

campus co-operatives

putting social commitment into glass boxes

Editor's Note: The following background paper was presented at the Canadian Union of Students 29th annual congress in Lennoxville, Que. this fall. It deals with a new concept in student action.)

A campus co-operative is a consumer-owned and operated co-operative dealing in goods and services. The goods are usually books. The service is generally housing. Because university students are the owners, either exclusively or predominantly, this type of co-operative can be differentiated from other groups of owners.

This characteristic of student ownership becomes a sign of uniqueness when it is realized that the owners are not primarily wage earners.

Yet, in Guelph, Ont. one of the oldest co-operatives in Ontario is a store housed in a building worth in excess of a quarter of a million dollars. That same co-operative is engaged in planning the first high-rise apartment for married students in Canada, and will be the first organization to make use of the National Housing Act amendment passed last June providing 90 per cent mortgages at low interest for up to fifty years for student co-operatives with accommodation for married couples.

The Campus Co-operative Residence at the University of Toronto, the main instigator of the amendment, has already obtained a quarter of a million dollar loan for the conversion of old houses to provide dormitory accommodation. It now owns property worth almost three-quarters of a million dollars, and is the largest student residence at the University of Toronto.

Students at Waterloo are presently engaged in the construction of the first new dormitory building in North America which is owned and operated by students. The new building was ready for occupancy in September and houses just over 100 students.

If the question is raised "Who needs campus co-operatives and why do they need them?" everyone focuses on the problem of students. But it is not only the students who have need. Universities as institutions need campus co-operatives. The co-operative movement needs campus co-operatives. Governments need campus co-operatives.

Society as a whole needs campus co-operatives.

The need is a broad one not confined by any means to students. Further, the need is urgent.

With all the student aid available today, there is less money available per student in bursaries and scholarships than there was ten or fifteen years ago. If the rise in the cost of education and the cost of living is taken into consideration the real dollars available have been greatly reduced unless a student wishes to mortgage his future by financing his education through loans.

The least expensive way to help the tidal wave of students arriving at university is to provide means whereby they can help themselves. Co-operatives are one way.

For the commuting student who buys his lunch on campus, we have had co-operative snack bars operated by students which, in the interest of administrative efficiency, have been

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The Gateway welcomes letters on topics of student interest. Correspondents are asked to be brief, otherwise their letter will be subject to abridgement. And correspondents, in replying to one another, should keep to the issues under discussion and abstain from personal attacks. All letters to the editor must bear the name of the writer. No pseudonyms will be published.

Exceptional circumstances apart, no letter should be more than about 300 words in length. Short letters are more likely to be published promptly—and to be read.

taken over by the university bureaucracy.

Where salmon between two slices of bread once sold for 15 cents and in a kaiser roll sold for 18 cents in a student snack bar a sliver of salmon between two pieces of bread very neatly wrapped in cellophane now sells for 25 cents in the snack bars operated by a commercial catering firm. Medical students have organized instrument buying co-operatives which have reduced the price of a haematology kits from \$25 to \$20.80.

But the most spectacular co-operative is the student co-operative which is owned and operated by the students. Fees in these residences are \$150 to 200 (25 per cent to 35 per cent) less than fees in the regular university residences. But student fees in the regular residence fees pay for municipal taxes, finance charges, depreciation expenses, as well as providing patronage dividends which are usually donated back for expansion and improvement.

Co-operative married quarters save students a minimum of \$20. per month, and in addition fill a gap that the university have neglected. Herein lies the biggest need for campus co-operatives.

Putting economics aside, there are other considerations. The mental health problem among university students is critical. Too many students, because of the drastic shortage of residential facilities, are forced to live isolated lives in damp basements or dingy attic rooms. The student co-operative residence becomes a home for students, not just a place to live. It is their home. They own it. They run it.

Further, because they run it, the student co-operative, and this applies whether it is a residence or a snack bar, is a unique educational experience teaching responsibility in decision making.

The danger in universities today is not that students will become castrated intellects, but that they will get through the university production mill, branded with a B.A. and sold to the highest bidder.

In either case, the education in democratic decision making; so necessary to a community whether it be restricted to scholars or enlarged to include all of society, is missing.

This educational experience is unique to a co-operative. It is not merely for economic and social reasons but, and perhaps even most important, for educational reasons that student need campus co-operatives.

But the university needs co-operatives even more than the students. Universities with rare exemptions, no longer play as ivory towers. Rather, they become manufacturing centers for a highly trained bureaucratic elite.

This was the deep-seated cause of the recent student rebellion in Berkeley, California. Gone is the secluded community of scholars. But it has not been replaced by a scholarly community concerned with the improvement and betterment of society.

Instead of social commitment, there is only a system of individual enrichment so that the product can

have more value when sold in the market place.

It is an attitude fostered by society. Go to university, or you will end up unemployed. I.B.M. only hires B.A.s as salesmen.

The mass university has lost its community. The manufacturing university has lost its scholarly atmosphere. The glass boxes which have replaced the ivory towers have not acquired a social commitment or concern.

The universities can use the aid of student co-operatives in order that their capital resources may be utilized primarily for academic building.

