

BSE: THEY MUST GO!

WORKERS PRESS
Readers were warned in December of a new variety of CJD — the human equivalent of 'mad cow disease' — that had struck down young people ('Should we eat the cows?', 23 December).

Our readers were among the first to be told that this was the beginning of an epidemic caused by eating contaminated beef products.

Now the government's Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) has admitted that BSE-infected beef may cause this fatal disease. Their admission allows changes in this committee's composition that have made it more sensitive to public health concerns.

Unknown numbers of people face death, thousands face unemployment and ruin, as the multi-billion-pound beef industry slides into bankruptcy.

For the first time in history millions of people have been exposed to prions — the infective agent causing BSE — with totally unpredictable effects.

Almost everyone in Britain will have been exposed repeatedly to infective material that is treated in medical laboratories with extreme caution.

BY DANIEL ROBERTSON

Humans are known to be susceptible to several types of BSE-like disease, and the variety that infects cattle is known to be particularly virulent. It infects most of the animal species it has been tested against, including primate species related to humans.

The government have hidden behind bland claims that there is no scientific evidence that BSE infects humans, but the reality is that no experiments have been done to try to infect humans purposely, to test their susceptibility — perhaps some Tory ministers would like to volunteer!

(You can bet your bottom dollar/50p they have been eating the safe but more expensive organic beef as part of their much-publicised 'balanced diet'.)

Subjects

Instead we are all the subjects in a massive experiment. They are waiting to see what the death toll will be and hoping that the political consequences will be manageable. The scientific evidence they are looking for is our deaths!

From the beginning the risks were so great that consumers should have been protected immediately by the removal of infected beef and

infected products from any possibility of human contact.

These include: steak, stewing beef, veal, beef fat, suet, beef extracts (used in flavourings), and cattle-bone gelatine (used in jelly, confectionery, baby foods and numerous other products — and even cosmetics).

Many honest scientists have tried to warn of the dangers, but have been ignored, ridiculed, sacked from their jobs and even physically threatened. Their advice should have been taken and all infected herds slaughtered back in the 1980s.

We must hope that humans have enough natural resistance to this threat to keep fatalities low. But at present we cannot guess how many people will be felled by this disease.

Politicians and their tame scientists who still insist that there is no risk are lying.

Why was this disaster allowed to happen?

The Tory government's priority all along has been to protect farming big business. Many Tory politicians are themselves farmers. They must have been aware of the dangers and cynically decided to offset the political risks of mass deaths against the potential lost profits.

As far back as 1979 scientists were warning that feeding cattle on recycled animal material could expose humans

to unknown medical risks. The government had ample warning that this disaster was likely to happen.

There must be a full, independent inquiry. It must include trade unionists and representatives of consumer organisations and other grass-roots organisations.

Guilty

The guilty must be held legally responsible for their behaviour and there must be full compensation for sufferers from CJD and for farm workers whose livelihoods are being destroyed.

Whole rural areas are likely to be driven into poverty by the collapse of dairy farming, resulting in the same type of community devastation that has hit former mining areas.

If the epidemic is as huge as some scientists fear, the pressures on the health service will be immense. Yet the government is planning to reduce medical care for suf-

Mad cow disease — a plague from the depths of capital, page 7

ferers from long-term terminal conditions. But the fundamental conclusion must be that human health will continue to be under threat if food production continues to be tied to big business.

This process has gone further in Britain than in most other countries. It is no coincidence that it is British consumers' health that is being repeatedly threatened by the dangers that result from intensive capitalist farming methods.

Food production must be organised to meet real human health and dietary needs, to eliminate cruel farming practices and to be in harmony with nature.

Tories put kids at risk

MILLIONS of schoolchildren have been put at risk by being fed the cheapest and worst-quality cuts of beef in the burgers and minces served in school dinners.

The Tories' 1980 Education Act ended the previous legal obligation on schools to provide meals that met minimum nutritional standards.

For some 15 years most school meals were full of offal of the sort that is now banned because of the possible risks of eating food contaminated with BSE.

Socialist Science Forum on MAD COW DISEASE

Speakers: Daniel Robertson and Jonathon Bruce (scientists) and Geoff Pilling (economist)

Wednesday 3 April, 7pm prompt,

Friends Meeting House,

173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ. (Euston tube)

Sydney Mthembu

Comrade Sydney Mthembu was a worker at BTR Dunlop for about 18 years. He was an active member of the Workers International soon after its launch in 1990 at Budapest, Hungary.

