

Big business honours Bethune

A contradictory celebration for a contradictory man

By JULIAN BELTRAME

Saturday was an uncharacteristically sunny and warm September day at Bethune, the sight of one of the college's most important events since its inception in 1971 when it ceased to be York's college "G".

An odd assortment of roughly 300 people came to the unveiling of Mac Reynold's bust of Norman Bethune, braving both mild and outrageous statements.

There was Mitchell Sharp, who sometimes takes over the federal house when the top cat's away, and Chan Wen-chin, the Chinese ambassador to Canada. There was also Ted Allan, who wrote a book (*The Scapel, The Sword*) about Bethune and who knew him as well as anyone did, and representatives of C.P. Air and INCO, who donated the bust to the college.

PRESSING ENGAGEMENTS

Conspicuous for their absence were Mayor David Crombie and Premier Bill Davis, both of whom had other pressing engagements.

There was even a telegram from James Faulkner, the Secretary of State, and, of course, H. Ian Macdonald.

Not the least conspicuous of the lot was a group called The Bethune Health Group which came all the way from the University of Toronto to hand out a leaflet condemning C.P. Air and INCO's participation in the event.

In all, the wide range of political and economic sectors in the nation was represented, and rightfully so. Norman Bethune "was a complex man" as has often been stated: he was filled with contradictions.

Bethune was an adventurer, romanticist, humanitarian, socialist, womanizer, capitalist, and egoist. If some of these things are contradictory, it was only fitting that they clash at Bethune College, where the true Norman Bethune was being unveiled.

USUAL FARE

After the five o'clock unveiling, there were the usual polite and diplomatic speeches by Sharp and Chang (two diplomats from way back), and Kenneth Clarke and Donald Cameron, representing INCO and C.P. Air respectively.

But no-one really said anything until Ioan Davies, Bethune's master, took the microphone in his hands. He summed up the event with a reference to an old Bertolt Brecht story. Brecht, who needed a car, entered a jingle contest sponsored by Mercedes-Benz. One of the conditions of the contest was that the winning jingle be written on the side of the prize car. Brecht, having won the car, complied with this specification and, on the other side, printed "Down with the filthy capitalists".

It was an uncomfortable moment for the assembled "filthy capitalists", for Davies was comparing himself to Brecht. On the one hand, he was receiving the bust of Bethune; on the other, he was saying "Down with the filthy capitalists".

A COMMUNIST

He reminded the crowd that Bethune was not only a humanitarian, a romantic, and an adventurer - he was a communist. Bethune was a member of the Communist Party of Canada when he went to Spain to fight against Franco during the Spanish civil war, and he was sponsored by the Communist Party of the U.S.A. when he travelled half-way around the world to enlist with Mao in 1938.

"Bethune's life," stated Davies, "was a trial based on failure, failure and achievement. As far as the Chinese were concerned, the result was a success; as far as Canadians are concerned, until a few years ago, it was a failure."

"Canadians are now asked to assess someone, whom they considered a failure, against the Chinese idea of success."

The official function ended - and the feast began.

On the third floor of Bethune, the guests mingled daintily in the broadloomed L-shaped lounge, sipping occasionally from their glasses or coffee-cups, occasionally gazing out the windows towards the west end of the campus and vying for the attention of the important people - Chan

Wen-chin, Mitchell Sharp and H. Ian Macdonald.

TWEED AND DENIM

Among the tweed suits, Mao jackets and the long gowns of the upper-crust ladies, one could occasionally spot a student in bluejeans and jacket. Students were invited to the unveiling, the reception and the dinner, although dinner would cost them \$5.

It was more than worth it. Commercial Caterers proved that, for \$10 a plate, they could put together a meal with the best of them.

When dinner and wine were over with, the speeches began, and so did some of the fireworks.

Henning Sorensen, a correspondent during the Spanish civil war who eventually stayed as interpreter with Bethune while Bethune was attempting to establish a medical service, told us that Bethune "had a passion for efficiency" and that he wanted humanity to function well.

FULL STATURE

"He had courage, boldness and, although

of the doctor after his death from an infection suffered while he was operating.

"He knew," she had said in a sorrowful and meek voice, "we all knew he would die. We wept. We carried his body, frail it had become. The people gathered. We said it is our doctor, it is our doctor Bethune."

REVOLUTION

Then Juliani burst in with a loud and powerful voice.

"I am an artist," he proclaimed. "An artist's duty is to arise the sleepers. He makes uneasy the static, the set and the still. In a world terrified of change he preaches revolution, the principle of life."

Ted Allan, author of *The Scapel, The Sword*, gave another view of Norman Bethune. He tried to imagine what Bethune would say if he were alive to-day.

"Bethune would have died laughing at the fact that International Nickel and Canadian Pacific were sponsoring the bust, and then he would have welcomed them. He would have welcomed their alliance."

Putting words in Bethune's mouth, Allan

idea."

Allan saw that Bethune would not be totally ecstatic about the Bethune bust or the ceremonies that followed.

"Bethune would say praise less and act more on behalf of those who are oppressed and hungry," said Allan.

"We do not help our brothers and sisters in Latin America, Africa and Asia who are still without the basic requirements which make life happy, dignified and free."

