well for its stockholders by doing good for the sick. With what became a torrent of press calls, Lilly now found itself exposed to the scorching glare of public scrutiny, facing allegations that Darvon was on one hand even less effective than aspirin in killing pain and on the other, more common even than heroin in killing people.

Companies can be knocked to their knees in such confrontations: The Firestone Tire and Rubber Company was forced to recall its entire 500 line of radial tires last year in the face of compelling evidence that the tires were unsafe. But industry can also win now and then: Two years ago, the Food and Drug Administration ordered a ban of saccharin because it could cause cancer. Soft-drink companies, among others, argued that the risk was small in relation to the benefits of saccharin; they helped persuade Congress to order a moratorium that remains in effect.

Now here was Lilly, its brow to the barrel of a deadly serious adversary. The author of the petition was Dr. Sidney M. Wolfe, director of the Health Research Group in Washington, a low-budget but high-impact consumer interest organization sponsored by Ralph Nader. Management considered Dr. Wolfe's assertions flawed and distorted readings of statistics on drug abuse, as well as a blatant attack on the company's integrity.

Lilly's response to the Wolfe allegations illustrates how companies have to proceed when the debate over them and their products moves outside the comfortable forum of the Government agencies that regulate them. The company would deal more with the question of the hazards of Darvon, than with the older, less inflammatory charges comparing it with aspirin. It would argue the case on the merits, but would also have to keep an eye on public relations. And the Lilly defense would show how two sides in such a dispute can take essentially the same information to reach entirely different conclusions.

"*What petition?*" Mr. Durbin wondered as he fielded the reporter's call. But he got the gist of it, and he promised to get right back. He hurried from his office on the 10th floor of Lilly's meandering headquarters building to the serene, wood-layered 12th. Edgar G. Davis, vice president for corporate affairs, was standing outside his office, ending a phone call at his secretary's desk and trying to get off to a meeting.

The meeting would have to wait a moment now. "That was a red-flag alert," said Mr. Davis. He and Mr. Durbin reported the call to J. Richard Zapapas, group vice president. Mr. Zapapas in turn called Richard D. Wood, chairman and chief executive, who was out of the building attending a meeting of the Lilly Endowment, a foundation set up by heirs of the company founder, Col. Eli Lilly, who won his rank on the Union side in the Civil War. A committee that came to be called the Darvon Working Group would convene for the first time that afternoon, and Mr. Davis would be in charge.

The bulk of Lilly's work ended last week, with completion of reams of documents that make up the company's side of the case, and it has reason to be encouraged. Late last week, Joseph A. Califano Jr., Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, denied Dr. Wolfe's call for a ban on Darvon. The debate, meanwhile, has shifted from the public arena, at least for now, into the F.D.A. and the Drug Enforcement Administration, where Lilly feels it belongs.

At best, however, Lilly won a draw. Mr. Califano didn't ban the drug, but he did order an intensive review that could lead to tighter restraints on its use. Darvon is still immensely profitable, and it accounted for $70 million of corporate revenues last year of $1.85 billion, putting Lilly near the top of the industry. But Darvon's heyday has passed. Sales fell to 1.17 billion pills and capsules last year from a peak of 1.57 billion in 1974, the result in part of studies showing that aspirin was often a better painkiller.

Lilly's experience in defending its product on a public battleground took an enormous toll. "It becomes a gigantic P.R. war with blunt instruments," said Mr. Wood, 52, an urbane, meticulous, rather remote presence in the otherwise collegial environs of the Lilly executive suite. "It's dumb," he said. "It's unfortunate. It's time-consuming. Doing this doesn't create anything. It's defensive."

The effort diverted a score of Lilly executives, full time, from their normal responsibilities: Lilly has been forced to allocate supplies of Mandol, a new antibiotic that was introduced in October, and Mr. Wood blamed the Darvon affair for stalling plans to expand production. Also delayed, he said, was the American debut of Cefaclor, an antibiotic that Lilly now sells only in Britain.

Meanwhile, John Holt, 53, secretary and general counsel of Lilly's pharmaceu-