Sydney died due to injuries which he sustained in a car accident on 10 January after attending for a medical check-up at hospital about his hand which was crushed by a machine at his workplace.

According to reports, the car collided with another vehicle. Doctors said two of his ribs and his left arm were broken in the accident. Due to his broken ribs doctors had to perform surgery. Sydney remained in intensive care until his death on 13 February.

We were very shocked to learn about his death because when we visited him in hospital he was showing signs of recovery. He leaves a wife and four children.

It is very difficult to say anything about the circumstances of his accident because the matter is still in the hands of the police.

As members of the Workers International we were very upset to lose such an active comrade at a time when the Workers International is under constant attack from the Stalinists, especially here in Natal.

During the 10th anniversary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions one of our comrades was brutally attacked by stewards while distributing Workers International leaflets with other comrades. Since then our

comrades have been under constant harassment by Stalinists in the townships.

At the Budapest conference one comrade from Sydney's factory reported that he was under attack from the Stalinists for participating. That comrade was slandered as an agent of the former government which wanted to destroy COSATU. Through Sydney and other comrades' bravery they didn't succeed in their smear campaign against him.

Sydney and others went out of their way to explain to the workers why this comrade went to Budapest and why socialism needed to be fought for throughout the world.

Many comrades will remember Sydney for his constant attendance at our national meetings. He was very popular with his fellow workers at the Dunlop factory. This was shown in their attendance at his funeral although some did not share his political views.

We as the Workers International would extend our deepest sympathy to his family and relatives for the loss of this revolutionary and head of their family.

We salute you, comrade, for your contribution to the struggle for emancipation of the world working class against exploitation by the capitalist class. We will always remember you by continuing where you left off.

We say rest in peace comrade.

Workers International
Durban

- Guilty must be held legally responsible
- Full compensation to CJD victims and farm workers
- Full, independent inquiry to include trade unionists



ally for the 500 sacked Liverpool dockers, see page 3

Photo: Alan Clark

Inside left

Priceless advice

VERPOOL dockers running to and winning support for their struggle might have missed Jim Dye's article in the March-April issue of *Workers News*.

He says they're doing well but 'the following things must be fought for: solidarity actions from other docks, shipping and transport unions in Britain and internationally; Official backing from the TGWU, even if this breaks the anti-union laws; Workers' Aid — the dockers must not starve; mass pickets to stop the port operating. I'm sure the advice will be welcome.'

Likewise, we must welcome the acknowledgment, in a full-page declaration on Bosnia in *Workers News*, that 'there is nothing wrong in principle with sending aid convoys to multi-ethnic areas like Tuzla'.

So glad to hear it. I'd been worried at by taking food and medical supplies to people fighting fascist 'ethnic cleansing', Workers Aid for Bosnia had broken some rule of etiquette for dignity and gentleman 'revolutionaries'. Like, 'Thou shalt issue lofty proclamations, but on no account do anything useful.'

Not that Workers Aid, the WRP or others are in the clear. Apparently we have presented a multi-ethnic Bosnia some kind of strategic goal, refusing to stress the need for a workers' public arm or for the right of the Bosnian army to receive arms.'

Worse, Workers Aid has used its convoys to develop a thoroughly opportunist relationship with supporters of the Izetbegovic government. Has Workers Aid gone out canvassing for Izetbegovic's SDA party, in expectation of a council seat? Been promised a peerage for a load of flour? Sounds more like *Workers News's* beloved Labour party.

Unfortunately, the joint declaration 'between the PST of Argentina and the LTT', isn't very specific. They don't even bother explaining that the LTT is the Workers' Socialist Party, and LTT the 'Leninist-Trotskyist tendency' (to which the Workers' International League, publisher of *Workers News* subscribes).

Obviously household abbreviations, known everywhere from Buenos Aires to Bugojno.

'We have never given the slightest political support to the Izetbegovic government,' they boast. Modesty forbids them telling us what they have done.

Later, between talk of 'international class struggle' and 'workers' council government', the declaration speculates on divisions within the SDA. Nothing about what Bosnian workers or intellectuals have done, or are doing. Dated 22 November 1995, in *Workers News* (March-April) on Bosnia.

True, although Workers Aid for Bosnia has mainly focussed on people like the Tuzla miners (not reknowned for supporting Izetbegovic's SDA), it isn't made aid conditional on which party people support.

