

*Canada Co-operatives Association Bill*

debate on the federal co-operatives bill because I feel that this is a historic day for the co-operative movement in Canada. There are many people in my own constituency of Regina East who are very much interested in the success and future of the co-operative movement. I might say that one characteristic of the co-operative movement which is present in my constituency, and which has been present in the co-operative movement all across Canada, is that it has gained support from many quarters of the community. It has gained support from all ethnic groups, from different religious groups and from people of varying political philosophies and outlooks.

The co-operatives, in this sense, have served as a unifying force throughout the community. They have been the vehicle for a useful and important role in furthering community action and in bringing about better conditions and improvements in communities across Canada. My interest in the subject of co-operatives is well known as an active member of co-operative organizations and as a former director and one-time employee of a co-operative organization.

I found it of interest, Mr. Speaker, to refer back to my first speech in the House of Commons, my maiden speech in this chamber on September 23, 1968. Speaking in the debate on the Speech from the Throne, the reference I made to the federal co-operatives bill was as follows:

There are, of course, some items in the Speech from the Throne which I welcome.

That reference is to the 1968 Speech from the Throne. I continued as follows:

The long-awaited federal co-operatives act will be welcomed by most people in Regina East. This act, which has been just around the corner for so many years, will enable co-operatives to play a more adequate role in the national economy. I trust that the promise of such legislation in this session will not meet the same fate as similar promises for such an act on numerous occasions in the past.

As a matter of fact, that promise in that session met the same fate as the promises of previous years. Nevertheless, since we now have the bill before us we can say, "Better late than never". I certainly hope that it will be carried through to final passage and royal assent.

Co-operatives, Mr. Speaker, have played a very important role in the development of my province of Saskatchewan. The story of the co-operative movement is part of the very fabric of the history of the province of Saskatchewan. Indeed, as was pointed out by the previous speaker, the movement played an important role in the province of Nova Scotia. I mentioned that it is a unifying factor in the province. It has welded together people of varying political outlooks, varying religious outlooks, varying ethnic outlooks as well as people with widely diverse backgrounds. The co-operative movement has brought them together. Thus, it has made a very material and important contribution to the development of my own province, Saskatchewan, and to Canada as a whole.

Throughout the history of the development of the co-operative movement in my province, it has concentrated much of its activity in the rural scene. This is where much of the original impetus for the development of the

[Mr. Burton.]

movement took place; and this was probably quite natural because of the nature of the problems that were faced on the rural scene in Saskatchewan. However, in recent years we have seen a transition to a greater interest and participation in urban affairs. I think it is quite evident that the change in population patterns in Canada, the influence of technology and economic developments have all forced co-operatives to change and to develop a new, broader and more extended outlook.

Some reference has already been made, Mr. Speaker, to the length of time it has taken to introduce this legislation into the House. Finally it is now before the House, and I should like to make a passing comment on that matter. I think it is a tribute to the co-operative movement that they very rigidly adhered to the democratic process in terms of their demands and request for this type of legislation. I think it has been stated, and stated accurately, that co-operatives are the very bulwark of democracy and that they enhance and further democracy. I think it is well to remember this particular point during these times of stress in Canada. I think there are lessons to be learned from the patience that was shown by the co-operative movement in pressing for this very important piece of legislation that was so important to them. The lesson is that they have faith in democracy.

• (8:40 p.m.)

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we should take note that there is a need to show a quicker response to economic and social needs in Canada in dealing with our problems at the present time and in the future. Nevertheless, I think it can be said, to the full credit of the co-operatives, that they have adhered and will continue to adhere to the democratic process in carrying on their activities within Canada.

I hope that this legislation will be passed before too long. It will, of course, pose new challenges to the co-operative movement. They will be called upon to fill a wider role in Canadian society and to come up with some answers regarding the needs of society. They must grow correspondingly in areas of need and in terms of their own efficiency of operation. I hope that the bill now before us is evidence of a growing federal interest in the co-operative movement and the role that can be played by co-operatives in dealing with our social and economic problems.

We should examine the present role of co-operatives in Canada and the new role that we see for the co-operative movement. As I mentioned earlier, the co-operative movement has played a traditional role on the rural scene. That is where some of the roots of the movement are, particularly with respect to those people engaged in the agricultural and fishing industries. Today there are new roles that have to be played by the co-operative movement. They illustrate why this legislation is necessary and overdue. In the area of urban needs and today's consumer economy there are many needs that can be filled more effectively through the activities of the co-operative movement.