

Taiwan: Where's the Beef? It's not with the USA but with Ma. Who Else?

Written by Jerome F. Keating Ph.D.
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A week past on Saturday November 14, thousands of Taiwanese took to the streets of Taipei to express their growing concern over the present government's continued mismanagement of the nation's international affairs. In line with this, the Legislative Yuan has been deadlocked on an amendment to the Act Governing Food Sanitation. The issue of course has been the recent agreement of President Ma Ying-jeou to the import of American beef. Don't misunderstand this. It is not a matter that Taiwanese do not like American prime rib, T-bones or filet mignon; they love it. What Taiwanese are upset with is the continuing slipshod manner of negotiations and apparent deal-making that the Ma government is trying present as fait accompli for the people and the legislature to accept.

What was the agreement and what was the presumed deal? Back on Nov. 2nd the agreement was this. Ma's government with little advance warning or announcement lifted its ban on US bone-in beef and other beef products mixing dangerous offal and ground beef. That presented a clear and present threat to mad cow disease for the people of Taiwan and yet that's where the Ma government has been cavalier in its attitude to public safety. Ma blatantly has tried to dodge the issue by in effect professing, "I am letting in poisoned products, but don't be alarmed I am not forcing you to buy and eat them." Why let them in, in the first place? Here then came the second part. What was the presumed deal?

What was the deal? Why all of a sudden, and why with so little discussion or consultation of the Legislative Yuan and the public was this made and announced as a done deal? What was to be gained by letting in such potential dangers? Where is the pay-off? What was the sweetening of the pot or the under the table deal that Ma wanted and needed?

Now Ma is asking the legislators not to reject this deal and not to make an amendment to the Act on Food Sanitation. He claims it would risk the nation's credibility. The issue however is not the nation's credibility, but the credibility of the Ma government in making ill-advised deals with little care for public health. In effect, Ma is asking the people to save his face by saying, "My negotiators goofed up and were caught. But please don't embarrass us in front of the world and the USA by asking us to go back to the bargaining table. We will look bad."

Look bad? Of course they will. Ma's people looking bad has been the story of this government since it took office with grandiose promises, incompetent performance, and its autocratic attitude in trying to squelch any questioning of its poor performance.

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The issues, problems and opposition are bigger than American beef. Further negotiations and dangers loom on the horizon. In quick succession, Ma's government has signed a hasty financial MOU with the People's Republic of China (PRC) again with little serious discussion or public disclosure beforehand. Now, worse still, a blind non-transparent ECFA is coming up, an ECFA that could damage many of the industries and agricultural products of Taiwan, a deal that could weaken the nation's sovereignty. Who will be making the profit on these deals as well? Who will be suffering? The people of Taiwan have good reason to be worried.

Source: [Jerome F. Keating's writings](#)