

British Columbia co-ops Fed-up

By John Thomas

"Are we a movement for mass social change, or are we a group of hippies producing food for ourselves and our friends? If we are the latter, we are achieving our goals. If the former, we are failing badly."

That's how the British Columbia co-operative movement, in a recent article in its newsletter, assesses the choices facing co-op members as their movement enters a new stage of relative economic and organizational stability.

The co-op food movement has probably been one of the more lasting contributions of the North American counter-culture. But its initial idealism as a perceived engine of revolutionary change has given way, in some cases, to a small business mentality that emphasizes saving up to 20 per cent savings for its members.

In B.C., the co-op movement has grown to include more than 50 co-ops and worker-controlled production units spread out over a mostly mountainous area of the small of California. The co-ops are collecting surplus from consumers, some in city neighborhoods and towns and the rest in the country, while the production units are collecting surplus from canned and baked goods, granola and other food stuffs.

The B.C. movement with an estimated 5,000 members, is the largest and most politically-advanced in Canada, but it's only medium-sized in terms of North America. It is coordinating body is the Federation of the American electorate voting for their presidential candidate, the Yippies have Nobody to blame but themselves.

They fought a long, hard campaign, and their cool-headed strategy and their tenacity paid off in the end where it matters: in the vote count. Twenty-seven per cent of eligible voters swallowed Carter's line but a heart-warming 47 per cent voted for Nobody.

Campaign manager Wavy Gravy (Nobody's Fool) took a moment out at the Yippie inauguration party to explain how Nobody came to get the Yippie nod. "Nobody's perfect. Nobody cares. Nobody understands you. Nobody loves you when you're down and out. Nobody lowered our taxes. Nobody gave us jobs. Nobody will stop imperialist wars and legalize pot."

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ventory on hand, much like stores-for-profit.

Fed-Up buys in bulk from producers throughout B.C., and as far away as California. Most of the suppliers are small, independent operations. Purchasing policy is to seek out foodstuffs grown under relatively natural conditions, and to avoid highly-processed products with chemical additives. The selection list includes 700 items, ranging from bulk foods, to canned goods, but not including meat.

Fed-Up is governed by a council consisting of every co-op and production unit. The council meets every three months and decides general policy, as well as with questions arising out of day-to-day operations.

Operation of the Fed-Up warehouse is carried out by four full-time workers, who do the bookkeeping and co-ordination, plus seven or eight co-op members who do much of the actual ordering, repackaging and consolidating of co-op orders. Co-op members from around the province contribute their labor for a week at a time on a rotating basis.

Participation from the member co-ops, although causing certain logistical problems since the people may have to come hundreds of

miles, gives Fed-Up much more of a mass base. Over the year, up to 700 - 800 people may work at Fed-Up; this builds links among the various co-ops and keeps the warehouse from becoming too distant from the people it serves.

The very nature of a member run co-operative, in which sharing the work is a requirement for membership, limits its appeal. Most working-class families, particularly if all the adults are working 40 hours per week, whether paid or unpaid, want to get their food with a minimal amount of work.

Limited Incomes

In the main, the membership of the co-ops consists of individuals on limited incomes. Most of them chose to be poor when they dropped out of the system some years back. But now many are finding that, with current high unemployment rates, it's harder to drop back in. Without a saleable skill, and lacking even much saleable job experience, they find they are marginal to industry's needs and must make do with poorly paid seasonal or temporary work, or with welfare.

The culture of food is essential to understanding the co-ops. People were simul-



Co-op food is distributed via neighbourhood collectives.

taneously switching their diets, learning how to cook and appreciate food, learning about nutrition and developing this new organization.

Through their mutual activities, people began to look to the co-ops as a means for making social contact. Work-

ing together and sharing an on-going project enabled people to develop a sense of community. This was particularly important for people who felt isolated or, as in many rural areas, didn't have other ways of making contact. For a large number of people, food and the co-op be-

came an intrinsic part of their daily lives.

Moreover the co-ops provide valuable political experience rooted in the concrete problems of running a democratic organization which people depend on for food. Questions raised include the relationship between leader and led, worker and consumer, and the fundamental problem of how to get people to be active participants.