BETHUNE'S ACHIEVEMENT

Allan summed up Bethune's achievement in a rather lighthearted but perceptive way. "Imagine a man who inspired 800 million Chinese and who was a Canadian. Only we in Canada understand that joke."

Read into the record was a letter sent for the occasion by Dr. Bethune's nurse who was with him while he was in China, attending to the wounded during Mao's worst period.

"To put into words how I feel about Dr. Bethune," wrote Jean (Ewen) Kovich, "is almost impossible. For a time I was more or less like his shadow, 24 hours a day."

"That he is honoured so graciously by the People's Republic of China is his due. He identified himself with the great eighth Route Army, he sometimes starved with them; he suffered cold and frustration. All of these things went with him to his death."

"Some men wander around in a vacuum most of their days, then suddenly a situation faces them. They handle it with an endurance and a fortitude they did not know they had."

BARE HANDS

"They are marked - their life's purpose is stuffed into a small period of months, days and hours. So it was with Bethune, for who can know the sorrow of having nothing but one's bare hands to work with, in the high mountains, completely surrounded by Japanese garrisons. He and the soldiers of the great eighth Route Army struggled and endured hardships that Canadians could not envision, never mind endure."

"There he died, a long time ago. Now, Dr. Bethune has come back to Canada to live."

The night did not go by without its tense moments. As representatives of INCO and C.P. Air, sponsors of the bust and of the evening, sat silently in their chairs, the Bethune Health Group from U. of T. ripped into the corporations.

EXPLOITATION

"INCO is exploiting Canadian workers," they said. "Dozens of workers have died of lung and sinus cancers because of working for INCO. INCO has supplied nickel for the U.S. war machine's activities throughout the world."

"Countless Chinese workers, brought to Canada as cheap labour, died in the building of the CPR," they continued when they had finished with INCO.

"Sponsorship by these corporations is a desecration of the memory of Norman Bethune, and an insult to the people of the world who are struggling against imperialism."

The abstractions and exaggerations aside, Bethune day at Bethune was a singular event.

DIFFERENT PEOPLE

"Norman Bethune was a complex man" Ioan Davies had said, and certainly he was a man of many contradictions. It was more than that Bethune could show different sides of his personality to different people - that he could be diplomatic to one person and a radical to another - it was that Bethune was many different people at different times in his life.

What Bethune College unveiled, Saturday, was mostly Norman Bethune, the communist and selfless hero, who died for a cause he believed in more strongly than any he had previously held.

It was perhaps fitting that Bethune died, while devoting himself to his patients, forgetting to attend to himself. An innocent scratch (Bethune did not take measures to prevent an infection) killed him on November 12, 1939. (Ten years later, he became a national hero in China. And now, 34 years later, he is about to become one in his own country.)



Mitchell Sharp and Chan Wen-chin, Chinese ambassador to Canada, at the unveiling of the bust of Bethune at Bethune College, Saturday.

...the wounds...

"Are wars of aggression, wars for the conquest of colonies, just big business? Yes, it would seem so, however much the perpetrators of such national crimes seek to hide their true purpose under the banner of high-sounding abstractions and ideals.

They make war to capture markets by murder, raw materials by rape. They find it cheaper to steal than to exchange, easier to butcher than to buy.

Behind all this stands that terrible implacable god of business and blood whose name is profit. Money, like an insatiable moloch, demands its interest, its return, and will stop at nothing, not even the murder of millions to satisfy its greed. Behind the army, stand the militarists. Behind the militarists, stand finance capital and the capitalists. Brothers in blood; companions in crime.

What do these enemies of the human race look like? Do they wear on their foreheads a sign so that they may be told, shunned and condemned as criminals? No. On the contrary, they are the respected ones. They are honoured. They call themselves and are called, gentlemen. They support private and public charity out of the excess of their wealth. In their private lives they are kind and considerate. But, threaten a reduction on the profit of their money and they become ruthless as savages, brutal as madmen, remorseless as executioners. There can be no permanent peace in the world while they live. Such an organization of human society as permits them to exist must be abolished.

These men make the wounds.

Reputedly one of Norman Bethune's last statements before his death in November, 1939.

he did love material things, he learned that only by serving your fellow man can you reach your full stature as a human being. China gave Bethune a chance to reach his full stature."

"We remember Bethune because China remembers him," it had earlier been remarked, and Davies, echoing this statement, stood up to toast Chairman Mao, "because he recognized and pointed out to us the road to Canadian self-reliance and international co-operation."

The Bethune Health Group, seated at the back of the large banquet room, stood up and applauded the toast and enthusiastically toasted Mao. Earlier the group had refused to toast the Queen.

As promised, John Juliani, director of the graduate drama programme at York, gave a rendition of Bethune, the man. It began with a Chinese peasant woman's memory

said, "I'm glad International Nickel and C.P. Air have started on their path to salvation."

WOMANIZING

Allan described his trip to China in 1972 and how amazed he was at the fame Bethune had achieved in that country, and how he had tried to tell them of the Bethune of earlier years, of his womanizing.

They seemed uninterested in the earlier Bethune.

But then he saw their point, he said. "The Chinese know the Bethune of China and the Bethune of China was marvelous. They inspired him. Because he saw them sacrificing, he became greater than he was."

"Bethune was a true revolutionary 40 years ahead of his time. he had a true idea of what communism was about, and if were around to-day, he would still have that