

# Mad Cow Disease Hits Europe: How Globalization Is Poisoning Your Food

by Jonathan Tennenbaum

The French population has been thrown into a panic, by the growing outbreak of the “Mad Cow” disease (bovine spongiform encephalopathy, BSE), and by the first cases of French citizens falling ill with the deadly brain disease nvCJD (new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease), thought to be linked to consumption of BSE-contaminated beef. Overnight, meat consumption in France has fallen by 40% or more. In the face of a looming repetition of the disastrous “Mad Cow” epidemic in Britain in 1996, the French government is taking emergency actions which would have been unthinkable only weeks ago. In Germany, apparently BSE-free so far, concern is growing, that cattle herds might already be infected with BSE, which has a long incubation time, and that German consumers might already have been exposed to BSE-contaminated meat through imports, despite supposedly strict controls. Meanwhile, BSE epidemics are developing in Italy and Portugal.

The growing panic is *absolutely justified*. But what people should really be panicking about, is not BSE and nvCJD—which are dangerous, but could easily be brought under control. What people should be *terrified* about, is the *economic policies* of radical “free-market” globalization and deregulation, which have created worldwide conditions for the explosive growth of *new and old pandemic diseases* on a scale which can only be compared with the 14th-Century depopulation of Europe by the “Black Death.”

While western Europeans worry about contaminated meat on their dining tables, vast new epidemics of antibiotic-resistant tuberculosis, malaria, cholera, HIV-AIDS, and other deadly diseases, are sweeping through the poor countries of Africa, Ibero-America, Asia, and parts of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union—exactly the areas which have been most brutally and systematically looted by International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity conditionalities, neo-liberal “shock therapy,” and the rapacious greed of the globalized financial bubble. Now, suddenly, that process is exploding in the faces of the so-called rich countries themselves.

The BSE scandal is only the tip of the iceberg of the epidemiological nightmare which has been created by radical free-market deregulation and brutal cost-cutting in vital areas of agriculture, public sanitation, and health infrastructure. The one-sided and irresponsible use of antibiotics and other pharmaceutical “quick fixes” to compensate for inadequate

public health, has led to a proliferation of drug-resistant strains of bacteria. A general erosion and breakdown of mankind’s immunological resistance, is being accelerated by the shutting down of hospitals, vaccination and insect control programs, and the decline in standards of nutrition and health care of the majority of the world’s population—including an increasing portion of the population of the U.S.A. and other “rich” countries.

Meanwhile, the vicious price competition in deregulated and globalized agricultural markets, depressing farm prices below the real, sustainable costs of production, has encouraged the spread of dangerous and irresponsible practices of cost-cutting in food production, drastically increasing the potential velocity of evolution and spread of microbial diseases of plants and animals across the planet.

By “deregulating the biosphere,” radical free-market policies are breaking down the natural immunological barriers between species, encouraging the emergence of new disease by serial passage and “species jumps.” According to evidence we shall review below, exactly such practices led to the artificial creation of BSE through a “species jump” of a deadly neurological disease of sheep into cows, and then a second jump from cows to human beings, creating a new variant of the fatal brain disease CJD.

What we are witnessing, is exactly the process Lyndon LaRouche described and warned about over a quarter of a century ago, when he commissioned a “biological holocaust task force” to investigate the impact of brutal, IMF-style economic austerity policies, and the resulting, projected collapse of the population potential of the human species, upon the biosphere as a whole. Results of that continuing investigation were later summarized in an *EIR* Special Report, *Economic Breakdown and the Threat of Global Pandemics*, published in July 1985. In addition, subsequent historical investigations by Paul Gallagher<sup>1</sup> demonstrated that the 14th-Century “Black Death” pandemic in Europe, which wiped out between a third and a half of the population, was itself the product of Venetian “financial globalization” and looting policies. Now, we can see that process, enacted on even a larger scale, re-

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1. Paul Gallagher, “How Venice Rigged the First, and Worst, Global Financial Collapse,” *Fidelio*, Winter 1995.

flected in the phenomenon of HIV-AIDS and the consequences of Margaret Thatcher's creation, the Mad Cow disease.

