Balancing politics and publishing: Victor Gollancz and the publishing revolution of the 1930s

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of contradictions. In publishing terms, the 1930s was a decade of both consolidation and conservatism and of revolution and progress. It was a period of commercial growth, but also ideological evangelism, thereby making one of the central questions of the period: how do you reconcile commerciality with political idealism? In the publishing industry there was no one who embodied these contradictions in the same way as Victor Gollancz. Building on the work of Febvre and Martin, and Eisenstein, this study seeks to show what happens when political belief is united with commercial publishing in an effort to bring about serious and quantifiable social change. In using the theories of both Bourdieu and Genette, it becomes clear how Gollancz managed to unify both the acquisition of economic and symbolic capital with formidable marketing acumen to create a type of commercially–driven, but politically astute publishing never seen before in the industry. By extensive use of the archives of publishers Victor Gollancz and Lawrence & Wishart, the British security services, and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), in many cases for the first time, this study makes clear that, despite becoming too closely aligned to the CPGB, the Left Book Club and Gollancz's own publishing firm made radical changes that not only revolutionised publishing in the Thirties, but also directly influenced the policies of the incoming Labour government of 1945. This is significant because it runs contrary to what is for many the perceived view of the success (or lack thereof) of the Left Book Club in particular, positions Gollancz within the wider context of social change, and claims his place as a great innovator in publishing, whose modern age we are still living in.

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Introduction

> *The reconciliation of oppositional politics and capitalist practice would appear to require supreme political optimism combined with the jaundiced wariness of the market veteran* Simone Murray, *Mixed Media*, 2004, p51

In August 1937 a chauffeur–driven automobile drove through the Capability Brown–designed landscape of Digswell Park near Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, and pulled up outside of the front of the former country residence of Earl Cowper, and now conference centre, Digswell House. Out stepped the balding, bespectacled, and moustachioed figure of 44–year–old publisher Victor Gollancz, who proceeded to enter the building through the impressive Ionic columns that mark out the south front of the house, for the first of a series of Left Book Club summer schools, a two–week course delivered by a number of distinguished intellectuals, such as GDH Cole, Rajani Palme Dutt, Emile Burns and John Strachey.

This event is significant because the September 1937 issue of the *Ashridge Journal* published an article misrepresenting Gollancz's arrival at Digswell. The article claimed that Gollancz had left his 'luxurious automobile' in the village, so that he could arrive 'among his comrades on foot'. Ever litigious, Gollancz's lawyers wrote to the editor of the publication threatening legal action, resulting in an immediate apology and a donation to a charity of the publisher's choice.

The *Ashridge Journal*, the Ashridge Business School's official publication, was a noted right–wing publication, and it was just one of many similar publications that linked Gollancz with the Communist Party, claiming that Gollancz's organisation, the Left Book Club, was merely a front for the Communist Party of Great Britain. That Gollancz pounced on this libellous article quickly is indicative of not just how frequently he was misrepresented, but how

pernicious rumours of this association had become. For a publisher whose aims were to unify the Left into a British Popular Front, this was a damaging perception, and one which highlights the apparently uneasy juxtaposition between Gollancz's sympathy towards socialism and its ideology, and his personal wealth and capitalistic business activities. Gollancz might have been a publisher of explicitly left–wing material, but if too close an association was drawn between him and the Communist Party and he would sue without hesitation; and if he was made to appear to be a man of the people, then he refuted it vigorously. Such were the contradictions inherent in this most complicated of Thirties publishers.

This thesis, then, is nothing if not a study of contradictions. In publishing terms, the 1930s was a decade of both consolidation and conservatism at the same time as being one of revolution and progression. It was a period of commercial growth, but also ideological evangelism from both extremes of the political spectrum, thereby making one of the central questions of the period: how do you reconcile commerciality with political idealism? In the publishing industry there was no one who embodied these contradictions in the same way as Gollancz.

His background and personal wealth made him *of* the establishment, but his Jewish heritage and left–leaning political beliefs meant that he would never be fully accepted. This, however, did not concern Gollancz as he had complete belief in his own abilities and the correctness of his political opinions, and was convinced that being a political publisher did not mean that you could not also be commercially successful. Other publishers of the time, who were influenced by the theories of F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis, such as Cassell and Methuen, might have had concerns with being open about their simultaneous publishing of both Robert Graves *and* Warwick Deeping, TS Eliot *and* Edgar Rice Burroughs, but Gollancz had

no such qualms[1]. From the first publication of his new publishing company – *My Life*, the posthumously published autobiography of dancer and socialite Isadora Duncan – and the embracing of the sales success of noted crime writer Dorothy L Sayers, Gollancz was unashamed of his commercial achievements. As noted from his arrival at Digswell House, Gollancz was unembarrassed about his financial success, but he was prepared to use that wealth and personal success to make political capital. Financially astute, he would not have expected to make a loss on any publishing venture, and indeed he altered or curtailed any, such as the Mundanus imprint, that did. He was, however, at least as motivated by engineering political change as he was by making a financial profit; especially in this most volatile of times – the Thirties.

In a period of time when political extremism was on the rise in the UK as well as in the rest of Europe, commercially successful publishing was also challenging. So was Gollancz successful in his aims? That is, in effect, the central question of this thesis: to what extent did Gollancz and the Left Book Club change British society and politics in the 1930s? After a period of working for publisher Ernest Benn Ltd, there can be little doubt about the almost instant success of Gollancz's new publishing venture, which was established in December 1927. The manner of this success also leads us to consider other important questions, such as the wider impact of Gollancz's innovative marketing and publishing strategy on the book trade during the period.

If Gollancz's embracing of the new marketing practices of the period was wholehearted, his relationship with the Communist Party of Great Britain was markedly more equivocal. The 1931 General Election had been disastrous for the Labour Party and the subsequent virtual

[1] In her book *Fiction and the Reading Public* (Faber & Faber, 1932), Q. D. Leavis advocated an essentially elitist view of what constituted 'literature' and what did not. Publishers, such as Cassell, who published Wyndham Lewis and Robert Graves were far less open about their publishing of popular low–brow authors, such as Warwick Deeping and Ernest Raymond, who would certainly not have been included by Leavis within the literary canon.

annihilation of the Left created a political vacuum that more extreme political parties were determined to try and fill. The British Union of Fascists was founded by former Labour MP Oswald Mosley on 1st October 1932, whilst the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), although founded in 1920, reached the peak of its membership during the 1930s.

This coming together of political extremes has been recognized by John Baxendale and Chris Pawling, when they highlight the slippery nature of trying to characterise a decade. For them the Thirties can be presented as,

> the 'red decade' of political commitment, Communist poets and the Spanish Civil War. It is the 'devil's decade' of mass unemployment and hunger marches, of Blackshirts and street–fighting. It is the decade of appeasement, betrayal and the complacent drift towards war. It is the first age of mass consumption, of mechanised houses, family cars and suburbia, of Hollywood, the Daily Express and dance–bands on the radio. (Baxendale and Pawling, 1996, p2)

For Gollancz it was a period of both the rise of the Popular Front, following on from electoral success in France and Spain in 1936, but also political disappointment as the Conservative–led National Government, that had come to power in 1935, stood back and let Mussolini's Italy invade Abyssinia in October 1935, and refused to get involved when the democratically elected Popular Front government of Manuel Azana in Spain was challenged in a military coup of right–wing generals led by General Francisco Franco. Gollancz, galvanized by Popular Front success, was spurred on to found the Left Book Club, along with John Strachey and Harold Laski, in February 1936. The perilous situation of the Left in Spain later that year only convinced him further of his rightness.

It also led him into the more dubious relationship of a close alliance with the communists. From the Club's inception rumours of the closeness of Gollancz's relationship with the CPGB abounded and continued to dog him for the lifetime of the Left Book Club and beyond. This, then, leads to another of the central questions of this study. How much did

that relationship with the CPGB damage Gollancz's reputation as a publisher, and thereby tarnish the image he had worked so hard to achieve? Or was it a symbiotic relationship, where each party needed the other, and neither would have been as successful during the Thirties if they had operated alone? As we have already seen Gollancz was at pains to create distance and draw a distinction between his aims and those of the communists. The alacrity with which he did this, however, is testament both to how damaging that interpretation of the relationship might be.

Throughout this study I will be discussing the various ways the Communist Party influenced Gollancz, his politics and his publishing output. More importantly, however, I will be analysing how Gollancz, in his turn, influenced publishing and the book trade, most immediately, in the Thirties, but also in ways the modern book trade is still reacting to. The consideration of Gollancz's position in the firmament of 1930s publishing is also part of an ongoing intellectual debate about the way politics and publishing interact and create a dynamic situation that frequently leads to change.

Politics and Publishing in the 1930s

The dichotomy at the heart of British society in the 1930s is reflected in W.H. Auden's poem *September 1st, 1939*, in which he calls the Thirties 'a low dishonest decade'. The period was, of course, neither as disappointing as Auden makes out nor was it a golden age of rising wages and improved living standards as others have suggested. It was inevitably somewhere in the middle. For those working in the heavy industries of Scotland, Wales and the North of England the years after the Wall Street Crash of October 1929 were a decade of depression, hunger marches and social deprivation. Elsewhere it was a decade of burgeoning home ownership and a 'Baby Austin in every garage' (Gardiner, 2011, pxiii).[2]

[2] Juliet Gardiner describes a more positive view of the 1930s: 'It ignored those areas of Britain largely unaffected by the "Great Depression", where the symbols of prosperity were the growth of home

Into this contradictory summation of the period we must add the very real changes that were happening in publishing. In many ways little has changed in the social composition of those involved in publishing, but in the 1930s British publishing had at its heart an elite of wealthy middle– to upper–class men who determined what was 'fit' for publication. For Geoffrey Faber, 'the publisher is a middleman, he calls the tune to which the whole rest of the trade dances; and he does so because he pays the piper' (Faber, 1934, p120). Inherent in this assertion is not just that he who holds the purse strings dictates what is published, but also that the publisher's political perspective will hold sway. In an essentially conservative period this meant a time of relative conformity. Publishers at the time released titles from a social milieu that tended to coincide with their elitist backgrounds. Few publishers were prepared to go against that and publish material that might have been seen as contrary to the natural hierarchical order of things.

In the 1930s the natural party of the Left in Great Britain at the time[3], the Labour Party, was in the political doldrums, but at least by 1936 it had something to rally around – the Spanish Civil War and the rising menace of fascism. The founding of the Left Book Club too motivated the creation of the Socialist Book Club run by Ronald Batty (almost inevitably called 'The Batty Book Club' by Gollancz in the March 1938 issue of *Left News*), but which lasted only a matter of months, mainly through lack of interest. Founded in February 1938, although it was named 'Socialist' it was set up by Batty who was employed at Foyles

ownership, new light industries, a consumer society – evidenced by rapidly multiplying acres of suburban semis, the hope of a Baby Austin in the garage, a branch of Woolworths in every town, roadhouses on every arterial road, lidos, cinemas, paid holidays, dance halls, greyhound racing football pools, plate glass, the modernist and the "moderne"' (Gardiner, 2011, pxiii). The reference to 'a Baby Austin' is the nickname of an Austin 7 car, which was famously advertised in the Twenties and Thirties with the strapline 'You buy a car – but you invest in an Austin'.

[3] In his history of the Labour Party, Simon Hannah plots the genesis and growth of the Party from its socialist roots as representatives of the burgeoning working–class. At the beginning of the twentieth century it was the trade unions who held power in the Party: 'The Labour Party was from the start a product of the desire of the unions for a political extension of their negotiating power' (Hannah, 2018, p5).

bookshop and who was married to Christina Foyle, the prime mover behind the Right Book Club. Its aim essentially was to undermine the LBC, but it folded with only three hundred members (Rodgers, 2003, p7). The Right Book Club too, established on 27th February 1937, was a direct reaction to the success of the Left Book Club. Unlike the LBC it did not commission its own original titles and its agenda 'for all its genuine political purpose, was essentially socio–cultural and commercial in its trajectory' (Rodgers, 2003, p6), however it shared a similarly educative aim as the LBC, albeit from a very different political perspective, and mimicked the advertising style, using a 'Right is Might' slogan, and a similar style of typography to that of Gollancz and the LBC. The RBC reached an estimated 25,000 members at its peak (Rodgers, 2003, p3), and although that was far short of the LBC's 57,000-strong membership in its prime, it was briefly a thorn in Gollancz's side and actually outlasted the LBC by continuing into the 1950s.

Elsewhere, the Left Book Club's influence on Labour members was happening at a grassroots level, however. Despite threats of being expelled from the Labour Party if you were found to be a member of the Left Book Club, many of the Club's members continued to belong to both groups. This was largely because of the extracurricular opportunities offered by the Club. It is often said that the Left Book Club was not so much a book club and more a way of life, and it is this all–encompassing lifestyle choice of reading groups, holidays, and cinema trips that members found so compelling. Rather than the communist–infiltrated organisation of popular myth at the time, the Left Book Club had a broader, more educative agenda than simply political change, even if it was anticipated that this improvement in knowledge must inevitably lead to that progressive political change. As Gollancz wrote in the *Left Book Club News* of May 1936:

> What the Left Book Club is attempting to do is to provide the indispensable basis of *knowledge* without which a really effective United Front of all men and women of good will cannot be built. If we are to win, we must have, each one of us, not less but

> more knowledge than the best informed of our enemies. (*Left Book Club News*, May 1936)

There is evidence that this message reached its intended audience with, for example, workers in factories creating their own lending libraries of Left Book Club titles for their comrades to borrow and share.

There is, of course, an opposing view that the Left Book Club had little influence and what influence it had was mostly malign. Philip Toynbee says of the Left Book Club, that it was an embarrassment for those involved and a viewed with distaste by the next generation (Laity, 2001, pxxxi), and Robert Graves and Alan Hodge dismissed the impact of the Left Book Club, claiming that despite initial interest few of the titles were ever read (Graves and Hodge, 1940, p334). However, can the Left Book Club, and, indeed, the wider publishing activities of Gollancz during the period, be dismissed so casually? Did they really have no positive impact on the society and politics of the time? To best evaluate these questions, it may be most effective to see Gollancz's publishing activities within the continuum of book history enquiry alongside original primary research. In this way it is possible to both position Gollancz within socio–historic contexts and assess the impact of both his publishing company and that of the Left Book Club on the publishing industry and society in general.

