

Private Members' Business

dian establishment is a characteristic of this country that probably none of us are terribly proud of.

I might point out in that regard, just by way of contrast, that the 12 million co-op members in this country control \$68 billion worth of assets, while the 10 richest people in this country control \$31 billion worth of assets. So those 10 people control half of the assets that the 12 million co-op members do through their co-operative organizations.

It is starting to be recognized, and I and many of my colleagues have done what we can to point out that the "have" and "have not" syndrome in this country is starting to become much more regionalized than perhaps it used to be.

The lead story in the Canadian section of *Maclean's* of October 23 states:

Fragile Roots. Canadians in the Country Feel Abandoned by a Government More Attuned to Urban Voters.

In that article, it states:

Indeed, some critics among the one-third of Canadians who live in communities with fewer than 10,000 people say that government policies designed to cut the federal deficit threaten to destroy the country's hinterland communities. They cite a host of recent initiatives: cutbacks in VIA Rail; closing of rural post offices; tightened unemployment insurance rules; shuttered military bases; and reduced regional development grants. And more blows may be in store they say, pointing to the threat of reduced regional CBC services and cutbacks in federal crop insurance and freight subsidies.

• (1710)

I might add that since then there have been three added to the list: Canada Post increased the freight rates for fly-in food to fly-in communities by 30 per cent; the northern tax benefits look as if they might be taken away, at least a task force has recommended that they should be; and the implications of the changes in the Railway Act as they impact phone service across the country will make it much more difficult for people in isolated areas to have the kind of phone service that you need to participate in any meaningful way in a modern economy and in a modern society.

This is not a hopeless situation and that is why I am proposing this motion and not in any sense of partisanship. Even if members opposite do not accept the full analysis that I presented and indeed, that *Maclean's* reported, I think it is still possible for members looking

around their communities and constituencies to realize that there are some opportunities to make progress that are not being realized.

This is particularly true with respect to co-operatives and community development, the small business sector, and the municipal sector that I identified in the motion. The reason it is not hopeless, and the reason I think this is something we need to look closely at, is because Canada is considered to be a world leader in the areas of co-operative and community development.

People come from all over the world to places like Antigonish or Memorial University or the University of Saskatchewan. Visiting parliamentarians are often very interested in our regional development programs. We are a world leader recognized around the world as having something to say in this area. That is a tribute to the people who have worked very hard in those communities over the years in the co-op sector, the Desjardins credit union movement, the Antigonish movement in the maritimes, the prairie pools, the Federated Co-operative Organization, and the credit unions. All those organizations that are now 12 million strong are organized in the Canadian Co-operative Association.

Many were established in the thirties as a result of economic problems then, but there have also been new frontiers in the co-op area. In the area of housing there are 1,400 co-op housing developments in this country at the present time, in spite of the struggle they have had for recognition. They are functioning very well and are providing an alternative for people who need low-cost housing. Worker co-ops are something we need to get into very I want to refer hon. members to the region of Montragon in Spain which has developed a very modern efficient and competitive economy based on interlocking co-operatives. That is something that all of us should be more aware of.

In our own country we are seeing, for whatever reasons, and in the spirit of non-partisanship, I do not want to dwell on the reasons, but there are profitable businesses in this country that are being closed not because of non-profitability or because the people are not doing a good job, but because of decisions being made elsewhere. We need a vehicle to maintain those jobs and industries in those communities. Worker co-operatives are a positive alternative and the government