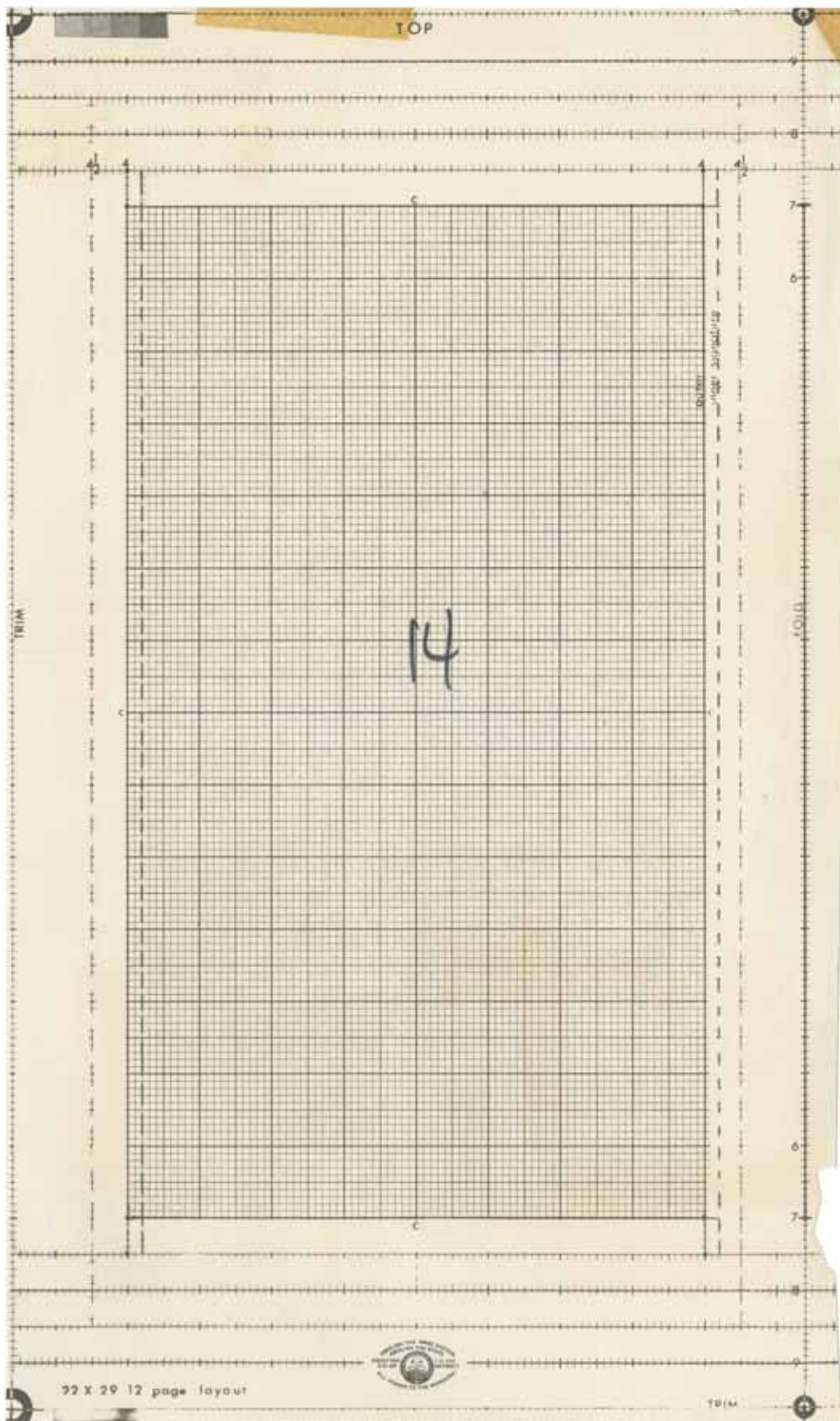


The Detroit Printing Co-op

The Politics of
the Joy of Printing

Danielle Aubert

INVENTORY PRESS



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The Detroit Printing Co-op

In the fall of 1969, a group of friends active in radical left politics drove from Detroit to Chicago to pick up a fifty-year-old Harris offset printing press. They had received information that equipment from a recently closed print shop was for sale. The friends worked quickly to borrow money, rent a work space in Southwest Detroit, and arrange transport for the industrial printer. They founded the Detroit Printing Co-op and declared the equipment social property, available for use by anyone who wished to learn how to operate it and contribute to its maintenance. Over the course of the next ten years the Co-op would be the site of production for tens of thousands of leftist books, pamphlets, posters, and brochures.

The Co-op drew a wide range of people from across the city, most involved in movement politics. Some of the publications printed over the course of the 1970s include the first English translation of Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*; the Black Star publication *The Political Thought of James Forman*; the poetry and art magazine *riverrun*; five years' worth of issues of *Radical America*, the journal of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS); and *Rebel's Voice*, an unofficial newspaper made by high school students. All books published by Black & Red, the radical left press that Fredy and Lorraine Perlman founded in 1970, were printed at the Co-op while it was open.

This book is an attempt to collect in one place the publications printed at the Detroit Printing Co-op. It is unlikely that it is complete, as hundreds of individuals passed through the Co-op and there was never any official "management." However, the range of printed materials represented here indicate a rich and vibrant political world that emanated out of the Co-op building on Michigan Avenue.

Detroit in 1969 held palpable revolutionary potential. Radicalized students were dropping out of

college and moving to working class manufacturing cities where they saw possibility for enacting system change. Various leftist groups were active in Detroit, and labor unions were strong. Facing Reality, an offshoot of the Trotskyist Worker's Party, had been a worker-intellectual hub in Detroit from the 1950s. The effects of the 1967 rebellion—quelled only when the National Guard was called in—were felt widely. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers organized in auto factories and some of their members made use of the Co-op equipment. The Republic of New Afrika was founded in Detroit in 1968, and the city also had a vibrant chapter of the Black Panthers. The underground newspaper *Fifth Estate* was thriving, publishing biweekly issues out of their Cass Corridor offices with a circulation reaching into the tens of thousands.