A Study in Change and Contradiction: Thesis Outline

In order to evaluate the impact of Gollancz's publishing output and the work of his Left Book Club, it is important to understand the context in which he was working. The 1930s was a pivotal time of change and contradiction in politics, society, and publishing. Into the post–1931 political vacuum came political extremists very often populated on the Left by an influential group of middle–class intelligentsia with literary ambitions, and an extreme Left Communist Party prepared to exploit those ambitions and harness the power of literature. This is an area of study that has not been previously researched and the hypothesis that I

will test is that communism influenced, not just Gollancz's publishing company, but also the Left Book Club, the physical appearance of the titles, and also the manner in which he promoted them. More importantly, I will study the lasting legacy that those changes wrought by Gollancz in the Thirties, made on the publishing industry and society in general. By using a case study of the publication of George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* to illustrate the impact of this I will seek to show the conflicted nature of much of this change, and in the final chapter I will evaluate the success of the Left Book Club, its long–term value and a measurement of its worth in a post–1945 society.

Chapter 1 describes how publishing contributed to the rise of the Communist Party of Great Britain during the Thirties and, in particular, that of the middle–class literary communist during this period, assessing its causes and effects, and most importantly looking at how that shaped the publishing industry to come and what legacy was left. I will discuss how the CPGB exploited the vacuum in British politics left by the heavy defeat of the Labour Party in the 1931 General Election and how literature was used as in important weapon in this battle for the Left. I argue that the coming of the CPGB in this way could not have happened at any other time. The combination of a one–party monopoly on government in the shape of the Conservative–dominated National Government, with relatively low–cost printing and a concurrent development in marketing skills, created the perfect set of circumstances to enable a political outlier to make the progress that it did.

Taking the Left Book Club as the perfect, and most successful, example of growth on the Left (if not communism) during the period, Chapter 2 focuses on the Club's success, but also its vexed relationship with the CPGB. The chapter describes the circumstances of the creation of the Left Book Club and details the nature of its relationship with communism, comparing it with Lawrence & Wishart to show what a 'real' communist publisher is. The symbiotic, yet dysfunctional, relationship between Gollancz and the CPGB was to cause him great personal difficulty, and through extensive use of letters from the Gollancz archives I

use examples of the litigation he undertook to attempt to distance himself from the communists. I also examine claims that as a highly commercial publisher Gollancz may have been motivated in the setting up of the Club by financial gain rather than political altruism. Finally, I examine the view that the Left Book Club became so closely associated with the Communist Party that as the communists became marginalized, so the Club's reputation was eroded. This chapter looks at why that was the case and whether the Club's reputation is worthy of rehabilitation.

The third chapter takes the key Left Book Club publication, Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, as a case study to understand not only the difficult relationship between Gollancz and the CPGB, but also the personal struggle Gollancz had in deciding whether to publish it or not. I will also look at the mixed critical reaction to the book and, finally, the continuing life of the book, drawing on the various stages of its publishing history, and how its paratext both reflects the book's longevity and also how it helped create it. That *The Road to Wigan Pier* was a pivotal book politically for both Orwell and Gollancz marks it out for further in–depth study and also serves to highlight a theme running through the thesis – that of an anti–capitalist work that was sold, and continues to be sold, to the financial benefit of a capitalist industry.

Chapter 4 considers both the rise of the marketer during the Thirties and how Gollancz, in particular, embraced this fundamental societal change in order to first promote his new publishing company and subsequently to further the political ends of his new venture – the Left Book Club. By evaluating the development of Gollancz's marketing and advertising style, and measuring it against the theories of both Genette and Darnton, the chapter highlights just how revolutionary Gollancz's promotional tactics were for the period. Gollancz and Lane at Penguin led the way in the commercialization of publishing in the Thirties (a development that still resonates today), and this chapter seeks to place Gollancz, in particular, in context with other publishers of the period.

Chapter 5 then develops Gollancz's iconoclastic approach to discuss, not just the controversial new designs for his book jackets, but also how those designs were heavily influenced by artistic developments coming out of new post–Revolutionary Russia. The chapter also highlights the importance of typographer and designer Stanley Morison not just to Gollancz's advertising, but more significantly to those iconic yellow, black and magenta book jackets. By discussing the dust jackets in detail the chapter aims to both map the development of the jackets and place them in the context of the new Constructivist art movement. This also involves the key practitioner of the art form in the early years of Gollancz's publishing company, Edward McKnight Kauffer, and serves to show that Soviet art as well as Soviet politics had a major influence on Gollancz's company and oeuvre.

The final chapter evaluates Gollancz and the Left Book Club's position in the history of the Thirties and discusses whether the perceived closeness of Gollancz with the Communist Party of Great Britain negatively affected the view of Gollancz as pre–eminent publisher of his time, preventing him from taking his place as a key figure of the period. By using the crucial event of the Soviet–Nazi Pact of August 1939, the chapter discusses the damage wrought on both the Left Book Club and also the CPGB by this surprising rapprochement and how the Left Book Club, in particular, failed to revive its fortunes to its pre–War position. Importantly, however, the chapter seeks to arrive at a conclusion as to the Club's ultimate success, discussing it in the light of the Labour Party's success in the 1945 general election.

This study seeks to determine the role of Gollancz as a key figure, not just in 1930s publishing, but also in the culture the period. By viewing him as an occasionally divisive figure whose close relationship with the Communist Party served to damage his reputation, we can also see him as revolutionary in publishing terms, who made changes to how books were published, marketed and sold that are still in practice today. The study also aims to not only rehabilitate Gollancz's reputation, but also to question the relationship between

publishing and commerce, and, using Gollancz's avowed commercialism, ask whether a capitalist venture can ever be completely altruistic or whether commercial concerns will always win out in the final analysis?

By assessing the output of the Gollancz publishing company and the Left Book Club, both in terms of content and appearance, examining it in the light of theories from book history and publishing studies, and measuring it against the prevailing publishing and political climate of the time, this thesis investigates the extent to which Gollancz was a genuine 1930s revolutionary figure, albeit a flawed one. This is largely unexplored territory and sits at the intersection of publishing studies, book history and political history; a position which gives a unique insight into the contradictory times in which Gollancz lived, and also the conflicted times that he influenced. Moreover, it allows us to perceive him as an agent for change that had implications in post–war society, the publishing industry, and beyond.

Literature Review: Reading Politics and Publishing

In his book *Churchill & Orwell: The Fight for Freedom* (2018),[4] Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist Thomas E. Ricks attempts to reclaim the 'Great Man' theory of history, which for many had become at best outmoded and at worst denigrated for its elitist and reductionist perspective, and apply it to Winston Churchill and George Orwell. However, as Ricks says, 'sometimes individuals matter greatly' (Ricks, 2018, p4), and that is particularly true in the case of Victor Gollancz. The 'Great Man' theory may have become passé, but it is a pertinent method for judging the changes wrought by the publishing revolution of the 1930s. Similarly, Alistair McCleery in his essay on Penguin founder Allen Lane[5] seeks to reposition the publisher within book history. Rather than notions of the publisher as a 'thief' of an author's work or a 'pimp' who sells and thereby commercializes art, the publisher is rather a communicator and, especially in the case of Gollancz, an educator for whom the charge of pimping his titles would be to drastically undervalue the beneficial effects of those works.

As McCleery highlights with regards to Lane, there is much mythmaking and hyperbole that goes into biographically–focused perspectives of book history, yet it is difficult to see how one could underplay the impact of Gollancz and Lane on the publishing industry. Also as McCleery states,

> A biographically based study should not, in turn, become an exercise in iconoclasm, in finding the feet of clay in a prominent figure. It should attempt to understand the nature of his success in publishing and perhaps to qualify initial hagiography without denying that success. (McCleery, 2002, p163)

[4] See Thomas E Ricks, *Churchill & Orwell: The Fight for Freedom* (Duckworth, 2018) for a persuasive argument for the impact of the individual on history. This is a particularly impressive feat given that the two men never met and, although they were both highly individualistic, they were at the opposite ends of the political spectrum

[5] See Alistair McCleery, 'The Return of the Publisher to Book History: The Case of Allen Lane' in *Book History* Vol 5 (2002) which posits that this removal of the legitimacy of the role of the publisher from book history 'forms part both of a more general erasure of the human from book history and of an authorial view of the publisher as enemy rather than as a facilitator or collaborator.' (p161)

Book history has in recent years been held in thrall by theories adopted and adapted from Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Robert Darnton, Gerard Genette and others, that tend to negate the role of the individual as publishing progenitor. Indeed, Bourdieu argues in *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) that literature is produced by cultural forces in a 'field', which diminishes the role of both the publisher and the author. Rather, as McCleery states,

> A book history that relies on structuralist models of historiography will remain as incomplete and unsatisfying as technical bibliographical description without the social context from which the book as material object emerged. (McCleery, 2002, p178)

In this study I would suggest that that we need to go further than that, and that the only way to fully understand the publishing revolution that happened in the Thirties and the long–term impact that still resonates, is to understand that through a blend of theory and biography, and a mix of research methods. That does mean, however, that all forms of research are inadequate in isolation and that the only way to reach a successful conclusion is to take the theoretical approach of book history theory and publishing studies, social and political history, art and visual perspectives, and combine that with archival research *and* biography, and synthesize it as I have done here, to arrive at a new theory that could, perhaps, be viewed as structuralist biography. Through this we can understand via a number of different perspectives and theories, how an individual comes to wrestle with the different pressures placed upon him, both commercially and politically, to effect great social change.

Print Culture and Social Change

One of the defining features of the fields of book history and print culture studies which emerged in the mid–twentieth century, was their interdisciplinarity. By reinterpreting the more usual field of academic bibliographic study via a number of different frameworks, including the political and sociological, book history proves to be a useful method with which to view publishing and the book trade. A major strand in book history is that of the printing press as an agent of change and social revolution and any study of Gollancz and, in

particular, the Left Book Club must be seen in that context. In their seminal work, *The Coming of the Book* (1958), Lucien Febvre and Henri–Jean Martin look at the field of book history as a whole, declaring that their hope is 'to establish how and why the printed book was something more than a triumph of technical ingenuity, but was also one of the most potent agents at the disposal of Western civilisation in bringing together the scattered ideas of representative thinkers' (Febvre and Martin, 2010, p10). They describe the book's progress as a force for change from manuscript to printed book over a period of roughly fifty years, so that by approximately 1550 manuscripts had largely fallen out of favour except with scholars. Their scope also enables them to examine the role of the book in the Reformation and to discuss how print helped to shape our modern languages, and fix them in their modern form somewhere around the seventeenth century. They do all of this whilst stressing that 'the printer and the bookseller worked above all and from the beginning for profit' (Febvre and Martin, 2010, p249). Like modern publishers, early publishers only published the books that they knew they could sell enough copies of to turn a reasonable profit. This in turn produced a more limited range of titles, but in greater numbers. In this sense publishing is, and has always been, a commercial endeavour, a fact that Gollancz would have endorsed even when balancing that with political concerns.

Elizabeth Eisenstein, building on the work of Febvre and Martin, in her two–volume work, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979), also takes the long view, looking at the rise of the printing press, which was 'unknown anywhere in Europe before the mid–fifteenth century, printers' workshops would be found in every important municipal center by 1500' (Eisenstein, 1979, p44). Although there is no term for the impact of this change, Eisenstein terms it a 'communications revolution', writing, 'One might talk about a basic change in a mode of production, about a book revolution, or a media revolution, or perhaps, most simply and explicitly, about a shift from script to print' (Eisenstein, 1979, p44). This change led to an increase in the number of books produced and a decrease in the time taken to produce them. Although Eisenstein interprets this as technology driving demand, it should also be

acknowledged that this was a symbiotic process in which a pent-up demand also increased the development in printing technology. There were new features to be exploited and the fact that identical images, for example, could be viewed simultaneously by numerous readers was a part of this 'revolution'. Eisenstein warns us against extrapolating too great a radical change in the development of new ideas and theories from the development of the printing press; she has little doubt about its long-term impact in the driving of post–Renaissance culture.

This focus on print culture as a vehicle for social and political change has been readily taken up most influentially by Benedict Anderson. In his work, *Imagined Communities* (1983), Anderson adapts these arguments as he envisages the social change brought about by publishing as essentially capitalist in nature. He sees the spread of printing presses through Europe in the sixteenth century as capitalism's search for new markets, reflecting Febvre and Martin's view that this was inevitable given that without growth publishers would struggle. His main concern, however, is the manner in which printing and publishing contributed to the development and 'fixing' of nationalism or 'nation–ness' as he terms it: 'print–capitalism […] made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways' (Anderson, 1983, p40). With books and newspapers 'fixing' the language, this was central to the subjective idea of a nation and although it was a complex and, to some extent, unrealised process, once they were they could be exploited in a more conscious fashion by the media and others (Anderson, 1983, p48).

Anderson defines nationalism as 'an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (Anderson, 1983, p15). Anderson sees one factor in the construction of this community as linguistic. However, as McCleery has identified, the decline of Latin as a transnational language has a religious basis rather than a nationalistic

one.[6] Anderson also sees the simultaneous consumption of the newspaper by thousands or millions of others over roughly the same period of time, as one of the ways an imagined community can be conceived of. In contrast to the views of Raymond Williams who saw the creation of a popular press being aimed at 'a particular kind of impersonal grouping, corresponding to aspects of the social and industrial organisation of our kind of capitalist and industrialized society' (Williams, 1965, pp200-201), for Anderson if the printing press is a tool of capitalism, its effect is one of unification, in this case, contributing to the creation of a national consciousness.

