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“Slaughtering with pre-stunning can be less efficient than shechita”

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The motive of supporters of food-labelling is suspect

OVER THE years, British Jews have had to remain vigilant as attacks on the community have become ever more subtle. The attack on shechita is being trumpeted under the guise of animal welfare. Or, if that doesn't wash, accurate consumer information.

So far, the British agriculture minister, Jim Paice MP - himself a farmer - has used the British veto at the Council of Ministers in the EU to block the "food labelling" proposals.

I met the minister together with shechita campaigners before the vote so I knew that the government was deeply sceptical about the changes.

Unfortunately, this is an EU issue rather than a British one, so the decision ultimately rests with the collective will of Europe's food ministers and the European Parliament.

It had been thought that the European Parliament would yield to the view of the Council of Ministers and drop the proposal.

Sadly, by a small majority of just six, (34 for the labelling and 28 against), the Environmental and Consumer Affairs Committee of the European Parliament voted through an amendment to a new European Union food-labelling bill that required meat not stunned before slaughter to be clearly labelled as such. Food packaging would

appear with the notice: "Unstunned before slaughter".

Is there a hidden motive? For some, no doubt, there are genuine concerns about animal welfare, but the scientific evidence is inconclusive.

But when someone suggests the animals slaughtered through the shechita method are labelled - "Jewish Method" - then the underlying real motives become clearer.

It is worth remembering that slaughter methods require pre-stunning procedures which can be less efficient than the integral stun of the shechita process.

The other default methods are gassing, electrocution and captive-bolt shot to the head.

None of these is without problems. The number of mis-stunned animals slaughtered is thought to run into the tens of thousands.

I have tabled Parliamentary Questions to obtain up-to-date numbers. Is gassing, electrocuting or firing a bolt into the head of the animal less cruel?

Who knows, but mis-stunning when the bolt misses and the slaughterman has to try again will clearly cause distress to the animal.

Yet, the "labelling" proponents are not asking that the food is labelled: "This animal was killed by a bolt through the head -

twice because we missed first time".

So the animal welfare argument looks weak, because it is being highly selective on the slaughter method.

Is consumer information a bad thing? Of course not.

But the labelling must not discriminate and require just one method to be declared.

The label would surely have to say this animal was killed by a bolt/gassed/electrocuted, etc. It would have to identify those that were mis-stunned too.

Any change would have a severe impact on the community.

If those in the European Parliament who wish to bring in food labelling get their way, the consequences will be vastly higher prices for kosher meat products as the trade currently sell a significant amount of their produce to the non-kosher market.

There does not appear to be an outcry from food producers.

They are not asking for changes and I doubt they would want to put off their consumers by gruesome slaughter descriptors being listed on the pretty packets in M&S chiller cabinets:

So, with the proponents unable to argue convincingly or coherently under welfare or consumer rights, the true motive must be suspect.