## How BSE Was Created

Despite enormous attention given to BSE and its apparent human version, nvCJD, many questions about the ultimate origin and nature of the pathogens involved, and the modes of transmission, have not been answered in a definitive manner. Nevertheless, what is known with reasonable certainty, points overwhelmingly to a massive, criminal irresponsibility—or worse!—on the part of British authorities, as well as the European Commission and other responsible agencies.

Judging from the available evidence, the appearance of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in England in the mid-1980s was nearly certainly the result of an artificially induced “species jump” of a disease of sheep, known as “scrapie,” from sheep to cattle. Whether or not the species jump itself was an intended effect, the conditions under which the “jump” occurred are demonstrably the result of very deliberate economic and related policies.

The story of scrapie can be followed back to 1732, when a strange neurological disease broke out among sheep in England, leading invariably to paralysis and death. By the mid-1700s, entire herds were being decimated by the disease, particularly in southern England. There was a public uproar in England at the time, with petitions demanding that the government take action. But scrapie was not eradicated, and has since then remained endemic in the British Isles. In the course of the following 250 years, there were repeated, explosive outbreaks of scrapie in British herds. Standard prophylactic practices which came to be used in many countries, including the preemptive slaughtering of all animals in affected herds, were never applied in England in the case of scrapie. Through the uncontrolled sale, purchase, and breeding of infected sheep, the disease was maintained all over the British Isles, and constantly spread to other areas of the world. This continued right up to the 1990s. Mandatory reporting of scrapie was introduced for the first time in Britain in 1993!

(By contrast: In Germany, scrapie was completely eliminated, thanks to strict control measures; the last case was in 1990—in sheep imported from France—and the last case before that was 42 years earlier!)

The 1970s saw the latest, massive scrapie epidemic in Britain. This epidemic, which came at a time of a major buildup in the size of sheep herds in England, again wiped out entire sheep herds in some areas, and affected a very substantial portion of all herds in the country.

Although human beings have consumed meat from scrapie-infected sheep countless times over the years, there is no evidence that people had become ill as a result. It is true, that strong similarities had been noticed between scrapie and the deadly, but very rare neurological disease of humans called Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. But there was no clear evi-

dence connecting cases of CJD in people, with scrapie in sheep. Until the frightening outbreak of a “new variant” of CJD (nvCJD) in Britain in the early 1990s, the average incidence of CJD was of the order of only about *one in a million people*. The victims of classical CJD were almost exclusively old people.

Nevertheless, the possibility of “species jumps” of scrapie to other animal species, has been known *since the mid-1960s* at latest, and confirmed more recently by extensive experiments.

In 1965, it was found in the United States that minks, fed on material produced from the cadavers of sheep that had died of scrapie, developed a similar disease, known as transmissible mink encephalopathy. TME was determined to be similar to that naturally occurring scrapie-like spongiform encephalopathy which had been discovered in minks back in 1947. In fact, mink farmers made extensive use of feed derived from animals that had died of undiagnosed causes, as well as scrap from the food industry and so forth. As minks are not normally part of the human food chain, the risk here to humans might appear limited.

But in Britain in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a combination of at least three factors created “forcing conditions” for a species jump of scrapie to cattle, and from there, in a massive way, into the human food chain. All three of these factors are closely linked to a long-standing process of looting British agriculture, which was accelerated with the advent of Thatcherist economic policies even before the Iron Lady herself came into power. These three factors were:

1. The large-scale use in Britain of animal-protein feed for cattle, produced from animal remains, including carcasses of sheep and particularly the heads, where—concentrated in the brain tissue—the infectious agent of scrapie is present in very high concentrations.

2. The high incidence of scrapie among sheep in Britain at that time, as a result of the scrapie epidemic of the 1970s. Sheep that died from scrapie were commonly disposed of, by turning them into feed for cattle!

3. The temperature of the heat treatment used to produce the animal-protein feed from sheep cadavers and other animal remains, was arbitrarily *lowered*, evidently for *cost-cutting reasons*. This had the effect, that the infectious agent of scrapie—which is highly resistant to heat, radiation, and chemical treatments—was not inactivated.