These theories of the printing press as an agent of social change are both global and long–term. If we are to consider political publishing in the Thirties, then it is necessary to focus on British publishing and print culture in particular. Darnton has reflected that new communication methods take a long time to replace old ones, what McCleery refers to as a palimpsest,[7] and the study of book history tells us that to fully understand the narrative arc of change in the publishing industry and its offshoots, it is often necessary take the long view. In contrast to the studies of Febvre and Martin, Eisenstein, and Anderson which emphasise the radical nature of print culture, there are many accounts that present the products of the printing press and publishing in general in Britain as either highly conservative or essentially non–political. Studies such as John Sutherland's *Fiction and the Fiction Industry* (1978) and Joseph McAleer's *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914–1950* (1992), use what Simone Murray calls the 'avowedly apolitical historical–survey' (Murray, 2004, p12) approach. This is particularly the case with John Feather's *A History of British Publishing* (1986), which views the British publishing industry as essentially a conservative one, designed through restrictive practices, such as the Net Book Agreement, to preserve the

[6] McCleery sees few obstacles in the way of 'the onward march of the English Language', although it is fair to say that the increasing global reach of China may yet challenge this (McCleery, 2015, p176)
[7] That is the notion that change overlaps and that 'the traces of earlier patterns have been effaced by change, but nevertheless can be discerned through the intervening layers of business and cultural practice' (McCleery, 2015, p162).

status quo. Richard Altick's seminal work, *The English Common Reader* (1957), sketches out many of the areas of book history that were studied in far greater detail by subsequent scholars. He also views the publishing industry as largely conservative, despite placing the growth of print in its social context as an influencer of the reading public, who in turn influenced society. For Altick, 'it is the story of how, through numberless tribulations, and against what sometimes appeared to be hopeless odds, there took root and eventually flourished in nineteenth century England a revolutionary social concept: that of democracy in print' (Altick, 1998, p1). Key for Altick is the galvanising effect print had on the lower classes:

> The democratizing of reading led to a far–reaching revolution in English culture. No longer were books and periodicals written chiefly for the comfortable few; more and more, as the century progresses, it was the ill–educated mass audience with pennies in its pocket that called the tune to which writers and editors danced. (Altick, 1998, p5)

The nineteenth century demand for print may have been such that 'it became a major social phenomenon' (Altick, 1998, p7), but it was a demand that was carefully controlled by those with the political power to ensure that reading was a benign activity and both politically and culturally anodyne. However, by the following century it is these readers and autodidacts that prove to be the main audience for Gollancz's self–declared educative works published by the Left Book Club. Shafquat Towheed and W. R. Owens have identified some of the issues faced by those constructing a history of reading, what they call 'the problem of identification, secrecy, data gathering, classification and interpretation' (Towheed and Owens, 2011, p2). A study of reading is not one of the aims of this thesis, however, those autodidacts of the of the Left Book Club's membership are clearly crucial to the Club's success and also to our understanding of the political and social impact of the various Club titles. Where reading is involved in this study it is more likely to be of an evidence–based nature in order to fully understand how, for example, LBC books were read by workers on

the factory floor.[8] Despite the establishment's best efforts, the democratisation of print provided Gollancz with the audience he needed to promulgate his ideas, but it left the more conservative gatekeepers of publishing uneasy as to what might be simultaneously unleashed. More pertinently as a key consideration for this study there are those who see that the end result of these two competing forces in British publishing – the conservatism of the mainstream publishing industry versus the democratising spread of reading leading to social reform and the spreading of radical ideas – as ultimately resulting in capitalism's nullification of radical ideology through publishing's inherent conservatism.

In *The Long Revolution* (1965), Williams suggests that from 1870 into the 1930s the press (and therefore the book trade and publishing industry) changed from being a medium for radical political change into the conservative capitalist model that exists to this day. Integral to that was that governmental attempts over a long period of time to control the press, often through implementation of taxes or acts of parliament and largely under the guise of preventing sedition or libel, had failed. By the 1930s the daily press had expanded its readership, but its content was compromised by a mixture of politics and magazine–style variety, for Williams best represented by the *Express*. This was a commercial decision in the pursuit of wider circulation and advertising revenue, and reflects the commerciality that was taking hold in the trade press. The substantial growth in circulation that had occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century was largely down to the growth of a new sort of advertising, moving away from small 'classified' ads to ones with larger type that broke with the column layout of newspapers, and which would find great favour with Gollancz.

Williams sees this as a victory for capitalism. The early part of the twentieth century saw change in the ownership of newspapers. Then a proprietor would occasionally own two or three newspapers, but typically most were single ownership. However, with speculative

[8] See the evidence of Eddie Frow, a Mancunian communist shop steward, collected by Kevin Morgan. Frow claims that Left Book Club titles were being read on the factory night shift (Morgan, 1989, p257)

ownership, groups of newspapers were started. These were then capitalised in order to start new papers, in the way, for example, that *Answers* was capitalised in order to start the *Daily Mail.* In this sense capitalism laid the foundations for the press as we know it:

> Thus, in the general expansion, and conditioned by the new kind of 'mass' advertising, the real 'Northcliffe Revolution' in the press occurred, taking the newspaper from its status as an independent private enterprise to its membership of a new kind of capitalist combine. The real basis of the twentieth–century popular press was thus effectively laid. (Williams, 1965, p229)

In her book *Respectable: Crossing the Class Divide* (2016), Lynsey Hanley wrote, 'My feeling has always been that you can't do much about your oppressors without having access to the same tools that are used to oppress you.' (Hanley, 2016, p90). Hanley may have been applying this to the education system, but this is particularly relevant when considering both Gollancz and the publishing industry. Gollancz saw himself as both a publisher and an educator. His declared aim for the Left Book Club was that its members should have 'not less but more knowledge than the best informed of our enemies.'[9] In order to do that that Gollancz, who was fortunate enough to have access to those same tools as those who would 'oppress' Club members, used them to subvert rather than subjugate, to educate and not to enslave. Similarly, it is integral to the publication of the first issue of the *Daily Worker* on the 1st January 1930. At the root of both the Left Book Club and the *Daily Worker* is the use of the establishment's tools against them, and in the case of the *Daily Worker*, it is a direct response to the impact of the 'Northcliffe revolution' referred to by Williams. The first editor of the *Daily Worker*, William Rust, wrote that the launch of the paper was 'a political decision, it arose out of the necessities of the situation […] The capitalist press is a great monopoly concern and its successful finances are based on vast circulations and the huge advertising revenues which these circulations bring' (Rust, 1949, pp16–17). Rust saw the mainstream press as anti-competitive with an inherent need to

[9] Stated by Gollancz in the editorial of *Left Book Club News* in May 1936.

maintain the status quo, but printing technology gave the *Daily Worker* the tools to challenge their monopoly.

Like Williams, Murray sees radical publishing as doomed to be cancelled out by the forces of capitalism. Unlike Williams,[10] however, Murray is unemotional in her view of this. She points out in her study of feminist presses, *Mixed Media* (2004), that all feminist presses have at some time 'been partially or entirely owned by non–feminist media multinationals, most have at some point derived funding from mainstream banks or local government authorities' (Murray, 2004, p5). Therefore, in a sense, all have compromised their political integrity by pursuing commercial avenues, whether through necessity or design. What is not in doubt is that if the personal is political, then so is publishing. The number and variety of feminist publishers in the 1970s and 1980s shows that, whatever the political leanings and however they are organised, feminist publishing is 'an inherently political act and that women, recognising this fact, must intervene in the processes of literary production to ensure that women's voices are made audible' (Murray, 2004, p2). Murray asks a key question:

> How can a publishing house committed to securing cultural and political changes in favour of women hope to accommodate itself to a capitalist system that largely benefits from social stability and acquiescent female participation? Phrased differently, how can an oppositional politics hope to achieve commercial success within the ruthlessly competitive global publishing marketplace? (Murray, 2004, pp25–26)

This was a conundrum faced by Virago in particular. Founded when the United Kingdom was in the first throes of Thatcherite politics and, perhaps inevitably, influenced by that ideology's market–driven commitment, they would ultimately be subsumed into that most

[10] In the conclusion of his chapter on the growth of the popular press in *The Long Revolution*, Williams opines, 'Is it all come to this, in the end, that the long history of the press in Britain should reach its consummation in a declining number of newspapers, in ownership by a few very large groups, and in the acceptance (varied between social groups but evident in all) of the worst kinds of journalism?' (Williams, 1965, p236)

capitalist of twentieth century organisations – the media conglomerate, becoming a subsidiary of Random House in 1982. This was a vexed relationship with the large multinational company, and, like Gollancz before them, Virago trod the fine line between left–wing politics and right–wing economics. Despite having more of a collectivist approach than Gollancz, Virago made no apology for their approach – indeed it may have contributed to their success. As Murray notes, 'Virago's alliance of feminist politics and capitalist economics, encapsulated in Callil's vow that "it is our duty not to go bust"' (Murray, 2004, pp44–45), meant that Virago outlasted all the collectivist feminist presses. Publishing in the 1930s may not have been the global concern faced by the likes of Virago and the Women's Press many decades later, but both Gollancz and contemporary communist publishers, Lawrence & Wishart, faced this very issue of left–wing publishing in a capitalist system, and tackled it in different ways.

If commerce has largely won out and governments tend to be influenced by the press, rather than the other way around, where does that leave the political publisher? Without the same access to advertising revenue, lacking the mass appeal of the popular press, and suffering from occasional government intervention in the shape of, say, paper restrictions or attracting the attention of the security services, how does a publisher on the Left survive, let alone flourish? In terms of the press this greatly affected the *Daily Worker*, in particular, but in the case of Gollancz it may have left him in a morally questionable relationship with the Communist Party, but he was also able to exercise perhaps his greatest skill, that of publicity. Without needing to have recourse to the opinions of the government of the day (or, indeed, the official opposition), Gollancz was free to use all of his commercial guile and wit to further his cause.

Victor Gollancz: A publisher for the Thirties

This study is unique in assessing the work of Gollancz and the Left Book Club through different prisms – that of book history, print and publishing as an agent of social change, and encompassing political history, visual art, and literary theory. It is also necessary to position Gollancz as both a publisher and a key figure in the 1930s, in both structuralist and historiographical terms. What research there has been in this area has been either from the perspective of the political parties in histories of the Communist Party of Great Britain, for example, or from publishers' biographies and autobiographies, such as Fredric Warburg's *An Occupation for Gentlemen* (1959), and the two autobiographies written by Gollancz, *My Dear Timothy* (1952) and *More For Timothy* (1953), which tend to focus on the mechanics of running a publishing company alongside the usual elements of self–justification. This is also true of the history of the Gollancz publishing company by Sheila Hodges, *Gollancz: The Story of a Publishing House* (1978). Largely anecdotal, the study lacks criticality. This is perhaps inevitable given that it is a commissioned house history and that Hodges worked for Gollancz from 1936 to 1954, becoming Assistant Managing Director in 1943. Consequently, Ruth Dudley Edwards' *Victor Gollancz: A Biography* (1987) provides a more insightful view of the man. It is not overly critical (the author, for example, rather cosily refers to the publisher as 'Victor' all the way through), but neither is it hagiographical. She has amassed a good range of source material and deals with many of the doubts surrounding his politics and business practices, whilst, perhaps inevitably, coming down on the side of the subject. Both titles focus on Gollancz the man; his enthusiasms and quirks, but neither touch on the essential question of this study. Neither seeks to reconcile Gollancz's political ideals with the commerciality of his business, and neither take an in–depth look at Gollancz's, initially useful, but ultimately destructive relationship with the Communist Party of Great Britain, and how that compromised both his political output and commercial reach.

Histories of the period do not tackle Gollancz's personal dilemma between commercial and political success either. In the case of both contemporaneous and more recent studies, they take either a broad sweep or focus on a particular element of the time, such as Julian Symons' book, which started life as a sort of anthology of Thirties verse (hence the amount of poetry, both good and bad, quoted throughout), but which soon became an overview of the decade, better placed to put the poetry in its political and social context. The key academic work on the 1930s must now be regarded as Juliet Gardiner's *The Thirties* (2011). Given how tumultuous this decade was, the book is inevitably a broad–ranging, socio–cultural overview of which publishing and communism are but minor players. However, the fact that communism weaves throughout the text is indicative of the Party's influence. This influence is probably clearer from the perspective of seventy years of hindsight, as it appears less frequently in the seminal history of the Thirties, *The Long Week–end* (1940) by Robert Graves and Alan Hodge. This is where any investigation of that decade must start. Written in the midst of the Second World War and with the decade in question only just ended; it is elliptical, biased and very much a product of its time. Consequently, it is in that sense, as much an historic document as, say, Wal Hannington's *Unemployed Struggles 1919–1936* (1936) or *The Menace of Fascism* (1933) by John Strachey, as it is a social history. Gollancz and the Left Book Club appear as infrequent players on the 1930s stage, and in the aim of these titles to either encapsulate the decade just gone or pin it on the tapestry of twentieth century history, they are most often mentioned only in passing.

Such socio–historic works, then, are good for background detail, but if we are to truly appreciate the impact of Gollancz and the Left Book Club during the Thirties, then it is through other theories and approaches we must consider his work. There are several different theories worthy of consideration at this point and chief amongst them are those of French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. Although he is one of the few sociologists to write specifically about publishers and publishing in general, Bourdieu's discussion on the subject is limited and reasonably discursive. Nonetheless, his theories have become key concepts

when considering the history of the book. His view, laid out in *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (1992), that there are two opposing modes of cultural production, is one that scholars have worked hard to reconcile. Bourdieu's claim that 'at one pole, there is the anti–"economic" economy of pure art. Founded on the obligatory recognition of the values of disinterestedness and on the denegation of the "economy" (of the "commercial") and of "economic" profit (in the short term), it privileges production and its specific necessities, the outcome of autonomous history' (Bourdieu, 1996, p142). This 'art–for–art's–sake' approach thereby accrues what Bourdieu terms symbolic capital. For him, symbolic capital legitimises art and ultimately will make that art economically profitable:

> the only legitimate accumulation consists of making a name for oneself, a known recognized name, a capital of consecration implying a power to consecrate objects (with a trademark or signature) or persons (through publications, exhibition, etc) and therefore to give value, and to appropriate the profits from the operation. (Bourdieu, 1993, p75)

However, at the opposite pole 'there is the "economic" logic of the literary and artistic industries which, since they make the trade in cultural goods into just another trade, confer priority on distribution, on immediate and temporary success, measured for example by the print run, and which are content to adjust themselves to the pre–existing demand of a clientele' (Bourdieu, 1996, p142). This, then, is an altogether more commercial enterprise.

