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## WHAT'S NASCO DOING?

At present NASCO has three major projects underway--the development of a CO-OP HOSTELING SYSTEM, which was explained two newsletters ago, a MANAGEMENT TRAINING PROGRAM, and TECHNICAL SERVICES for co-ops.

### First, the management training program:

One of the questions frequently asked in regard to co-ops is why aren't co-ops succeeding? As with any business, the answer is a lack of good management--but not in the standard sense. Cooperatives as business ventures are generally successful. A number of the farm co-ops rank in Fortune's top 500 companies. However, they seem to be failing in being any more than a standard business. Cooperation, at least as seen by the youth cooperative movement, includes more than the economic aspect of existence--it includes taking a leadership role in the social aspects of life. To make a cooperative succeed, the management must be two fold it must be effective in terms of business standards the "ledger-mind" must be sharp, but it must also be very people oriented--the "humanistic" aspect of management is probably more important to the success of a cooperative as a cooperative than the economic. This is where most cooperatives fall down. While being good, well-run businesses they lack the humanistic, people-oriented management so needed by a co-op.

To help remedy this situation, NASCO plans to create a training program. This would accomplish two main objectives; first it would draw new blood into existing cooperatives; and secondly, it would train these future co-op managers not only in the ledger aspects of management, but would also stress the human side. The

program as proposed by Paul Merrill of the Council for Student Co-op Development in Minneapolis, would accommodate 45 trainees 15 each at Ann Arbor, Michigan; Madison, Wisconsin; and Minneapolis. There would be a seminar program in which such topics as the history of cooperatives, communications, and accounting would be covered. When the school year was over, the trainees (expected to be junior or seniors in college) would be expected to pick up a particular project: it might be working with existing co-ops or maybe starting a new one where needed. Participants would receive a stipend, which, if they went into co-op management after the program would become a grant, otherwise, it would be treated as a loan. This program would initially be funded by foundation grant, and hopefully beyond that would become self-sustaining. Undoubtedly, the actual details will take a much different form by the time that the program is actually under way, and we would like any ideas, comments or suggestions you might have.

The other project NASCO is under taking is the creation of a technical services wing of NASCO. Eventually this would be a service, provided on a fee basis, available to cooperative organizations. Such things as helping organize a new co-op, setting up the accounting systems, or helping with the details of purchasing property will be provided by this arm of NASCO. A staff member would be assigned to work directly with your group to accomplish your purpose. This would not be the type of thing where an outsider would come in and take over, but rather would work with, and direct the local people not only accomplishing the task, but also helping to train new people from that area so that they could do any such work in the future.

At present, NASCO is negotiating a contract with the student Housing Corporation in East Lansing, Michigan to help in making an application to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, under the College Housing Program. They have to obtain a loan to purchase about \$500,000 worth of properties to be used for student cooperative expertise and assistance in filling out the application, and in dealing with the HUD officials.

Both of these projects are still in the infancy stage, and it is now that we need any suggestions or ideas you may have. If you would be interested, in some way, in either of these projects, please contact us in Ann Arbor.

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## HOW TO ORGANIZE A CONFERENCE

Whether a conference, convention, seminar, institute, revival, or mere gathering, the point is the same. A number of people with or without something in common will gather together for a certain period of time, learn a good deal, socialize, and come away inspired, ready to fight the local dragons, because they have learned that others have fought them or will be fighting them.

However, before the results can be seen, a large amount of planning must be done. This includes considering such mundane problems as date, site, housing, meals, transportation, speakers, programs, timing, publicity, parties, and last but not least, fund raising. Some of the above are easily resolved by determining the cru-

cial issue around which the conference will spin. ( At times, there is a problem even with this, when people want a conference merely for the gathering and dissemination of information; but then one might say that the burning issue is that there is not enough communication and education presently available). Goals and results should be considered at this time, also, so that it is easier to pick speakers, if desired. So, then, what do you want accomplished by this meeting ?

Philosophical themes aside--pick a date about two months hence. This allows for two mailings to participants, for time to corner speakers, time to book rooms, reservations, and so on. (If this is really a whalloping woozer of a conference, you could even start six months ahead, to be sure of accomplishing the same.) Site then--is it to be the Hilton, or the meadow behind the farm? Base your choice on expected turnout (how many people are you contacting), and weather (yes, it makes a difference--if it's too beautiful, most people will be roaming elsewhere; or if too gray, people might feel confined). Meals might also be considered here. If it is a weekend project, you should expect to serve at least five meals and some refreshments--coffee and stuff during some meetings. Exceptions to this are if the meeting is in a big city where the dining out is more popular than being cooped up at the conference center, or again if weather permits, have a picnic. Obviously, use your judgement as to maximum effectiveness. If everyone had a smashing time but didn't learn anything, the conference was only half successful. Consider mainly how much the group as a whole needs to be together to exchange information, and how much need for a reprieve from such a situation there is.

Site; university meeting rooms, conference centers, retreat--all in one building or in several? All this should as with the meals be considered for maximum effectiveness. And how then should the participants be housed? If this is a local conference, there is probably no problem, so you might want to keep people together as much as possible during the day, since they will be separating in the evening. If you expect a good number of out-of-towners, you may have to consider renting rooms at a motel, at the Y, from the university, or some such solution. If the participants are young, they can generally be expected to not mind on the floor, or outside in good weather.