The co-operative movement will never be able to supersede capitalism on its own. It is still ultimately dependent on corporations; direct links between the producers and the co-ops are at a tenuous stage. There is the ever present danger that if they get to a point where they threaten corporate interests they will be destroyed with State collusion.

However, the co-ops are a "propaganda-by-deed" organization. They demonstrate that people can come together to meet their own needs. This creates the awareness that perhaps we don't need the State or the capitalists. Participation in a co-operative is not sufficient for politicization but can be a contributing factor.

For further information on Fed-Up, write to them at 304 E. 1st Ave., Vancouver, B.C.

Everybody needs nobody sometimes

By Steve Conliff

With a clear plurality of the American electorate voting for their presidential candidate, the Yippies have Nobody to blame but themselves.

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And there was Ben Masel, who, with 49 buses, is rapidly closing in on Abbie Hoffman's outdoor world record for arrests. Masel was scooped up last spring when he allegedly assaulted Presidential hopeful Scoop Jackson.

The Yippie inauguration party was Black Puerto Rican anarchist Martin Sostre, who is celebrating his first anniversary on the street after spending more than nine years behind bars on a drug frame-up. Sostre urged establishment of a coalition of all Left groups to push for amnesty for opponents of the Vietnam War. This means deserters, people with less-than-honorable discharges and civilian offenders, and not just draft dodgers, as Carter intends.

The Nobody-for-President campaign had been building for almost a decade, as the Yippies played out their role as the anarchist Id of North America.

Whether crusading against the Indochina War and the CIA Police State or for the removal of President Nixon and the flouting of marijuana prohibition, the Youth International Party has always rejected the rigged U.S. electoral system.

In '68 in Chicago the Yippies nominated a pig named Pigsus for president and, of course, a pig was elected. In '72 the Yippie candidate was a rock, and when the dust settled after impeachment, Sostre, and behold, Nelson the Rock was running the country.

For the 1976 Republican nomination, the Yippies joined with the Native American Pow-Wow Committee, local radicals, the militant prostitutes' group

assault charge is no laughing matter.)

Sostre Urges Coalition

The main speaker at the Yippie inauguration party was Black Puerto Rican anarchist Martin Sostre, who is celebrating his first anniversary on the street after spending more than nine years behind bars on a drug frame-up. Sostre urged establishment of a coalition of all Left groups to push for amnesty for opponents of the Vietnam War. This means deserters, people with less-than-honorable discharges and civilian offenders, and not just draft dodgers, as Carter intends.

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Coyote, the National Coalition of Gay Activists and other ex-communicants of the New Left Church of the Sacred Marx and Lenin to form the Kansas City Convention Coalition. For ten days, they distributed for free 50 pounds of domestic pot, one pound of Colombian gold, two canisters of nitrous oxide (laughing gas), a wash tub of peyote, champagne, innumerable kazooes, balloons and red plastic noses, and 5000 New Nation flag iron-ons. Though few leftists turned out Yippies received gratifying support from K.C.'s poor people-freak and gays and straights, black and white and Indian.

K.C. Convention protests were more peaceful than the legendary '68 Democratic and '72 Republican riots, less peaceful than the '72 and '76 Democratic meetings. There were only about 35 arrests, all misdemeanors, the result of both a conscious govern-

ment effort to avoid focusing media attention on protesters via mass busts, and a paralysis of terrified city officials and police faced with "big city" protest problems, which resulted in a takeover of security by State Police. The State Pigs were anxious to bloody heads until faced with Yippies moving up as clowns and visions of morning-after headlines screaming: "POLICE BEAT UP CLOWNS AT G.O.P. CONVENTION!"

Meantime, thousands marched for Nobody for President in San Francisco, Austin, Tex., and Madison, Wis., at the election rallies held in New York and Ohio, and the running-down media lapping it all, as well they might. Nobody had built Yippies' momentum. Better than the Rock in '72, better even than the Pig in '68, Nobody in '76 had captured the elusive zeitgeist, the spirit of the times.

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