

Private Members' Business

If we look at worker co-operatives as a whole, there are approximately, at this time in Canada, 15,000 workers who are members of such worker co-operatives, with about \$300 million in annual sales. That means that we have approximately 400 worker co-operatives across the country.

These have been in Canada since the 1940s and they can be seen in such areas as heavy equipment repairs, textiles and furs, industry and wood-cutting, market gardening, building trades, and maintenance. There are actors, musicians, people in the consulting field, computer programmers, people in the print and electronic media, school bus contractors, people in towing, people in blueberry picking, cedar shingle production, restaurants, graphic art, food processing, bakeries, warehousing, and, of course, retail activities, to mention just a few.

Across the country we have a great many examples of social ownership developing. This motion suggests that it is important to protect and to extend this important role of social ownership. In the time I have left, I want to explain how it can be possible to extend this important role.

A special committee of federal and provincial officials has been meeting during over recent years. I give credit to the federal government for responding in a positive way to the suggestions of the Canadian co-operative movement for such activities. It has not moved as fast as I would have liked it to, but it has taken the issue seriously.

A special committee of federal and provincial officials has recommended three ways by which to improve, preserve, and extend this kind of social ownership. This special committee first has called on governments to provide equality of treatment so that worker co-operatives get the same kind of treatment from our financial institutions that small or medium-sized businesses receive. This would require the amending of some current legislation, some regulations that specifically limit the development of worker co-operatives.

Second, this committee has suggested that government should provide equality of opportunity. In other words, it should ensure that co-operatives are considered in the development and implementation of new programs which the government is putting into effect.

The co-operative movement, for instance, testified when the amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act were being discussed, and I notice my colleague across the aisle, from Burlington, who was part of this discussion with respect to C-21. At that time the co-operative movement said: "Look, as originally drafted, these changes to the unemployment insurance regulations were not going to make it possible". At least it left it ambiguous whether it would be possible for members of worker co-operatives to use their UIC entitlement, as would be possible for those who were trying to start small enterprises to use that same entitlement to start worker co-operatives.

It has now proven to be the case that it will be possible in some of the regulatory changes which were made as a consequence of the presentations put forward by the Canadian co-operative movement. That is the kind of thing which has to take place to see that we do not have discrimination in regulations, that we have instead equality of opportunity.

Finally, this committee has suggested that governments have to overtly encourage the formation of worker co-ops. It seems to me that this requires what we as a party suggested five years ago in a report which came from an action group, which I co-chaired, called "Jobs Action Group", which aimed to provide some new bottom-up ways to increase employment opportunities, especially in some of the poorer regions of this country. To do that, however, will require some financial commitments on the part of government.

I want to finish my comments today by noting some of the suggestions which have come from the Worker-Ownership Foundation in Toronto which has set out a policy agenda direction in which government should move to provide this kind of financial support. It is something which we in this party certainly endorse very strongly.

I should say, of course, my colleague who is our spokesperson on co-operatives is here. I have to be especially careful that I do not make any mistakes in what I am saying as I carry this argument further.

The suggestion from the Worker-Ownership Foundation is that we need the implementation of a program that provides short term seed financing for specialized technical assistance people to come and work with newly establishing worker co-operatives. We also need the development of a tax credit that will partially offset the