British Columbia co-ops Fed up

By John Thomas

"Are we a movement for a new society, or are we a group of hippies pro- ducing food for each other and our friends? If we are the former, we are achieving our goals. If we are the latter, we are falling badly." That's how the British Co- op Council sees the cooperative movement, in a recent article in its newsletter. The council faces co-op members as their movement enters a period of expansion and rapid economic and organizational growth.

The co-op food movement has probably been one of the most underdeveloped in the North American counter-culture. But its initial idealism in the late 1960s has not revolutionized change in the same way that the "small business mentality" that emphasizes up to 20 percent savings for its members.

In B.C., the co-op movement has grown to include more than 50 co-ops and membership. Credit union and cooperative unionization initiatives spread out across a mostly mountainous area the size of the Province, with groups primarily in the Vancouver region, are mainly small groups of entrepreneurs, social workers, and representatives of neighborhoods and towns and the rest of the country, who are starting to form co-ops that are turning out canned and baked goods, generally in small quantities.

The B.C. movement with an estimated 5,000 members is the largest and most politically advanced in Canada, but is only by comparison in terms of North America. It's a coordinatingbody and the Fed- Up Council, which has its own distribution warehouse in Vancouver, has relations with about 160,000 co-op members. B.C. co-ops have migrated in the past two years largely as part of the general flowering of the Left and counter-culture communities, and unorganized, unorganized co-ops have fanned out across the province and even into the Yukon and Alaska.

The co-ops were an organized response to the demands for more democracy and user control.

Neighbourhood Collectives

The basic unit of the co-op is the neighborhood collective, usually consisting of 15-30 people. The collective, generally made up of volunteers in the body's house, acts as a small scale co-op. It takes orders from the Federation, which groups the orders and ships them directly to Fed-Up. Food is distributed in the reverse order, and each group orders directly from the Federation. In the same way, the system has the need for central control and the need for renewal.

Some co-ops run storefronts. These usually operate in the cities, sometimes with part-time paid staff. They generally serve a large group of people, keep regular store hours and have an inventory on hand, much like stores-for-profit.

Fed-Up is built 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 from producers who grow or raise it 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 foods, to general, 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 coordination. Nobody gave us jobs. Eight co-op members who do the actual order taking, repackaging and consolidating of co-op orders. Co-op members from the warehouse province contribute their labors to a time at a fraction of their basic pay.

The culture of the food is essential to understanding the co-ops. People were beginning to share the experience of growing things and appreciate food, learning about nutrition and development of new organizational structures.

Through their mutual activities, people began to look to the co-ops as a means for making social contact. Work and living together and sharing an eating-giving project enabled people to develop a sense of community. This was particularly important for people who felt isolated or, as in some rural areas, didn't have other ways of making contact. For a large number of people, food and the co-op became an intrinsic part of their daily lives. Moreover, the co-ops provide valuable political experience rooted in the concrete experience of working in a democratic organization which people depend on for food. This raises the issue between the worker and the 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 producer and the co-op are at a tentative stage. There is the ever present danger that if they get to a point where they threaten corporate interests they will be destroyed by State collusion.

However, the co-ops are a "power from below" group, a group of people who can demonstrate that people have their own needs. This creates the possibility that they won't suffer the disadvantages of people who don't have the state or the capitalists. Participation in a movement is a way of getting for people who can't be active participants.

The Co-op运动's history on Fed-Up, write to them at 304 E. 1st Ave., Vancouver, B.C.

Everybody needs somebody sometimes

By Steve Conlin

With a clear plurality 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, collected and confident tenacity paid off in the end where it matters: in the vote. The White House is, in fact, 20 percent of eligible voters swallo-ved Carter's line but a convincing 5 percent of eligible voters for Nobody.

V.I. Net. ray 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 takes the fact. Nobody cares. Nobody under- stands you when you're down and out. Nobody lowered your flag. Nobody wore your hat. Nobody will stop imperialist forces if you're in trouble. Nobody's the one you have if you're in trouble. Nobody's the one you have if you're in trouble." Or, as the revolutionary song put it...

"the co-op food is distributed via neighbour-
hood collectives

Yipp's '76 presidential candidate

And there was Ben Masel, who, with 48,000, is rapidly closing in on Abbie Hoff- man's national world record for arrest for all. Masel was scooped up last spring when he allegedly assaulted Pre-

sident hopeful Scoop Jack-

son, the Senator from Bo-

de. With the help of his wife Pat, Madison, Wis., he got 15 days in jail on an assault charge and no appeal after the judge said he didn't want to make a scene of him by letting out a stiffer sentence. Then, Masel was arrested at an anti-abortion demonstration just after the inaugu-
ration of the new Senator. A few days later, Aron Ray Commando Unit and friends occupied the White House fence. They all got off on that one on a tech-
nicality, but Masel was re-


assault charge is no laugh-
ing matter.

Stouts Urges Coalition

The main speaker at the Yippie inauguration party was Black Puerto Rican anarchist Martin Stuart, who is celebrating his first anni-
iversary on the street after spending more than nine years behind bars on a drug frame-up. Stuart urged esta-

lishment coalition with the Left 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 against the "establishment" arch-enemy of North America.

Whether crusading a gainst the Indochina War and the CIA Police State or for the removal of President Nixon and the flaunting of mar- 


botarian anyone, the Youth International Party has always rejected the rigged U.S. electoral system. In '68 in Chicago the Yip-


cipation. Nixon and the flaunting of mar-


nies nominated a pig named Yippie for president. This time, a pig was elected. In '72 the Yippie candidate was a rock, and when the dust settled after Impenetrable Summer, ito, and behold, Nelson the Rock was running the country.

For the 1976 Republican nomination, the Yippies joined with the Native American Pow-Wow Com-

munity, local radicals, the militiamen's prostitutes group