Okay--so far we have decided on dates (and thus length of conference), site of meetings, meals, refreshments, housing. We now need a program and so must decide on an effective form or a mixing of forms. Most conferences start and end very successfully by using two dynamic speakers (well-known is a good trick, but they might demand honorariums; so you better know how rich you are before you make any rash promises.), one to begin and one to sum up the whole deal. In the middle though, what? A suggestion is that the participants become involved by discussions, groups, panels. Have a good chairman handy to steer wayward harangues back on a track, or to limit discussions on a topic not universally enjoyed. (A good chairman is more than a valuable asset--he can make or break the meeting, so he must be sensitive to the vibrations in the room.) Topics to be discussed and themes to be examined can generally be directed by the original burning issues, so be sure to bring them up often.

Besides speakers and discussion, you might want to have available a lot of resource people who can be called upon to lead, direct and pass on information, but this depends highly on your theme. Publicity, then--should it be superb booklets with fancy graphics or mimeo sheets? Depends on whom you wish to attract, the amount of money you can spend, and the amount of time you have. A simple, but effective way to handle publicity is to get hold of a list or make up one of all the groups and people you want to come (decide also on the amount of geographic area you want to cover) and send them a letter of purposes, a description of the proposed conference, expected results and a dash of enthusiasm, and promise another mailing in a few weeks with the final program. About two weeks before the conference send out the (beautifully put-together, of course) program. If you have only about a month, hustle so that the one mailing is complete. Another alternative is to print up one beautiful brochure with graphics, stating problem, symptoms, purpose of discussions, and widely distribute this, as was done for the 1968 NASCO Washington, D. C. conference.

Fund-raising... and registration fees... and transportation. The best thing to do is to find a sugar-daddy in the form of a rich company which thinks it might get some benefit (like good-will) out of promoting a conference, or a foundation dedicated to supporting idealistic thinking, or matching funds (where you get \$1-\$? for each \$1 you raise. If you aim to have a large conference, with big name speakers to be put up at fancy (or even not-so-fancy) motels, then you had better draw up a smash-bang wooing proposal for funding and attempt as soon as possible to insure that you have enough money, so you can continue planning. On a smaller scale try to hit like-minded organizations, or churches, or socially relevant groups who feel richer than you do. It may come down to the fact that no one seems to have any money, so you will have to replan everything. Be aware of this, so that your expectations are not constantly being crushed. On a small scale, you might want to charge all the participants \$2, to cover food costs, if all else is free, more or less. Remember, conferences should be self-liquidating, so don't make any great plans to spend any money you haven't got. It helps to have an accurate count of how many participants there will be, so you can count on a certain income--but people are notoriously bad at letting you know they're coming until they actually show up. This is the simple reason for trying to get some outside money to cover costs other than food.

Transportation--If you're feeling rich, and so and so can't possibly make it without some gas money, consider the case and see if you can help it--perhaps simply by waiving the registration fee. At any rate, the most legitimate people to ship in are the resource people, whose contribution is invaluable. Consider each case carefully.

Which brings us to the actual hot tip of this piece. Don't do any of this as an individual. Get an active and excited (even not very) committee to work with you; and each person on that committee is to get at least two helpers to handle the breakdown of the work to be done. There is a lot of staggered timing here, so stay on top of it--but do not-repeat, do not consider this only your baby. The best thing to learn from all this is the delegation of power and responsibility.

Let's finally go through a sample outline: The burning issue in your group is whether or not you should form a strong central governing organization. The group is evenly split and bitter sparks are flying. You, as compromiser, decide that the only way

to resolve the argument is to look at other groups and see the problems they've encountered. Theme: Is a strong central organization destructive to democracy and member participation? You decide that the question demands an immediate answer, so you see that three weekends hence seems free on all counts. This gives you time for only one mailing, and so the conference (seminar?) will be fairly local in nature-- little problem with housing or meals, except for the out-of-town resource people, who you've decided to bring in to demonstrate other sides of the question. In the interests of getting the information most pertinent very quickly, you decide that one meal will be served to all. Given the number of people in your organization who are at each other's throats and the number of resource people, plus a factor of 10%, you decide that the meeting can be held in a nearby church basement, since the pastor is a friend of yours. Obviously, costs will be slight. The only three items now, are the meal, publicity, and transportation for the out-of-towners. Two of the three groups can probably pay their own way. So you charge \$2 registration fee and probably make a \$10 profit on the whole deal. That's all pretty simple, but here's the trick: Get at least three people on publicity--to make posters, write letters to the out-of-towners, and later phone them. Circulate leaflets about the whole affair. Make maps to the church. Promotion is a big deal and should involve at least five people. You'll need workers for the meal and a crew to set-up and clean-up the basement. Two people can handle registration, make name tags, keep accounts and give receipts, and keep an address list for follow-up materials. A chairman is vital. So far about fifteen people have been involved in a very simple one-question seminar--and everyone of them is working for it's success because he has a stake in it. The conclusion of the conference may point out more flaws in your organization, but you have gotten together on organizing. That in itself is the most important lesson of a conference--the subtle education of knowing how to work with people, so that everyone is involved.

A. E. Dreyfuss, (who's our experienced,  
behind-the-scenes, co-op conference organizer)

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**NEW CO-OP BOOKSTORE OPENS!!!, 652 West Tennessee St., Tallahassee, FLA.  
32304**

A miscellaneous group of students is opening a co-op bookstore (in Tallahassee, Florida) which may eventually sell textbooks wholesale for FSU students. A non-profit, student-run organization, it is starting out with a stock of donated books and a book-ordering service, and will gradually add sales of regular paperbacks on a wide variety of topics at reduced prices. Students with used textbooks will be able to sell their books for better than usual prices, by marking a price on them, leaving them in the store for sale, and picking up the money later.