Nor did we insist the Bosnian people proclaim a 'workers republic' before we support their right to self-defence. Far from not raising the issue, we supported the Bosnia Solidarity Campaign picket which used its banner in Whitehall for three months — **BREAK THE EMBARGO!**

Along with Bosnian workers and democrats we think a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural Bosnia is worth fighting, against Greater Serb fascists, Croatian nationalists, imperialists or Muslim reactionaries.

A democratic national policy was vital to the Yugoslav revolution as national ownership. Today, as Workers Aid has reported, it is the fault-line which Bosnian politics divide and the bottom line for rebuilding unity between workers in former Yugoslavia.

Charlie Pottins

GERMANY IS

THE German economy is in deep crisis. Here PETER JEFFRIES summarises recent news on the economy and points to some of its implications for the rest of Europe.

GERMAN CHANCELLOR Helmut Kohl has promised to halve unemployment by the end of the century. In the opinion of an increasing number of Germans, this merely proves that, however astute a politician he might be, he is woefully ignorant of economics.

For the headline stories about record levels of unemployment and a fall in real gross domestic product in the first three months of the year tell only half the tale, if that.

There is substantial hidden unemployment in addition to the officially registered 4.27 million (over 11 per cent of the population) jobless.

According to federal labour office president Bernhard Jagoda, a further 1.5 million are being kept off the unemployment register by various government 'job creation' schemes, training programmes, early retirement and short-time working.

Of those on such schemes in such categories 800,000 are in eastern Germany and 700,000 in western Germany. Overall employment dropped by over 200,000 last year.

The 0.15 per cent fall in real GDP since the start of the year will not be the last. The Berlin-based DIW economic research institute forecasts that real GDP will fall about 1 per cent in the current quarter.

Recession

Economics minister Günter Rexrodt's words 'There is no question of a slide into recession or zero growth this year' are one that may yet haunt him. Even Rexrodt had to admit that any recovery 'will not be sufficient for a fundamental improvement in the labour market.'

The fact that GDP has fallen for two consecutive quarters means that the economy is officially in recession, although in the run-up to last week's state elections in Baden Württemberg, Rhineland Palatinate and Schleswig-Holstein, Bonn has banned the 'R-word' from its vocabulary.

The monthly business climate indicator for western Germany from Munich's Ifo economic research institute has risen in only two of the last 14 months.

Survey

The latest survey of 25,000 member companies by the German chambers of industry and commerce (DIHT) shows that a third of western German firms expect business to worsen. As a result the chambers forecast virtual stagnation in the economy for the current year, with half a million job losses.

The number of workers in the manufacturing sector, once the real strength of the German economy, has dropped from 11.1mn in 1991 to its present 8.8mn, a loss of 2.3mn jobs.

Germany's public finances are deteriorating rapidly. Last year the country's public sector deficit shot up above the 3 per cent required by the terms of the Maastricht agreement for economic and monetary union.

The deficit will exceed the target again this year and doubts are mounting whether Germany can meet it in 1997, the year when decisions are due to be made about which countries will enter monetary union.

Last week finance minister Theo Waigel took powers to cap public spending that does not meet with his approval. He did so in the face of a federal budget deficit that is heading for an overshoot of between DM10bn and DM14bn on its DM60bn projection for the current year.

The overshoot arises from the economy's slowdown which has slashed tax receipts while increasing welfare spending because of the dramatic rise in unemployment.

A crisis has hit some of Germany's high-profile firms. They include the financial crisis at the Bremer Vulcan shipbuilding firm, which last month sought a restructuring for its growing debts, and Dasa, the aerospace company owned by Daimler-Benz.

Bankruptcies and liquidations



Dole queue in Berlin

reached record levels in both eastern and western Germany last year. Nationwide, insolvencies rose by a sixth last year to 28,785, with the construction industry bearing the brunt of this crisis.

The government blames many of the mounting economic problems on last spring's rise in the value of the Deutschmark and excessively high wage settlements.

The trade surplus was up at the end of last year, despite falling exports. This was because the cut-back on imports has been even sharper. Last year visible exports were down 2.7 per cent while imports fell back 6.9 per cent.

But recent figures have also brought to light a sharp slowdown in investment. Investment in equipment was down 0.6 per cent in real terms in the last three months of 1995 compared to the same period of 1994.

