NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

For meat industry, anti-trust efforts in corporate control collapse

David Andrews | Jan. 23, 2012 Eco Catholic

In 2008 the Federal Farm Bill instructed the Department of Agriculture to write rules for competition in the meat industry. This directive was to complete the details lacking in the 80-plus-year-old legislation on competition in the meat industry from the Theodore Roosevelt era. That legislation was to be enhanced with detailed directions on contracts, anti-trust policies and mandates requiring greater justice in meat production, processing and distribution.

The rules were to be developed by a small administrative unit of the United States Department of Agriculture: The Grain Inspection Packers and Stockyard Administration. J. Dudley Butler, who had a career as a plaintiff?s attorney challenging poultry companies? control of the poultry industry, was brought in to direct the effort. This was a conscious effort by the Obama administration to tame the meat industry and challenge its control by a few corporations.

The effort involved an historic collaboration between the Department of Justice and the Department of Agriculture on anti-trust issues in the meat industry. Department of Agriculture secretary Thomas Vilsack and Department of Justice director Eric Holder presided at every workshop - in Iowa, Wisconsin, Alabama, Colorado and the District of Columbia. New anti-trust staffing was brought in, as well: Christine Varney and Philip Weiser at the Justice Department, and John Ferrell and Butler at the Department of Agriculture.

A series of national and regional workshops on the theme of anti-trust in the meat industry was held across the country, with over 60,000 comments submitted by the public. I attended four out of five such meetings. I knew Butler because I am an officer in the Organization for Competitive Markets and have been for nearly fifteen years. He was a member of OCM and announced the program of the USDA at one of OCM?s annual meetings in August of 2009 in Saint Louis, Mo., with Justice Department and USDA staff in attendance.

After an onslaught of attacks on the rules by corporate agribusiness, the rules announced by the USDA and supported by thousands of farmers and ranchers, the Administrations? leaders in the anti-trust effort gradually left the administration: Farrell, Varney, Weiser and now the director of the office Butler. There was weak pushback from the administration. It did not stand its ground and did not support the follow-through required in what it started.

The Obama administration lifted up hopes and dashed them to the dustbin of history, unlikely to be re-energized again, a terrible defeat at the hands of the corporate meat industry. Those of us seeking a just food system will have to work harder now that this effort to occupy the food system has collapsed.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/01/2014 - 17:01*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/meat-industry-anti-trust-efforts-corporate-control-collapse