Now, given what was already known in the 1960s from the case of minks, the danger of creating a scrapie-like disease in cows should have been recognized. Furthermore, in German agriculture, for example, animal-derived protein was only very rarely used as a feed for cows and other ruminants. Indeed, German farmers (and others) regarded such a “cannibalistic” practice with suspicion, since cows are herbivores, and their physiology and *immune systems* are not developed for meat consumption.

Thus, the fact that the combination of the above-men-

tioned three factors was tolerated by the British agricultural authorities, already points to gross negligence, at best. But that is only the beginning of the story.

### Thatcher Globalizes Disease

In 1984, the first few cases of a strange new, scrapie-like illness began to appear among cows in Britain. In September 1985, the veterinarian Carol Richardson, investigating some of these cases, wrote a report in which she unambiguously identified the pathology of the new disease as belonging to the type of *spongiform encephalopathies*, otherwise typified by scrapie in sheep, CJD in humans, and TME in minks. Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) was born.

At that point, any responsible government would have taken immediate action, at the very least to halt the feeding of cows with animal protein, to isolate infected herds, and prevent potentially contaminated material from such herds from getting into the food chain either of other animals or humans. But this was the heyday of *Thatcherism*—an epidemic of radical free-market ideology, of globalization, deregulation, and privatization, which infected more and more of the world. The prospect of “excessive” government interference in the lucrative, increasingly deregulated food industry, in favor of defending public health and the common good, would have gone against the *Zeitgeist* which Thatcher’s backers in London and Wall Street were working to spread around the world.

For more than three years, the British government refused to take decisive action against the rapidly mounting epidemic of BSE. Only in *June 1989*, when the BSE epidemic had grown to over 7,000 cases per year and panic was spreading, did the British government finally ban the use of animal-protein feed for ruminants—on British territory. But this did not prevent British producers of animal-protein feed from continuing to *export* the contaminated material all over the world! On the contrary, exports were encouraged, to compensate the lost market inside Britain. The main consumer of British animal-protein feed, in the European Union (EU), was France.

The European Commission (EC), the policymaking body of the EU, waited another five years, until June 1994, to finally ban the use of animal-protein feed for cows. In the meantime, the rate of new BSE cases in Britain had increased fivefold, and the first, terrifying news had appeared of young British citizens dying from a variant of CJD, never seen before.

Why didn’t the EC act earlier? A crucial factor was pressure from British companies in the billion-dollar business in exporting contaminated feed, and the pervasive, often dominant role of British bureaucrats inside the EU and EC apparatus. Plus, French, Belgian, and other business interests involved in the same activity. In a word, *corruption*. Even after the EC ban, thousands of tons of contaminated animal-protein powder continued to find its way from Britain into cattle farms in France and elsewhere, through black market operations, via third countries, and diversion from still-legal sales of the



A German department store in 1996, during the “Mad Cow” scare, advertises the fact that none of its meat comes from England.

feed for pigs, chicken, and other animals. Only now, after the public panic surrounding the BSE and nvCJD outbreaks in France, have French President Jacques Chirac and some other European leaders begun to call for a total ban on the use of animal-protein feed in European agriculture.

In fact, the continued spread of BSE, in France, Portugal, Italy, and other countries—even after supposedly strict bans and controls had been introduced—has cracked open the rotten egg of massive corruption and routine, criminal practices within the EU and on the globalized world food markets—practices which are killing people, and threatening the lives of many more.

### A New, Deadly Human Disease

Now nvCJD threatens to become a second major man-made epidemic disease, after the emergence of HIV-AIDS.

Until the first cases of nvCJD appeared, many officials and so-called medical experts in Britain scoffed at the idea, that the consumption of meat and other food products from

BSE-infected cattle, might represent a serious threat to the public health. Yet there was already ample evidence pointing to a very considerable danger to humans.

Beginning in the 1950s, it was demonstrated that two diseases causing spongiform encephalopathies in humans — Kuru and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease — could be transmitted to chimpanzees, by injection of brain tissue from Kuru and CJD victims, causing a similar disease in the chimps. There was also evidence that CJD could be spread from human to human by surgical procedures. Thus, Kuru and CJD were known to be *transmissible*, and in other respects similar to spongiform encephalopathies of animals which had been shown capable of performing species jumps. Finally, there was experience that once a virus or other pathogen, has made *one* species jump, a kind of evolutionary acceleration often occurs, which makes further jumps, to other species, easier and more probable.