And despite the big construction projects underway in eastern Germany investment in buildings was 1.8 per cent lower.

The chambers of industry and commerce warn that investment in equipment will fall by a real 2 per cent this year, with a 3 per cent drop in spending on construction.

The BDI, the German industry federation, warns: 'Rationalisation will continue to be the most important investment motive, rather than the expansion that would be normal in a phase of recovery.'

The government is pinning its hopes on a surge in exports to stem the rising tide of unemployment. But export growth is lagging behind the expansion of world trade and with German labour costs around a quarter above those of its competitors, there seems little chance for any improvement.



'We want work not the dole', Zeiss workers in Ober Kochen, west Germany

ASN'T WORKING



'Alliance for jobs' faces collapse

THE German conservative government is trying hard to revive the alliance between employers and unions aimed at selling wages and conditions for the promise of future jobs.

Werner Stumpfe, soon to take over as president of the engineering employers' federation, Gesamtmetall, said two weeks ago the alliance was dead.

He announced the aim of cutting wage costs per 'unit' by 20 per cent in the next wage round.

Stumpfe scornfully attacked the IG Metall union's 'illusion' that 'the employers could create 100,000 new jobs'. He demanded a 10 per cent cut

in wage costs through reorganisation of working hours and new group-work methods.

He called on the state to cut social security contributions by five per cent and demanded unions should accept cuts in holiday pay to save jobs. Finally, he demanded a two-tier system which would allow firms in difficulty to avoid paying the agreed rate.

The following day government spokespersons and union leaders loudly insisted the jobs pact is still viable. Nevertheless, the carefully engineered system of class collaboration in Germany seems to be breaking apart.

Many firms are selling things abroad at a loss, reminiscent of the 'dumping' of goods that characterised the world slump of the 1930s. Bremer Vulcan's crisis came to a head after it contracted to build two cruise ships for an Italian line at a loss.

Any government hopes for a recovery via an increase in consumer demand seemed doomed by rising contributions for health and pension insurance and sharp increases in charges for local authority services.

Many workers and middle class people have cut back their spending in the face of growing fear of unemployment.

The government's '50 point programme' is condemned by big business as too little and too late. It is based on a series of 'supply-side' measures of the sort introduced by Thatcher in the 1980s — deregulation of markets, corporate tax reform and incentive for company start-ups. It involves a cut in public spending from its present 50 per cent of GDP to 46 per cent.

Accord

The social security system is to be 'restructured' (that is cut) while at the same time the amounts that employers must pay into the system are to be reduced. Early retirement schemes are also to be curbed on the grounds of cost.

Meanwhile the trade unions' 'alliance for jobs' — in which pay

increases would be sold in return for promises of fewer sackings — appears to be running into the sand as leading employers reject them out of hand.

Germany is the biggest and strongest economy in Europe. Its crisis is therefore one for Europe as a whole.

Maastricht

If it is to achieve the Maastricht criteria for monetary union, there will have to be sharp cut backs in state spending which go far beyond anything yet proposed. Yet such spending reductions will send unemployment climbing even more rapidly, especially in the east which is heavily dependent on state hand-outs from Bonn.

But the reduction in demand in Germany will have the most serious effects for the rest of Europe.

As the more intelligent commentators now realise, there is a real prospect of a spiralling down of the whole European economy, with all the social and political implications that this would entail.

It is now clearer than ever that the attempt, by no means realised, to assimilate the former German Democratic Republic into a united capitalist Germany has brought the most severe economic, social and increasingly political stains, not simply for Germany, but increasingly for the rest of Europe.

German builders strike for minimum wage

From BOB ARCHER in Germany

TWENTY thousand Bavarian building workers rallied at Munich's disused airport last week to demand a DM15 an hour minimum wage to cover all building workers employed in the area.

The city's mayor, Christian Ude, told them the council had proposed a

minimum wage on all city building projects but the Bavarian state government had cancelled the proposal.

A fleet of 186 buses, plus other vehicles carrying demonstrators to the site, temporarily blocked the motorway ring around the city.

Cheap labour in the building trade comes from Portugal, Poland and soon Ghana or Senegal, it is expected. Workers want all building workers to be paid a minimum wage.



Portuguese building workers in Berlin. Cheap labour in the building trade comes from Portugal, Poland and soon Ghana or Senegal, it is expected. Workers want all building workers to be paid a minimum wage.

