

*Co-operative Energy Act*

at which members of the movement looked closely was the investment by the co-operatives movement in energy development.

Bill C-116, to establish the Co-operative Energy Corporation, is a much bigger step for the co-operative movement than people realize. On many occasions I have been told that co-operatives are into everything, and "why not energy?" Co-operatives have actually been into energy. In many ways they certainly are into everything from cradle to the grave. As a matter of fact, they are involved in maternity and daycare centres right through to funeral homes. Why, then, is this venture into energy different? To understand the differences it is necessary to look at the origins of the co-operative movement.

How and why were co-operatives formed? Those of us who grew up on the prairies are vividly aware of co-operatives and credit unions. Co-operatives were spawned during hard times. They are the result of the need of producers for fair prices for their products. The pools on the prairies grew out of the need for protection from the gouging of line elevator companies that were handling producers' grain. The credit union movement started in Lévis, Quebec, in 1900 and grew, because previously people were unable to obtain money from banks even at high interest rates.

As democratic socialists in Canada, we face many of the same problems the co-operative movement faces. How can we develop our basic belief that we are our brothers' keepers and that through co-operation and sharing we can make a better life for everyone?

The co-operator, like the democratic socialist, has some difficulty translating his belief into an organization which will survive in the capitalist system. That system is based on materialistic gain and greed at the expense of others and is diametrically opposed to the principles of co-operatives. Back in the early days people found they had to protect themselves from that greed in order to survive with some security for their families. On the economic level people formed co-ops and credit unions. On the political level people formed political parties. The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, the old CCF, grew out of the despair of the depression and, in many ways, out of the co-operative movement on the prairies. I recommend to all hon. members the play "Paper Wheat" which is the story of co-ops and the development of the wheat pools on the prairies.

The New Democratic Party has always recognized that its aims were common to those of the co-operative movement. We share many of its ideals and we share the same struggle to survive in a dog-eat-dog environment. Consequently, the New Democratic Party has done what it could to support the co-operative movement.

Only in provinces where there have been New Democratic governments are there departments of co-operatives. In the House yesterday I asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) a question—which he refused to answer—about whether his government would establish a co-operative department. His refusal to answer perhaps shows the limited interest the

government has in this particular area. Nonetheless, I repeat my question: Will this government form a department which will provide a place to which co-operatives can go?

I am speaking today in the House of Commons about this bill to establish Co-Enerco because my leader, the leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent), has recognized the tremendous contribution and importance of co-ops and has appointed me as spokesman for co-operatives. This is the first co-operatives critic post in the federal Parliament.

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Today we are debating the Co-Enerco bill which is another attempt by the co-operative movement to protect people from an uncaring economic environment. It is attempting to deal with the capitalist system by modifying it rather than by replacing it. As a socialist, I cannot entirely agree with this support of the system but I have nothing but admiration for the groups of people in the co-operative movement who are trying to cope with the system. They are trying to adapt to the present economic order and they are trying to make changes to the system to match their principles.

What is a co-operative? Co-operatives provide an organizational framework of structures and processes that enable people to co-operate with one another. Co-operatives are both associations of people and economic organizations, with social and economic goals. They attempt to merge political democracy with economic activity to create economic democracy. Co-operatives are distinctive because, first, they are owned and controlled by their primary users, consumers, producers and workers, rather than by investors. Second, control is based on democratic values and various structures are used to enable member participation and representation. Third, the benefits from the operations and resources flow to members as users of services, not as investors. That is why I said at the beginning that this is a greater step for the co-ops than many people realize. The benefits flow to the members as users of the service, not as investors. In the case of Co-Enerco, the co-ops are indeed in a new area because they are becoming investors.

Anyone trying to deal with the economic problems we face today should be supported, and the co-operative movement in this venture is setting a positive example for Canada. A New Democratic Party economic task force travelled across the country last year. The only consistent notes of optimism we heard on that tour came from co-op groups—from Federated Co-operatives, the wheat pools, even small co-op farms and co-op housing groups.

In these troubled economic times, however, we must ask why it became necessary for the co-ops to enter the energy field to this extent. The government assured Canadians that we could be self-sufficient in energy in a very short time, but the government has abdicated its responsibility and cannot achieve that objective in the manner it planned.

Co-operatives cannot live without planning. They face many difficulties if their future is not planned. It is by planning and sharing that co-operatives can protect their members from the