But they need student co-operatives for even more important reasons. A sense of community must be re-established. A sense of open questioning which carries with it a sense of responsibility must emerge in a democratic environment that best encourages it.

The questioning must be based on thorough scholarship and look with a critical eye at everything, including society and the university itself, with a view to reform and improvement.

A co-operative, and in particular a student co-operative residence, can provide this unique contribution.

But if the universities are sick because of vitamin deficiencies which student co-operatives can help provide, the co-operative movement as a movement is critically ill. Co-operatives need fresh blood, yet the Board of Directors of the Co-operative Union of Ontario stressed in its last annual report that its first concern was "The ignorance of a majority of the young in the past achievements of co-operative, and their blissful unawareness of its fantastic potential for future growth and service . . ."

Where can this problem be better overcome than by capturing the hearts, minds and imaginations of the future leaders by involving them in co-operatives while their minds are open and eager to inquire into new ideas. By failing to tap that source sufficiently, the co-operative movement is by-passing the only elixir of eternal youth.

But the symptoms of illness go deeper. One of the Rochdale principles is continuous education. Too many co-operatives interpret this as an imperative to provide skills, public relations or membership indoctrination. None of these are education.

The training of minds and hands is not education but training, pure and simple. Training is a necessary pre-condition of education but it can often be the major roadblock. Co-operatives are democratic communities and, unlike any other type of economic organization, whether individualistic or collectivistic, are the only ones in which education and not training is a primary goal.

Training provides answers and techniques. Education stimulates inquiry and questions. The foundation of a democracy is education.

The co-operative movement is uniquely attached to the principle of education. Yet where do we find the overwhelming involvement that should accompany this attachment? The way lies open through student co-operatives, but it is a way that has been neglected, not through intention, I suspect, but through ignorance and indifference.

letters

Uncritical?

To The Editor:

"SUB's PRICE APT TO RISE"—"Rising construction costs in Edmonton have been attributed to a labor shortage, caused by a current building boom plus rising wages." "attributed"—fine—only we expect a more critical response than that from a university editor.

Who attributes rising costs to rising wages? Labor costs are 25-30

per cent of the total tab: so whose wages have nearly doubled?

What about the 15-20 per cent increase in profits reported by Big Steel at their annual meeting this year? What about the high profits reported by construction companies (aside from McNamara caught, Eldorado tells us, in a bad contract)?

We expect university editors to exercise more critical intelligence and not lead themselves to anybody's propaganda. Or inflationary pressures.

C. Kenneth Johnstone
grad studies

(Editor's Note: Mr. Brook is correctly attributed as saying rising construction costs have "been attributed to a labor shortage caused by a current building boom, plus rising wages." A reporter reports only what is said, provided the material does not libel anyone. We are sure our readers would not want to hear an editor's opinion in a news story. Editorial opinions in this newspaper are reserved for the editorial page. The news story contains Mr. Brook's opinion, which is not necessarily ours.)

Epitaph

To The Editor:

Oh, yes indeed! It happened.

What are we speaking of?

Why, Freshman Introduction Week.

It came, and now it has passed—and it seems so have such mementoes as beanies, coffee tickets, buses, and the three-orchestra civic reception with bushels of hot dogs, frosh court (students' union variety) and perhaps those memories many a present senior now has and tomorrow's senior may never really know.

Doug Pinder
ed 4
Bob Crooks
sci 2

Viewpoint

By BRYAN CAMPBELL

Fraternities offer much to the individual university student but contribute relatively nothing to the life of the campus at large.

For the individual, fraternities offer good fellowship, good parties and a good set of contacts when you graduate.

For the campus, fraternities create a basic division in the community and as a result a lack of communication between members and non-members.

When fraternities select members, they select the best from their point of view.

Any organization would do the same, but the fraternities are not just any organization.

Once inside the fraternity, the member spends the rest of his university career and, most important, his social career in the company of his brothers. He may join outside extracurricular activities, but, by and large, these activities will be controlled and run by other fraternity members.

Fraternity men participate in FIW, Varsity Guest Weekend, Students' Council, The Personnel Board.

Fraternity men do not participate in The Gateway, Radio Society, The Male Chorus and the fine art societies in large numbers.

There are exceptions to this as there are exceptions to anything, but generally the rule holds.

The tragedy of the fraternity on campus is the removal of ten per cent of the students from interaction with the rest of the campus.

The most important single thing a student can get from a college education is contact with a wide range of ideas and viewpoints over a cup of coffee or a glass of beer.

But the fraternity members, the product of a particular middle-class upbringing, never take part in this great discussion and hence impoverish themselves and the campus at the same time.

The final tragedy of the fraternity is the fraternity man who is elected to Students' Council.

Here we have a man with relatively little contact with student body speaking for the campus as a whole.

And every year the result is the same, no communication between the student and student government.

The men in student government are usually the best people on campus for the job. They just do not know the student.

There is only one way to close the rift in the community of scholars which is a university and this is abolition of the fraternities.

(Editor's Note: Bryan Campbell, besides being Sports Editor of The Gateway, is generally regarded as being unalterably opposed to fraternities.)