

The growth of the co-operative movement in Canada has been largely due to the farmer's struggle to improve his bargaining position. Consequently, the greatest development of co-operatives has been in rural areas, most notably in the marketing of farm products and the purchasing of farm supplies but also in the production and service spheres, including artificial insemination, community pastures, seed-cleaning and transportation. Co-operatives also provide farmers with groceries, credit, electricity, natural gas, insurance and many other consumer services.

Co-operative activity among urban families got off to a later start but has made significant progress. Credit unions and *caisses populaires* virtually blanket the country. Co-operative insurance is also thriving from coast to coast, while co-operative housing has made progress in selected areas. Co-operative grocery-stores have enjoyed great success in certain cities, particularly in Western Canada.

Early history

Agricultural organizations possessing some co-operative features existed in the earliest Canadian settlements. Most of these were informal manifestations of co-operation, such as barn-raising bees, exchanges of labour, etc., and were economic necessities in the pioneer way of life,

where neighbours had to depend on each other in order to survive. The earliest true co-operatives did not make their appearance in Canada until the late nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, in 1844, the weavers of Rochdale in England established the following basic principles for the co-operative form of business organization:

- (1) open membership (all who could benefit from the service might join);
- (2) democratic control (each member had only one vote);
- (3) limited return on capital at a modest rate;
- (4) distribution of surplus on the basis of patronage;
- (5) promotion of education.

A co-operative was opened by coal-miners in Stellarton, Nova Scotia, in 1861 and at least nine more were opened in other communities in that province before 1900. None of these survived the First World War. The still-existing British Canadian Co-operative Society was organized at Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia, in 1906; it is the oldest co-operative, and one of the most successful, engaged in the purchasing of consumer goods in Canada today.

In Quebec, development of the co-operative movement began with the formation of a farmers' mutual fire-insurance company in 1852. Co-operative insurance soon spread to the life-insurance field, the first fra-