

## Present Co-op rent agreements to be honoured by UNB

By NEIL DICKIE

Low occupancy rates coupled with a long evident lack of co-operative spirit have killed the operations of the uptown N.B. Residence Co-operative Ltd. A transfer of responsibility to the university is expected around Nov. 1, pending a final audit.

Occupancy rates this year at the Co-op Buildings at 780 and 810 Montgomery Streets have declined to 70 per cent, said Co-op General Manager Mike Robertson. The "Co-op" could continue their uptown operations — with an across the board rent increase of 25 to 30 per cent he said, but doing so would be pointless, as co-operative spirit — the basis for any co-operative enterprise — no longer exists in the buildings. In fact, he indicated, there is some doubt that a working co-operative spirit ever did exist at the "Co-op".

What is finally happening now said Robertson, "are the natural consequences of what happened a long time ago". He said that the "basic aims" of the Co-op — decent accommodation at a reasonable price — on a co-operative basis — "have failed".

Robertson said that he thought that originally the Fredericton Co-op idea had been thought of with "mature" persons in mind. The buildings are now dirty by and large and in a poor state of repair. Robertson indicated that present Co-op residents are young and probably not consistent with the type of person Co-op originators had in mind. Residents of the buildings are expected to do their own cleaning, and some maintenance work.

Robertson stated that in their "letter of intent" read at the last UNB Board of Governors meeting (in August) he said basically that "there is no grassroots support for a Co-op here, so lets not try and impose one."

However, he said he would not be quick to condemn present residents. "It would be interesting to see what would happen if maintenance men were removed from other university residences for a week. Maybe they could clean up themselves — I don't know".

A member of the Co-op Board of Directors, Ruth Fraser, stressed that the University is NOT "taking over" the Co-op. N. B. Residence Co-op Ltd., leases the uptown Co-op premises from UNB. Rents collected by the Co-op are used in turn to pay the rent to UNB. The premises on Montgomery Street are being "given back" she said. "That was the association's decision, and not UNB's".

The association is liable for any excessive damage done to the building. "I wish more people would realize this".

Fraser noted that the Fredericton Co-op enterprises have been the only ones in Canada to have consistently "paid their bills". She termed the transfer of responsibility "too bad it was an experiment that failed". Running the buildings on a co-operative basis has been proven to be impractical she said, "maybe it could work under (standard) residence rules". Robertson said that continued financial responsibility on the part of the association would jeopardize the downtown co-operatives on Union and Aberdeen Streets.

In turnover Fraser said, "it will be agreed that present rent agreements must be honoured by the university for the duration (of

the year). It is only fair to assume that UNB will not be as lenient with some peoples' behaviour as we have been".

"Co-op rents should be lower" she said, "but aren't because of abuse of the premises from inside and outside". She attributed this to the type of people that the uptown operations tend to attract. She noted peculiar attitudes widespread within the buildings, particularly 810 Montgomery, such as residents regularly allowing strangers to wander around their rented units at will.

Unsecured ashtrays set by the elevator doors on all seven floors at 810 Montgomery last year were stolen she said. "They were replaced by very heavy cement ashtrays which were broken." She indicated that this occurrence was indicative of residents attitudes.

Fraser noted that the "married" building (780 Montgomery) is in "very good condition, but that 810 cost us more than it should have. The married building has always been sort of a modulated society. If they co-operated they did so in small cliquish groups and not for the good of the whole association".

Fraser said however that "if 810 (single students building) had been as well looked after as 780 the turnover would not be necessary".

She stated that in the first and second years of operations residents of the Co-op on Montgomery "liked the set up. However, co-operative instincts later took the wrong direction".

"Co-operation began taking place within small peer groups rather than within the association as a whole. Conflicts began occurring such as 'freaks vs. straights' and 'stereo players vs. sleepers'. Co-op residents (in 810) have not been particularly studious," she said. "People used to get stoned and

hang out the windows to see people going to their eight thirties. Very few went to their classes but we did win the monopoly marathons at UNB 3 years in a row".

Mike Robertson indicated that he expects the university will undertake renovations at 810 Montgomery. "Structural defects such

as leaks in the roof, need to be altered as well as inferior fixtures — the fault of the contractors according to Robertson. He cited the example of the faucet-stove units in the twin suites that cannot be removed and cleaned behind. "No wonder we had cockroach problems".

The President of N.B. Residence Co-op Ltd., Fred Voegli, said that it is expected that the university will assume responsibility for "any deficits" incurred by the Montgomery Street complex — "if there are any; so that the very successful operations of downtown Co-op houses can carry on".



Photo by Ron Ward

Pending a final audit, the university will be taking over the co-op on Montgomery St. on November 1. Low occupancy rates and poor co-operative spirit have forced the move.

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