These two opposing views lead us to question where publishers fit as agents of cultural production. Crucially, this is where Bourdieu is largely absent. He sees publishers as one of the producers of art who are able to recognise the meaning and value of the work and therefore to claim it as 'art', but clearly many, if not all, publishers will attempt both a quick financial profit *and* the accumulation of long–term symbolic capital. When it comes to political publishing, there are one or two publishers, principally Gollancz in the 1930s, who will attempt both of these things, as well as gathering political capital via a number of explicitly political objectives that are separate to, but not instead of, economic and symbolic

capital. Consequently, this lack of a detailed critique of publishing on Bourdieu's part and a binary approach to the fields of cultural production, means that the model that Bourdieu has established is in many ways inadequate for analyzing publishing that has a political aim as its primary objective, which, therefore, makes it a largely unsuitable approach for assessing the impact of the Left Book Club.

Jarad Zimbler has questioned what Bourdieu terms 'social art', and what Zimbler calls 'political art', which fits solely into neither (or perhaps both) of these definitions. Bourdieu sees this as an anomaly and subsequently dismisses it. This may be because, as Zimbler suggests, he is unclear whether social art is actually a disguised commercial art or whether it is ultimately eclipsed by 'pure art'. However, this insistence on Bourdieu's part on the dualism of his theory makes social art appear 'transient and insubstantial, rather than a mode of literary production in its own right' (Zimbler, 2009, p602). As Zimbler points out, Bourdieu's Manichean approach fails to take account of publishing's balancing of political capital and publishing. The publishing output of Gollancz is neither insubstantial nor transient and counters Bourdieu's claim that art is either anti–economic or commercially focused. Consequently, in this study I will be examining this further in the light of Gollancz's inherent combinations and contradictions.

In his book *Merchants of Culture* (2010), John Thompson extends Bourdieu's discussion of economic, symbolic and cultural capital in publishing by adding additional potential capitals. Publishing is seen as a combination of 'fields', which cannot work in isolation. According to Thompson for a publisher to be successful the fields must be interdependent. He writes, 'The theory constantly reminds us that the actions of any particular agent or organization are always part of a larger whole, a system if you like, of which they are a part but over which they do not have any overall control' (Thompson, 2010, pp4–5). According to Bourdieu's theory the two most important resources are economic capital and symbolic capital. Thompson calls symbolic capital, 'one of those intangible assets that is enormously

important for publishing firms. For publishers are not just employers and financial risk–takers: they are also cultural mediators and arbitrators of quality and taste' (Thompson, 2010, p8). Symbolic capital is particularly important in attracting authors, of course, and this is especially the case with academic journals, for example, where the journal's 'impact factor' has a direct influence on an academic's tenure; but it also strengthens a publisher's position when negotiating with booksellers, reviewers and other 'media gatekeepers'. In effect this view of Thompson's is a structuralist one: it is the overarching system and structure of publishing that matters and which determines its future. However, this perspective is to downgrade the role of the auteur and entrepreneur. The sort of individual, like Gollancz and Lane, who circumvents the usual processes and makes radical changes. Whether that is Lane's Penguincubator dispensing books via a vending machine or Gollancz's Left Book Club deliberately subverting the usual distribution channels for new titles by having Club members collect them from selected socialist bookshops, the publishing trade's norms, as captured in Darnton's Communications Circuit, are summarily dispensed with. It may not be smashing the system, but it is certainly subverting it.

Another key theoretician in interpreting the impact of Gollancz and the Left Book Club outside of a socio–historic context is Gerard Genette. His theories surrounding paratext or 'what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public' (Genette, 1997, p1), are an important tool for evaluating Gollancz's publishing output. By applying Genette's theories it is possible to assess the sizeable impact of Gollancz's chosen design path for his book jackets, advertising, and marketing material in an essentially conservative publishing environment. The paratext of Gollancz's books and marketing material is where politics and commerciality interact, and it is therefore important to examine this paratext as one of the ways in which Gollancz negotiated the tensions between politics and commerce. Indeed, it could be said that a book's paratext is the physical manifestation of the commercial nature of a publication – from the endorsements and cross–marketing on the cover to the legal copyright on the bibliographic verso inside.

However, where Genette and Gollancz differ is in their appraisal of the publisher's epitext, or that area that surrounds the text, but is not the book, and which includes anything to do with marketing and promotion. Genette dismisses this area because 'its basically marketing and "promotional" function does not always involve the responsibility of the author in a very meaningful way; most often he is satisfied just to close his eyes officially to the value–inflating hyperbole inseparable from the needs of trade' (Genette, 1997, p347). The marketing and advertising campaigns for both his publishing company and Left Book Club venture are genuinely ground–breaking and are another area in which Gollancz reconciles the demands of political expediency by employing the most overt of commercial tactics. It is fair to say, that the selling of books would never be the same again. Even fellow publisher Fredric Warburg acknowledges that however distasteful he found this form of promotion, it was necessary to adopt the same methods in order to not be left behind commercially. Gollancz may have been 'high horse–power' (Warburg, 1959, p118), as Warburg terms him, but he knew how to create a stir and it is that which enabled his success both as a publisher as well as a political influencer.

Similarly, Gollancz's promotional activities disrupt the Communications Circuit as described by Darnton. Murray has noticed that the importance of Darnton's schema in the field of book history is 'partly, one suspects, because the field is characterised by anxiety as to how its disparate elements might be made to coalesce into a semblance of disciplinary unity' (Murray, 2004, p13). It is, nonetheless, a useful (and, currently, the only) template for describing the publication of the 'average' book, but it is, as Murray finds, flawed when considering political publishing in particular. Crucially, for the purposes of this study and for Murray's, Darnton's Communications Circuit does not allow for what is rejected by a publisher or what is not stocked by booksellers or distributors. This is significant when applied to any books with divergent political standpoints, such as feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, and certainly to communist or left–leaning publications in the 1930s. Company sales records from Lawrence & Wishart, who were the main publishers of titles directly generated

by the Communist Party, detail the reluctance of booksellers to stock the publisher's titles, and the resistance of the book trade and the hegemony of mainstream publishing directly led to Gollancz setting up the Left Book Club, with its own unique distribution strategy, as a means of disseminating works the book trade would otherwise reject. This, in effect, is an innovative commercial solution to a more philosophical problem. Likewise, alternative methods were required by the *Daily Worker* that had to gather together a team of volunteers to distribute its issues when the usual newspaper distributers refused.

All of these works provide important reference points or theories by which to examine Gollancz and the Left Book Club, but ultimately the study contrives to produce an original perspective that shines a light on a hitherto unexamined aspect of Thirties publishing, and, consequently, illuminates some of the changes in society and the publishing industry after 1945. The originality of my approach lies in the duality necessary to be a successful political publisher. It requires a unique synthesis of approaches and theories and reflects in some ways the compromises made by Gollancz to be both commercially successful and politically effective. The sort of nimble approach to business and 'ideological tapdancing'[11] that Gollancz exemplified throughout his life.

[11] Ricks uses this phrase in *Churchill & Orwell* to describe Gollancz's introduction to *The Road to Wigan Pier* and his attempts to spin the second half of Orwell's book to make it palatable for a communist audience (Ricks, 2018, p43). This is the sort of spin, incidentally, that Orwell took issue with all his life, being the long–term advocate for straight talking that he was.

Researching Gollancz and the Left Book Club: Methodology

Perhaps appropriately, given the subject of this study, there is something Orwellian about the construction of, and access to, archives. That sense that those who have control over information can choose how it used, what is seen and by whom. Key to that is the notion of 'appraisal'. In the public's mind archivists will be allied with historians and seen to serve a similar function in explaining and curating the past. However, as John Ridener has asserted things have changed in recent decades:

> Especially since the 1980s, archival appraisal theory has become the focus of much professional and public discourse regarding archives. […] Appraisal is the initial interface between archivist and a collection: if records are appraised as less valuable than others, they may never be archived and effectively forgotten, even erased, from institutional or public memory. (Ridener, 2009)

To some extent all archives are inevitably curated, whether at source prior to delivery to the archive's holders or afterwards, for reasons, perhaps, of political sensitivity or national security. The archives used in this study are no different. They have been appraised by the people preserving and compiling the archives and then by scholars selecting what to use and deciding what relevance it has. Significant archival research has been undertaken with the aim of clarifying just how, and to what extent Gollancz and the Left Book Club had transformed publishing culture and society. Publishers' archives are particularly affected by political sensitivity as there may be legal implications, such as copyright, or personal concerns around, say, author communications, and by concerns regarding national security when the security services became interested in the activities of publishing companies. Given the period under study all the archives used have been affected by the travails of the Second World War with much material being lost as a result of damage inflicted by bombings and fire. This study draws heavily on two archives held in the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick: the personal papers of Sir Victor Gollancz and the publishing archives of Victor Gollancz Ltd.

Fortunately for the researcher Gollancz was at heart a communicator and, as such, an indefatigable letter–writer. Consequently, Gollancz's personal archive has around 40,000 individual items within it. This archive is effectively divided into 'personal' and 'publishing', although the distinction was largely made by the secretaries who created the subject files prior to assembling the archive and who, as a result, put some letters to do with Gollancz's own writings in the personal rather than the publishing files. As is to be expected, there is a considerable quantity of correspondence to do with his work as an activist and campaigner for such causes as nuclear disarmament, capital punishment, euthanasia, Jewish affairs, and homosexual law reform, which, outside of his pre–Second World War political campaigning, do not concern this study. They do, however, illustrate the rich and varied interests of Gollancz outside of his work as a publisher. They also inform some of the subjects that Gollancz chose to not just write about personally, but also to publish, such as the Left Book Club publications, *Modern Marriage and Birth Control* (July 1937), *The Jewish Question* (August 1937), and *Racism* (January 1939).

The Gollancz publishing company archive was deposited in the Modern Records Centre in late 1992 following the sale of Victor Gollancz Ltd by Houghton Mifflin to Cassell plc in October of that year, the consequent closure of Gollancz's Henrietta Street offices and move to Cassell's offices in the Strand, London. The collection extends to 78 boxes and covers the period from the setting up of the company in 1927. The only records not accessible are those papers relating to the acquisition of Gollancz (Holdings) by Houghton Mifflin in 1989, which are closed for thirty years, and should therefore be available to scholars in the near future.

Both archives are extensive in their scope and variety and provide an important perspective into the early years of the publishing company, the establishment of the Left Book Club and Gollancz's vexed relationship with Communist Party of Great Britain, both personally and

politically. Key also to this study is an understanding of the relationship between Stanley Morison, Edward McKnight Kauffer and Gollancz, and in particular the influence of the Constructivist art movement from post–Revolutionary Russia. Sadly, Morison's personal records were destroyed by fire and neither of the Gollancz archives holds much correspondence or material between the three outside the most perfunctory of notes.

Consequently, the connection between the three men and Constructivism must be inferred through close study of the design of dust jackets, and this is where the British Library's dust jacket archive was invaluable. By accessing a number of dust jackets I was able to compare them to key works of Constructivism, overlay that with what we know about the impact of the movement in Western Europe in the late 1920s and early 1930s, to draw the conclusion that Gollancz's publications were as influenced visually by communist art as they were content–wise by communist rhetoric.

Accessing the Communist Party of Great Britain's archive, and that of key players, such as Harry Pollitt and Rajani Palme Dutt, was central to my contention that the influence of the CPGB on Gollancz did not simply operate in one direction. The archive, held at the People's History Museum in Manchester, made it clear that the CPGB had a declared focus on publishing and literature in general and that the fracturing of their relationship with Gollancz following the Soviet–Nazi pact in August 1939 caused the Party considerable difficulty. I was able make clear links between Gollancz and the CPGB and assess the impact on both sides for the first time.

In assessing the relationship between Gollancz and the Communist Party it is also important to compare the relationship to that of true communist publishers, Lawrence & Wishart. Key to doing this is investigating two archives: one at the National Archives in Kew and the other at the Beinecke Library at Yale University. These two archives are largely untapped sources of information about what it was like to be a communist publisher – both the moral dilemmas and also the official scrutiny it put one under – as well as the minutiae of running a niche,

politicised publishing company at that time. Lawrence & Wishart's archives largely focus on business matters, such as sales figures, along with commissioning information. The National Archives, in contrast, show how those key players among the staff and authors at Lawrence & Wishart were viewed by the security services at the time.

Unfortunately, the majority of Lawrence & Wishart's records and papers were destroyed during the bombing of London in the Second World War, but what survived was transferred to the Beinecke Library. The most telling documentation from the 1930s are the company's accounts, which show the precariousness of their financial situation, and the records of the company's sales that detail how difficult it was to sell Lawrence & Wishart titles into bookshops. A sales representative's report from 1938 covering sales visits to bookshops in Oxford, states that the Workers Bookshop will only take one copy of non–Left Book Club editions (Lawrence & Wishart entered into an agreement in August 1937 with Gollancz that every book published by them would be made available to members of the LBC) and Blackwells will only take *New Writing*. Only Parkers placed an order they thought All Souls Library might take. The report concludes,

> I would say that you would get a much better reception if you had more non–political books. 'New Writing' is a very useful title, because it sounds 'respectable'. Apart from political prejudice it is difficult to sell a series of similar (similar, that is to the bookseller) books. (Lawrence & Wishart Records, Box 7 Material relating to financial position 1936–9)

The attempt to broaden the sales of Lawrence & Wishart titles via the LBC scheme is severely doubted in an internal memo that states:

> There is a great deal of evidence that the scheme is disliked by booksellers in general, and that it has had the effect of keeping our books almost entirely out of the bourgeois. The bookseller is not prepared to stock L.W. titles at full price, knowing that members of the L.B.C. can obtain them under the scheme and that to a great extent non–members are also obtaining them through friends. (Lawrence & Wishart

Records, Box 7 Material relating to financial position 1936–9)

The security services archives, held in the National Archives in Kew, proved to be a rich source of information about those under suspicion of communist activities from the literary and publishing community. With embargoes continuing to be maintained and some papers being redacted, it likely that there is more information about the security services surveillance tactics that may yet come to light, however, the papers currently available show, firstly, some fairly clumsy attempts to monitor suspected pro–communist activities, such as the tapping of Douglas Garman of Lawrence & Wishart's telephone, and the interception of letters and parcels. Secondly, it is clear that the security services had little understanding of the nuances of political affiliation. For them, a card–carrying member, such as Garman was the same as a fellow–traveller like Auden or Koestler, or even that most independently minded of socialists, Orwell. The papers show, however, that despite the naiveté of their blundering attempts, the security services were occasionally onto something – Garman was, of course, a communist, and if not exactly plotting to bring down British democracy, he was still an enthusiastic proselytizer for the communist cause. The seriousness with which the communist threat was taken shows the strength of the communist message at the time and also how far it had penetrated into the middle–class intelligentsia. That Gollancz both came onto the security services radar, and was quickly dismissed, is indicative of the nature of his relationship with the CPGB – associated with, but never quite in their thrall.

Chapter 1 'Literature is a neglected weapon': How publishing contributed to the rise of the Communist Party of Great Britain during the Thirties.

In a pamphlet distributed to delegates at the 13th Communist Party Congress held in Manchester in 1935, Florrie Bedford wrote:

> Literature – the literature of the working–class, the imperishable works of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, the means by which one worker can talk to another and make a background – is essential to our work, especially to our building of the united front. Marxism is the theoretical hard core of the united front. The literature the Nazi hangmen and the Kuomintang counter–revolutionaries burn is our buttress in our factory and cell work. (CPGB National Congresses papers, CP/CENT/CONG/03/04)

This is indicative of the fact that in many ways for the Communist Party of Great Britain, the first five years of the decade had been about how they had learned to harness the power of the published word. For the communists, more than any other political party at that time, publishing and the printing press was an agent of political change. Their ownership of a publishing house, Martin Lawrence, enabled them to publish such series as the *Little Lenin Library*, but openly partisan material was never going to convince the British public to move to the hard Left. Despite this, by the time war was declared in September 1939 the CPGB owned a large commercial, some might say, capitalist publishing house, a daily newspaper, and had inspired a number of weighty periodicals. This chapter looks to understand how and why this apparently contradictory situation came about and what unique set of circumstances enabled this marginalised political party to move towards the mainstream and closer to the centre of power.

The political situation in 1931 was ripe for exploitation from both the extreme right and the extreme left. In *The Thirties*, his 1940 assessment of the decade just gone, Malcolm Muggeridge claims that Ramsay MacDonald and Arthur Henderson summed up the state of the Labour Party in the early 1930s:

> They represented two elements in the Labour Party whose incompatibility has been perhaps its greatest weakness – the urge on the part of prudent, industrious manual workers to improve their conditions, and the romantic discontent of would–be, and sometimes actual aristocrats. Trade Unionism and the Co–operative Movement are characteristic products of the former; National Labour and the Left Book Club, of the latter. (Muggeridge, 1940, p61)

Of the parties that aimed to fill the political gap left by the absence of the Labour Party and exploit the potential of those 'actual aristocrats', the Communist Party of Great Britain became not only a credible political party, but also the progenitors of a publishing movement that revolutionised the media during the period; the repercussions of which are still being felt in the media and society today. That this revolution was conducted by the moneyed middle–classes rather than an ascendant working–class, just makes the revolution more fascinating and significant. Although these middle–class, and, indeed, upper-class communists may have been few in number compared to the mass membership of the Party, their self–confidence and financial background enabled them to achieve what the working–classes would have struggled to achieve: that is, a high profile, legitimate media presence. The entitlement that comes with wealth and privilege meant that these sons and daughters of the aristocracy never countenanced the fact that they *might not* be able to found major publishing houses or literary magazines or that people *would not* be interested in them.

In this chapter I will assess the rise of the middle–class literary communist during this period, its causes and effects, but more importantly to look at how that shaped the publishing industry to come and what legacy they left, if any? This new breed embraced publishing and the printing press as a means of advocating the political change they wanted the see. In many ways they lack the commercial awareness of Gollancz and Lane – that can be seen in the number of short–lived periodicals started by the group – nor did they have the mix of political zeal, capitalist nous, and market–led perception deemed necessary for success by

Simone Murray. What they did have was the confidence of their class, and in that sense, they would have felt right at home with Allen Lane and Victor Gollancz.

Three main sources inform this chapter. Firstly, there are those histories of the period that either look at the totality of the decade through a long lens, such as Juliet Gardiner's all–encompassing *The Thirties,* or which focus on aspects of it, such as *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the '30s* (1979) by Clark et al, D J Taylor's *Bright Young People: The Rise and Fall of a Generation 1918–1940* (2007), or the book based on the series of seminars and lectures held at Gresham College in March 2013 and May 2014 that form the basis of *Radiant Illusion? Middle–class recruits to Communism in the 1930s* (2015). The chapter also draws on important contemporaneous or near–contemporaneous studies, such as Robert Graves and Alan Hodge's *The Long Week–end*, Malcolm Muggeridge's *The Thirties*, Julian Symons' book of the same name, Philip Toynbee's memoir *Friends Apart* and William Rust's *The Story of the Daily Worker*. What is perhaps more significant about these titles is that in many ways they reflect the period in which they were written (the overpowering Nazi threat of 1940s *The Long Week–end* or the post–1945 Labour election victory optimism of Rust's work) more than the period about which they are writing. Finally, original sources, such as the Security Service files in the National Archives and the CPGB and related sources held in the archives at the People's History Museum in Manchester, allow an assessment of the impact of the rise of communism amongst the middle–class intelligentsia, and how the Communist Party of Great Britain and its leaders cultivated and exploited that for their own ends.

The literary left has, of course, been the subject of numerous books and learned articles. Biographies of Auden, Isherwood, Spender et al, such as Humphrey Carpenter's acclaimed 1981 biography of Auden and John Sutherland's 2004 life of Spender, abound. There has recently been important work done in this area by Benjamin Kohlmann, primarily in *Committed Styles: Modernism, Politics, and Left–Wing Literature in the 1930s* and *Edward*

Upward and Left–Wing Literary Culture in Britain, in addition to classic texts, such as Bernard Bergonzi's *Reading the Thirties: Text and Contexts*, Samuel Hynes's *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s,* and Valentine Cunningham's *British Writers of the Thirties*. One thing, however, that all these works have in common – whether literary biography or academic research – is that they approach the period from the point of view of the author in question. The assessment is always on how these individuals voiced their views and not on how the Communist Party shaped them and, more significantly, how the Party's various publishing organs mediated, influenced and ultimately controlled their output. This chapter – and indeed this whole thesis – will show that publishers and the means of production (that is, publishing), alongside, and in collaboration with other popular media, such as film, newsreel, and radio, literally and metaphorically manufactured the voice of the left–wing during the 1930s.

It is also important to question something that has not been covered in these or any other works, that is: how can a supposedly egalitarian, left–wing publishing house reconcile the fact that it requires personal wealth to keep it going and uses modern and ostensibly capitalist marketing techniques to prosper financially and to drive its message? For example, the Labour newspaper, the *Daily Herald,* became a capitalist enterprise in order to survive, embracing all the compromises necessary in an advertising–driven industry. So, what was the *Daily Worker* to do when distributers boycotted them and advertisers refused to go near them? They still needed money and revenue, so whether they liked it or not, they were compelled to play the capitalists' game in order to continue to represent the working classes. By the 1935 Party Congress and exacerbated by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, the CPGB had come to the same conclusion and one of the ways they could do this was to control the means of literary production in order to broaden their appeal.

Publishing the voice of the Literary Left

The outbreak of the war in Spain in July 1936 galvanised those on the Left, inspiring them to embrace the written and, in particular, the political polemic. That the war was not initially taken as seriously as it should have been is borne out by Toynbee's recollection that,

> Over a hurried breakfast on July 19th we read the news of the 'Generals Revolt' against the Spanish Republican government. I myself – and it is a sign of my political ignorance, even of my frivolity – was excited and pleased by the result, believing that it must be quickly crushed and that its suppression would be a heavy blow against reaction everywhere. (Toynbee, 1954, pp84–85)

However, the Party co–ordinated volunteers throughout the British Battalion of the International Brigade. Almost half of the 2,000 British volunteers were communists as were many of the 526 killed. Membership was still only 20,000, but the CPGB's position at the centre of the anti–fascist struggle gave it a kudos that exceeded its size. This period aligned the Party with the Popular Front consensus that was more attractive to intellectuals than the Party's 'class against class' anti–intellectualism. The cause also became a magnet for many literary figures who joined at this time including Edgell Rickword, Christopher Cauldwell, Randall Swingler, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis, and, of course, George Orwell, as did composer Alan Bush and classicist George Thomson.

Communists helped to set the political, cultural and intellectual agendas in the Thirties. They dominated the *Left Review* (1934–1938), which was the key cultural journal of the period at a time when many prominent party members and key British writers, such as Rickword, Lewis, Spender and Hugh MacDiarmid wrote for it. The *Left Review* was effectively the mouthpiece of the British Section of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers, although it developed into an organisation in its own right and became 'the primary forum for Popular Front literary activity' (Hilliard, 2006, p41). The *Left Review* was run by an editorial board consisting of Tom Wintringham, Montagu Slater and Amabel Williams–Ellis, and later Alick West. From 1936 there was a single editor – first Edgell Rickword, an Oxford poet who

had fought and lost an eye in the First World War and who joined the Party in 1934; followed by Randall Swingler, the son of a clergyman and godson of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was another Oxford graduate who also joined the Party in 1934 and donated much of his inherited wealth to it. They also attracted the attention of the security services: Nancy Cunard wrote angrily to the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police on 20th February 1932 demanding to know why she was being watched by Special Branch and Ralph Fox complained to the General Post Office on 22nd March 1935 about 'the continuous and exasperating irregularity […] of my letters' (The Security Service: Personal (PF Series) Files, KV/2/1376), which he assumed was as a result of them being intercepted.

In its first issue of January 1935, the *Left Review* stated that its aim was 'the development of a literature of struggle for socialism' (Hilliard, 2006, p43). The end of the *Left Review* was unexplained as it was shut down on the understanding that it would open again quickly. It has been claimed that the CPGB had started negotiations with Allen Lane of Penguin Books, with the view that a well–produced, commercial publication from a left–leaning publisher and a good editor would outweigh the negative of losing editorial control (Hilliard, 2006, p42). Although the editor at the time claimed that it was he who had been looking for a commercial publisher because of the CPGB's increasing attempts to control the journal.

In addition to pressing for political change, the *Left Review* also contributed to the rise of a new Marxist literary theory. As the Left's journal of cultural discussion it helped make the literature of the Thirties political. For the Left it was impossible to be above the struggle – 'even refusing to take a political position was itself a position' (Margolies, 1979, p67). Dimitrov wrote in *Left Review* that 'Literature must serve the great revolutionary ideal of millions of workers' (Margolies, 1979, p67). Literature's political role was to judge not just works of the present, but also to give a perspective on works of the past. Many critics of the Left felt that a political character was an essential part of the nature of literature. This literary theory was crystallised in three books published in 1937 – Ralph Fox's *The Novel and the*

People (Lawrence & Wishart), Alick West's *Crisis and Criticism* (Lawrence & Wishart) and Christopher Cauldwell's *Illusion and Reality* (Macmillan). Perhaps the key title is Fox's, where he clearly lays out his statement of intent – 'It is the aim of this essay to show that the future of the English novel and therefore the solution to the problems which vex the English novelist lies precisely in Marxism with its artistic formula of a "socialist realism" which shall unite and re–vitalize the forces of the left in literature' (Fox, 1937, p26). Fox argues that Marxism is the right theory for dealing with fiction. He claims that economic determinism is indirect and explains at length 'the fundamental Marxist notion on cultural production, that social being determines consciousness' (Margolies, 1979, p73). He even proposes that Dimitrov's trial in Leipzig was suitable for novelisation (something Dimitrov himself suggested in *Left Review* in June 1935).

The Party's 'public face', the *Daily Worker*, was edited by a supporter of the New Line policy, William Rust. First published on 1st January 1930, the *Daily Worker* was the successor to *Workers Life*, which had been the Communist Party's weekly paper. As Rust writes in his 1949 history of the newspaper, there was little journalistic experience in the *Daily Worker* team, 'but the launching of the *Daily Worker* in 1930 was a political decision, it arose out of the necessities of the situation and it could not wait interminably on the gathering of staff which possessed both journalistic experience and political understanding' (Rust, 1949, p16). The appearance of the *Daily Worker* transformed the Communist Party. As Rust puts it, 'It meant that the Communist Party was now able to advance from the stage of general propaganda to the handling of daily political events as they occurred, to give a daily and direct answer to the problems before the people as they arose and to organise action in support of its policy' (Rust, 1949, p18).

The paper's model went against the capitalistic one, in which, Rust claimed, you needed around £2m 'entrance fee' in 1930 to break into the Press monopoly.[12] Financing that required large circulations and the advertising revenue that comes along with that. The difficulty of this can be seen in the *Daily Chronicle's* financial collapse despite having a circulation of 900,000. In addition to this, in the paper's infancy from January to May 1930, most wholesalers boycotted the *Daily Worker*. This boycott was maintained for twelve years, meaning that the *Daily Worker* had to develop its own means of collecting issues from railway stations and delivering them to newsagents. This was an ad hoc network of supporters who got up in the early hours to distribute the paper. Like the Left Book Club, the *Daily Worker* needed to develop its own distribution network to circumvent the usual capitalistic model. Also like the Left Book Club, the *Daily Worker* had to persistently fight pernicious rumours that it was funded by Moscow. This was despite the fact that it raised £33,930 over the first six years of its existence. Nonetheless in July 1936 the *Daily Herald* published an article called 'Communist Secrecy on Sources of Funds', which implied that the only way the *Daily Worker* could continue to be published was through foreign subsidy. Those against the *Daily Worker* could not understand its finances given that advertising revenues were so low and its circulation before the War never went higher that 50,000 per day or 100,000 at the weekend. They made ends meet 'not only through the medium of the Fighting Fund, but by a strict business–like approach on all questions and by a regime of strict economy' (Rust, 1949, p78). Given the sympathetic aims shared by the *Daily Worker* and the Left Book Club, and the fact that Gollancz wrote an article in support of the *Daily Worker* in April 1937 called 'Why I Read the Daily Worker', by 1949 Rust is dismissing Gollancz as someone 'who now hob–nobs with Churchill' (Rust, 1949, p76). Such was Gollancz's philosophical shift away from his former backers among the communists by this point.

[12] According to William Rust, Wickham Steed (a former editor of *The Times*) wrote that 'the entrance fee to the world of Press monopoly was not less than £2,000,000' (Rust, 1949, p17).

The *Daily Worker's* other main obstacle was the lack of advertising revenue. Owing to its reliance on advertisers, and despite encompassing a variety of political sympathies and opinions, the mainstream press was inevitably a monopoly capitalistic institution, that frequently resulted in editorial interference from advertisers, and a tendency to 'bribe' readers with free gifts and competitions. With no advertisers wanting to go near the *Daily Worker* the newspaper avoided this, but that created other problems. There are few examples of a daily newspaper surviving without the lifeblood of advertising revenue. The only one of note at the time was *PM*, established by Ralph Ingersoll in New York in 1940. Generally left–leaning with particular support for the unions, *PM* was sold for 5 cents, which was regarded as a high price in 1940, but which was necessary to offset the lack of advertising revenue. According to Paul Milkman, *PM* was 'responsible for scores of innovations in newspaper publishing […] It did all of this through most of its history while refusing paid advertising for fear of jeopardizing its independence' (Milkman, 2016, px). It was not truly self–financing, however, and in reality the only way it could survive, especially given its relatively low circulation figures,[13] was through substantial proprietor subsidy, primarily from Marshall Field III, the heir to a family department store, who bankrolled the paper to the tune of seven million dollars. Ingersoll left the paper in 1945 when Field finally accepted advertising, and the paper closed for good in 1948. Without this sort of philanthropic financial support Rust and the *Daily Worker* were left to rely on the good will of those willing to contribute to a fighting fund.

Other methods of boosting circulation were considered, and it could be argued that copies of the *Daily Worker* were difficult to sell, perhaps in the main because it lacked the titillation of the popular papers. However, according to Rust, with a certain Presbyterian austerity, this was a distraction and bright optimistic newspapers and grateful advertisers kept 'readers'

[13] According to Milkman in *PM: A New Deal in Journalism, 1940–1948* (2016), the circulation of the paper never rose above 150,000, although 400,000 were printed of the first issue following an extensive pre–launch publicity campaign (Milkman, 2016, ppix–x)

minds off the nasty realities of the capitalist system' (Rust, 1949, p28). Rust also believed that this pursuit of over–bright optimism and entertainment 'facilitates the putting out of pernicious political propaganda' (Rust, 1949, p28). Harry Pollitt suggested that they needed to utilise the 'techniques of the capitalist press'. However, attempts to do this by persuading a journalist each from the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* to moonlight and teach them these techniques inevitably failed due to the severe diktat the paper operated under. Over time that strict protocol became diluted and more news, entertainment, cartoons and even recipes and knitting patterns, crept in.

Before that, however, the lack of advertising revenue meant that a fighting fund was a necessity and page numbers fluctuated according to the paper's cashflow. Rust writes, 'In those old days we were always announcing a new grave crisis and calling for a renewed effort in terms of donations and circulation drives. The wolf was always at the door, but somehow or other we just managed to keep him at bay' (Rust, 1949, p45). By 1933 the *Daily Worker* was in a financial crisis. Pollitt stepped in with an appeal for a loan of £2,000 from readers. At that time the paper had dropped to four pages, but the response to the appeal was so impressive that by March they were back to six pages – this is compared to the 20–24 pages of the 'capitalist giants'. There was a further fighting fund appeal started in July and over the three years £12,000 was raised for the fund. A further appeal by Pollitt in September 1934 raised £2,551 to enable them to move to new premises, after they had received a notice to quit from the landlords of their Tabernacle Street premises. Despite this by 1956 its heyday was over, the *Daily Worker's* annual circulation had dropped to 63,000, and by 1966 it had been renamed the *Morning Star*. Nonetheless, at its height it was the only newspaper openly advocating an Anglo–Soviet Pact in the lead up to the War. It fought political and legal opprobrium and, in some cases, downright lies, in order to take the capitalist classes to task. As JR Campbell put it in the foreword to the original edition of *The Story of the Daily Worker*, 'It should inspire everyone to fight back resolutely in the

knowledge that the common people have great resources of talent at their disposal and that their triumph over decaying capitalism cannot long be delayed' (Campbell, 1949, p14).

The Communist Party had always been acutely aware of the effectiveness of written propaganda, and it was in publishing and distribution of the written word that the CPGB really excelled. Distributed at the 13th Congress of 1935 was a significant booklet entitled 'LITERATURE a neglected weapon' by Bedford that included 'a list of Marxist books'. The pamphlet stresses the importance of improving the circulation of *Communist Review* and *Labour Monthly* as both a means of propaganda and disseminating information, but also as a means to self–education, 'of drawing the workers into mass activity and to winning them for the Communist Party' (CPGB National Congresses papers, CP/CENT/CONG/03/04).

Significantly, like other publishers, the communists were attempting to reconcile commercial concerns with political objectives. For them the use of literature was not just ideological; it was also an important source of revenue. Bedford says that the growing radicalisation of the masses has led to a demand for literature and uses the example of 'the last three London DAILY WORKER bazaars [where] the bookstall has taken £70, £105 and £175 respectively'. Concluding that 'when the workers see the literature they want it' (CPGB National Congresses papers, CP/CENT/CONG/03/04). Bedford highlights distribution problems, saying that creating a bookshop or appointing a literature secretary is not enough, saying that it should be 'an essential part of our everyday work'. She praises the fact that the *Daily Worker* now carries book reviews, but says 'the value of the printed word is under–estimated, Party members do not consider the job a personal responsibility' (CPGB National Congresses papers, CP/CENT/CONG/03/04). She goes on to exhort delegates at the conference to start a bookshop with 'an honest, business–like comrade […] in charge, who will keep the shop clean and attractive and always open at fixed business hours' (CPGB National Congresses papers, CP/CENT/CONG/03/04), and to 'sell literature everywhere […]

wherever workers, students, schoolmasters, intellectuals, etc., congregate' (CPGB National Congresses papers, CP/CENT/CONG/03/04).

The pamphlet contains an extensive list of appropriate titles – the obvious ones by Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Engels, plus notable European Communists such as Rosa Luxemburg, Nikolai Bukharin and Vyacheslav Molotov, as well as home–grown comrades like Ralph Fox and the American John Reed, whose *Ten Days That Shook the World* is recommended. Also, showing the close ties between the Party and publishing, there are adverts for four titles published by Martin Lawrence: a ten–part 'study course of a popular nature' called *Political Education*, Allen Hutt's *The Condition of the Working Class in Britain*, *Fascism and Social Revolution* by leading communist R. Palme Dutt and Joan Beauchamp's *British Imperialism in India*. This is important as just ten months later Martin Lawrence merged with Edward Wishart's publishing company to become Lawrence & Wishart, thereby adding commercial muscle to the already existing ideological sinew.

In addition to Lawrence & Wishart, the Party operated a number of other publishing houses, such as Modern Books, formed in 1929 to circulate material from the Communist International. Books were published by Party intellectuals on the Soviet Union as well as other political and historical subjects. Lawrence & Wishart also published fiction by communists or that was regarded as being of interest to communists. The first English language version of Lenin's pamphlet on the origins of the Great War were published in 1926. A popular edition was published in 1933 as part of the *Little Lenin Library*, called *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. The pamphlet became the standard Marxist text for understanding the relationship between war and capitalism. Lenin's general writings on war were published in 1931 as Volume 2 of the *Little Lenin Library* and called *The War and the Second International*. There was a more developed critique of imperialism called *Lenin on Britain* published in 1934 by Martin Lawrence, as were the others.

This growth of left–wing publishing did not happen spontaneously, however, and to fully understand how the country arrived at this point we must go back to 1931 and the Left's disastrous performance in the General Election.

The rise of the Communist Party of Great Britain

Gardiner has called the 1931 election 'essentially a fight between Labour and the rest: and the rest won' (Gardiner, 2010, p116). Labour seats fell from 287 in 1929 to 52 in 1931 (and that figure included Scottish ILP members, who eventually disaffiliated themselves). Major Labour figures, such as Herbert Morrison, Hugh Dalton and Arthur Henderson all lost their seats and only one former cabinet minister, George Lansbury, held on to his. The newly elected National Government despite being led by Ramsay MacDonald (who by this time had been ousted from the Labour Party, with Arthur Henderson taking over as leader), was comprised mostly of Conservatives and swept the board with 554 seats. In effect, MacDonald had split the Labour Party. By siding with British bankers and international financiers, who were demanding cuts to welfare and unemployment benefit in order to balance the budget, cuts totalling around £97 million, MacDonald triggered the resignation of several cabinet members and required bolstering by the Conservative Party to stay in power. Although there were few alternative solutions being proposed by Labour politicians, Labour rank and file regarded MacDonald's strategy as a betrayal and as historian of the Labour Left, Simon Hannah, put it, 'MacDonald's remaining time in Parliament was a shambolic end to a disastrous career as Prime Minister. In his last rambling, tearful speech to Parliament, [Joseph] Maxton famously interrupted him: "Sit down man! You're a bloody tragedy"' (Hannah, 2018, p53).

The vacuum left by the absence of an effective Labour Party was occupied by parties from both ends of the political spectrum. Oswald Mosley founded the British Union of Fascists (BUF) on 1st October 1932 on the belief that in the face of economic disaster political

extremism would triumph. Mosley believed that the BUF would not only restore economic order, but also save the country from the menace of communism. Unsurprisingly the *Daily Mail* came out in support, declaring 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!', and by Spring 1934 the BUF had 42 branches in London alone and around 34,000 members across the country (Gardiner, 2011, p434). The support came not from the depressed areas of Wales and the North East of England as might have been thought, but mainly from the South East and London in particular. Being seen as a party of thugs, especially in the aftermath of the violence and bloodshed at the BUF's largest rally held at Olympia on 7th June 1934, contributed to the fall in membership to around 4,000 by 1936, and they were never to make headway at the ballot box, winning neither a parliamentary nor a council seat.

More successful was the political party on the extreme left. Whilst not achieving much greater electoral success than the BUF (although they did secure seats at both a national and local level) the influence of the Communist Party of Great Britain during the period was impressive and wide–ranging, especially given its relative size. Although never rivalling the three major parties in terms of membership or electoral success, it is these Party members and supporters, who turned their back on what might be perceived as their natural political affiliations and started up the magazines and publishing houses that went on to influence a generation. Daily newspapers, literary magazines, book clubs and at least two of the great publishing houses arose from this political movement. What it lacked in MPs, the CPGB made up for in political and cultural capital.

The way in which the CPGB filtered and bowdlerised the harder line Soviet diktat did much to make the communist message palatable to a traditionally sanguine British public. Their astute choice of leader, sophisticated use of the media, and their infiltration of meetings and discussion groups (the Left Book Club's groups in particular) made their brand of political extremism appear far less radical and dangerous than that being peddled by the British Union of Fascists. Indeed, at the height of their success in the thirties, it is their stance

against fascism (one born out of much soul–searching and self–destruction) that contributed greatly to the Party's political high-water mark.

In their study of British social history, *The Long Week–end*, Robert Graves and Alan Hodge bring a unique perspective to the interwar period. Written in 1940 and very much a product of its time,[14] Graves and Hodge view the preceding decade from the perspective of the Dunkirk invasion and 'the grave risk that German might soon be spoken in Whitehall' (Graves and Hodge, 1940, p6). Given the political and social uncertainty in which they were living, it is significant that Graves and Hodge acknowledged the very real role the CPGB was playing in the fight against fascism. For Graves and Hodge the Labour Party had left a vacuum on the left wing of British politics that the CPGB, amongst others, filled and it was the communists who were leading the counter attack against Mosley and his blackshirts:

> The Fascist revolution had been given a mixed reception in Britain: the Radical and Labour Press had furiously assailed it for the gangster methods of the Blackshirt partymen against Socialists and Radicals [...] But the Conservative Press saw Mussolini as an energetic saviour of Italy from Red revolution, loyal to his monarchy (Graves and Hodge, 1940, p259).

As Betty Reid of the Left Book Club wrote: 'Whatever the sectarian mistakes the Communists had made in earlier years the deeply menacing world situation now required the Labour Party to make new efforts to give leadership to the widespread anti–fascist struggle. Of this it proved incapable' (Reid, 1979, p197). Along with the Independent Labour Party (ILP) led by James Maxton, the CPGB set up a joint committee for anti–fascist action in 1934. This Committee for Co–ordinating Anti–Fascist Activities was an important focussing of the CPGB's aims. John Strachey, former Labour MP, selector for the Left Book Club and secretary for the CPGB, wrote in the October 1934 issue of *Labour Monthly*

[14] See Graves and Hodge's dismissal of homosexuality as 'the fascination of perversity' (Graves and Hodge, 1940, p101).

> that the counter demonstration of London workers in Hyde Park on September 9 [a communist–led counter demonstration against Oswald Mosley's Hyde Park rally] marked the first appreciable success in securing the participation in the Anti–Fascist struggle of the large majority of the British workers who are accustomed to follow the official Labour Party and Trade Union leadership. (Callaghan and Harker, 2011, p129)

It took the confirmation of Hitler as German Chancellor in January 1933 to propel the communists into leaving behind many of their self–destructive tendencies. Prior to this the CPGB had been following the strict 'class against class' policy direct from Moscow that increased their isolation and led to their distancing themselves from their natural allies. The Labour Party was dismissed as the 'third capitalist party' and as 'social fascists' and ties were cut with other left–wing organisations, such as the ILP. In its first editorial from January 1930 the *Daily Worker* states:

> Daily Worker: your paper will fight social fascist labour government and lead revolutionary struggles [it is] an historic achievement – the sharpest expression of the independence of the revolutionary workers from the influence of the Social–Fascist leaders of the Labour Party and trade unions and the surest proof of the determination of the revolutionary working class movement to carry on a bitter daily struggle against the triple alliance of State, employers and the Social Fascist bureaucracy. (Callaghan and Harker, 2011, p115)

Most communist parties were established after the foundation of the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow in March 1919. The CPGB was founded in 1920 and was seen by the Comintern as the main hope for a revolutionary breakthrough in Europe, primarily because of the industrial unrest in Britain that had culminated in the General Strike of 1926. Despite the defeat of the Strike, by the 1930s the CPGB had established strong links with a number of industries and unions. The annihilation of the Labour Party at the 1931 general election should have left the door open to the CPGB to make great inroads

into the British electorate. That this did not happen says much about both the electorate and the divisive behaviour of the CPGB itself.

With the National Government in power, Malcolm Muggeridge characterised the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, as ‘a respectable Scotsman with an irregular moustache, a rich quavering voice and a gift for meandering oratory’ (Muggeridge, 1940, p51), and he saw a mixture of pragmatism and duplicitousness in politicians’ support for him: ‘Even now it remains inexplicable why so many who distrusted MacDonald should have contrived to endure his leadership – unless it was that consciously or unconsciously, they felt that what he was going to do had to be done, and that he must do it, leaving them free to disassociate themselves’ (Muggeridge, 1940, p49). Muggeridge is highly critical and disparaging of MacDonald’s pacifism which he feels is ‘like everything else in his life, confused. That he made himself greatly unpopular during the [First World] War is certain, but what were his actual opinions about it, and what policy, if any, he advocated, are still the subject of controversy’ (Muggeridge, 1940, p48).

Despite the Conservative landslide of 1931, CPGB candidates were unable to take advantage of the disappointment felt first towards the Labour and then the National government. The CPGB’s attempts to engage with electoral politics rarely led to success. Most of the CPGB’s support came from London and the depressed areas of heavy industry, particularly mining, in Scotland and South Wales, with 58.7% of its membership in 1938 coming from those regions. Yet despite the depth of the depression in the mid–1930s at the Merthyr Tydfil by–election of 1934 Wal Hannington, national organiser of the NUWM and founder member of the CPGB, only managed to pick up 9.4% of the vote (Gardiner, 2011, p181). The participation of the CPGB in elections certainly had a ‘nuisance value’ which often resulted in the left–wing vote being split, and which occasionally led to a Conservative or National candidate being returned. There was no CPGB MP until the 1935 election when

Willie Gallacher won West Fife, although the CPGB General Secretary Harry Pollitt came very close to winning in East Rhondda.

So given the lack of electoral success and tendency towards self–destruction, how did the CPGB become as influential in Thirties life as it undoubtedly was? This must largely be down to the re–focussing of their vision following Hitler's rise to power, as the main anti–Fascist threat and also the Party's great success in attracting intellectuals to its ranks. The 'New Line' imposed by the 6th Congress of the Communist International in 1928 dictated that communists should disassociate themselves from the labour movement, whose reformist ideologies were seen as bolstering capitalism. Communists were to see themselves as the only representatives of the working class and the only group to lead a 'class against class' struggle. In the CPGB this partisan arrangement centred around Palme Dutt and Pollitt, a former boiler–maker who had been appointed General Secretary of the CPGB in August 1929. This was a turning point in the CPGB, which was followed by a purging of the old guard at the 11th Congress in November 1929. Callaghan and Harker describe this period as 'a self–righteous and ultra–leftist isolationism adrift from the British political realities but fuelled by eternal vigilance against the "Right danger" of former and current comrades still mired in reformist assumptions' (Callaghan and Harker, 2011, p107). Pollitt called for a 'war to the death' against the Independent Labour Party at the 1929 general election. The CPGB put up candidates against sitting Labour MPs and this period has been termed one of 'drastic internal self–mutilation' in which, ironically, the most politically successful left–wing groups, such as the NUWM, were those least in step with the 'New Line'.

However, by the 7th World Congress of the Communist International in 1935 a new broader anti–fascist coalition was being advocated. This new position was spelt out by the General Secretary Georgi Dimitrov who, in his book *The Working Class Against Fascism* (published by Martin Lawrence in 1935), urged communists to build alliances with any groups who opposed fascism, even those committed to a bourgeois democracy:

> We must under no circumstances underrate this fascist capacity for ideological infection. On the contrary we must develop for our part an extensive ideological struggle on the basis of clear, popular argument and a correct, well thought–out approach to the peculiarities of the national psychology of the masses of the people. (Callaghan & Harker, 2011 p128)

At the 13th Party Congress held at Hulme Town Hall, Manchester 2nd to 5th October 1935, that was named 'For Soviet Power', the link is made explicit between capitalism, fascism and war: 'Fascism is the dictatorship of the most ruthless, reactionary and jingo section of monopoly capitalism. The paymasters of Hitler and Goering are the biggest millionaire financiers and capitalists of Germany' (CPGB National Congresses papers, CP/CENT/CONG/03/04). The delegate pamphlet draws comparisons between the rise of Fascism in Germany, Austria and Italy:

> In Britain the capitalist preparations for a Fascist form of Government are not only Mosley's blackshirt gangs, financed and organised by rich capitalist groups. The 'National Government' is also preparing the ground, with its militarising of the police, putting in middle–class officers and mobilising middle–class 'specials'; it is swelling the numbers of its secret police, to spy upon working–class organisations; it is organising concentration camps for the unemployed, supressing still further the workers' right of free speech, and abolishing many other existing rights through the Sedition Act, and taking additional measures to concentrate control in the hands of central officials instead of local bodies. This is exactly how the Governments in Germany and Austria prepared the way for open Fascism. (CPGB National Congresses papers, CP/CENT/CONG/03/04)

The pamphlet then goes on to appeal to the perspicacity of the British working–class:

> British workers are not blind to the fact that the British capitalist class is just as ruthless and savage as any other capitalist class – the methods adopted to crush the General Strike, the Black and Tans in Ireland, the shooting down of hundreds of

> defenceless workers in Amritsar, in India, the holding down by armed violence of millions of colonial peoples have proved this. (CPGB National Congresses papers, CP/CENT/CONG/03/04)

Dimotrov's call for left–wing unity in the face of the fascist menace and linking of capitalism to fascism made at the 13th Congress was not typical of the decade and there was much tension between Soviet–style communism and its British counterpart.

British versus Soviet communism

The international crisis surrounding the outbreak of the Second World War exposed the deep conflict between the CPGB's identity as a British organisation and its loyalty to the Soviet Union. Throughout the 1930s there was a tension between a CPGB–inspired patriotism, which linked communism with a deep–rooted British radicalism. For example, Dimitrov had urged communists to 'link up their present struggle with its revolutionary traditions and past' (Callaghan and Harker, 2011, p129), and Ted Bramley described a communist pageant of 20th September 1936 called 'The March of English History' as 'giving the impression of never–ending battalions of Communists' (Bramley, *International Press Correspondence,* 1936).

The conflict between these two differing strands of communism – one patriotic, the other international – came to the surface over conscription, which was introduced by Chamberlain in April 1939. The Party initially rejected conscription, but the line then changed following clear intervention from Moscow. This was a diktat that led to Harry Pollitt threatening to resign. However, as war drew closer, so the tone became increasingly aggressive, particularly so in Pollitt's two pamphlets *Will It Be War?* (July 1939) and *How to Win the War* (September 1939). The draft programme for the 16th Congress, which should have been held 7th to 9th October 1939 in the Town Hall, Stoke Newington, was published on 29th August 1939. However, Britain declared war on Germany five days later and the Congress

was cancelled. Nonetheless the unpublished 'First Draft of Plan of Proposed Report to 16th Party Congress' shows that the Communist Party had updated their long–term stance of Britain being under the control of a handful of wealthy people who 'control land, industry, banks, Press, BBC and Parliament' (CPGB National Congresses papers, CP/CENT/CONG/04/12), to include how fascism appeals to them and how they hate the Labour movement. The draft programme makes it clear how Pollitt's pamphlet *Will It Be War?* was to be a mainstay of the Party's approach. In the section entitled 'Our Defence Policy Against War and Fascism' the first draft of the programme states that,

> This needs to be revised and amplified in light situation time of Congress – But already new problems arising out of Peace Front are before the People – What is the Peace Front? The line of 'Times' and 'New Statesman' – Preparing for betrayal. How do we answer these new problems?
>
> The Anglo– Soviet Pact? Problems arising if there is no Pact, if there is a Pact – Peace Front with Chamberlain, Daladier and Book is not the real Peace Front – But if with other Governments what policy?
>
> Should we deal with question of our policy if war breaks out and a Chamberlain Government in power? Our proposals for winning such a war. (CPGB National Congresses papers, CP/CENT/CONG/04/12)

By this stage Pollitt's preferred view of a war on two fronts – against fascism in general and Hitler's Germany in particular – had been rendered irrelevant by the Soviet–Nazi pact of non–aggression signed on 23rd August 1939. This pact was initially presented as a diplomatic triumph in the *Daily Worker*, but this was soon over–ruled by Moscow who insisted that the War should be denounced as one of inter–imperialist rivalry.

The Party justified the pact in a statement made on 16th September entitled *Britain and the Soviet Union*:

> It [the Soviet Union] has made a Pact of Non–Aggression with the Nazi Government. Why?

> Because the Chamberlain Government refused to build up a Peace Front of all States which had no interest in war and aggression, and refused to conclude a pact of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union.
>
> Because the Chamberlain Government influenced Poland to refuse the military help which the Soviet Union offered.
>
> Because, although the Labour and Liberal leaders and their press stated they wanted a pact with the Soviet Union, they never fought to get such a Pact signed. The Southport Conference will be remembered in labour history for the unassailable fact that it allowed Bevin to divert the Labour movement at the most critical time, from a united campaign for the pact with the Soviet Union on to the chimera of seeking an accommodation with Hitler. (Harry Pollitt papers, CP/IND/POLL/2/7)

This statement is careful to position the CPGB as a forward–thinking party and as benign exemplars of world peace, unlike, it is implied, the other major political parties. However, this about turn split the Left Book Club and divided the leadership of the CPGB. Some of the Central Committee were willing to go along with the Comintern's ruling, whilst others rebelled. At meetings on 2nd and 3rd October 1939 Pollitt and J. R. Campbell were removed as General Secretary and editor of the *Daily Worker* respectively. As Callaghan and Harker put it, 'The symbolism of the pact was powerful, vividly dramatizing the central conundrum of how the party's historical mission – to mobilise the working class against capitalism and towards self–liberation – was forever entangled in the interests of the Soviet Union, from where the CPGB's authority ultimately derived' (Callaghan and Harker, 2011, p146).

In a mealy–mouthed statement that sounded as if it could have been lifted from Orwell's *Animal Farm,* the CPGB released a press statement on 12th October 1939 purporting to come from Pollitt and appearing to endorse the Party's decision to remove him as General Secretary:

> The decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain to remove me from the position of General Secretary of the Party is correct and it was

> taken after a very full and free discussion, and is in strict accord with the democratic policy and practice of the Party. I had every opportunity of placing my views before the Central Committee as to the course of the policy which should be pursued. (Harry Pollitt papers, CP/IND/POLL/2/7)

He declares that he will continue to give the Party 'my fullest support' and he wants to make it clear that the Party stands firm with its Soviet counterparts: 'It needs to be clearly understood that the differences which have arisen have nothing to do with the policy of the Soviet Union, with whose policy I am in entire agreement' (Harry Pollitt papers, CP/IND/POLL/2/7). Nonetheless this statement is indicative of the awkward rapprochement that existed between the two wings of the Party: one in which Pollitt was caught in the crossfire. He was to return as General Secretary twelve months later, however the Party's opportunity to make political capital from the start of the War had been missed.

The rise of the middle–class communist

What symbolic and political capital the Party did acquire over this period was in many ways due to the high profile influence of its middle–class adherents, because, despite the fact that the membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain was overwhelmingly working–class, it was the small number of intellectuals it attracted to its ranks that raised its public profile the highest. In the 1930s it drew in a number of students from Oxford and Cambridge in particular. It can be difficult to pinpoint what exactly the motivations were for this, what might be seen as, unnatural political leaning, especially, as Roderick Floud points out in his introduction to *Radiant Illusion? Middle–Class Recruits to Communism in the 1930s* (2015), that in the face of the Cold War and spy scandals many former communists refused to discuss their past and there are resulting gaps in our knowledge as to why people joined the Communist movement. As a result, these middle class recruits were 'portrayed – with the hindsight of the Cold War – as mistaken, naïve or actively treacherous, rather than as young men and women convinced of the need to fight fascism by the most effective methods

available to them' (Floud, 2015, p14). Also, as Nicholas Deakin puts it, the young idealists from middle–class backgrounds who joined the CPGB in the 1930s are 'too easily dismissed as "Stalin's useful idiots", or as children of the bourgeoisie suffering from acute class guilt' (Deakin, 2015, p15).

So, what did motivate this move to the Left among many of Britain's most privileged young people? Firstly, many of the key public schools, such as Westminster and Gresham's (attended by WH Auden and James Klugman) were sympathetic to radical views. There was also a reaction to the ubiquity of the Officer Training Corps in these institutions, and also school trips abroad to Germany and, in particular, the USSR. Thus, set up by their schools, this radicalism flowered when they got to university, especially Oxford, Cambridge or the London School of Economics.

There was also internal conflict within the Party itself. In the early 1930s the CPGB was 'locked into a fierce struggle to establish itself as the authentic party of the British working class, in opposition to the Labour Party and the existing trades union movement' (Deakin, 2015, p31). At that point in time the CPGB was largely factory–based and little attempt was made to extend its class base. This changed when the Nazis came to power in 1933, the apparent success of the Soviet Five Year Plans, the growth of Mosley's British Union of Fascists and the relaxing of the Communist Party's 'class against class' policy, which led to the building of what had previously been unacceptable alliances on the Left. In an address to Cambridge undergraduate students, the CPGB's only MP Willie Gallacher made a direct appeal saying, 'we need you as you are: if you have a vocation it is pointless to run away to factories' (Deakin, 2015, p34).

The Cambridge undergraduates associating with the Communists included high profile names, such as David Guest, son of the Labour peer, Lord Haden–Guest; Maurice Cornforth, the poet Charles Madge, and James Klugman. Many of them were gathered

under the wing of economist Maurice Dobb, a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. Dobb was one of the earliest academic recruits to communism. He was the son of a north London draper, who founded the Cambridge University Labour Club in 1920 and joined the Camden branch of the Communist Party when working at the LSE in 1922. He, somewhat surprisingly given his political affiliation, was made a fellow of Trinity, but nonetheless continued to support the Party unswervingly until his death in 1976. In his autobiography, Harry Ferns comments that not all the highest intellectuals at Cambridge during the Thirties joined the communists, 'but those who did were nearly all people of high intelligence measured in terms of academic achievement' (Deakin, 2015, p28).