Fredy and Lorraine Perlman, founding members of the Detroit Printing Co-op, were a part of a wave of radicals who moved to Detroit in the late 1960s seeking to participate in Detroit's active political climate. Fredy was born in Czechoslovakia and had immigrated, via Bolivia, to the United States, where his family ended up in Kentucky. Lorraine grew up in Iowa City. They met in New York, where they lived for several years, then moved to Belgrade, Yugoslavia. When they returned to the United States, they found themselves in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where Fredy had a two-year teaching position at Western Michigan University. The Perlmans finally made their way to Detroit, which was racially and ethnically diverse, inexpensive, and not too far from Ann Arbor, where Lorraine was enrolled as a graduate student at the University of Michigan. Lorraine wrote of Detroit, "In many ways this city resembled Belgrade: it was sprawling and unpretentious, a melting-pot for arrivals from other regions, a place where factory work was held in high regard."¹

¹ Lorraine Perlman, *Having Little, Being Much* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1989), p. 56.

	MOVEMENT PRICES (for movement people and non-profit organizations)				COMMERCIAL PRICES (for institutions, businesses, etc.)			
	1 Color	2 Colors	3 Colors	Multicolor	1 Color	2 Colors	3 Colors	Multicolor
NEGATIVES								
Line Sheet (Copy size up to 8 1/2" X 11")	.80	1.80	2.40	3.20	1.50	3.00	4.50	6.00
Half-tone (Copy size up to 5 1/2" X 8 1/2")	1.20	2.40	3.60	4.80	2.40	4.80	7.20	9.60
OFFSET PLATES								
Price includes stripping and spacing of negatives	1.30	3.00	5.00	10.00	2.50	6.00	10.00	20.00
PRINTING (on 8 1/2" X 11" sheets)								
Press Run, First 1000	3.00	6.00	9.50	15.50	5.50	12.00	19.00	31.00
60 lb. White Offset Paper	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50
10 lb. White Bond or Similar	2.50	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75
Total Price for First 1000								
One Side								
on 60 lb. White Offset Paper	9.10	14.00	20.90	32.80	15.00	26.50	39.00	62.50
on 10 lb. White Bond	7.60	14.00	14.00	14.00	13.25	13.25	13.25	13.25
Two Sides								
on 60 lb. White Offset Paper	14.20	28.20	37.80	61.60	24.50	47.50	72.50	119.50
on 10 lb. White Bond	14.20	14.00	14.00	14.00	13.25	13.25	13.25	13.25
Price per 1000 for larger press runs								
One Side—2000 to 5000								
on 60 lb. White Offset Paper	6.50	8.00	12.00	18.00	9.00	12.00	24.00	36.00
on 10 lb. White Bond	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	7.25	7.25	7.25	7.25
One Side—Above 5000								
on 60 lb. White Offset Paper	6.00	8.00	12.00	18.00	9.00	12.00	24.00	36.00
on 10 lb. White Bond	4.75	4.75	4.75	4.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Two Sides—2000 to 5000								
on 60 lb. White Offset Paper	8.00	14.80	24.00	39.00	12.50	24.00	48.00	72.00
on 10 lb. White Bond	8.00	8.00	8.00	8.00	12.50	12.50	12.50	12.50
Two Sides—Above 5000								
on 60 lb. White Offset Paper	8.00	14.00	24.00	39.00	12.50	24.00	48.00	72.00
on 10 lb. White Bond	8.00	8.00	8.00	8.00	12.50	12.50	12.50	12.50
TYPESETTING (on IBM Selectric Composer)								
& LAYOUT	The price depends on the nature of the copy (Roughly \$85 to \$25 for a full page of copy)				For commercial outfits, roughly between \$20 and \$30 for a full page of copy.			
NOTE: For printing on 8 1/2" X 11" paper, add \$1 per 1000 to the press run, \$2.00 per 1000 on paper costs, and 30 cents for each negative. For other sizes, colors and weights of paper, the price of the printing depends mainly on the cost of the paper and its performance on the press.								

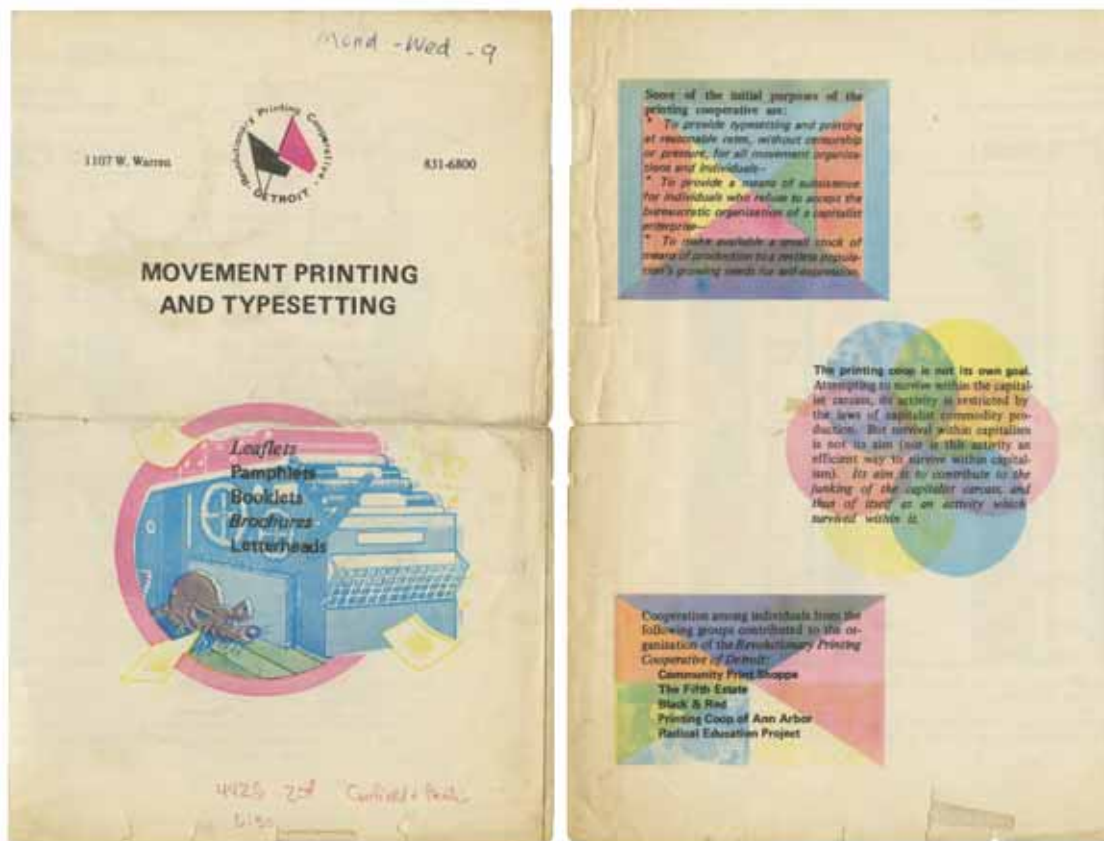
"Itemized Price Schedule" for the Revolutionary Printing Co-op, a precursor to the Detroit Printing Co-op, ca. 1969.

