and livestock exports] holds sway, the slaughter will continue and the huge destruction with it.” The MAFF expects the cull to continue until Christmas. The longer it takes, the more realistic the ideas become that the human flu could become the “human variant of HMD.” In case a flu epidemic broke out, it is not unthinkable that the government could adopt the same attitude toward handling the crisis, i.e., not using modern techniques such as vaccines to combat it. “Culling humans” is no longer unthinkable, and the longer the HMD crisis drags on, the more probable that danger becomes.