

<b>Working Together: recording and preserving the heritage of the workers' co-operative movement</b>
<b>Ref no:</b>
<b>Name:</b> Chris Green <b>Worker Co-ops involved in:</b> Trylon (Northampton, employee ownership), Trojan Press Ltd (London) , Raven Co-op Ltd (Manchester), Mills & Moors Tours (Hebden Bridge). Co-operative Development Worker with Calderdale Council Economic Development Department, Kirklees Council, Community Business Development Officer (Included co-ops)
<b>Date of recording:</b> 08/02/2018 <b>Location of interview:</b> Holyoake House, Manchester <b>Name of interviewer:</b> Philippa Lewis <b>Number of tracks:</b> 2 <b>Recording Format:</b> Wav 16bit 48 khz <b>Recording equipment:</b> Zoom H2 Handy Recorder <b>Total Duration:</b> 00:59:33 Track 1: 00:57:24 Track 2: 00:02:09
<b>Additional Material:</b> Folder of related material available at the National Co-operative Archive. Selected images related to Trojan Press Ltd. available online at The National Co-operative Archive on Flickr.
<b>Copyright/clearance:</b> Assigned to the National Co-operative Archive
<b>Transcript compiled by:</b> Michael Bowden <b>Number of transcript pages:</b> 24
<b>Interviewer's comments:</b> Some redaction of personal data

**Summary:**

**[Track 1]**

[00:07] Chris Green briefly outlines the worker co-ops he was involved with: Trylon, Trojan Press and Raven Co-op. [03:49] Speaks about setting up Trojan Press. [07:22] Discusses structure, wages, and decision making at Trojan Press. [12:24] Discusses work produced at Trojan Press. [18:48] Talks about input from ICOM (Industrial Common Ownership Movement.) [20:38] Discusses leaving Trojan Press and setting up Raven Co-op Ltd. [26:35] Discusses working at Raven. [31:38] Talks about leaving Raven to get involved in co-operative development work. [32:35] Discusses involvement in co-operative development work. [37:09] Speaks about setting up Mills & Moors Tours. [39:27] Discusses why he left co-operative development work. [39:55] Discusses work post-involvement in worker co-ops, including work at Manchester Metropolitan University, and White Ribbon Campaign. [41:58] Discusses self-exploitation in worker co-ops. [46:43] Discusses accompanying material.

**[Track 2]**

[00:02] Discusses gender politics.

**Transcript:**

[00:04]

*So, this is an interview with Chris Green. Hello*

Hello.

[00:07]

*So firstly, could you briefly outline for me your involvement in the worker co-op movement?*

Yeah. It all started when as a student I went to work for Trylon which is a they produced canoes. I did it in a summer holiday job and I thought it was really cool that actually, ah, an organisation a company could, erm, have a meeting at which they decided whether or not they wanted to keep the manager on. And so, I suppose also I was politicised anyway but that put the meat on the bones which meant that I was committed to working in worker co-ops. Then I, erm, when I graduated I got a job as a youth worker and was really enjoying that work but didn't like the idea that somebody else was telling me what to do which was incredible because I was pretty autonomous really running a youth club and having my own organisation. So, there seemed to be a need for a resource centre and I had great fun going as a youth worker to the Islington Resource Centre and churning out political stuff so I thought, well, we'll have one of those in Hackney as well and so I got a couple of duplicators and a scanner, an electronic data scanner, which meant you put things like pictures on it and scan them onto duplicated documents. Really high-tech stuff and probably terribly carcinogenic as well and these were sitting in the, sort of, hall of a communal house which I shared with a number of other people and then people started to get a bit grumpy. I was sleeping on, the sort of, a paper store which was a sort of, er, a number of plan chests. Two plan chests put together where we stored the paper. All really, sort of, alternative and hippie and this isn't really very good so I thought hang on we'll take on another person and we'll set it up formally as a co-op and that's what we did. And we hung around there for another couple of months in my front room and then we moved to premises which were on the third floor. Not a great place to have a printer when you're running up and down stairs with piles of paper. Similarly, in terms of paper deliveries in those days would mean me jumping on a bike with a bike trailer and going off cycling a couple of miles and then bringing it back, and papers pretty heavy stuff. And so, we were bringing back 1000, 2000 sheets at a time not much more than

that. Not ideal. So, we've covered that. And then also we'll talk about, erm, I then ran away from that co-op for personal reasons a year or two later and moved to Manchester. And because I knew lots about setting up co-operative print businesses I set up another one, erm, called Raven. And very similar operation but we also found premises there which was a shop so we did a load of retailing as well, erm, of the stuff we produced. And after that my next career move if you like was to be a co-op development worker. So, but that was not so much to do with printer co-ops although I tried to set one up as well in the Calder Valley where I was working.

[03:49]

*Great. And the first place. So, you mentioned Trylon and then was it Trojan?*

Trojan was the yes. And we were working and what was some really cool sort of macho sort of printery sort of name, you know, and in fact I was looking it up just now to see if there are any records. Of course, there are no records because you know we didn't have the internet and stuff in those days. But there are a number of other places called Trojan Press. So, you know it's obviously the right sort of name to have for printers.

*So, you've told me a bit about why you chose to set up as a worker co-op but could you tell me a bit more. Did you kind of have that idea that you specifically wanted a worker co-op or was it more that you just like that way of working?*

I've always worked in sort of collective organisations and co-oppy housing organisations etc etc lived in communal housing, so yes, it was just, that's the politics that I come from. Additionally, to which at that time as you probably know lots of CDAs Co-operative Development Agencies who were around. And, the one useful thing they could have given you was money but nobody ever did. They were happy to give loads and loads of advice and I have here in front of me the market assessment for Trojan Press. This is after we'd been going for a number of years and, sort of, they're happy to pay for consultancy to come and

work with. We don't want consultants. We actually want capital input. Yes, we'll fund the latest wizzo printing press that you need.

*And how did you actually get the funds to start then if you if you didn't get any from the CDA?*

The way I operated the entire of my life really was by tipping my money in because life to me is a hobby you know, and so. Most recently I set up in the last ten years I set up a charity about men's violence against other men sorry men's violence against women and that's largely been funded out of my pockets but I've got a bit deeper pockets now. When we setup Trojan I was working as a youth worker I was youth working as I did some work as a in childcare and intermediate treatment stuff like that and so the money kept flowing in so as long as you've got enough money to pay your rent you can put the rest into the business.

*And did you set up with other people? How many people kind of started?*

I, it may sound so stupid but I'm sure you haven't come across this before. I set up the co-op. Now, isn't that ridiculous, you know, but I set up the co-op. But, it very, you know, then other people got involved and then we started when we formally, er, registered then it becomes, er, the co-op and gradually when I left, of course, the organisation kept going which is the ideal situation for a co-op to be engaged in.

*And is it still running now?*

No. It ran for about eight more years after I left. I really don't know what happened then.

[07:22]

*And, so, when you were kind of up and running, can you tell me more about the structure of the co-op?*

Yes. There were four workers who three of whom became or were already more experienced at printing than I was, er, so I ended up doing the bookkeeping and, I didn't even do the

graphic design, that was done by other people. And so, I managed the office if you like. And we had an apprentice on some sort of YTS scheme, erm, as well and that was successful and helpful for their education as well. So, four or five staff. The minute I left in I think it would have been about 1989, they put the wages up straight away and that's quite right really because I lived my life through self-exploitation, you know, but you still seem to come out the other end with loads of money and doing alright. But that was a particular phase and it's really not healthy to spend your time ripping yourself off to serve the community because it's unsustainable. People can't buy houses or pay rent or what have you if they're only paying themselves you know fifteen or twenty quid sometimes. And that's the joy about doing it in particularly the second co-op, erm, which again we started on that same sort of basis where we had an income pool there as well so it didn't matter whether I contributed one week or not the other week because people will be cool about that and that's very supportive environment to set up a successful business in.

*And, was, were the wages in both the co-op were they flat wages or were they based on equal wages?*

Yes, they were equal wages.

*And how did you take decisions? Let's start with Trojan. So how did you make decisions there?*

Oh, we'd have weekly meetings, you know, sort of and that. The big decisions were really about investment, sort of, and by the time, and that, and things like moving premises. We moved premises three times. The third the last move was just after I left, erm, but the second move was a significant one. We moved from this third floor inconvenient single - a garret really in Dalston - which had obviously been used as a sweatshop years' before, erm, and it was quite weird to have film crews sort of trying to get in there to make TV pictures about you and stuff like this. Er, and we moved from there to ground floor really nice, sort of, building which had been used as a printers' before. Some pretty ancient machinery still in there but it was really good. There were two really big presses in there which were good and

a huge suicidal guillotine. Erm, perfectly safe if you used appropriately and there were guards on it. But even so the blades would come down come what may. Very mechanical. I still remember in that house and the office building that we used at the back was sold for £30,000 or something like this. What? It's worth about a million or two million by now.

*And were there any or ever any disputes, kind of, when you had to make decisions?*

I'm sure there were but at least two of the people were quite easy going so it made possible for the more forceful members in the collective to get there-own way. I was one of the easy-going ones and might just get a little bit grumbly but, er, I can't think of times when we had huge rows. I mean, when I left I did leave in in feeling disputatious but I might well have been more to do with my own state of mind than the organisation. Erm, but because I had founded it I felt more sort of possessive so I stole some of the smaller pieces of equipment like the badge making equipment and stuff like this which was what I was most interested in anyway rather than the commercial printing side. I was much more, always much more, interested in churning out some of our hundred posters and two hundred badges and so on, and seeing those get into the hands of people to make change.

[12:24]

*And, yeah, kind of on that note, what sort of material did you make at this printers'?*

Well, we would take commercial work off people, although obviously we would have been very fussy about who we worked for. But, as we got better and sometime we would get orders from people and then they we did not in the early day they were not the highest quality prints but people were still quite forgiving because they supported our aims and objectives. And, that would then support us to in the spare time, the downtime, to be printing off interesting posters and the, er, inserts for badges and that sort of stuff and even for them producing some badges as well so we've got a decent amount of stock and so there was well not really cross subsidisation just a really useful way to use spare time but then if another commercial order came in we'd spend time doing that because very often that would be important. Things like the local cinema would give us a regular month. It was a co-operatively owned or communal cinema called the Rio in Dalston. And, those sorts of things.

And some of the work from trade unions and political parties was really useful to keep the organisation afloat.

*Would you ever say no to business if it's aims did not match up with yours?*

Oh absolutely. And I'm sure that's the case for a lot of the co-ops and quite right too because that was the reason why you wanted to keep the organisation on the road. But you also saw people coming in and you'd think 'oh for goodness sake why they be a bit more commercial objective you know'. People would be producing, sort of, fifty-page typed out manuscripts of how the revolution would be waged you know and they'd pay us for that. You'd just think 'nobody is going to read that ever' you know, but that was the sad thing.

*And, did you ever do any work for other worker co-ops?*

I can't think so apart from the CDA might have given us some work here and there. Er, but, as I say, one of the joyful things I've got in the scrapbook in front of me is a letter from someone from Eton College ordering some of our radical badges. And you think I wonder where that child is now you know forty years on and maybe we can blackmail them. There'd be someone in the commanding heights of British industry, I'm sure. But, when I look, what I find interesting when I look through this back catalogue of badges for example and this was thirty years ago. Thirty years ago? Yeah. It's things like boys against sexism and men against male violence and stuff like this and loads of feminist things. You know, 'You've got to kiss a lot of toads before you get a prince', 'women like the simple things in life like men', stuff like this, and 'women are called birds because the worms they pick up'. So, some sense of anarchy stuff. Some feministy stuff. And the pro-feminist men's, sort of, slogans. And, that of course is still going on now. 'Mother Christmas brings better presents'. And then there are more normal ones like 'people like you give wankers a bad name'. It'll be interesting because we had a whole load of pop. There's a Madness badge here and the joy about Hip, Ska which was all in black and white so was easy for us to reproduce.

*So, these are all ones that you produced?*

These are just a fraction of them. I find it astounding that I have, haven't got a full catalogue of stuff but nevermind. Housing Action Decent Homes for All. Thirty years ago, we were trying to do this. Oh yes, and an anti-Di and Charles marriage one. Don't Do It Di I remember was a big campaign. Don't get married to Charles. Tony Benn for Number 10. All that sort of stuff.

*So, did you have a catalogue that people chose from or people would come to you with specifics?*

No, no, no. We had catalogues which we sent out. So much more exciting now potential for that sort of thing, you know, to be able to have an online catalogue and online ordering we would have been quids in because we had to make sure we were sending these things out to people and we had catalogues of posters as well designed by a guy called Cliff Harper who was very famous in his time. He did a lot of stuff with co-operative ethos' and he did a particular poster to promote Trojan Press which was really, erm,, gorgeous and then we reproduced a lot of his work as well. So, we had a catalogue of about fifty posters, A3 posters, and they sold quite well.

*Who did you send the catalogues out to? Who was your main customer?*

There's another thing for interesting research. The radical bookshops, yeah, which some still survive. News from Nowhere in Liverpool would be one of them but not many. Bookmarks and Houseman are still in London but it is extraordinary how that, er, whole area has declined you know. I think people have just do things more independently now than they used to. But, yeah, that was really our sole source of regular orders and then individuals. But now it's so much more easy to have individual orders than in those days.

[18:48]

*And did you have any networks set up with other worker co-ops that were in the printing business?*

No. I suppose we still thought there was competitors a little bit although certainly, the other, this was in London and the other big printers were far better established than us and had far better equipment which was another reason to keep to our local market and to diversify into the merchandise side. So, I really don't think we ever went to a meeting like that. We might have gone to national co-op co-ordinating meetings, but I'm not even sure about that. We certainly had a good relationship with ICOM, you know, International Co-operative Movement and stuff. But that was about it.

*Could you tell me a bit more about that relationship with ICOM? What did that entail?*

Oh, to help set up the model rules and so on and certainly, within our local CDA. Now that's where we would attend meetings and go to and be supportive of hopefully setting up a huge, sort of, co-operative network and structure. But then again, I remember feeling 'oh they don't really understand what it's really like because there they are sitting on their salaries' and so on and doing their independent work and patronising us to hell and back, you know, and so you get quite resentful like that because people are, as I say, getting paid four times what you're getting paid and so on. But that's it.

[20:38]

*When did you leave Trojan then?*

As I say, I left and ran away to, er, Manchester. I obviously wasn't terribly well mentally I think because I thought, where do I know people so I went back to Manchester because that's where I've been to university and moved into this collective household and then I must have, I had the makings of making badges and so on so I must have started that in the back room. Somebody else was doing silkscreen printing in the basement, erm, but I didn't combine with him and so I said 'oh yes I'm going to do this' because I had the experience just about how to manage. Again, I founded Raven Press. And this was with three young, much younger people this time. I must have advertised around the university and, erm, they had lots of energy and so we took on this shop and we had the ground floor for production. The first floor was mostly stock and we had a meeting room in there. On the top floor there were a

couple of offices which we let out to the National Animal Liberation League, er, and they would give us some business as printers. But, also, they paid a quarter of the rent which was very useful to us.

*And, what were the kind of similarities and differences that you found in setting up Raven in comparison to Trojan?*

It was a lot easier because I'd done it all before, erm, and you just know you've got to keep working capital going. But, I was a bit older by then and as I say I had some resource to call on from the household that I was living in. They would look after me to make sure I didn't starve or thrown out in the street, erm, and that meant all I had to do was find enough money between us for the rent of the building and we would survive, you know. Gradually things pick up over the first six months or so and then you're up and running. And then, again, I moved on from that while it was thriving after about two and a half years to sell out to become one of those advisers who get paid this fortune you know and I worked for the local authority as a co-operative development worker instead.<sup>1</sup> So, very similar, erm, setting up issues and the same sort of support from national organisations which I found very useful. I can't imagine Manchester also would have had a co-operative development agency but I can't remember being as dependent on them as we were, er, with, er, with Trojan. But I do remember that when one of the people who were senior in the co-operative development agency did offer to sponsor people through business school. I remember going for an interview at Manchester Business School – Manchester Business School. And then when I later became a co-operative development worker I did take up an MBA and because I think all the people in the co-operative are very helpful very good at how you're feeling now. Let's have a meeting and discuss how we all are. Actually, not enough people cut to the chase about keeping the organisations going and that's why I was quite interested in doing a business degree so that I could make sure that I knew and introduce me to concepts which I had had no knowledge of while I was running these companies which were very valuable concepts. I would urge that people to do that in the future you know so that actually get do

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<sup>1</sup> Calderdale Council Economic Development Department

the business and the morality will also be there if you have if you're rooted in where you're coming from you know if you have some and but too many people do the touchy feely stuff and don't do enough of the head on hard head on shoulders and that was my experience while I was working as a co-operative development worker anyway. It's unfortunate because you need to make enough money and then decide you're going to share it equally or decide no we're going to tip 100 tonnes more than anyone else you know.

*So, you did the MBA after you had finished working in the [inaudible]?*

Yes, but I did have the offer and I did go to the interview. I was interested but I think there was something that must have put me off. Maybe they were meet half the fees or something like this and I thought that a very generous 'but' you know I've still got to find the rest of the funds and I wasn't in a position to do that at the time. One of the other interesting things we did at Raven was that we had commercials shown at the local alternative cinema which was in Hulme. And the deal was that also we got free tickets so it, as far as I was concerned it didn't even cost us anything. Absolutely straight into our potential audience you know all the people who would go to the arts cinema who might be potential clients for us so that was the important thing.

[26:35]

*And where were you based? Were you in central Manchester?*

We were based on Great Ancoats Street which is now knocked down you know. Dodgy buildings. Always dodgy buildings. Landlords still making money out of dodgy buildings. Right at the top opposite there's the Daily Express building which is now a hotel or something. A big glass building at the top of Oldham Street where Oldham Street meets Great Ancoats Street. Anyway, city centre based which was great for us and because anybody can come into the city centre, you know.

*What was your main client base?*

The same sort of thing that we had had before. The political class if you like. So people like who were – unfortunately not people like the city council who would have big print runs and things like that and probably had inhouse printer services anyway - but people on the fringes of politics the leftists on the fringes of politics and partly you know that was the audience we appealed to anyway because we were sort of you know long haired alternative weirdos and with the stuff we had on the posters we had in the office and and also the t-shirts because we had t-shirt sales as well there. An interesting kind of anecdote and a cautionary anecdote is a health and safety one because, oh, ten years ago now I developed bladder cancer and that's to do with not having enough health and safety with inks with mucky handed inks and we were I didn't do much printing but when I did I didn't do it very well. That's all clear now but there's plenty of evidence that says printers and bladder cancer go together and it was community printers in my opinion which probable had. Once they set up they had much better health and safety but in the intervening period while they were training it's 'oh yeah, let's just bung some on here and do some' you know we're just not experienced enough.

*So, would you say in comparison to, kind of, bigger commercial printers at the time they would have had higher health and safety regulations?*

Yes, but as I say gradually you would have better conditions probably in terms of you could say I want to take time off to get the kids from school or something like this, but in terms of the physical environment. Of course, there were very strong unions in the print. Both Trojan and Raven were unionised.

*What Union was that?*

Now, I think Trojan was eventually in the NGA - National Graphic Association - and I also in Raven we were less qualified and so we joined SOGAT which was one of these workplace divisions in proper printing, you know, between people who could because they were huge divisions of salary. So SOGAT was a not such a prestigious union to be in.

*How did you define the relationship between being in a working co-op and the trade union?*

Oh, not particularly interesting or important because it was, gesture politics is not quite right but we did it because we wanted to be in the trade union. We, I don't think we ever attended meetings and they never asked us don't forget to come to the union meeting and so on whereas now I'm much more politically active and locally and regionally and nationally.

*And did you still have links with Trojan at this time in terms of learning?*

No, no because it was grrrrr. I got back in touch with people there later on they're all fine and dandy now but at the time it was not a happy leaving.

*Okay. So, you decided to leave based on a dispute?*

Mmmmm. I was running away anyway from London. I couldn't cope with London anymore and so I sort of filled a car with bits of no I couldn't have filled a car because I couldn't drive at the time, so, whatever.

[31:38]

*So, why did you decide to leave Raven and go into CDA work?*

I'm getting older and the money. And, also, I thought it was a useful thing to do. I would do it better and differently than these professional agencies which are full of principled right on people who were very helpful, you know, but you just don't feel that at the time. Whereas, and it was an opportunity. I saw the job and I thought 'Hey I could do that' and so that's. I was probably getting tired as well. I'd been involved in the sector for about six or seven years. I'm not on good quality money and, you know, still struggling along at the bottom and so that would have been the reason I think.

*And what CDA was it?*

No, it wasn't a CDA. That was another sore point. CDA's tended to have four or five staff and be well and really good. I was just employed as a sole operator for one council but I mean it must have served me well because I moved to Hebden Bridge and I have never moved away.

[32:35]

*Could you tell me a bit more about your work there? So, what did that involve?*

I was part of a strategy section of a local authority and they got some Euro money for work in a particular part of the borough which needed extra assistance, you know. So, I was plonked there 'I know, we'll set up lots of workers co-operatives'. I did actually have access to a grant of a thousand pounds for business but then people would see me and they'd see a thousand pounds lining up in their eyes and oh yes, we'll be a co-op and I said there's no point, that's not enough. But the joy was that an organisation like SUMA who were big whole-fooders. They wanted to move out of Leeds anyway so they moved into our borough. Erm, but as soon as a big operation like that wanted to move in it was taken out of my hands and I was allowed to do the small stuff. I then moved into helping set up community enterprises as well and credit unions. Community enterprises was very interesting. One of the biggest estates in Huddersfield where I moved to to work, erm, set up a community enterprise keeping money in the estate and now there's been lots of talk about what's happening in Preston. 'Oh, it's really good they've decided to keep money within the community'. I said 'yeah we were doing that about twenty-five years ago'. Things like, you know, local authority services. Repairs on all council houses on the estate. Some of that work came back to Bracken Hall and cheap projector enterprises and that really made a huge difference to the money circulating within that estate. So those were good times working for the co-operative government agencies. But everybody was under-financed, you know. Desperately under-financed. So much of it was little service industries. Sandwich making and things like this. No, go big. Make widgets. Make things. But even then, somebody set up printers and somebody, oh, an actors' co-operative service agency. That actors' agency is still going twenty-five years later which is great because no real capital requirements. People can service

each-others' needs, which is really good. So, oh, plenty of people in the whole foody preparation or distribution industry. Preparation was better. Somebody set up a chutney making factory and actually did really really well.

*What was the process? Would a worker co-op come to you and would have to apply for a grant or would you give them advice?*

I'd give them advice but we'd get the grant. I would, I would, try to encourage anybody to come to me and say yes because I was underworked and we needed to develop more in the sector. And a community nursery did quite well as well. But it just wasn't enough to be self-sustaining, you know. That's what you really want. People spending money within that sector to build and develop that sector even further until it's so powerful that, sort of, everybody comes crumbling and knocking on your door saying can we be like this? I mean we modelled the idea on Mondragon where it's such a big sector of these.

[37:09]

Oh, that's something else I set up but that's not printing related. That was a tourism co-op company running something called Mills & Moors Tours and I set that up with two friends offering holidays in the Pennines amongst all the political sites we have up there. Co-operative, feminist and labour history and the only lasting product of that was a fabulous poster with all the sights marked. What's extraordinary is that for many of the sights for co-operative and labour history are based not very far from here.

*And, who came on these tours?*

Ah, that was the problem. One group was Swedish MPs. We got a lot of individual interest but you can't fund a tour guide on a one-to-one basis so it didn't, it didn't work. And then if you offered people dates that didn't quite work either. So, the one group that we ever had was this group of Swedish who loved it. But that was the problem with that organisation.

*I did see we've got a directory and it has Mills & Moors Tours in it and it says that you offered or you could arrange trips to worker co-operatives.*

Yeah.

*So, did you do that with the Swedish MPs?*

No, they were only there for the weekend. We didn't actually go there. [redacted for Data Protection] but I will send you a poster because I've still got a hundred of them at home. And, and, they're nice. They're well designed.

*So that was fairly short lived, the Mills & Moors Tours?*

Yes. The good thing and the bad thing about it is that we all had alternative jobs so that we were not dependent on it, so we didn't work hard enough to make sure that something would happen. We weren't desperate for success. We just wanted it to be a success.

[39:27]

*When did you leave the CDA<sup>2</sup> or why did you leave?*

Erm, I worked firstly at Calderdale<sup>3</sup> and then moved to Kirklees<sup>4</sup> and then I eventually said I am now 35 or something like this and I want a gap year. And so, I sort of, I negotiated half-heartedly and they said no, so I went anyway. I'll have the year off, and that was that.

[39:55]

*And then what did you do after that?*

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<sup>2</sup> Not an official CDA (Co-operative Development Agency)

<sup>3</sup> Co-op Development Worker at Calderdale Council Economic Development Department

<sup>4</sup> Community Business Development Officer at Kirklees Council

Now I've done twenty-two years at Manchester Met University after that. So, that was a change of track.

*Linked to worker co-ops?*

No. Linked to print. They wanted somebody who'd teach business management to print students. Well, by that time I had my MBA and I knew I thought I knew about the printing industry but again when I went to the university it made me realise that I knew nothing about printing. I'd worked full time for six years seven years in the printing industry but I had, you know, there were men, I say advisably men, who were working in that department who you know they could make printing presses sing if they wanted to. That was what they taught. they taught printing whereas I wanted to teach about how to make successful businesses and stuff like that. So, for years I struggled to teach students in the faculty of art and design that they should try to make a living out of it but they'd say 'no, no, let's make the most beautiful painting in the world'. How will you make a living?

Did you ever recommend worker co-ops as a business model?

Did I? So many people wanted to do it as individuals. I'm not sure that I did. What was interesting was that I considered with my current organisation which is a charity called White Ribbon Campaign is that we toyed with the idea of setting that up as a co-op but I really have no co-operative model of a charity. You know. I don't think it would have been hard. But once you've appointed a chief executive it's very hard to say to that chief executive 'actually we want you to take a massive pay cut' and be more collective.

[41:58]

*What would you, in term of print shops, now, what would you. I'm trying to phrase this. Would you recommend worker co-op models for print shops now or printing businesses now?*

I was shocked. Just before I came, sort of, a couple of days ago I looked up printing co-op, you know, and I found there was still one in Leeds and it looked almost exactly the sort of model that I set up. A bunch of young people under-charging because I looked at the price

list, self-exploiting and probably doing it while they're art students or students anyway. I didn't go and visit them, but, and that's quite interesting that model continues.

*Do you think that self-exploiting is quite a big issue within worker co-ops?*

Oh, I would say so because it's there's no other way to develop adequate capital and of course by doing that hopefully if you're working reasonably hard you're producing a surplus and reinvesting it in business that means that you can upgrade and buy some decent equipment. And then hopefully after a year, twelve months or so you know two years you can afford to pay proper salaries proper wages. So, that's unfortunate because it means only people with no dependence and stuff like that can afford to do that sort of activity. I think it's very hard to do because there's no appropriate funding now I don't think. I, my current organisation operates out of a building which I bought. We buy a building therefore we can afford to run especially if you have volunteers working in the organisation who don't pay any rent. But when I was looking for an organisation maybe now maybe to buy the building off me I looked for some commercial value I thought the commercial values were so tied up with complications that I thought it's not worth it. Why don't they pay me back the money gradually as they so I offered the loan if you like because it would be so hard to jump through all those hoops. And then the interest rates which we would be paying to the bank would be not prohibitive but very expensive as well. So, I think lack of access to capital is very hard for anybody because both those organisations, both of the early co-ops, that I started up ended up starting in somebody's front room. I remember first one Trojan I had an answerphone because it was just me to start with so I had an answerphone. Real to Real tape recorder, it was. Bursting to the telephone you know and I got complaints from some of the other people in my house saying that somebody was ringing me up and they got this machine. Can you imagine? So, we moved and we moved a lot. It doesn't mean that I think this huge opportunity for people who printers who could start to print some sort of merch as well as doing commercial printing and that's a way of, as I've said before, cross subsidising. I'd love to try it again, you know, when again ones' going through a bad patch with my current charity I'll say I'll just take all the awareness raising materials out and I'll run that side of the operation and you can do all the

policy stuff because we turn over we make about seventy or eighty thousand pounds a year out of that and that's important for our sustainability. It could easily be twice as much.

*Would you ever do a worker co-op again then?*

Oh, yes. Yes and no but this was part of the problem with the co-ops which I worked in before. Sometimes certainly with Trojan I knew best but I didn't get my way, you know, and that's unfortunate. And when I say I knew best I wouldn't say that unless I really did. It's not because I wanted to get my own way because I wanted my own way. I'd say 'no that's not going to work' 'oh'. Well that happened mostly in Trojan. In the second one it was much more collectively run and I probably did get my own way because I was an older more mature voice more when I needed to. The rest of the time we discussed things collectively so that was fine.

[46:43]

*So, those were all the questions I wanted to ask unless you wanted to go through anything, any of the material so we've got it on the recorder.*

This may be of interest and I'm happy to leave it with you if that's appropriate. A market assessment. This was done by Co Media Research Consultancy in Poland Street. West End address you see, in London, very posh. And the primary motivation in this report is the co-ops desire to invest in new print machinery. And that's the trouble asking experts to come and decide whether or not you've got. I'm pretty sure the decision was no. Not the decision, their suggestion was no. And you just think, 'that's crazy'. But it tells a lot about how the organisation was managed and how where it fell down in their opinions so that may be very interesting to look at. What I find more fun is the scrap book and the appalling quality. Look at that, look. Sorry you can't see this on the tape, but that Trojan horse. That's the whole point behind Trojan, you see. We are working within capitalism but we'll come out of the horse's belly and we'll change the way everyone relates, you see. That was not our first commercial address. That was the communal house that I was squatting in at the time. We were offering posters, badges, leaflets there we are.

*A mural painting?*

Just because we had someone in the house who could do that so that was mural painting. Photographic developers. Oh, there we are 'So Green took the Red Road' This was outside my squatting house 'No Lorries on the [ph]Balls Prom Road you know we had a big big lorry there I'm wearing a badge. In fact, that's a Minnie the Minx badge and guess what DC Thompsons the big magazine and comic producer sent us a threatening letter because they read this article and they saw this and we apologised and said we were sorry and would never do it again. Why Trojan? Here we are.[reading from article] 'Adding my bite to the franks tangled machines in the hall. We go through to the kitchen to talk about Chris' early life. Inside the Trojan premises an atmosphere of convivial chaos prevails. Among the empty coffee mugs on the kitchen table, someone called Geoff is preparing artwork for a catalogue of badges to be touted round local bookshops.' So that was again the early days of when we were still based in our first premises and I also was involved in the local community newspaper there called the Hackney Peoples Press but this was, yes interestingly, even in 1987 no 1980 it says [reading from article] 'Chris has thrown himself into the anti-sexist struggle though not without personal cost. He accused somebody of being sexist at a party and their response was to put him to the floor with a black eye and a bloody nose'[laughing]. There we are. And then some features from [reading from article] 'Hackney's newest business promotion agency has scored a major success in its first month of operation. Hackney Co-op Development helped Trojan printing'. Here you are, another picture of me which is and in Hackney People's Press we have a little thing there. [reading from article] 'Over 50 local groups have already used our local facilities. If you think you can make use of our services and you can manage three flights of stairs, why not pop in and see us? We're open from 11am to 7pm.' Very alternative opening hours there. Time Out. And that's a guy with a clapper board so that's a film crew coming up. Look it's me again! There are other people. Hackney Communist Party offering us a plug. Islington gutter press. Holy Trinity Dalston. Plug the church. Somebody using a process camera. That was exciting. Oh,

another interesting thing is I went on a speaking tour about fascism and the threat of fascism in Holland. Not about the threat of fascism in Holland. I went to Holland to talk about the National Front because they were big in Hackney. And they raised a thousand pounds for our work as the press as being the alternative voice so I've just seen that. I've just seen that process camera there and I think that's partly where the money went as well as some sort of really fancy golf-ball typewriter to help us do alternative. This looks like a catalogue of posters. New badge designs. There you are. And, leaflets about our work. Yeah, that's from when we moved. A full list of services. Again, badge making. Duplicating design and layout. [rustling through papers]

*When did you put all this together?*

Oh, at the time, as it happened. Hackney Co-op Development Workers report. Work with [inaud] Trojan's finally had its grant approved moved into new larger premises. Rapidly becoming TV stars with yet another feature on us.

*Do you have the features still? Do you have copies of them?*

No. A letter from Ken Livingstone. 'Thank you for the invitation to the grand opening party. Unfortunately dot dot dot'. And there's one here. Adrian, a very famous poet. Adrian.<sup>5</sup> We used to get people who and reproduce their work on posters. Oh gosh.

*We can always put in later.*

Yes, anyway. That was a source of material. Obviously, we asked them first. That might be from Tony Benn. eighth of the eleventh eighty-one. 'Thanks. The badges are lovely, and I am keeping them. The photos I'm returning. Keep on it. Tony Benn.'

*What were the photos?*

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<sup>5</sup> Adrian Mitchell

I have no idea. Here we are. Hardy's Eton College Windsor. 'Sir, please send me both the graffiti and the anti-sexist alphabet posters. I enclose £1.30. Please send to the above address.' 'Please send me one The Tories are the Cream of Britain. Rich, thick and full of clots badge. Excellent, hilarious etc.' Ah, and this might be a bit more of a catalogue. Yes, a poster catalogue. You'll recognise some of those images. Again, I can't remember what they were called. The Birth of Socialism, The Garland, Viva La Commune. We have some popular movie ones and some photomontage ones, all good. Adrian Mitchell, 'On the Beach at Cambridge'. So, okay. Oh, that may be of interest as well. Preamble of Trojan Printing. The code of practice for members. Now you're very welcome to take a look at those. 'Common ownership by means of production control of the distribution of earned surplus and the allocation of capital will enable us to provide opportunities for the full development of us all and to this end the ultimate criteria of the organisation of work shall be human dignity and not solely economic performance'. I think we've lifted that from somewhere. You might want to take a copy of that or have it. I should have started with that and I could have talked about that. And that's more or less it. We used to advertise as well that's how we got some of our Peace News. Marxism Today, Community Action, Spare Rib.

*I've heard of them, yes.*

East End News, Labours Tribune and the Leveller. Mainstream magazines. Ok.

*That's great. Well, that's everything I want to ask unless there's anything else.*

No. Let's find you a copy of this, terms and conditions or whatever we called our, [inaud]  
[rustling through paper]

*Was it nearer the back?*

[rustling through paper]

Say No to Cruise, Missiles. We did have a, cut out cardboard Ronald Reagan, sorry Margaret Thatcher with cruise missiles and stuff. You pulled this down, and 'ehh'. It was very simple but very good. I liked that kind of stuff. [rustling through paper] There we are.

[Track 2]

[00:02]

One of the places I learnt about, gender politics apart from always hanging out with feminist women, was this place called The Lenthall Road Workshop. It was based in Hackney. It was a women's-owned; men could go in but it was absolutely like a feminist collective. And, they were a photography and silkscreen business, and they were responsible for quite a lot of the early, big A2 posters about women's rights and stuff like that. [redacted - personal data]

And the Trojan, again, there were four principals and one of the four was a woman. But, I think gender politics are a really big issue. But I didn't feel that they – because I was feeling we were progressive and everything was consulted but that might have been me not being sensitive enough to the issues. Certainly, in terms of childcare and other responsibilities we were very flexible about that. And, in Manchester I was a member of various pro-feminist men's organisation, like crèches against sexism and stuff like that. So I think the organisations were pretty sensitive. But, I think in terms of the movement as a whole, I think there was probably long way to go and women self-organising I think is a really good start to do that.