Setting up the print shop

Upon arrival in Detroit, the Perlmans immediately connected with friends at *Fifth Estate* and an assortment of leftists, including Martin Glaberman of Facing Reality, Jon Supak and Hannah Ziegellaub, Don Campbell and Judy Campbell, League of Revolutionary Black Workers member Carl Smith, and others. *Fifth Estate* had typesetting equipment and their office was next door to the independently-run Community Print Shoppe, which housed an offset press. The Perlmans and friends

printed several things there before the Detroit Printing Co-op opened in 1970.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was difficult to find presses willing to print left publications. Offset presses had been used commercially for many years by then, and printers started replacing their early twentieth-century machines with new ones. As secondhand offset presses arrived on the market, independent groups of radicals were able to acquire them cheaply and set up their own print shops. At the same time, typewriters such as the



Front and back of the folded "Itemized Price Schedule" for the Revolutionary Printing Co-op, ca. 1969.

IBM Selectric Composer were being manufactured. These used a technology that made it possible to set type with different fonts, where previously one would have had to set type on a letterpress jobbing printer for a professional look—or settle for setting text in Courier on a typewriter. The IBM Selectric (and competitor products like the Veratype machine) allowed people to set pages of type much more cheaply. As a result, the late 1960s and 1970s bore witness to a mushrooming of the “underground press”—independently printed materials by groups outside the mainstream.

When they first arrived in Detroit, the Perlman, who were publishing texts as Black & Red, joined with individuals from *Fifth Estate*, the Community Print Shoppe, Radical Education Project (REP), and a printing co-op from Ann Arbor to form what they called the Revolutionary Printing Co-operative.² The Perlman had printed often with REP, the printing collective for SDS, in Ann Arbor. In the summer of 1969 REP had moved their operation to Detroit.

Members of the Revolutionary Printing Cooperative drew up an itemized price list of

² Lorraine Perlman describes Fredy's first visit to the Community Print Shoppe, "Peter Werbe, *Fifth Estate* stalwart, took Fredy to the adjacent print shop operated by a seventeen-year-old mechanical whiz, Joel Landy. Fredy was impressed by the tall, skinny teenager and often recalled his first view of Joel crawling out from under the gears and rollers

of the press he was adjusting. Joel welcomed Fredy, gave him a key, a ten-minute lesson on darkroom techniques and encouraged him to start printing." L. Perlman 1989, p. 59.

³ Movement Printing and Typesetting, ca. 1969. Emphasis in the original.

⁴ Marszalek's concerns are echoed almost exactly by Perlman himself

years later, in a letter to a friend, when the Co-op closed down in 1980 and the Harris Press was passed on to a group of young anarchists in Ann Arbor, MI.

⁵ Recollections from Perlman's visit to Chicago to pick up a printer were conveyed to the author by Bernard Marszalek in a conversation on January 20, 2018.

services, with discounted rates for “movement people and non-profit organizations”: producing negatives, preparing offset plates, printing, and typesetting on *Fifth Estate*'s IBM Selectric.

They articulated some of the reasons for forming a printing co-operative: to provide typesetting and printing “without censorship or pressure,” to provide “a means of subsistence for individuals who refuse to accept the bureaucratic organization of a capitalist enterprise,” and “to make available a small stock of means of production to a restless population's growing needs for self-expression.” They further explained,

*The printing coop [sic] is not its own goal. Attempting to survive within the capitalist carcass, its activity is restricted by the laws of capitalist commodity production. But survival within capitalism is not its aim (nor is this activity an efficient way to survive within capitalism). Its aim is to contribute to the junking of the capitalist carcass, and that of itself as an activity which survived within it.*³

While it might be possible to eke out a “means of subsistence” with the equipment made available through the cooperative, they did not see it as an “efficient way to survive.”

Several of the individuals involved in the Revolutionary Printing Cooperative would soon re-organize into the Detroit Printing Co-op when a friend of Fredy & Lorraine's from Chicago, Bernard Marszalek, helped them acquire the large Harris offset press. Marszalek was a young graphic designer and activist who had been working at a print cooperative in Chicago called J. S. Jordan Press, which printed many of the Yippie fliers and leaflets that were distributed during the summer of 1968 for protests against the Democratic National Convention. He introduced the Detroit group to a dealer who had a huge warehouse full of second-hand printing equipment.

Marszalek encouraged them to choose a smaller machine, knowing that running a large offset printer was a big undertaking. People apprenticed or went

to vocational schools for years to learn how to operate industrial presses. He was concerned that while the Detroit friends had noble intentions, they did not have a clear plan for running a large offset machine. The press they chose was hulking and industrial-sized, and printed 22 × 29-inch press sheets. At this size, they would face the challenges of getting ink across long rollers, moving unwieldy stacks of paper around the print shop, and using blowers properly to separate the sheets of paper as they were fed into the machine.⁴

In justifying his decision for getting a larger printer, Perlman told Marszalek that it would be economical for them—they could gang up more pages on a large press sheet, for example.⁵ Perlman was specifically focused on the ability to print books, rather than only flyers and leaflets. There were other groups in Detroit with printing abilities—notably Black Star, which had a Gestetner press which they used to print newsletters and countless flyers. But the offset press at the Co-op would make it possible for the Perlman to run every aspect of Black & Red, their publishing house—from writing, editing, and layout, to printing, binding, and distribution. They could also more easily print for others—they had already begun printing issues of *Radical America* at the Community Print Shoppe.

They secured a space on the ground floor of a building in a working class, industrial neighborhood at the corner of Vinewood and Michigan Avenue, across from a Cadillac factory. Upstairs from them was REP, which had its own facility. Dozens of people poured energy into making the Co-op functional. A Chicago printer came out to give them a day of instruction on operating the Harris press. They also had a manual. A comrade of Carl Smith's from the League of Revolutionary Black Workers worked in a large printing establishment. He brought a professional electrician to the Co-op to wire the machines.⁶ Fredy Perlman had previous printing experience running a mimeograph copy shop in New York City and working on mid-size

⁶ L. Perlman 1989, p. 63.

offset printers. Other skilled individuals came through the Co-op in the early years and helped troubleshoot the Harris press as they got to know its quirks.

Setting up cameras and a darkroom were critical to making the Co-op functional. Lorraine Perlman described Fredy Perlman's approach to designing the space: "Fredy read books about darkroom design and drew up plans for adjacent darkrooms, one for each camera. Then the layout of the rest of the shop was decided on. With the same meticulous care he had used on statistical analyses in Yugoslav classrooms, Fredy now used flow charts to determine where to place the equipment, the goal being to avoid moving the paper unnecessarily from the time it was loaded onto the press until it was packed in boxes at the cutter. (Paper-moving was no trivial concern.)"⁷

One friend, Judy Campbell, installed plumbing in the darkroom. Another friend helped them acquire an enormous supply of film, plates, and darkroom supplies—purchased for \$500 at the auction of a bankrupt print shop. Lorraine wrote that a single lot of panchromatic film lasted them through the 1970s, permitting Fredy, "sometimes with Carl Smith, sometimes with me, to experiment with color reproduction without thought to expense of supplies."⁸ She said of this period at the Co-op, "Fredy was exhilarated by all aspects of the new activity ... he frequently asserted that never before had he felt so intellectually stimulated as he was by the challenges and gratifications he found in mastering the graphic arts equipment and techniques."⁹

The Harris press only accommodated one metal image plate at a time, so printing multiple colors required that the same sheet of paper pass through the machine once for each color, with the need to carefully align the page so it registered properly. They printed on whatever discounted or free paper that was available to them, often acquiring remaindered stock from other printers or paper distributors. Different print runs make use of different kinds of

paper—sometimes coated or uncoated stock, with oddly textured or colored heavier weight paper for the covers.

Marszalek would describe Fredy's inventive approach to printing, "[He] came to Chicago with one of his first color pamphlets and proudly told myself and my printer partner at J. S. Jordan Press that he got his press to register pretty well and managed to mix inks to approximate full color printing. As I remember he used three colors: yellow, red and dark blue but not black. He was shocked when we told him that the four-color process was exactly what he was trying to achieve. He had never heard of that before!"¹⁰

Soon after setting up the Co-op, its users wrote up a set of shared guidelines which established that no single person or group controlled access to the equipment:

The equipment of the Printing Co-op is social property. It is and shall be controlled by all individuals who need, use and maintain it.

It is not and shall not be owned or controlled by any individual or group of individuals, whether they claim to serve, represent, or speak for society, whether they are elected or self-appointed.

The purpose of the Printing Co-op is to provide access to printing equipment to all those individuals in the community who desire to express themselves (on a non-profit basis), with charges made only to maintain the print shop (rent, utilities, materials, maintenance of the machinery).

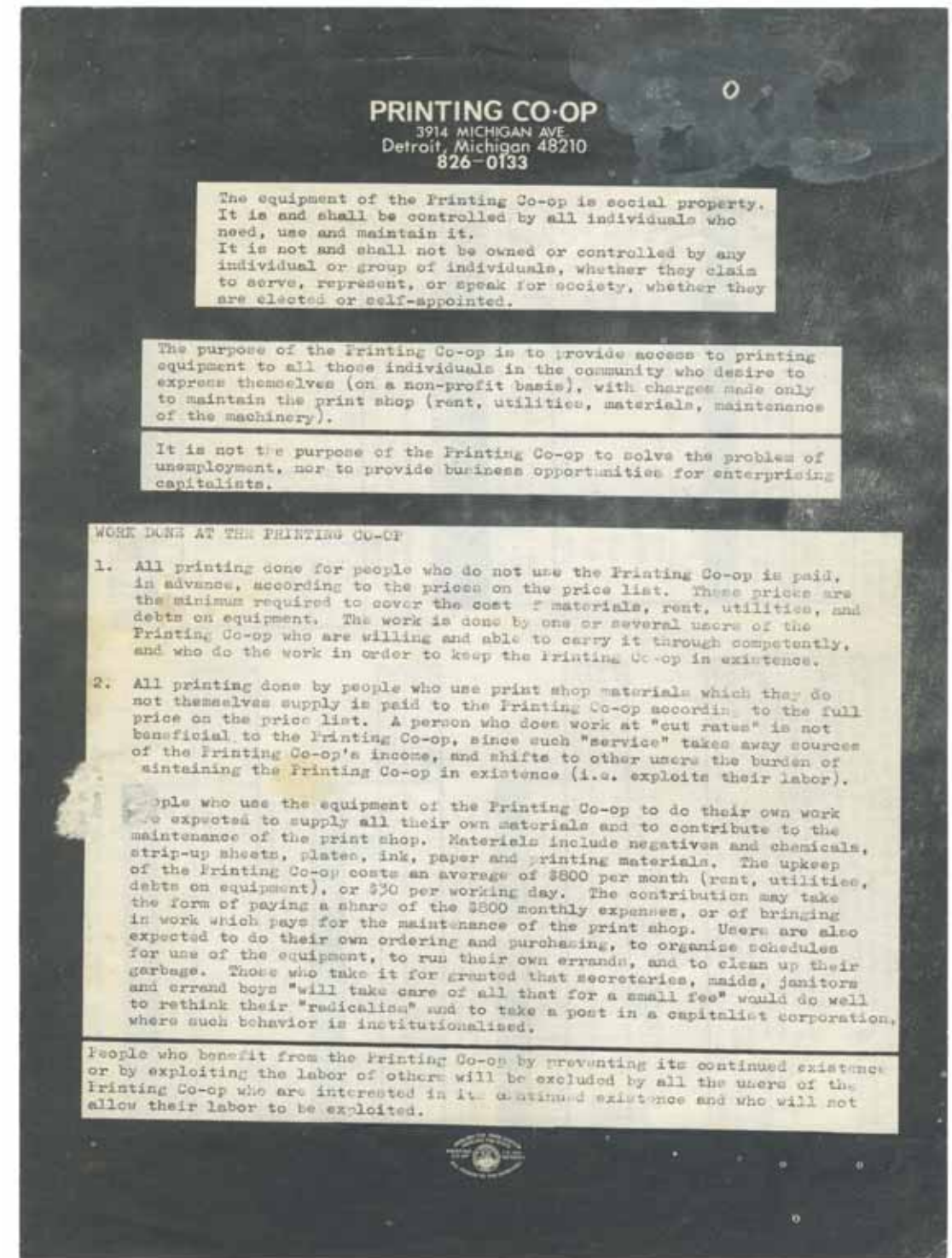
*It is not the purpose of the Printing Co-op to solve the problem of unemployment, nor to provide business opportunities for enterprising capitalists.*¹¹

There were numerous discussions about the role of wages—and wage labor—as it related to printing. There were some who would have liked the Co-op to provide employment, and others who hoped to earn income through the Co-op. But the Perlman's doubted from the beginning that it could ever function as a commercial enterprise—the equipment

7
Ibid., 62.
8
Ibid., 64.
9

Lorraine Perlman read this statement at a panel discussion at 9338 Campau Gallery, October 9, 2016.

10
Email from Bernard Marszalek,
October 5, 2016.
11
Rules of the Printing Co-op, 1970.



These guidelines were taped to the wall at the Detroit Printing Co-op.

PRINTING CO-OP PRICE LIST All payment is made in advance because, not being a capitalist enterprise, the Printing Co-op cannot extend credit, does not have liquid funds, and does not stockpile inventories of materials.

Quantity	LEAFLETS 8 1/2 x 11		POSTERS 14 x 22		POSTERS 22 x 29	
	1 side	2 sides	1 side	2 sides	1 side	2 sides
500	\$ 8.50	\$11	\$30	\$30	\$50	\$50
1000	8.50	14	50	42	44	80
2000	14.50	22	42	66	75	120
3000	20.50	30	40	90	105	160
4000	26.50	38	78	114	135	200
5000	32.50	46	94	138	165	240
each additional 1000	6.00	8	18	24	30	40

Printed from camera-ready copy on white paper (50 lb offset), black ink. Typesetting, layout, paste-up, halftone, another paper, another color of ink, see all extra.

Quantity	PAMPHLETS 5 1/2 x 8 1/2		JOURNALS & BOOKS with covers 5 1/2 x 8 1/2		
	24 pgs. or 1 signature	40 pgs. or 2 signatures	72 pgs. 4 covers	96 pgs. 4 covers	120 pgs. 5 covers
1000	\$107	106	284	342	412
2000	174	200	472	564	674
3000	241	414	660	796	974
4000	308	528	848	1008	1198
5000	375	642	1036	1250	1460
each additional 1000	67	134	188	220	260

Quantity	7 x 11		7 x 11	
	16 pgs. 1 sig.	24 pgs. 2 sigs.	48 pgs. 3 sigs. + cover	80 pgs. 4 sigs. 5 covers
first 1000	\$107	186	284	342
each additional 1000	67	114	108	222

Includes printing, folding, collating (if more than 1 signature), stitching, trimming and waste.

Quantity	MAGAZINES, NEWSLETTERS 11 x 14 1/2				
	12 pgs. 1 sig.	24 pgs. 2 sigs.	36 pgs. 3 sigs.	48 pgs. 4 sigs.	60 pgs. 5 sigs.
first 1000	\$107	186	244	302	372
each additional 1000	67	114	148	182	222

Includes printing, folding, collating (if more than 1 signature), stitching, trimming and waste.

Quantity	SMALL NEWSPAPERS 11 x 14 1/2				
	8 pgs. 1 sig.	16 pgs. 2 sigs.	24 pgs. 3 sigs.	32 pgs. 4 sigs.	40 pgs. 5 sigs.
first 1000	\$107	186	244	302	372
each additional 1000	67	114	148	182	222

Includes printing, folding, collating (if more than 1 signature), stitching, trimming and waste.

Quantity	TABLOIDS 14 x 22				
	4 pgs. 1 sig.	8 pgs. 2 sigs.	12 pgs. 3 sigs.	16 pgs. 4 sigs.	20 pgs. 5 sigs.
first 1000	\$85	164	222	280	340
each additional 1000	45	92	126	160	200

Includes printing, folding, collating (if more than 1 signature), and waste.

The following basis was used to calculate the price of all printing on 22 x 29 signatures, from camera-ready copy, on white 50 lb offset paper, with black ink:
 Printing: \$80 for first 1000, \$40 for each additional 1000 with the following reductions for runs of more than one signature: 10% for 2 signatures, 20% for 3 signatures, 25% for 4 or more signatures.
 Folding: \$5 per 1000 sheets
 Collating: \$5 per 1000 sheets
 Stitching: \$10 per 1000 books, pamphlets or magazines.
 Trimming: \$10 per 1000 books, pamphlets or magazines.
 Covers: stock (including ordering and purchase): \$15/1000; Printing: \$15/1000; Folding: \$5/1000; Collating: \$5/1000

Detroit Printing Co-op price list, ca. 1970.

was too old, and trying to make the Co-op profitable would limit the flexibility of letting anyone come in and use it freely.¹² Ultimately, the group that first set up the Co-op aimed to make it a place where participants could engage in printing and simultaneously resist having their labor transformed into what Fredy Perlman might call “indifferent activity” undertaken as a means of survival.¹³

While profit was never a motive, they did have bills. It was important for the Co-op to take on paying jobs in the first few years in order to settle their debts. They had borrowed \$5,000 to acquire

the equipment and space necessary to get things up and running. Lorraine Perlman kept track of the Co-op’s accounts. They had a list of debtors taped to the wall and recorded who had been paid off. It took them most of two years to pay back what they owed, which they did by collectively taking on paid jobs for others. After that period, most of the work done at the Co-op was self-defined by people who bought supplies themselves and contributed to the maintenance of the print shop.¹⁴

They calculated that the upkeep of the Co-op cost an average of \$800 per month, or \$30 per

12 Lorraine Perlman, 9338 Campau panel.

13 F. Perlman, *Reproduction of Daily Life* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1972 edition), p. 4: “The sold creative power, or sold daily activity, takes the form of labor; labor is a historically specific form of human activity; labor is abstract activity which has only one

property; it is marketable; it can be sold for a given quantity of money; labor is indifferent activity; indifferent to the particular task performed and indifferent to the particular subject to which the task is directed. Digging, printing and carving are different activities, but all three are labor in capitalist society; labor is simply “earning money.” Living activity which takes the form of labor is

a means to earn money. Life becomes a means of survival.”

14 During this time, they were also being monitored by the police, who sat outside the Co-op watching people come and go. When asked what they were doing there, they said they knew that a group had acquired a printing press, and they were suspicious that they might be printing

working day. Co-op users could contribute to the maintenance of the print shop by bringing in paying work, paying a share of the \$800 monthly expenses, or helping on paid projects. This work was different from wage labor—people were free to come and go and no one was profiting from their work. The labor that any individual put into working at the Co-op on paid projects went directly toward meeting the basic financial demands of the print shop (rent, supplies, debts).

Users were also expected to schedule use of equipment, clean up after themselves, and do their own ordering and purchasing: “Those who take it for granted that secretaries, maids, janitors and errand boys ‘will take care of all that for a small fee’ would do well to rethink their ‘radicalism’ and to take a post in a capitalist corporation, where such behavior is institutionalized.”¹⁵

After the Co-op opened, they created a price list. A note at the top reads, “All payment is made in advance because, not being a capitalist enterprise, the Printing Co-op cannot extend credit, does not have liquid funds, and does not stockpile inventories of materials.”¹⁶ The Co-op rules are printed on the back of the price list along with further explanations about the nature of work at the Co-op, which was done by “one or several users of the Printing Co-op who are willing and able to carry it through competently.” There is no reference to Co-op “members,” although I use the term sometimes in this book—people are referred to as “users” of the Co-op.

People were explicitly discouraged from trying to use the Co-op equipment to turn a profit—“a person who does work at ‘cut rates’ is not beneficial to the Printing Co-op, since such ‘service’ takes away sources of the Printing Co-op’s income, and shifts to other users the burden of maintaining the Printing Co-op in existence (i.e. exploits their labor).”¹⁷

Abolish the Wage System / Abolish the State / All Power to the Workers

A publication’s print origins are not usually identifiable—it’s hard to tell exactly where

money. Records of this surveillance are in the Red Squad file that the Detroit police kept on Fredy and Lorraine Perlman.

15 Rules of the Printing Co-op, 1970.

16 Movement Printing and Typesetting, ca. 1969.

17 Rules of the Printing Co-op.

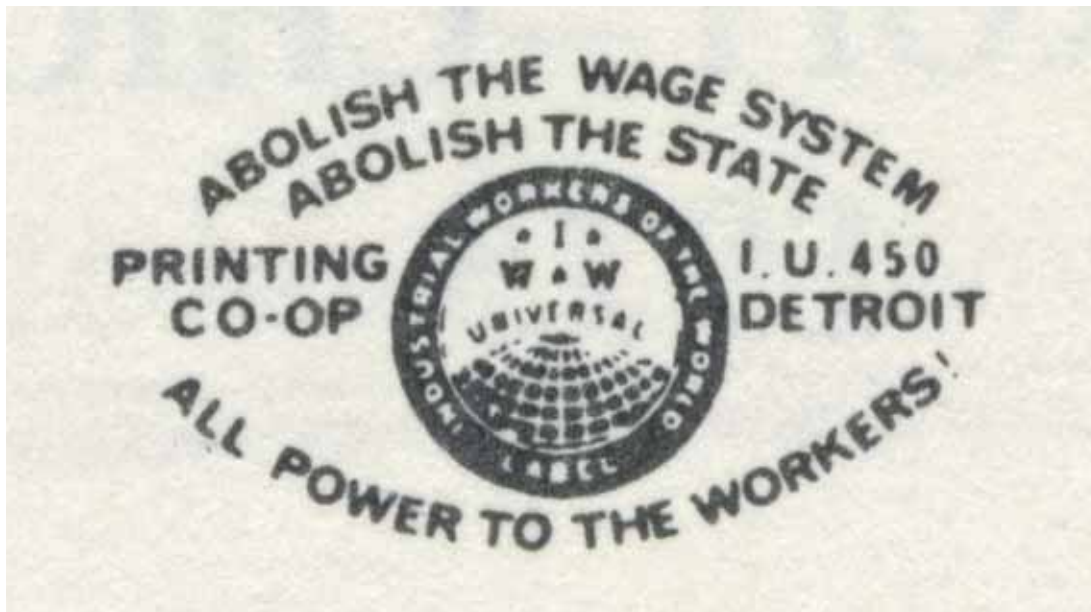
something was printed once it is out in the world. One can often find information about the author, publisher, and year of publication. Sometimes artists, designers, and photographers are credited, but the printer—the person and machine that physically put ink on paper—typically goes unnamed. The Co-op users were intensely aware of the physical labor of typesetting and printing. Black & Red books often include notes about the labor involved in their production.

For the most part, the publications included in this book were printed on the Harris offset press, though some things may have been printed on one of two smaller presses that also shared the Co-op’s space. The materials printed at the Co-op are identifiable through the inclusion of the Detroit Printing Co-op’s union label, also called a “bug,” printed somewhere on an opening or closing page. A union bug is a small badge that appears on materials printed at union shops—discreetly placed, they usually appear near the edge of the printed area, and include the printer’s shop number. They often read “Allied Printing,” an indication that all aspects of the work—from typesetting to printing to trimming and folding—were performed by union labor.

Union bugs were first placed on printed material produced by the International Typographical Union (ITU) in the late nineteenth century. These have a precedent in printer’s marks, which have appeared in books since the late fifteenth century. At the time, a printer’s mark represented both the publishing house and the print shop, which were one and the same place.¹⁸ As the work of the typesetter and the printer became separated from that of the publisher—one worked with machines and the other worked with ideas—printers fell more cleanly into the category of “workers” than “thinkers,” but there has always been some overlap.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, many anarchists were printers, and many printers were anarchists. Political scientist Kathy Ferguson has written of the centrality of printers in the physical and social reproduction of the anarchist movement

18 Another descendent of the printer’s mark is a publisher’s logo.



Detroit Printing Co-op union bug designed by Fredy Perlman, 1970.

in the United States between 1871 and 1945: “Because the technology of publishing required many skilled printers, because commercial print shops often rejected anarchist materials, and because of a general anarchist reverence for the written word, printing was one of the most common occupations of anarchists.”¹⁹ In writing about the role of the printer in the development of socialism, French philosopher Régis Debray describes the printer as “quintessentially a ‘worker intellectual or an intellectual worker,’ the very ideal of that human type who would become the pivot of socialism: ‘the conscious proletarian.’”²⁰

While the Perlman did not explicitly identify as anarchists or socialists (or any “-ist,” for that matter), they followed in the tradition of radical left printers. As Ferguson writes, the anarchists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had “less money to spend on new technology, and thus were more likely to stick with the older machines,

even after the new became available.”²¹ Similarly, Co-op users had little money and made do with old equipment.

The Revolutionary Printing Cooperative, which predated the Detroit Printing Co-op, used two different marks, which functioned similarly to a union bug. The first has the name of the cooperative encircling a red and black flag. It appears on at least two publications and their 1969 price list. The two flags represent anarchism (black) and communism (red). They began using an actual union mark when several Co-op users became dues-paying members of the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World). A version, with the words Revolutionary Printing Cooperative encircling the IWW logo, appears on some publications from early 1970.²²

In 1968, Fredy and Lorraine Perlman had visited the IWW headquarters in Chicago, where they were impressed with the level of activity and engagement. The Wobblies, as IWW members are called,

was one of the tramp printers who crisscrossed the U.S., working as a freelance artisan as well as organizing unions and spreading anarchist practices, before later settling in his home town of Detroit. Labadie printed a series of labor papers and wrote articles and verse for anarchist journals. He and his colleague Judson Grennell printed over 200,000 pamphlets explaining

socialism and anarchism (which were often considered interchangeable) to working class readers.” Ferguson 2014, p. 392.

²⁰ Régis Debray, “Socialism: A Life-Cycle,” *New Left Review* 46 (July–August 2007).

²¹ Ferguson 2014, p. 396.



Above: printer's marks for the Revolutionary Printing Cooperative from 1969 (left) and 1970 (right).

had been in the same office in Chicago since the 1920s and the space was full of literature and materials that dated back to those days. Members included older Wobblies who tended toward democratic socialism, and younger activists who leaned toward anarchism.²³ At some point in the spring of 1970, Fredy Perlman designed a mark for the Detroit Printing Co-op. The language around the bug—“Abolish the wage system / Abolish the state / All power to the workers!”—is part of the preamble to the IWW constitution. The Perlman had a copy of Joyce Kornbluh’s 1964 graphic history of the IWW, *Rebel Voices*, which may have provided inspiration for the label.²⁴

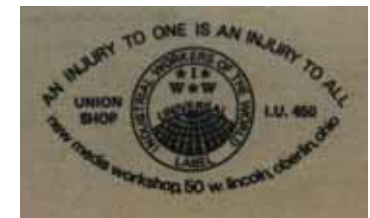
The Co-op bug communicates both information about the print shop and an idea for system change. The IWW is a radical union, and in calling for the abolition of the state and the wage system, the Co-op bug demonstrates the ways in which the aims of the IWW (e.g., “One Big Union”) are different from traditional labor unions that seek primarily to negotiate fair wages and working conditions for the workers they represent.

Unlike some other IWW union bugs from this time period, such as New York City’s hand-drawn badge for Come!Unity Press (with the tagline “Survival by Sharing”) or even the Oberlin, Ohio New Media Workshop’s “An injury to one is an

injury to all,” the Detroit Co-op’s bug directly commands the reader to act (“Abolish the state!”). It eschews cuteness or any romanticizing of what it means to upend the wage system. It isn’t hand-drawn—it isn’t something you can do at home—it is machine made, all caps, insistent.²⁵

Printing at the Co-op

The Harris offset press was an enormous, ancient, cast-iron machine with wooden wheels. One Co-op user, Ralph Franklin, recalled, “There were open gears that you were certain would grab your elbow at some point.” (At least one person, Peter Allen, did get his shirt caught in the gears while printing and narrowly avoided serious injury.) In addition to the large Harris press, the Co-op had a smaller Davidson 863 two-cylinder offset press that could print 16 × 18 inches and a smaller Multilith 1250 offset duplicator that could do 11 × 14 inches, a large sheet folder for folding book signatures, a



Above: unions bugs for the IWW print shops Come!Unity Press and New Media Workshop.

¹⁹ Kathy E. Ferguson, “Anarchist Printers: Material Circuits of Politics” *Political Theory* 42, 4 (August 2014), p. 393. One example of an anarchist printer is Joseph Labadie. Ferguson writes, “Labadie, whose collection of anarchist materials forms the basis of the University of Michigan archive of radical literature bearing his name,

stamps into our little red membership books.” L. Perlman 1989, p. 64.

²⁴ Conversation with Lorraine Perlman, September 19, 2015. Joyce Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964).

²⁵ Ironically, given how unusual it is, the Detroit Printing Co-op mark

is the one that appears on the Wikipedia page for “union bugs.” A typical union bug does not call for the abolition of wage labor or the state.

²² This mark was used on *Radical America* vol. 4, nos. 2 and 3 (Feb. and Apr. 1970), *A Child’s Garden of Perverse* (ca. 1970), and *The Gnomon* (June 1970).

²³ Conversation with Bernard Marszalek, January 20, 2018. Lorraine wrote in *Having Little, Being Much*, “for several years we pasted the dues



This page and opposite: two of very few photos taken inside the Detroit Printing Co-op. Above: Lorraine and Fredy Perlman.



Peter Werbe and Colleen Jenson. Color separations for a poster are visible on the wall behind Fredy and Lorraine Perlman.

stitcher for stapling the spine of smaller publications, and a Harris Seybold paper cutter. In 1973, they acquired a hot glue perfect binding machine which enabled them to print thicker volumes.²⁶

Bill Bryce spent a fair amount of time at the Co-op with his partner, Elaine Crawford. They mostly used the Multilith 1250, which was easier to use than the Davidson, but not without its own hazards. One night Crawford's ponytail was caught in the Multilith, and she was rescued by the same upstairs neighbor who had saved Peter Allen from the Harris press.

Stewart Shevin was a young high schooler when he began going to the Co-op. He learned all the stages of typesetting and printing, but was wary of the final stage: cutting. If you hadn't participated in a book's production, it was generally understood that you should not offer to cut the books and inadvertently ruin the job. Furthermore, for fifteen-year-old Shevin, the cutter was hard to use. It "had a huge fly-wheel on it, a clutch mechanism and a safety. You'd get the thing going, the

fly-wheel would start going off, you'd pull up on one lever and push down to actually make the cut, and at that time I could barely work it, because I didn't have the weight to step down and get the leverage and the height to do it."²⁷

Typesetting

The Co-op did not have typesetting equipment. Many of the publications were typeset at *Fifth Estate's* offices on W. Warren Avenue.²⁸ To lay out a page, a person would type out text then work at a light table to line it up on a sheet of non-reproducing blue graph paper. The table was back-lit which made the grid lines visible. Once the pages were made up, they were taken to the Co-op to be photographed on a large flat-bed camera to produce a film negative. The image was then transferred right-reading to a metal plate which would be affixed to the press. Ralph Franklin said that sometimes,

you'd have a long galley and in the middle of a paragraph there might be a mistake—or you wanted

contributed from the audience. Franklin later described his first encounter with Bryce: "[A friend and I] walked into the Print Co-op early one morning and it was dark, there was nobody there. We turned the lights on, and we're laughing and joking, doing some of the camera work, and I remember hearing this voice from the back of the Print Co-op shouting, 'Shut the fuck up,

*something that was bold, or italic. If we didn't want to re-type the whole thing again we would type out the one line, cut it very small, put it on a light table so you could see through it, cut the other type, and replace it. You would have little bits of paper everywhere. Sometimes you might have gotten it laid out and ready to go to the printer, and a word had fallen off. And then you had to find it. It was a laborious method of doing things, but it was always a great time.*²⁹

Carl Smith, and sometimes Lorraine Perlman, typeset texts at the Black Star offices on Fenkell Avenue. Black Star had modern equipment which dramatically cut down on the amount of time it took to set pages of type. Around 1975, Fredy and Lorraine began laying out text at Dumont Press Graphix, a typesetting and printing collective in Kitchener, Ontario. Black & Red publications printed at Dumont are identifiable through their use of the typeface Melior.³⁰

The Co-op had a lithographic camera attached to the darkroom, light tables for working with

negatives, and an arc-light plate burner. The switch for the light was inside the darkroom, and whenever someone needed to use it, they'd shout, "Lights!" before flipping the switch, to give people time to turn away so they weren't blinded by the brightness. Ideally there were two people operating the lights, because carbon from the arc-lights could fall on the floor and cause a fire.³¹

The Co-op equipment did not work well for printing newspapers, though Shevin printed a student paper there on sheet-fed pages. High-volume newspaper printing requires a rotary press, so underground and alternative papers like *Fifth Estate* were printed elsewhere. Hamish Sinclair, who had known Fredy Perlman in New York City, moved to Detroit and worked at the Co-op. He and his comrades published the newspaper *r. p. m.* (revolutions per minute), which was directed to factory workers. At first, they thought they might print it at the Co-op, but ended up working with a commercial printer, though they still made use of the Co-op's light tables and darkroom.³²

²⁶ Ironically, given how unusual it is, the Detroit Printing Co-op mark is the one that appears on the Wikipedia page for "union bugs." A typical union bug does not call for the abolition of wage labor or the state.

²⁶ Black & Red published a 720-page book in 1975 and an 830-page novel the following year.

²⁷ These anecdotes about the Co-op were recounted during the 9338 Campau Gallery panel that included John Grant, Ralph Franklin, Lorraine Perlman, Stewart Shevin, and Peter Werbe. Bill Bryce

I'm trying to sleep!' And it was Bryce, sleeping in one of the paper bins."

²⁸ *Fifth Estate* was founded in 1965 by Harry Ovshinsky, and by 1970 was a widely circulated biweekly underground newspaper.

²⁹ Ralph Franklin, 9338 Campau panel. Preparing columns of full justified

text was onerous. They would first type out the text at column width (or trim it to column width). Then they would determine how much space was left at the end of each line, then re-type the text with the leftover space redistributed within each line of text.

³⁰ More on Black Star, p. 148. More on Dumont Press Graphix, p. 221.

³¹ Stewart Shevin, 9338 Campau panel, and Ralph Franklin email, July 3, 2019. There was a metal plate on the floor below the arc lights to make it less of a fire hazard.

³² L. Perlman 1989, p. 67.



Fredy Perlman at the Detroit Printing Co-op, 1979. The entrance to the two darkrooms is visible on the right.



The machine directly behind Perlman is the folder. The rollers on the Harris press are barely visible at the back left.

By the end of the 1970s, the printing industry was already beginning to decline, and print shops were closing. Publishers were no longer censoring content the way they were at the beginning of the decade. Fredy and Lorraine Perlman were often the only ones using the Co-op. Work at the print shop still brought satisfaction, but it had also become an obligation. The building was unglamorous, the ceiling leaked, it was dark. At the end of 1979 their landlord informed them of plans to sell the building. Unable to find anyone in Detroit who wanted to reopen the Co-op in a new location, they decided to close. A group of young anarchists in Ann Arbor (the Nameless Anarchists) took the Harris offset press. Other equipment ended up in the basements and workshops of friends and acquaintances.

Connected with radicals, printers, and publishers in England, France, and Canada, the Co-op was an integral and unforgettable part of the left movement in the United States in the 1970s. It had a profound effect on many who worked there. Collective projects that members engaged in were later shaped by the ideas they read about in publications printed at the Co-op, and by the discussions and arguments they generated. Foremost among these was a desire to work cooperatively, to abolish the wage system, and to abolish the state.³³

From the outset, the focus of the Co-op was to be a productive space where people could print whatever they wanted, uncensored, without anyone's labor being exploited. Over the years, the Co-op was the site of countless forms of

collective work, with groups forming and reforming, people jumping in to work on one project or another, coming to work on their own, or joining on a larger project. Typesetting and printing were often a truly collective experience, involving six or seven people in a room working, eating, drinking, arguing, and laughing.

33
Email from Ralph Franklin, June 30, 2019.