

Work of the Market Committee

Address Delivered by E. L. Burke at Annual Convention of
Nebraska Stock Growers Association, at Alliance, June 21

It certainly is a privilege and a pleasure to have this opportunity to talk to an audience of Nebraska stockmen. It seems mighty good to get into a friendly atmosphere and to meet with men with whom you have common cause, who understand your motives and whose interests are the same as yours.

As a member of the Market Committee, for a good many months it has been my lot to take an attitude of criticism toward many practices as they exist at the live stock markets. We members of the Market Committee have felt it our duty to criticize many of the methods of the big packers, the attitude of the live stock journals, the inertia of the commission men, and in fact to find fault with a great many features of the system, under which live stock is marketed and distributed in this country. It has not been a pleasant job, I assure you, and it has involved much hard work, personal sacrifice and some financial loss to those who have given their time and energy to this work. There is no glory. The reward must come from the satisfaction of having benefitted an industry for which we all have a deep-seated affection, and an undying interest, an industry which for years has in many respects been suffering because of a lack of the effective co-operation of its membership.

I want you to understand the purpose for which the Market Committee was appointed, what progress it has already made, and what it hopes to accomplish, so that you may decide intelligently whether you are in sympathy with our aims and can give us the stamp of your approval. No small set of men, no matter how disinterested their motives or how earnestly they work, can hope to succeed in such an undertaking as we have set our hands to, without the cordial support of the great majority of the stock men behind them, and this support must be more than a mere acquiescence and a mild applause. It must consist of active moral and financial aid, and with that in view, I shall do my best to lay the situation before you. I shall call your attention first to some fundamental ques-

tions which apply to the general industrial development of this country and then take up our industry in detail.

In the last twenty years developments have been rapid in our industry. The most striking feature of that development has been on the one hand rapid concentration of the buying into a few large units, world-wide in scope and power, and on the other the tendency toward smaller and weaker units among the producers. Please bear this in mind, as it is fundamental, and the basis of what I have to say. Your attitude toward this aspect of the question will decide your policy regarding questions of the utmost importance in your own industry. The tendency toward concentration of the buying and manufacturing and of the live stock business is not confined to that industry, by any means. It is a world-wide tendency, and by many has been regarded as the inevitable result of modern economic conditions. It involves trusting a few men with very great power, and the elimination of many individuals, thinking and acting independently. Its principal justification is on the ground of efficiency, which has become a by-word around the world. It is not confined to industrial affairs. The system which places efficiency first in every department of life must be directed by a centralized power—an autocracy. Germany furnishes the best illustration. Contrariwise is the democratic idea with individual initiative at the bottom. Today those two systems are engaged in a life and death struggle in Europe. Are we in this great land of liberty willing to accept less efficiency, less power in the hands of a few, for the sake of more individual freedom and democracy? Your answer to that question, gentlemen, will determine your position in this first real struggle for emancipation for all of us from the control of the forces whose principal justification of their methods is that magic word "efficiency."

At this time you may well ask the question, "Where is the benefit of this efficiency, if all or nearly all the advantages which result therefrom

are to be absorbed by the few?"

The mass of the people of this country are just waking up to the fact that if these large units are allowed to develop unrestrained in the future at the same rate they have in the past, it will only be a short time until their control over the industry will be practically complete, and neither the producers, commission men, the retailers nor the public will have much to say regarding it. Many of us believe that the time has come to call a halt and take our bearings. We are willing to sacrifice something of efficiency for the sake of more individuality and a more equitable distribution of the profits. It is time for plain and frank speech if results are to be obtained. It is one of those critical times in our industry when selfish and personal considerations must be laid aside, and the common welfare and safety placed first. Nearly all of us who have spent our lives in some branch of the live stock industry, whether it be as packers, feeders, commission men or breeders, owe most of what we have to it, and just as every man in this world crisis caused by the great European war owes it to his country to do what little he can to help solve the tremendous problems which threaten our civilization and the welfare of the race, so now it is the plain duty of every man in the live stock business to study honestly, diligently and free from personal prejudice, the problems which confront our industry, and having made up his mind where the right and the light lies, declare himself and contribute his mite toward their proper solution.

The control over the markets by a few concerns, including a dominating influence over many of the facilities and accessories at those markets, viz, stock yards, loan companies, banks, live stock journals, rendering companies, etc., has been so thoroughly discussed that a repetition of it would be superfluous. We all recognize it, and the question is, what are we going to do about it? Most of us are overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problem and throw up our hands. On the other hand, the editor of one of our leading live stock journals in Chicago seems to think that the trouble can easily be cured by co-operation. It is no such simple matter. Co-operation is just one of the things which will help. We believe the first step is a careful economic study of the whole question, to be followed later by co-operation, governmental regulation, publicity and more competition. Government ownership of packing houses has

been suggested, but that is far in the future, if it ever comes.

The very recent disposition on the part of leading packers to co-operate with producers is a very hopeful sign and is welcomed. If at last these gentlemen have awakened to a realizing sense of their responsibilities in connection with the other branches of the industry, our labors have not been in vain. It is altogether too early to tell whether this unprecedented interest is only temporary or permanent.

From generalities let us go into detail. You all know the history of the recent movement on the part of the producers to secure better and fairer conditions at the markets. First, at the solicitation of the producers, the Brand Hearing was held in Chicago last November, where the packers failed to appear, showing plainly no desire to co-operate. At that time the efforts of the producers were not taken seriously by the packers, the live stock journals, and, I think I may truthfully say, the commission men. Few men were aware of the wide-spread sentiment that something drastic must be done to improve conditions. This is best shown by the light, not to say contemptuous way in which the Hearing was afterwards referred to. In the common parlance of the Chicago Stock Yards, "No great harm has been done."

Next came the annual meetings of the various live stock associations, where the sentiment among producers was practically unanimous that the hour had struck, the time had come when the producers and those interested in their behalf must find some way of protecting themselves, or else their industry would be ruined. The resolutions passed by these great associations were all of a similar tenor. All were vigorous, and showed a deep-seated feeling of dissatisfaction with and distrust in the methods of the packers. The American National Association at El Paso put their ideas into practical shape by appointing a committee of five men and raising funds to temporarily support them in the first real attempt on the part of the producers to ascertain and enforce a line of justice and fairness between the producers and the few men who buy their products. Since the American National Association took this action, events have moved rapidly. Wide-spread interest has been shown throughout the country. The producers seem to feel that they have found a standard under which they can rally. There is a general con-

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RANCHMEN ARE INTERESTED, WHETHER WANTING TO BUY STOCKERS OR SELL

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FIFTEEN YEARS AT IT

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The Inter-State Live Stock Commission Company, South Omaha

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