Already over 70 students have volunteered to help out. All are dues-paying members of the co-op. Membership fees for the store are \$2 for students \$5 for non-students. Members decide all policies of the co-op, but anyone can shop at the store and participate in the activities of the store. The people involved plan to make the co-op a community store, offering such services as movies, art shows, poetry readings and coffee.

Information sent by Bob Broedel  
Research/Resource



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collated, folded and stapled by absolutely  
anyone we could con into doing it.

CO-OPS IN EAST LANSING FEDERATE

After nearly three years of hard work, and many failures, the student housing cooperatives at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan have finally formed a federation, the Student Housing Corporation (SHC). Five houses have joined to make the association, New Community, Bower, Elsworth, Hedrick and Ullrey, with the possibility that a couple more will join in the next year. The houses that have joined will turn their properties to the federation, who will then be responsible for mortgage payments, taxes, insurance and the like.

The situation is unusual in that not only did houses which were already payed off join the federation, but that two co-ops which are presently only renting their houses were also included in the association. This will give the SHC a capital base with which they could eventually purchase houses for the two which are now only renting.

Two years ago, the co-ops in East Lansing tried to do the same thing, in fact, the corporation they formed then was also the Student Housing Corporation (the new group is legally the same one incorporated two years ago), but because of problems, including summer break, all the arrangements that were made fell through, and the property transfers never came off.

## COOPERATION FOR WHAT?

The student co-op movement and the youth culture in general faces a crucial crossroad in the early 1970's. One road leads to the development of a withdrawn youth community (merely a 'counter' culture) in early retirement from the work-a-day world, consuming, passively, the new 'hip' commodities and seeking an illusory transcendence through oriental and mystical religion, primitive naturalism, and drugs. The other road leads toward a radically conscious and political youth culture which works within the institutions of the dominant culture for the actual realization of what for the above can only be a frustrated hope and romantic longing: a life more conscious of itself in the world and committed to fighting for its permanent humanization. This road is followed by those who realize that only a radical political movement, rooted in the everyday realities of creating new communities as it builds for the taking over of the dominant institutions of oppression, can begin to achieve the actual realization of new freedom and the elimination of alienation, in all its aspects. And such a radically conscious and political youth culture can not consist of merely drop-out communes and unreflective activism, for the principle lesson of the 1960's was that this was only a beginning, it was just too shallow.

The co-op movement faces this vital existential choice in the university, itself a key institution of the dominant culture. The opportunity reveals itself in the beginning decline of the bourgeois fraternity/sorority system, which is evidence of the deeper structural and class changes going on in American society. The fraternity/sorority system has traditionally been the cultural arena for the training of middle class youth in the social manners and conventional wisdoms required to maintain the dominant institutions. For the university is the institution which selects the supposedly most capable of the young from high school and trains them for what the liberals call 'leadership positions' or positions of prominence' in the social hierarchy. But increasingly students are becoming conscious that these liberal phrases are ideological mystifications of the fact that they are being trained for a new working class.

The fraternity/sorority has been the principal social and cultural, as well as residential,

home for large segments of these university youth. It is here where they have learned the existential skills of hustling (for sex, status, and money), management (of themselves, each other, and social groups), and empire building so necessary for 'success' in the bourgeois spectacle. With more and more students realizing that their future is in the new working class and rejecting the alienated life-style of the fraternity/sorority which domesticates students for that future the co-op movement faces the opportunity of becoming the major social and cultural home for increasingly self-conscious university students in the 1970's.

Will we rise to the challenge? Will we create a radical alternative, one truely less alienated than the fraternity/sorority system? Or perhaps, as now seems the case at some universities, the co-ops will become merely a cheap place to live for an essentially withdrawn, apolitical, illusory 'counter' culture. The answers to these vital questions lie not in the stars, in fate, or in some blind social force which operates independant of men and women, but rather, the creation of radically conscious and political student communities in the universities of the 1970's is dependant upon what we, the present leaders and organizers of the co-op movement, do in the immediate future.

But in order to act wisely we need understand the dynamic forces that are now transforming the American social structure, the university, and the youth culture. To act in disregard of these dynamic forces is to fall into the idealist fallacy: to champion abstract ideas, like "cooperation", as if they were mere labels to be glued onto specific people and conditions which have concrete historical reasons for not being that way. To avoid the impotence of the idealist fallacy which creates and nourishes illusions by failing to practically connect its theory (ideas) with its everyday practice we must commit ourselves to dispelling all these illusions. And as Marx said, "The call to abandon illusions is a call to abandon the conditions that require illusions." We must build our program on the understanding of those conditions. So in order to clarify what those historical and material forces are I will pose us a series of questions, which, if we choose the progressive path of developing radically conscious and political communities, we must answer.

1. What are the goals of the present co-op lea-

ders and organizers, that is, what are the goals of the co-op movement? Are they merely to provide cheap place for students to live, in other words, equitable consumption? Why are co-op leaders so focused on management and finances? Aren't most co-op residents uninterested because their existential concerns are elsewhere?

2. What are the motivating existential concerns of students today? Why do most students (especially those living in co-ops!) laugh off any mention of 'cooperation' and the co-op movement? Isn't students' confusion a result of an 'education' out of touch with their actual life needs? What are those needs? What work do students want when they get out of college? Why doesn't this work exist?

