

*Canada Co-operatives Association Bill*

very interesting to read. But there is no need to study it in depth to see that it should make it possible to control quite well the operations of these associations.

[English]

It was interesting to note the comments made this afternoon suggesting that reference of this bill be to another committee. The minister has stated he does not have a committee under his department, but the minister on his left tonight, whose responsibilities have been greatly reduced, could put half a committee at his disposal; and, really, consumer and corporate affairs seem to be much more important. It is also interesting that there are four ministers in the House tonight, Mr. Speaker. It is not very often we see so many here.

It is my understanding that the Co-operative Union of Canada has had consultations with officials of the department urging passage of legislation of this general type. I understand there are some objections concerning its details, but these things can be ironed out in committee. As was pointed out by the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) and others, basically we have no objection to this bill. I understand that co-ops in general now fall under provincial legislation, and if they operate in more than one province they come under the Corporations Act. Bill C-177 deals with the interprovincial co-operative movement. I am glad that the bill will provide protection to co-operatives which use the word "co-op" in their title. Many so-called co-ops have sprung up in recent years, such as housing co-ops and other, but they really are not co-operatives in the true sense.

This bill provides the framework within which the co-operative movement can expand, but as I read the 107 pages of the bill I see the word "minister" far too many times.

**Mr. Basford:** But he is a good minister.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Alexander:** That is the overstatement of the year.

● (8:20 p.m.)

**Mr. Comeau:** The minister has to stick up for himself; nobody else will. What bothers me a little is that the word "minister" seems to be in there too many times. The bill appears to give to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs—not particularly this one, but whoever it may be—detailed powers and, quite frankly, I do not understand why all the regulations have to go through the hands of the minister. In that sense the bill is too dictatorial and this aspect of it must be well scrutinized in committee. I will give the minister the benefit of the doubt and hope that this will be exactly the type of legislation that the co-ops want, but it seems to me that the minister has too much control under the bill as it stands.

I should like to know whether the existing co-ops have the choice to opt out. I know there is a clause in the bill about transmission, and so on. As I understand it, at present the co-ops operate under the Corporations Act,

[Mr. Comeau.]

and I wonder whether they can still do that and whether there are any real advantages in operating under this new bill. It would be interesting to see the type of bureaucracy set up to deal with a bill as detailed as C-177. Although the word "minister" appears in every second paragraph, I am sure the minister cannot be expected to attend to every little detail. Therefore, it will be interesting to see exactly the type of body established to deal with this legislation. I hope it can be done without too many civil servants.

**Mr. Baldwin:** Don't kid yourself.

**Mr. Comeau:** The hon. member asked me not to kid myself, but I just mention this to warn the minister not to set up the type of bureaucracy we see so often around here.

**Mr. McGrath:** The fastest growing empire in the west.

**Mr. Bell:** Like the Prime Minister's office.

**Mr. Comeau:** I have very high regard for the co-operative movement, which is certainly important to the community life in Canada—to the Atlantic area, the west and indeed to all provinces of Canada. The Maritime Co-operative, for example, which is involved in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland, has done a tremendous amount of good in the communities and has been very successful. The United Maritime Fishermen has also done an effective job and I hope it will be able to continue its good work under this bill. I have a very high regard for these co-operative movements and hope this bill will give them a boost and generate the interest of the public.

As was pointed out this afternoon, the co-operative movement was started in Nova Scotia. We have now a very extensive program at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, and the work being done there is to be praised. A few Canadian universities offer courses on co-operatives and some conduct extension work in this field. None of these, however, offers a course as extensive as that of St. Francis Xavier. Since the early 1930s it has offered an extension program to organize and assist co-operatives, and in more recent years a variety of courses have been developed to train people in the work of co-operatives. Some of these are short courses for directors and managers of existing co-operatives and credit unions; others are offered as an integral part of university work. In addition, special courses are offered for visitors from other countries who wish to learn about co-operatives in Canada. There is the Coady International Institute, for example.

I believe that the co-operative movement is to be encouraged, but we must be careful about the type of bureaucracy set up to deal with this legislation. I hope the committee will scrutinize the bill and make sure there is not too much control by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, whoever he may be at the relevant time. An interesting point was brought out by the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacIn-