

Estée Lauder Exploits U.S. Federal Prison Slave Labor
Eric Pepke 6/13/19

Last month I reported that federal prisoner slave labor was producing comic books for the American market. It now appears that prison slave labor has penetrated further into the mainstream.

To recap, the UNICOR corporation pays federal prisoners from 23¢ to \$1.15 per hour, often working 15½-hour shifts with unpaid lunch and dinner times but no other breaks. UNICOR is not supposed to compete with American companies or give them the benefits of slave labor. Nevertheless, UNICOR prints comic books and graphic novels clearly intended for the American market, under the ostensible justification they do it for Japanese companies.

Now, UNICOR has moved beyond the limited market of "independent" comics. The UNICOR at Petersburg Low is cutting advertisements that state Estée Lauder makes the "#1 Foundation in the U.S."

The front of the advertising card shows three pouty models with different skin tones, all in black turtlenecks. It reads, "Free 10-day sample. See details."

The back lists three products: "Stay-in-Place Makeup," "Radiant Concealer," and "Matte Powder Foundation."

It is unclear whether the cards are intended for mailings or magazines or trays in shops. The cards have no instructions on how to obtain the sample.

What is absolutely clear is that these cards are processed by prisoners at the Petersburg Low UNICOR. There is no indication on the cards of prison slave labor. Their origins are concealed.

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UNICOR slave labor

Petersburg, Va.—The UNICOR corporation uses federal prisoners for labor, paying 23¢ to \$1.15 per hour. Other federal prison jobs only pay 12¢ to 40¢ per hour.

UNICOR jobs are highly valued, especially by prisoners owing thousands to millions in restitution or with families to support. Veterans get preference.

I make 12¢ per hour 4.5 hours a week. That buys one medical visit or four stamps per month. Still, I do not envy UNICOR workers. They work rush job “death marches” 15.5 hours a day with unpaid lunch and dinner but no other breaks, several days in a row. Even workers over age 75 do this. I consider this slave labor by any reasonable or even sane standard.

The UNICOR here at Petersburg Low is a print shop. UNICOR is not supposed to compete with U.S. companies or provide them the competitive advantages of slave labor. To justify printing comics, they reportedly say companies such as BS Source Point Press are Japanese, not American.

Yet the books are clearly for American markets. The art uses American styles. The language is colloquial American English.

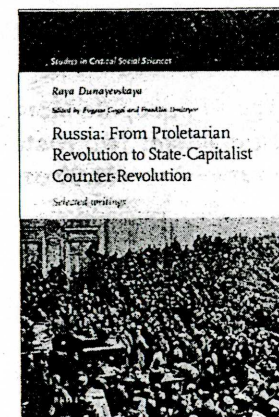
Federal overreach and draconian sentencing with vague and overbroad laws ensure a reliable supply of slave labor. Antiquated machines nowhere near OSHA safety standards further reduce costs.

Nevertheless, the printing is excellent and affordable. So, I am sure, were cotton products in the antebellum South, for much the same reasons. Slave labor is definitely mainstream!

At the bottom it says, “Printed in the USA by KrakenPrint.” There is no mention of UNICOR or prison labor. Do customers think they are supporting independent comics, or do they know they support slave labor? Do they care? Does slave labor make comics more collectible?

—Eric Pepke

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