3. What is the economic and social theory the goals of the student co-op movement are based on? Don't they actually accept the basic drive-motor of capitalism, namely, the drive to accumulate capital in order to buy into the system as a means to achieve some distant, but never achieved (because it gets forgotten), goal of freedom? If the goal is to free and humanize, how does buying into capitalism change its essentially exploitive nature? Did the old-time co-ops of the Depression have any radical content to them and if so how did New Deal state welfarism co-opt these co-ops?

4. How are the dynamic, historical and material forces of automated technology and cybernetics changing the class structure in America? Are not the universities the training ground for the new working class of technicians and professionals? Can the system absorb us, or, will we be absorbed without radically changing the system?

I suggest that we hold a summer study retreat to pursue these questions further. If those of us who are serious about the implications of these questions and are beginning to see ourselves as organizers and educators within the student co-op movement for the next couple of years can study together for several weeks late in August we will be on our way to a coherent program for the student co-op movement of the 1970's. Address any correspondence about concerns or retreat to:

Rick Margolies  
1830 California St. N.W. #42  
Washington, D.C. 20009

## HUD EXTENDS DEADLINE

The Department of Housing and Urban Development has just notified us that they will be extending the deadline for applications to the College Housing Program. Originally May 1, the new deadline will now be June 15. So, if you plan to apply for this years money, you've got some more time. Hopefully, this extension will enable more student co-operatives to apply, and receive money from HUD.

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## HURRY HOSTELLERS

Another reminder to all of you interested in the NASCO 1971 hostelling program--if you want to participate, you should make the decision soon, fill out the application and return it immediately. If you haven't heard about the project for this year, please write us, and we'll tell you all the details and send an application. It is absolutely essential that all participants have notified us by the 15th of May, if we are going to get the hostelling guide and cards in your hands by the beginning of June.

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## A E DEMANDS COOPERATION

A.E. Dreyfuss, Director of the NASCO-USYC Cooperative Project has asked us to remind you to complete and return the survey which you should have received by now. If you haven't gotten one, and feel slighted, write A.E. at 120 East Thirty Second St., New York, N.Y. 10016 and demand that she send you one immediately. She'd like to hear from you. (Don't know what the NASCO-USYC Cooperative Project is? See A.E.'s description in this newsletter.)

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HAVE YOU PAID YOUR MEMBERSHIP FEES TO NASCO FOR THIS YEAR?? THEY'RE ONLY TEN DOLLARS, AND THEY ENTITLE YOU AND YOUR CO-OP TO ALL KINDS OF GOODIES--INCLUDING THE NEWSLETTER.



## USYC-NASCO PROJECT REPORT

The past month and a half has been very busy. The survey of existing youth cooperatives has just been mailed. The questionnaire encompasses many areas, asking specific and general questions in the following areas: legal structure, history, management, organization, membership, publicity, finances, expansion and development, education and community involvement. The questionnaire was designed for individual co-ops, rather than federations of co-ops, but the latter is being surveyed as well. Preliminary results would be available by the beginning of the summer.

NASCO-USYC is currently aware of 350 youth co-ops, and the survey should pick up others. It is useful to search out the smaller buying clubs and craft co-ops. These often have a few people who wish to work with cooperatives, but do not see an opportunity to gain practical experience in organizing, as well as financial and managerial skills except by starting a small co-op by themselves.

The conferences are serving as an invaluable educational vehicle. The Minneapolis, Madison, Austin, and Berkeley conferences are all regional in nature, but people from other regions are planning to attend. Each local group is serving many functions: presenting speakers on the history of co-ops, managing, communicating with other co-ops and with the community at large. They are providing a forum for developing communication among co-ops in their region, thus promoting solidarity and the potential of learning from the experience of others. Student governments and youth groups are also becoming involved and taking back to their constituencies ideas for cooperative housing, grocery stores and bookstores. So, interest in the cooperative concept is spreading.

Education and communication among co-ops and with the community at large seems to be at an all time low. This is partly due to the provincialism and local nature of many co-ops, but the conferences are helping to break down some of this isolationism.

The Washington conference was held April 1-4. Much youth cooperative activity is concentrated in student cooperative housing. The expansion

and innovation in this area was demonstrated by the variety of projects and groups attending the conference.

The original premise had been that the Department of Housing and Urban Development was unaware of the needs of student co-op housing. Although HUD has funded six student co-op housing projects over the last three years, few groups are presently applying. This is due in part to the conservatism of the new organizational structure of the local HUD offices. It is also due to the growing interest of student groups to provide housing not only for themselves, but for the surrounding community as well. The college housing program cannot fund such projects, so other means of financing will have to be found.

The director of the college housing program was more than helpful and highly sympathetic to the problems presented at the conference. Student co-op groups have found a sympathetic ear if their project is confined to student housing. Anyone wishing to approach HUD this year with a basically sound project should receive aid and guidance in obtaining funds.

A side-effect of this conference was the visits to legislators. For many participants it was the first time they had approached their congressmen. The most common reaction was the acknowledgement that if the group had a proposal to make, backed by NASCO, there was a good chance of having it examined and perhaps passed.

The Minneapolis conference was held March 6-7 at Camp Frontenac in Southern Minnesota. It pointed out the vigorous weed-like growth of small co-ops formed to meet specific needs as well as the interest student groups have in starting an enterprise in the spirit of cooperation. The speakers and participants addressed themselves to the history of cooperatives, obtaining practical information of the various types of cooperatives from student credit unions (U. of Mich) to OEO buying clubs, to large student housing co-ops, Ecology clubs, and small grocery co-ops. Also available were speakers on good, efficient management and communications. In addition, there was a long and interesting discussion of why co-ops have failed, and a highly encouraging discussion of the future of the cooperative movement.

A. E. DREYFUSS

## WHY STUDENT COOPERATIVES?

These pages talk about ideals not facts. I think you can take your choice about ideals in a way you cannot with facts. This section is more personal, and everyone would have a different view. In this section, therefore, I will use the word "I", to let people know that the ideals expressed are my own.

It is very difficult for me to figure out why I am interested in student cooperatives. I have discussed this at a number of meetings and we came up with three kinds of motivations felt by a lot of students:

1. Economic--Cooperatives as a way to save money.
2. Community--Cooperatives as a way to form warm, emotional relationships (close friendships) with other people. Very much need in the competitive, fragmented, isolated, cold world of a big university is this type of community.
3. Political--A channel through which desires to change America politically can be expressed. An experiment with an alternative lifestyle, a collective, democratic form of ownership, and a base for political organizing that allows people to survive in the long run, instead of burning themselves out in confrontations.
4. Educational--Universities teach one very well how to read and write, to compete, and to cope with a bureaucracy. They do not teach one how to act and do things. Ph.D.'s who teach in Universities are in general theoreticians rather than people who act. More fundamentally, formal university education neglects to teach students how to relate to other people, values, maturity--how to be human in a broad sense. Cooperatives can help members develop into more capable people who are better able to love others.

O.K., four types of motivation which are no doubt real motivations felt by some people. I am not satisfied that the words mean very much. Trying to think of some other explanations of why co-ops meet my own needs kept me awake till the sun rose one night. Finally, at 5:30 a.m., I went and woke a friend in the co-op and asked her what cooperatives are for.

"But, what are co-ops for?" I asked.

"Fishin'," she replied sleepily.

"What else?" I asked.

"To meet people," she said.

"What else?"

"To go to sleep." she replied firmly and rolled over saying no more.

Now, this is very illuminating, isn't it. What a co-op is for is to have somebody to go ask what it is for at 5:50 a.m. Admittedly, the "fishin'" reference is slightly obscure. Perhaps it is best understood as a contrast to "fission," a much worse alternative to which more powerful agencies in our society are devoted. Fusion too, unfortunately. My friend claims she must have been dreaming about fish. For the scholarly, of course, there is Marx's famous description of life under socialism: "We will hunt in the morning and fish in the afternoon!"

To elaborate further on why students need cooperatives, a few more disconnected fragments:

Brook Farm--a historical co-op.

During the 1840's, the United States was beginning to industrialize. (Actually at the time, indus-

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trialization was more visible in England, but it was clear what was coming worldwide.) In 1845, the United States invaded Mexico, winning California, Texas, and the Southwest. Henry Thoreau went to jail for not paying taxes for war and wrote an essay on civil disobedience.

Apparently, there were a lot of relatively well-educated college-type people, especially around Boston, who didn't know what to do with themselves. Like Thoreau, the thought of working, scrambling, and striving for the almighty buck did not appeal to them, especially when it was clear that for every winner who got rich, there were three hundred mill hands working themselves to death in dreary factories.

There is a lot in common here with many students now, who would like something better to do with themselves than to be a cog in the machinery of a big bureaucracy devoted to making other people rich, or worse. You find a lot of people when you ask what they are doing after they graduate say: "I don't know." They know only what they don't like. Like poor, unskilled black people, there is really no place in society for them.

Anyway, a minister named George Ripley and a few of his friends and acquaintances, including Nathaniel Hawthorne, got together and bought a farm near Boston in the early 1840's dedicated to the idea that by cooperating and working together work and life could be rejoined--that work would no longer be a part of life spent in slavery but a pleasure. They also felt that by cooperating, they could live well without being rich. Moreover, they felt that manual labor and intellectual development could be combined through a cooperative lifestyle.

The Brook Farm community attracted many of the leading intellectuals of the day and produced a nationally distributed magazine called The Harbinger espousing the virtues of "associationism," and raised lots of money to carry out the various enterprises started by the community.

However, then as now, there was no magic. The city intellectuals really weren't very good farmers. The place was financially mismanaged. Hawthorne, after only one summer, figured out that he wasn't transforming the nature of society but that he was actually, in reality, shovelling cow shit, so he left and went back to Boston to write novels. The community got carried away into political theory--Fourierism--leading itself to taking on too much. It called itself a Phalanx (from Fourier's political theory) and build a huge, communal house which burned down with no insurance. Bankrupt and having spent a year in squabbling rather than community, the Brook farm people gave it up.

However, for a time, according to Emerson, who watched the farm from the beginning with understanding and reservations, "they did what all men seek to do, they created an agreeable place to live.

The farm created a context in which members of the community could place themselves and feel alive and comfortable.

### War Crimes Prevention

Although to say so may make a lot of people mad and not make sense to almost everybody, in my opinion, student co-ops are justified partly because their members are perhaps less liable to commit war crimes.

For thirty hours a week, the average American watches television. On television, he sees mainly two things: first, he sees hundreds of commercials during which his reason and emotions are assaulted with arguments to buy products. Usually, these arguments are lies and the products being sold are useless, if not actually harmful. The second main thing on television is violence--dozens of casual murders, beatings, etc. Life is very cheap, easy as pulling a trigger, no emotion whatsoever, except relief that the hero shot first. Mission Impossible--clean death.

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Now, switch to the news: United States-backed juntas are torturing political prisoners, cool bomber pilots are "doing a job", expertly, bombing civilians, ground troops are on trial for casually squeezing triggers and murdering unarmed civilians, and they feel nothing.

Because in a cooperative community, connections with other human beings are created, perhaps it makes slightly less likely to commit war crimes. In a co-op, we relate as personalities and often with some emotion, rather than as objects or targets.

### Dormitory Machines and Monopoly Landlords

During the early 1960's, the University of Wisconsin build the Southeast Area dormitories which, I believe, won admiration from University housing administrators nationally because of their advanced design. They had managed to squeeze three thousand students into three city blocks and feed them all in only six dining rooms. Efficiency is also high on a smaller scale: Each student's room was built exactly like hundreds of other rooms, containing two beds; two build-in desks and bookshelves; floors, tile; bathrooms shared by seventy students; walls, institutional pastels.

The pattern of life envisioned for the student is obvious and simple: eat, study, and sleep. The student is to act as a machine, enclosed in a sterile, concrete, educational factory. Why cooperatives? To get away from dormitories!

On the other hand, private apartments, the usual alternative to dormitories are machines of another kind. Their purpose is to make money for the landlord. Their quality is often low, in terms of size, maintenance and construction. Their price includes a "traffic will bear" factor. In most places, expanding student populations have created a scarcity of housing and landlords have gotten rich. Students find themselves in competition with low income families: five students can afford to pay more than a family, so rent goes up and families go out. Another reason for cooperatives is that students are so much at the mercy of landlords, usually lacking transportation to go far from campus, money to buy their own housing. Cooperatives can compete with landlords, and break monopolistic rents, if the cooperatives control enough space. This has never yet happened in this country. If rents have been lowered, it is the University that has competed by housing large numbers of students in dormitories or apartments. Student co-ops are everywhere too small.

### The Student as Nigger-Student Power

Not only are students supposed to be machines for learning, they are expected to dance and do other amusing, irresponsible and childish entertainments during the process. There are several particularly obnoxious things in the student role:

1. Academically, the student is entirely on the receiving end. The professor is god, giving out the truth. The student's experience and what he has to teach the professor are ignored by the heirarchical educational system. Students have too little to say about what is taught, and since identity is being molded by the educational experience, this amounts to oppression in some cases. That would be O.K., except that lots of what is being taught is wrong, making students less fit for life rather than more so.
2. Universities still retain vestiges of in loco parentis, a doctrine whereby the school replaces the parents in supervising children. The problem is that college students are not children, in most cases, and that the university makes a terrible parent. Universities end up serving in loco policeman, rather than parentis.

Student cooperatives organize students and give them a way of expressing their needs. Student governments should do this, but, in most cases, have been kept too trivial by a combination of students who run it because it will look good on their resume', and university administrations

## WHY STUDENT COOPERATIVES?

which make sure student governments have no voice in anything important.

If the students do not operate the cooperative responsibly, then it will fail--go bankrupt. Cooperatives are a way in which students can become living, real world people, rather than powerless victims.

All this idealism is, of course, just that. In fact, student cooperatives are beset with very difficult problems and have not, so far, had much effect one way or the other, even on those students directly involved. Still, cooperatives are harmless, and perhaps some of the people in them find some advantages. The most difficult part is to make an ideal into reality and that isn't easy.

The above are a few ideas that will probably fit no one. You pick your own reasons for having a co-op--the main thing is to think about why. If you don't, you are likely to build something that doesn't serve your needs.

## COOPERATIVE DEFINED

Cooperative is a word that has so many meanings to so many people that it is really meaningless. This is a description of a certain type of cooperative--student housing cooperatives--and how they work. A number of books and articles are referred to giving other meanings to cooperatives. At this point, some very brief presentations about what co-ops are, followed by a description of several already existing student cooperatives, will be given.

Co-ops are:

A group of people come together to achieve something they all want, but can best obtain best by working together rather than separately.

The goals can be anything from cheaper groceries, to making friends, to educating people, etc. Maybe different members have different goals--the important thing is that they do better to get what they want by working together.

Usually, the cooperative is an economic enterprise and, therefore, has a business aspect and an economic life. It buys and sells things most often or makes things.

But, a cooperative's goals are not purely economic, and in student cooperatives, the goals are not even mainly economic. That is because most students' real problems are not economic in the sense that saving a few dollars makes a lot of difference. (Do you agree? You don't have to, you know. This is just an opinion.)

This leads to a first main conclusion: Co-ops have two sides--economics and a social concern--and that is fundamental to understanding what you are trying to do.

If the whole thing were economic, probably some private, profit-oriented capitalist would already be into it making money. If the whole thing were for non-economic reasons, a lot of the co-op structure would be unnecessary and we might form a school, or a political party, or something, leaving money out entirely.

Co-ops have taken different roles in different countries. In communist countries, co-ops have been a way for the state to organize production on a grand scale. However, the control of major policy has remained with the state. In Sweden, co-ops broke monopolies by gaining enough of the market to compete with private capital in the consumer interest. In the United States, co-ops have been poor cousins, not very well supported by national policy in most cases, and fitting into the areas, like rural electric co-ops, where private capital would not go, or into areas, like

student housing, where private capital or public agencies were doing a poor job of meeting people's needs.

Co-ops are whatever their members make them. They are to save money, to bring people together and form a community, to educate members, to be an alternative to profit-oriented businesses.

The first prerequisite to forming a cooperative is a group of people with needs that can be met by working together through an organization, rather than individually. Traditionally the needs met by cooperatives have been economic--farmers needing higher prices for their products, consumers wanting cheaper groceries, etc.

Cooperatives have usually, however, gone beyond economics into a social concern--a desire to improve members' lives through the organization as well as save money.

Cooperatives are legally a democratically controlled form of business--controlled on a basis of membership--one man, one vote, rather than financial control like a stock corporation. The idea also is that a cooperative will be controlled by the people who use it, the people who buy its services (consumer co-op) or the people who do the work (producer co-op).

Theoretically, and to some extent in reality, this makes the co-op respond to other goals besides profit--the co-op reflects the concerns of membership. In fact, many co-ops fall short of the ideal. Members are apathetic--a few people really decide things. Managers take over. The democratic structure, to be meaningful, depends on members knowing what is going on and caring what happens. This means that co-ops must take a lot of time to educate members about what they are doing. Members need a kind of consciousness about the aims and methods of the co-op. Please read on and be an activist in controlling your co-op. There is no magic, unless you make it. A poorly managed co-op with narrow, selfish goals will not serve people's needs as well, even as an ordinary profit-minded capitalist. You must take the co-op and make it into something useful.

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Let us make the dual nature of co-ops explicit:

1. They are businesses like General Motors.
2. They are motivated by members' concerns rather than just by profit.

These statements have consequences:

1. If you are not a successful business, your co-op will soon disappear, go broke, cease, and die. Co-ops operate within an economic and social system that will kill them if they don't take in more money than they spend.
2. If you are a successful business, so what. Successful business is likely to make us all extinct in its desire to sell us useless junk. If efficient ways of making money are your only desire, profit-oriented corporations are more efficient, you don't have to hold annual meetings and elections with so many people. To be successful, a co-op must have higher purposes than making money. These purposes depend on what people who are the members need, in what ways their lives are unsatisfactory. The center of the co-ops' concern is human beings, rather than dollars and the business is really a means to human ends.

MAX KUMMEROW



Issue #19 23 April 1971

Excerpts: from a letter to NASCO from the Cooperative League of the USA - 59 East Van Buren, Chicago, Illinois, 60605- regarding the Madison co-op conference last weekend:

"No one in the League received an invitation to this meeting that we know of. If we had received one, or had been told who did, we could have promoted attendance. Glenn Anderson was invited and did attend and promoted attendance. We are concerned that other people received the letter under these circumstances--too late to effectively respond.

We think our work with you and others on the Washington meeting, and Midland's work on the Minneapolis meeting -- particularly M. D. Zeddies' -- indicate a willingness to help with student co-op programs. I do believe that one way to assure involvement in a program -- apart from making sure an invitation gets out in time -- is to put an organization on the program. Outside of Wisconsin Federation of Cooperatives, I saw no programming of existing co-ops at Madison.

Perhaps you could take this up with the people who organize these conferences.

Philip J. Dodge  
Assistant to the President

## FEDERATING CO\_OPS

Possibly one of the greatest problems facing the student cooperative movement is the fact that few people feel, or seem to realize they are part of it. Altogether too many student co-ops are content to stay in their own worlds, not interested in any more than simply providing their particular service. Is this bad? If they provide the service well, what more need they do? Traditionally, student co-ops have stood for more than the provision of a service. They have tried to promote a lifestyle—a way of living in which your neighbor is more than the fellow next door. They have tried to promote the idea of decision-making by those affected by the decisions --at least in theory.

It is a sad commentary on cooperation to see student co-ops, in the same town, hardly aware of each others existence. For organizations founded on the idea that people can work together successfully for mutual benefit, it is hard to see why the individual groups tend toward isolation. The idea of working together for mutual benefit seems difficult to dispute, yet it seems to be failing in our own ranks. Doesn't it seem reasonable that an association of the student co-ops in a given area would be beneficial to the members of the independent co-ops by providing the service more efficiently, and better, and to the students in general by increasing the capacity for the expansion of both membership and the service provided?

### What is gained through an association?

Although it is impossible to sit down and think of all the possible benefits, the following areas may be helped considerably by an association of student co-ops:

#### Membership

By centralizing membership, especially when dealing with housing co-ops, time-consuming duplication and overlapping expenses can be eliminated. For example, where four housing co-ops might take out one larger ad, saving both money and members' time. It can also simplify the procedure for becoming a member of one of the houses. Where someone would have to apply for membership at each of four houses before, the association can provide a central place to apply, where the prospective member can specify his interest in a particular house, or simply get into the co-op system.

#### Maintenance and repairs

Major repairs, either planned or emergency can be a tremendous strain on a co-op's budget. However, if each of the members of a co-op association have been contributing to a maintenance and repair fund, the reserves build faster, with less strain on a particular co-op. This way, if one house for example has two bad years, needing a new roof the first and a new furnace the second, the money will be there-- available to make the necessary repairs-- without destroying that or any other co-op.



### Expansion and development

If demand is high, and a new house needed, or a bookstore or co-op grocery capital will be required. It is nearly impossible for either one existing co-op or any other single group to come up with the necessary money. But, if members of an association have been paying into an expansion and development fund, the funds might be available, and the needed expansion underway. Thinking also in terms of planning and carrying out such projects, the greater membership of the association provides a better pool from which workers can come.

### Purchasing of food and supplies

By purchasing for a larger group the association (as opposed to an individual co-op) can take advantage of the price reductions available through quantity, purchasing. In addition, the association might have enough purchasing power not only to influence price, but also quality.

