

## When the Buying Public Says 'Enough!'

**T**HE SITUATION that forced Wilson Foods Corp. to seek refuge under bankruptcy laws may be attributed to the same cause that wrecked the automobile, steel, railroad and other industries.

That is the incessant demand for "More!" by labor union bosses, eventually driving wage costs beyond feasible levels. With unions favored by federal laws, industrialists often have acceded to their demands under threats or strikes or violence.

The concept that wages and more extensive employee benefits could always be passed along to consumers, costing industries nothing, is fallacious. When profits disappear, jobs eventually evaporate.

When buyers decide that prices have risen far enough, they look for similar products that may be bought elsewhere for less money, or they might try to get along with deferred purchases or none at all.

When sales decline, profits fall and quite likely some of the workers will have to be laid off, perhaps permanently. Excessive wages may result in no wages at all.

It may be recalled that meat packing was the first major industrial development in Oklahoma. It was labor trouble that forced the closing of the Armour & Co. plant in Oklahoma City. Although Wilson built an efficient new plant, it also was shut down because high costs made it unfeasible to operate. It could not compete.

If officials of Oklahoma National Stockyards had not been alert to develop an auction for stocker and feeder cattle, Oklahoma City's status as a livestock market would be dim. Animals exhibited at the recent AH and FFA livestock show had to be shipped out of state for slaughter, as required by show rules.

Meat packers all over the country have had similar difficulties. Not only have unions demanded and often received disproportionate wages and benefits, but they also have resisted the installation of operating efficiencies that might have sustained jobs.

Many major packing plants have closed for lack of profits, rather

than for lack of demand for their products.

Vigorous competition always has been a characteristic of the meat and foods industries.

Admittedly, wage rates have not always been top level for hard work at tasks which might be distasteful. Nevertheless, it is consumers who, in the end, determine what the work is worth.

In the past, customers often waited while butchers brought parts of carcasses from refrigerators and cut steaks, roasts or chops to individual orders. This may have appeal for some customers but it certainly is less practical than supermarket methods of displaying ready-cut portions, weighed, wrapped and priced for consumer selection.

Meat still is the most popular entree for Americans. An old butcher once told me, "Customers always will think the prices of meat are too high!" They will pay only so much.

Union bosses always have demanded "More!" but there comes a time when the buying public says "Enough!"