On this background, and amid much public concern, the British government (as well as others) took some reluctant action to prevent the most highly infectious parts of BSE-infected cows — above all, brain tissue and spinal column — from getting into the human food chain. The chronology of British bans on the sale of so-called “risk parts” of beef, is rather revealing:

**June 1989:** Risk parts are banned from baby food in Britain.

**November 1989:** General ban on human consumption in England and Wales.

**January 1990:** General ban in Scotland.

**March 1990:** Ban on exports of risk parts to countries of the EU.

**July 1991:** Ban on exports to developing countries.

Thus, for *two years*, the Thatcher government saw no problem in continuing to export BSE-contaminated beef to the Third World, although it officially acknowledged the threat to British children! In reality, nobody knows how much BSE-contaminated material is still finding its way onto the world markets, including the huge market for raw materials for gelatin and other processed food products, medicines, etc.

In 1994, the first handful of cases of nvCJD appeared in Britain. To date there have been 84 verified cases of nvCJD there, and the number appears to be growing rapidly. This disease clearly belongs to the same general family of spongiform encephalopathies as BSE, scrapie, and classical CJD itself, but it differs from classical CJD both in the young average age of the victims, and in the detailed pattern of destruction of brain tissue. Attempts to treat the disease have little or no effect; like classical CJD, scrapie, and BSE, nvCJD appears 100% lethal. A most frightening aspect, is the probably *very long incubation period* of nvCJD, which is implied by the time-lapse between the first large-scale exposure of British consumers to BSE-contaminated products (in the 1980s) and the first cases of nvCJD in 1994.

Assuming that nvCJD is in fact the result of a species jump of BSE to humans through consumption of contami-

nated products — which appears very likely, if not virtually certain — an article published in the British science journal *Nature* in August 1999 projected, that a total of 63,000-131,000 cases of nvCJD would probably occur in Britain in the coming decades. However the author, Roy Anderson, admitted a very large margin of error, especially if the number of nvCJD were to accelerate faster than expected in the coming months. The latter has in fact occurred. Instead of his expected total of 15 new cases in 1999, there were 17, and then an additional 24 cases appeared in the first three months of 2,000 alone! Revised estimates now foresee as many as 500,000 cases — assuming, of course, that no further exposure to BSE-contaminated products occurs, and that *no additional transmission routes appear*, that might create a self-sustaining epidemic among humans. Experiments have pointed to the likelihood, that nvCJD might be transmitted by blood, and precautions are already being taken by the United States and other countries, to exclude possibly nvCJD-infected persons from donating blood.

## Globalization: 1980s Origin of ‘Mad Cow’

by Marcia Merry Baker

The record shows emphatically, that the first spread of BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) disease, during the radical “free markets” reign of the original Mad Cow, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1979-90), was preventable. The companion article, “Mad Cow Disease Hits Europe; How Globalization Is Poisoning Your Food,” describes the scope of today’s livestock and meat supply crisis, and the process leading up to it.

It is important to go back, and name the names of those persons and companies responsible during the critical 1980s period. Seeing this clearly, also throws the spotlight on today’s “who’s who,” of those menacing the food chain.

*EIR*’s June 21, 1996 issue contained a 17-page dossier, titled “Maggie Thatcher’s Economics Spread ‘Mad Cow’ Disease,” including a timeline of events from the 1970s to the 1990s, and corporate profiles of the livestock suppliers, renderers, and others involved. We here summarize some key points, and also note today’s counterpart companies, demanding “free market” rights to subvert farming practices and endanger food supplies.

No mere question of mega-companies getting “too big” and “going bad,” what we are seeing is the lock-up of food, and other essential commodities (energy, metals, minerals, even water) in the control of those positioned to make a killing off shortages, and guarantee economic breakdown.

In particular, as of November 2000, a merger fight is under way involving the two largest meat processors in the world: