

Adjournment Debate

CO-OPERATIVES—TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION ON WORKERS' CO-OPERATIVES. (B) CONSULTATION WITH CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. Lyle S. Kristiansen (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, on May 30 I asked some questions of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) regarding the May 29 task force recommendations on a co-operative development strategy for Canada. That report, which arose out of the Throne Speech last December and a committee financed by the federal Government in January of this year, produced an excellent report, the Report of the National Task Force on Co-operative Development. I would like to make the Government aware that both I and my Party are in strong support of many of those recommendations. The Government has had at least a couple of weeks to have an initial look at the report. We hope that it will perhaps give us a more clear and forthright response, at least in terms of direction, than was obtainable either from the Prime Minister on May 30 or from the Minister responsible for economic development when he was asked a question on May 29, immediately following the presentation of the task force report by my colleague, the Member for Prince Albert (Mr. Hovdebo).

● (2120)

The recommendations of the task force dealt with a number of areas. I will quote from their release of May 29. It reads:

As priorities the task force recommends increased development in four areas of national concern where co-operatives have "significant undeveloped potential"—worker-owned enterprises, health services, fisheries, and housing.

One of the areas which I am most personally concerned with as a representative of an area of British Columbia with a very high level of unemployment and a very strong spirit of independence, which is suffering under a rather reactionary provincial government at this point, has regard to the lengthy sections of the task force report which refer to the success of worker co-ops in the Basque area of Spain. Anyone who comes from my region cannot help but draw certain parallels between the situation in which we find ourselves in the west Kootenays of British Columbia and that confronted by the people of the Basque for several years under Franco. By the process of worker co-ops, during that period of 30 to 40 years, they have been able to become one of the most industrialized and prosperous areas of that country, in spite of a Government which tended to victimize them on occasion.

Particularly I would like to make reference to the three major recommendations of the task force on worker co-ops. The report reads:

The task force puts forward major recommendations to help spur the development of worker co-operatives:

A support system should be created "under the direction of the co-operative system but in partnership with the federal Government and interested provincial governments".

A steering committee should be set up with representatives of both the established co-operative movement and emerging worker co-operatives to formulate a plan for creating a regionally-based worker co-operative development agency. The plan would specify respective roles of the co-operative system, federal and provincial governments, and local worker co-op organizing groups.

The federal Government should endorse worker co-operatives as a priority vehicle for employment generation. It should also make funding assistance available to the co-operative movement for the staff work of the steering committee, for regional development assistance agencies, and for the creation of a pool of start-up funds or start-up guarantees for individual employee-owned co-operatives.

There are a number of other recommendations. There are some 14 pages within the main report on the establishment of worker co-ops alone.

When the Parliamentary Secretary opposite replies, perhaps he could give some assurance in answer to the other question which I posed to the Prime Minister to which I got an interesting, but not particularly relevant reply. It has to do with the absence of consultation with organized labour by the task force. If we want to see the maximum utilization of the concept of worker co-operatives we must attempt to enlist the co-operation and support, because there will naturally be some suspicion, of those people in organized trade unions in order to facilitate the logical and orderly growth of a principle which I think many people on the Government side, as well as many of us in the Opposition, support. For years and years there has been a joint labour co-op committee within the Canadian Labour Congress. There are many other examples of long-standing, at least consultation if not always active, co-operation between those two sections of the popular movement in Canada. It would be very regrettable if we missed the opportunity to maximize the consent and support for such a worthwhile concept. It may indeed hold a lot of economic and political answers to maintaining democracy, both in the economic and political sphere in this country and to help resolve some of the problems of severe economic dislocation that some of our regions have suffered.

● (2125)

I look forward to hearing some assurance, not only this evening but in the upcoming campaign, that it will be one of the major subjects addressed by the Government. It will certainly be a subject to which we will give active discussion during that period. Hopefully, with whatever government we are blessed or obsessed following the campaign, we will be in a position to take concerted action to realize these constructive dreams that offer the best of all possible worlds for the benefit of the people of Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Rolland Dion (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State for Economic and Regional Development and Minister of State for Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to have this opportunity to answer the question put by the Member for Kootenay-West (Mr. Kristiansen).

Mr. Speaker, the report ordered after the Speech from the Throne last December was published on May 29 and contains, of course, a number of recommendations. Tonight I would like to comment on the Government's position for a number of years on co-operative movements. In this connection, I would like to quote some resolutions adopted at the National Conven-