### Professional help

Although student co-ops generally shy away from hiring professional help, the ones that are operating most successfully do have people working for them. The employees work for the co-op, and not vice versa. The decision-making must stay with the co-op members. This employee, let's call him the executive secretary, should train officers. Learning how to keep the co-op's books can be rough, but an executive secretary helping the treasurers learn, can make things easier and help the co-op run more smoothly. Because by their nature students are transient, student co-ops have a tremendous turnover rate. All contacts established and projects started are frequently lost within a year, simply because the originator moves on, and nobody continues in his place. An executive secretary will be around for a longer period. He will be able to maintain the contacts. He will become known and hopefully respected by the community. He'll be there to see that projects started are completed. In general, he'll be able to provide a liason between the student co-op and the community-- and bad community relations can kill a student co-op.

Having an executive is certainly beneficial, however he must be paid, and if he's worth keeping, a fair salary. This is quite a burden on the 26 residents of one co-op house (it's nearly impossible), but when divided over 200 members of a co-op association, it becomes reasonable, and well worth it.

### Helping a co-op with a bad year

If one of the member co-ops has a bad year, and doesn't get the income they expected, they are likely to have a hard time paying bills-- which might lead to bankruptcy. But since it is a member of an association, the other co-ops can loan it money, in hopes things will soon be better. Of course such an action is a gamble, but in some cases it is probably worth it. There are many things that can cause a bad year -- members might not support their house because it's too dirty, too ramshackle, or just too untogether. Here again the association can help. They can provide expertise or finances to get the house back together.

This last point, however leads to the next point of consideration. The successful members would be supporting an unsuccessful member. That is, members of one co-op paying for the faults or mistakes of another. There are certainly some advantages to an association, but what do the individual co-ops stand to lose?

### What are the disadvantages of an association?

#### Inequality of participation

One of the frequent worries when forming an association is that some of the members might have to give up more and that others might gain more. Consider a situation where in a certain town four student housing co-ops want to form an association, which is to become the landholding agency. One of the houses already owns itself, while the others are just leasing properties. In this case the house owning itself would lose more in that it was giving up its property. It should, however, be noted that that house also gains more from the association. The maintenance and repair funds will benefit them most, as will the help of the other houses should they have a bad year. While the leased houses would simply lose the lease, a bad year could mean foreclosure to the house owned by itself.

#### Loss of autonomy

In creating and staying with an association with other co-ops, each member co-op must accept some responsibilities, and of course these responsibilities can inhibit some aspects of the houses' operation. The extent of this depends on the structure of the association under consideration. While a loosely structured organization is likely to require less responsibility, it will probably also provide less service. This trade-off must be realized and considered when forming any type of organizational structure. Are the advantages outweighed by the loss of autonomy?

#### Bureaucracy

Whenever an organization deals with more than a hundred or so people, it is usually necessary to set up a bureaucracy. A bureaucracy is not in itself necessarily bad, but rather the problem is the tendency of bureaucracies to become unresponsive to the people they were created to serve. Careful planning can eliminate much of this tendency. However, because the bureaucracy tends to be composed of those who are more interested, and because they have more contact with the facts, the bureaucracy (including the leaders) will probably be able to exert a great deal of pressure to see things happen the way they feel they should.

#### Member Involvement

In a group of twenty-five, a good degree of member involvement is a reasonable expectation, but a co-op association with two hundred or more members is being unrealistic to expect to achieve a high degree of member participation. Members will get involved when they are interested, angered, or feel threatened.

But when things go smoothly, they are content to let things run as they have been. (After all, why not, when things have been working satisfactorily?) This is why it is important that the smallest units (the houses, for example) should retain ultimate power -- they can generate involvement. Each house may have a couple of members interested in the larger group, but nearly all house members can see a need to be interested in their particular house. So you can be sure that when a decision affects a house, and the house is made aware of it, its members will become interested.

### Education and information dissemination

The lack of education and transmittel or easy accessability to information is probably the greatest pitfall to be encountered. The quickest way for the bureaucracy to become unresponsive is to allow it to stop providing good education to the members. The educational program should explain what co-ops are, on both philosophical and practical levels, how they operate, why they succeed or fail, and what they can do. As far as information goes, members must be told what is happening, even if they are not required to make a decision. There is no faster way to generate cries of "bureaucracy" or "smash the state" than to be lax in providing all the information possible to the members.

As with all things, there are both advantages and disadvantages to forming an association of co-ops. If your desire is for a group which is totally on its own, with the ability to fall flat on its face as well as succeed, and which has a high degree of member involvement, then maybe you're better off as an independent organization. But you must also realize that if you have any hope of influencing social change, as an isolated group you are doomed to failure. This has been one of the reasons the co-op movement has been unable to generate the changes it could -- it's too willing to remain fragmented and isolated; it's too willing to say large organizations can't work, and therefore not bother experimenting with the structure to find some way to make them work. Like the rest of society, they've become calcified, and not willing to be different, to try something new -- but instead turn inward, ignoring others, selfishly isolating themselves and changing nothing.

Rex Chisholm .

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### IMPORTANT REMINDER!!!!

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN NASCO'S 1971 HOSTELLING PROGRAM, AND WANT TO BECOME A PARTICIPANT---EITHER AS A HOSTELLER, OR AS A PARTICIPATING HOSTEL---YOU SHOULD HURRY TO GET YOUR APPLICATION IN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

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