

Canada Co-operatives Association Bill

national activities. Manitoba was the first province to incorporate a co-operatives act in 1887, followed by Quebec in 1906. The co-operative movement in Canada was first launched in Stellarton, Nova Scotia, in 1861, and since that time has grown to the point where, as the minister mentioned, it does business today in excess of \$2 billion.

The co-operative movement in Canada has a membership of over 1.5 million people. These people are totally involved in co-operatives of one form or another under the headings of marketing and purchasing; fishermen's co-operatives in the province of Newfoundland and the other Atlantic provinces, as well as in the province of British Columbia; service co-operatives; and production co-operatives. The need for legislation at the federal level was thus quite clear and in line with the continuing needs of the co-operative movement in Canada, needs that have been manifest for the past 50 years. This prompts one to ask why it has taken so long to introduce such legislation.

I should like to find out what became, for example, of the recommendations of the royal commission on co-operatives which was set up in 1945. I do not think the minister made any reference to that royal commission, the recommendations of which have gone largely ignored, though coincidentally perhaps some of them may have been incorporated into the bill now before the House.

This bill is largely of a technical nature and will provide mainly, as the minister has said, for the operations of co-operatives in a way that is substantially different from the operations of other corporations. Hence, co-operatives will be removed from the jurisdiction of the Corporation Act. There will be this system of registration rather than the requirement of parliamentary legislation and letters patent.

There are a number of questions of a technical nature which we hope to put to the minister, his officials and the witnesses who will be called when the bill is before the committee. At first glance it seems to me that, apart from the discretionary powers referred to by the minister which he will be assuming under this legislation, it is not clear whether or not, a division within his department will be established to handle the operations of co-operative associations. Obviously this will be necessary and will automatically flow from the bill. I notice the minister is shaking his head, but unfortunately a shaking of the head is not recorded by *Hansard*.

Mr. Basford: It is a shaking of the head in the affirmative.

• (4:20 p.m.)

Mr. McGrath: I hope he will clarify this point when he has a chance to speak before the legislation passes this stage.

The question that comes to mind is, since we are setting up this type of a structure why not create the post of registrar to be responsible for co-operatives? In other words, we could have a registrar of co-operatives

[Mr. McGrath.]

instead of having this power largely assumed by the minister as now envisaged by this legislation. To my mind the minister was very vague on the kind of consultation which has been held with provinces regarding some of the objections raised when the original bill was brought before Parliament in 1908, objections that were of a constitutional nature. I should like to know whether or not some of these objections have any foundation at the present time.

I salute the co-operative movement in Canada for the good work it is doing all across the country. We notice this bill will help to facilitate this work and make it much easier in terms of federal responsibility. We cannot help but wonder why it has taken Parliament so long to act on a matter that is obviously so important. In conclusion, I would again plead with the minister and his colleagues to give earnest and serious consideration to the necessity of establishing in this House a standing committee on consumer affairs in order that we might have the opportunity, not only of dealing with this particular legislation but of dealing with many important areas which come within the minister's jurisdiction, and which are so vital and important to the consumers of Canada.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of our group to welcome this legislation and say to the minister that we will be as helpful as we can at all stages of the proceedings on this bill. First, I should like to add my comments to those of the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) regarding the disposition of this bill after it has received second reading. As indicated on the order paper, the bill is to be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs. My question to the minister is, why should this be so? I know that the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs is something of an orphan and its measures are shifted to different committees for consideration, but it seems to me that usually the minister appears before the committee on health and welfare.

I do not think this bill should fall within the prerogatives of a lot of lawyers on the Justice and Legal Affairs Committee. Just as war is too important to be left in the hands of generals, this legislation concerning co-operatives is too important to be left in the hands of lawyers, particularly since the number of lawyers who have some knowledge, feeling and understanding about co-operatives is so small. I would feel much more comfortable, and I would hope the minister would also, if this bill were to be considered by a different committee than the one proposed.

At the outset, let me say that finally we are getting a bill which provides for federal incorporation of co-operatives. As has been said, we have been waiting some 62 or 63 years for this. I have not been waiting that long, and certainly the minister and the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) have not been waiting that long because we are not that old, but the people in the co-operative movement in Canada have been waiting that long.