

'Renewed sense of community' needed

Bethune college council wants to form co-op

By DEBBIE PEKILIS

Bethune College and its College Council are studying the possibility of forming a co-operative residence which, they feel, will give the residence students a 'renewed sense of community and purpose in an old college building'.

In a report submitted November 29 to the Task Force on Colleges at York, Bethune Master, Ioan Davies and College Council Chairman, James Heffernan outlined their proposals for the co-op.

"We believe that it will give the students in residence a renewed sense of community and purpose; will be a true educational experience of undergraduates; will free the Master's office to attend to the academic aspects of the college; and may even save money for the students and the University."

The report says further that a cooperative "is a group of people who had together to provide themselves with goods or services." A co-op in Bethune would probably take the form of a management co-op, composed of all Bethune residents, which would contract with the York University to perform some or all of the management functions necessary to run the residence.

According to the report, the co-op would be incorporated with six "internationally recognized" principles, three of which "are required by the Ontario Cooperative Corporations Act."

The co-op would be democratically organized on a "one member one vote" basis. Membership would be open, "not limited on the basis of inherited or irrelevant... characteristics." Any surplus made by the co-op would be "rebated to members on the basis of how much they used the services. Members may also vote to allow the capital." The fifth principle is "limited return on capital. Co-ops are for service, not speculative gain." Co-ops must continue to educate both their members and the public in the meaning of such cooperation. Lastly, "whenever possible, cooperatives should try to support other cooperative enterprises."

AUTONOMOUS CENTRE

The report says that having a cooperative residence will strengthen the college as an autonomous centre within the university in opposition to the "trend toward larger and more

centralized operations at York and in society." Among its four main goals for the co-op is the hope that "the College might also become a center for people on campus interested in co-ops and Tutorials and other courses in the College could deal with the many different aspects of co-ops."

"The work of creating the co-op and making it work would bring the residence together in a way that the College Council cannot. Movies, pubs, and the like don't affect as many people as the residence does."

A very important goal of the co-op is to save money for both the students and the university. One way this can be done is to have volunteer labour, with each student doing one hour of routine household and other tasks each week. Although student workers are not always as skilled or efficient as paid workers, "sometimes they are more efficient knowing that their neighbours depend on them. If the jobs are arranged so as to involve more than one student, "people get to know each other" and they become closer to their neighbours.

LESS VANDALISM

The co-op expects to be able to make minor repairs to property by the students, although they will have to rely on the university to make major repairs. Another saving would be from damaged property. "Most co-ops have only minor vandalism problems compared to dorms."

The report stresses as well the educational aspects of the co-op. "Many students get an education from their co-op that they could never get in the classroom. Co-ops are businesses, and need to be well run to survive." The report adds that co-ops are politically desirable, stressing co-operation over competition.

The actual structure of the co-op still has to be worked out with the university administration, according to the report. It is expected that Bethune residents would form a cooperative Corporation under the laws of Ontario and an elected Board of Directors. "The Board would be composed solely or largely of Bethune residents, but provision could also be made to include College or public representatives."

PUBLIC PROPOSAL

Bethune Master Ioan Davies said in an interview with Excalibur that

the proposal will be made public to the college residents at a public meeting which will probably held at the beginning of next term. So far, only the College Council knows about it.

He said the report was drawn up and submitted to the Task Force on the Colleges "so we could get some sense of whether the Task Force will back it. If they recommend it, they will probably bring it to the attention of the committee. We will still press it even if the Task Force doesn't back it."

ROCHDALE COLLEGE

He said the co-op would have a contract with the university by which York would continue to own the land and the buildings and provide major repairs, whereas the co-op would have to reimburse the university's expenses on the buildings. "The university would probably insist on some sort of a constitution setting out the exact structure, rules, and regulations of the co-op," said Davies.

When asked how Bethune could succeed with a student-run co-op where Rochdale College failed, Davies said, "Nobody at University of Toronto was accountable to Rochdale College. It was just handed to the co-op. In this co-op,

the college Master will be the ultimate responsible authority and can keep an eye out to make sure it doesn't get into debt."

Although the idea of a co-operative residence has been around Bethune for at least two years, College Council President James Heffernan was the first to take it seriously. He told Excalibur "It was my idea, based on consideration of various successful co-ops at Guelph, at Queen's, at Waterloo. In those places, I saw a better standard of living, better food, and better attitudes."

Ioan Davies, said he and a Bethune don, attended a November 19 meeting of co-op representatives from Innis College, at the University of Toronto, which has run a successful co-op since 1966. At that meeting, they happened to meet Jonathan Klein, a member of the Board of Directors of the North American Student Co-operative (NASCO) and works out of Ann Arbor, Michigan. On his way back from a student co-ops conference at Guelph University, Klein stopped at Bethune College and wrote the report, aided by Environmental Studies professor Jack Craig.

He said this is a "loose report, to whet their (the Task Force) appetite, and give them a general idea

of what we plan to do." A more detailed report, containing factors and figures, and full details of the Board of Directors, is to be released in January."

INNIS COLLEGE

David Jackson, a member of the NASCO Board of Directors at Innis College, was unable to comment on the proposal until, as he said, a more detailed analysis comes out. He did say that Bethune has a good chance of succeeding because the co-op has worked at other universities. The co-op idea originated in Rochdale, England, in 1844, when a group of workers banded together to fight employer exploitation, and spread to Canada around the turn of the century.

According to the report, the oldest student co-op in Ontario was started at the University of Guelph in 1913. Since then, others have been started at Queen's University in Kingston and at the University of Waterloo.

Bethune don Tom Thomson was unavailable for comment.

Don Richard, Chairman of the Task Force on the Colleges, said it is too early to comment on the Report because the Task Force members have not yet arrived at a consensus.

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