

# NEWS RELEASE

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## Lords give Gareth's Bill safe passage

Industrial and Provident Societies Bill is Carter's swansong

The Industrial and Provident Societies Bill, the Private Members Bill sponsored by Co-operative Party Chairman Gareth Thomas MP, has been safely steered through the House of Lords by a group of Peers with strong links to the Co-operative movement.

No amendments were tabled during the Second Reading on the night of Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> May, making the Bill's eventual arrival onto the statute book a safe bet.

Lord Graham presented the Bill to the House, and paid tribute to the work of Gareth Thomas MP in steering the Bill through its earlier stages. He said: "He has performed a Herculean task, holding scores of meetings both inside and outside Parliament. He has proved to be an operator of high skill and I congratulate him warmly".

Lord Carter, in his last engagement as Labour's Chief Whip in the Lords, underlined the Government's support for the Bill. He said: "We must not underestimate what the Bill will achieve: a more robust de-mutualisation procedure should create more confidence and strength. The ability to update industrial and provident legislation through secondary legislation will ensure that the legal framework for societies need not fall further behind that for companies. In time, the Bill will have a profound effect in allowing industrial and provident society legislation to catch up in areas in which it is felt appropriate, helping to create a genuinely level playing field with companies and across the mutual sector."

One of the finest speeches was made by Lord Fyfe, who told the House: “Action is necessary to protect, in particular, new co-operative endeavour, which is spreading all over the UK and beyond. I believe that it is absolutely vital that people have a sympathetic regime, which will foster the creation of new co-operatives and encourage them to prosper in the years ahead. The Co-operative movement has a noble history...and it intends to have a prosperous and relevant future.” He also reminded the House of the notorious Lanica bid for the Co-operative Group in 1996, which he had been instrumental in fending off as Chairman of CWS. The Bill would do much to protect the Co-operative movement against similar predatory actions, he said.

Remarkably, three of the Labour and Co-operative Peers who took part in the debate had previously held the Chair at Co-operative Congress. They were: Lord Fyfe, Lord Morris and Lord Edmonton. Lady Nichol was on the Woolsack during the debate.

National Secretary Peter Hunt said: “The Co-operative Party faced a real test of its strength in the Commons earlier this year. We passed that test with flying colours. Now we have shown that we are good at mobilising support in the Lords too. It makes me particularly proud that Lord Carter, who has been a fine Chief Whip and will remain a valued ally, represented the Government in the debate”.

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**More information:** Oliver Fry, Media and Campaigns Officer Tel: 020 7367 4158 Mob: 07855 456 453