One such alumnus from Cambridge (King's College, in this instance) was Ivor Goldsmid Samuel Montagu, the third son of the 2nd Baron Swaythling and scion of a major Jewish banking house. Montagu was significant for many reasons – zoologist, writer, filmmaker, critic and even the founder of the International Table Tennis Federation – however, it is his long–standing commitment to the communist cause that runs through this nomenclature. Having been a member of the Fabian Society and the British Socialist Party, Montagu joined the Communist Party in 1931. He was described in his *Daily Worker* profile of 9th May 1959 as a 'Dynamo and Man of Peace' who has 'devoted his life to the working–class movement, and is a tireless exponent of how permanent world peace must be won' (Ivor Montagu papers, CP/IND/MONT/1/1). A letter from barrister and Labour MP D N Pritt of 24th Sept 1940 suggesting amendments to Montagu's *The Traitor Class* (published by Lawrence & Wishart in September 1940), also describes Montagu as 'probably the only political writer in this country who is better than I am' (Ivor Montagu papers, CP/IND/MONT/2/9).

Like many high-profile names joining the Party at this time, Montagu did not escape the attentions of the authorities – in this instance the US Department of Labor. Informants were everywhere, in this case within Montagu's own profession. A letter from GA Atkinson (the Cinema Editor of the *Daily Express*) included in New York Police Department report 001–

PB–529 of 7th July 1930 says that 'One of the most dangerous and, in my position, the most cunning propagandist in this direction [what Atkinson calls 'Moscow Plotters'] is the Hon. Ivor Montagu, the youngest son of the late Lord Swaything, the Jewish financier'. Atkinson goes on,

> Montagu has very influential connections in social and financial circles, in addition to considerable private means but instead of following the brilliant career marked out for him, he has turned aside to devote the whole of his energies and not considerable [sic] intellect to the fomentation of industrial revolt. (Ivor Montagu papers, CP/IND/MONT/1/1)

Unlike many middle–class communists Montagu did not desert the cause. It is clear from correspondence with the *Daily Worker*, its successor the *Morning Star*, the People's Printing Society, and the People's Press Fighting Fund held in the archives at the People's History Museum, that Montagu continued to contribute to the *Daily Worker* and People's Press Fighting Fund. For example, there is a letter from *Daily Worker* Assistant Editor Bill Wainwright from 21st October 1960 thanking Montagu for his 'wonderful donation. This cheered me up immensely' (Ivor Montagu papers, CP/IND/MONT/3/5). Montagu's support remained unwavering until his death in 1984. This frequently led him into conflict with some of his former colleagues. There is extensive correspondence, for example, with John Strachey, who by 1940 disagreed with the communist view of the War, that turns into a lengthy and heated debate over eight letters in which Montagu calls Strachey 'completely crackers' (Ivor Montagu papers, CP/IND/MONT/6/13). This exchange will be dealt with in more detail in a later chapter, but it is evident that not every Thirties communist intellectual reneged on their former support.

The most famous group of intellectual fellow travellers, of course, was the Oxbridge student poets W. H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, Cecil Day Lewis and Stephen Spender. Neither Auden nor MacNeice actually joined the CPGB, but other Cambridge recruits, Burgess, MacLean, Philby and Blunt, later gained notoriety for spying on behalf of the USSR. Unsurprisingly

(especially in the light of the so-called Cambridge Spies) the 'MacSpaundays' received considerable attention from the security services. Day–Lewis, for example, tended to boast about his political work. In May 1935 MI5 intercepted letters from Day–Lewis to FN Roy sent care of Martin Lawrence (where mail was being monitored by MI5). In the letters he talked about slipping political messages past the BBC on a broadcast called *Youth Looks Ahead* and he formally joined the Party in 1935. Whilst it is true that the attention was probably warranted as there is little doubt that the CPGB was plotting a certain amount of infiltration into major British institutions, it is also true to say that little of the communist literature had any political impact. Indeed, authors 'were notoriously difficult to herd if they did take out a Party card and were liable to quit in a blaze of publicity if pushed too hard to hold the Party line or if the Party decided to go in a direction with which they did not agree' (Smith, 2013, p20).

By 1934 communists had effectively taken over the Oxford Labour Club, even hanging a large portrait of Lenin on the wall of the meeting house. At Cambridge there were probably about 200 paid up members of the CPGB, which included several dons. The Cambridge cell, which was centred on King's and Trinity colleges, were active in organizing anti–war demonstrations and welcomed the Hunger Marchers in February 1934 (something which writer and academic, Margot Heinemann, puts her conversion whilst at Newnham College down to; remaining a party member all her life and even standing as the communist candidate in Vauxhall in the 1950 general election). *Cambridge Left* also started publication at Cambridge in 1932, publishing 'Marxian analyses of literature and poems about the class struggle' (Graves and Hodge, 1940, p259).

Graves and Hodge attribute the appeal of communism to the 'young, eager and intellectual' down to 'the sense it gave its adherents of being outside the ordinary political game, free to criticize it and free to speculate widely on new plans' (Graves and Hodge, 1940, p330). They also attribute a certain faddism to this support for communism:

> Anti–Governmental Labour clubs at the universities greatly increased in membership and by 1931 students were not only welcoming hunger–marchers but even marching with them. A few went to the extreme of calling themselves Communists – especially at the elder universities, where the test of being 'advanced' was no longer whether one understood modernist poems, but whether one understood Marxism'. (Graves and Hodge, 1940, p259)

The unusual marriage of the disaffected aristocracy and communism alluded to in the opening of this chapter and the hold of Marxism in the hallowed halls of Oxford and Cambridge can be seen in Toynbee's 1954 memoir, *Friends Apart*. Ostensibly about two of his friends, one of whom was Esmond Romilly, who married Jessica Mitford, was killed in 1941, and was reputed to be Winston Churchill's illegitimate son[15], the book actually turns on Toynbee's years of communist activism whilst at Oxford. One anecdote of a typical country house party illustrates the mixing of these unusual bedfellows:

> It was a house party appropriate to the period. There were rich American ladies; there were poor English aristocrats; there were tweeded and pipe–smoking Labour politicians, and a large number of those permanent guests who pay their way by wit or handsome faces. Silent footmen were folding the *Daily Worker*, and a butler pushed the Left Book Club books back into the shelves. (Toynbee, 1954, p109)

This, then, was the world of the middle–class intellectual, the breeding ground for a new, more socially aware, aristocrat. The same class of people from the previous decade – the 'Bright Young People' of the 1920s – could be said by the end of the decade to have had an elegiac quality, a world captured in the image of 'sorrowing in sunlight, good times gone, the myriad champagne corks bobbing away on a stream turned unexpectedly chill' (Taylor, 2007, p4). These were a group, perhaps inconsequential, and with a style that was 'brisk, affected, outwardly impersonal, inwardly often deeply vulnerable', but who 'influenced a host of descendants who nothing of their ancestry [and whose] echoes can be found in the pages

[15] According to Thomas E. Ricks this attribution seemed to be largely based on the accuracy of Romilly's impersonation of Churchill (Ricks, 2018, p49)

of books written long after the movement's original members were gone' (Taylor, 2007, p6), then the earnest young people of the 1930s could be said to be part of what Taylor calls 'the new seriousness'. The Bright Young People are usually associated with the rise of fascism in the 1930s – Diana Guinness (nee Mitford), for example, left her husband Bryan to start an affair, and eventually marry, British Union of Fascists founder and leader, Sir Oswald Mosley. However, the truth is, as ever, more complex as many former Bright Young People 'turned Left' as hunger marches and rising unemployment hit home. These included the likes of Robert Byron, Inez Holden, Gavin Henderson, who took the Labour whip in 1934 when he became Baron Faringdon; Brian Howard who rallied authors to the cause of the Spanish Civil War; and Tom Driberg, who remained a card carrying communist all through the Thirties and who mixed with the likes of Gollancz and Strachey and others of a similar stripe. If there was an uneasy juxtaposition between left–wing ideals and capitalist methods within publishing, then there was a similar unease between the lavish lifestyles and political affiliations of the group dismissed by Lord Beaverbrook as 'Café Communists'.

Conclusion

It is true to say that the rise of the Communist Party of Great Britain could not have happened in the way that it did at any other point in British history. There needed to be a unique combination of events that resulted in the monopoly of the government by one party, no effective opposition, political extremism of all persuasions on the rise, and an incipient global crisis on the horizon, for such a political outlier to make the progress it did. No wonder that the CPGB thought their time had come and no wonder idealists of all backgrounds flocked to join them. What makes this doubly significant, though, is the cultural crossroads which had been arrived at. At no point before had printing been so cost effective and the marketing man so ubiquitous. The perfect time, in fact, for a political party to harness advances in the media for its own ends. This is perhaps the first time in the twentieth century that the printing press fulfilled the potential identified by Febvre and Martin and Eisenstein,

as an agent of change. The CPGB recognised its power before any of the other political parties and harnessed it quickly and effectively.

Numerous newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets and books arose out of this period and many of the publishers of this literature were small groups acting under the auspices or with the financial support of the CPGB. Therefore, it made sense for them to legitimise and professionalise this literary endeavour via bona fide 'capitalist' publishing houses. By analysing the publishing output of the Left Book Club, effectively an adjunct of Gollancz's publishing company, and comparing it to the titles produced by the communist–owned Lawrence & Wishart it is possible to see the extent of the influence of communism on what they published. It also shows the compromises it forced the publishers into and the dichotomies of running a commercial, not to say capitalist, publishing company whilst restricted by a political straitjacket and pursuing on the face of it, contradictory political aims. The creation of the Left Book Club marked a sea change in political publishing during the Thirties, in content, appearance, and distribution. One of several contradictions of the period is the Left Book Club's attempts to reconcile commercial success with political conviction. Simone Murray would recognise the necessity of Gollancz's approach – commercial acuity was a necessity if his political aims were to be broadcast widely and successfully. Gollancz made little attempt to disguise his financial success, but that only makes it more important to understand the extent to which the communists attempted to infiltrate and control the Left Book Club's output, why they would want to do it, and how that might have compromised both the Club's integrity and impact.

Chapter 2 'Not so much a Book Club, more a way of life'. Victor Gollancz, the Left Book Club and the struggle with communism.

Paul Laity has claimed that the Left Book Club is 'a thirties legend, the definitive symbol of a time when British intellectuals were seduced by communism' (Laity, 2001, pix), but is that true and, if so, why has it been largely forgotten? Is it because the Club was closely linked to the now unfashionable ideology of communism and is so much a product of its time that it seems to have no relevance today? It is therefore important to analyse these links between the Left Book Club and the Communist Party and determine whether the Club really was just a front for the Soviets. It is also important to consider the most significant man at the Club, publisher Victor Gollancz, his role within the Club and the Popular Front movement in general, and assess whether his motivation was philanthropically political or just another means of extending his already successful publishing business. This dichotomy lies at the heart of this study. There is little doubt that Gollancz had a keen eye for a financial opportunity and was not given to wasting money on what he felt would be an unsuccessful venture, such as his quick closure of the failing Mundanus paperback imprint, for example. However, his political conviction was so strong (and increased in strength during the second half of the 1930s) that he was prepared to take financial risks in order to fulfil it. The binary choice that Bourdieu advances of a distinction between economic or cultural motivation, but not both, is clearly not appropriate here. Gollancz undoubtedly built up significant symbolical capital via his work at the Left Book Club and also through his publishing company, but it was economic capital that kept both viable enough to achieve his aims.

Compared to Allen Lane at Penguin, Gollancz's visibility as a public figure is minimal now and, surprisingly for someone who had once had a significant impact on left–wing politics, there has only been one biography of him: Ruth Dudley Edwards' *Victor Gollancz: A Biography*. There was something of a duality to Gollancz. As an immigrant he was not *of* the establishment, however his business success and financial wealth meant that he would have

been perceived as such. Nonetheless there was a direct manifestation of his social conscience and political view in much of his publishing and especially in the creation of the Left Book Club. Despite the complete contrast in their background and circumstances, there is a marked similarity between Gollancz and that other titan of the Thirties Left – the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Harry Pollitt. Pollitt might have been a working–class Lancastrian with a background in the Boilermaker's Union, but like Gollancz he was motivated by change and making a difference: he was a leader who led. If Gollancz personified the Left Book Club, then Pollitt no less *was* the CPGB. There has only been one biography of Pollitt – Kevin Morgan's excellent *Harry Pollitt* (1993) – and in it Morgan says of the relationship between the man and the Party, 'If Pollitt owed what authority he had to the Communist Party, it is equally true that the CP owed much of its credibility to its charismatic leader and to the trust and esteem in which he was held by many on the left' (Morgan, 1993, p89). The Left Book Club has its own history by Groups Convenor John Lewis. *The Left Book Club: An Historical Record* (1970) is inevitably subjective and surprisingly chatty, but does provide a linear guide to the books published by the Club. It glosses over much of the tension and conflict, but is invaluable in its eye–witness narrative of the Club's output.

The broad Left, Popular Front vision of Gollancz and the Left Book Club needed all participants on the Left to be involved if it were to have any success. The Communist Party involvement in the Club was effectively preventing the Labour Party being part of Gollancz's vision. Despite being a beaten force during the Thirties, the Labour Party was not prepared to fully commit. Initially 'cool, but not hostile' (Lewis, 1970, p92), Atlee sent a friendly message to the Club's Albert Hall rally. However, before long Labour rejected the Club's collective approach and disapproved of books that they regarded as Communist by the likes of Palme Dutt, Hannington, and Strachey; they even threatened expulsion from the party for Club members. Consequently, the close proximity of Gollancz and the Left Book Club to Pollitt and the communists was effectively limiting the chance of the Club achieving its aims.

In this chapter I will be examining the relationship between the Left Book Club and the Communist Party in greater depth than previous studies, utilising the Gollancz archives held at the Modern Records Centre at Warwick University. This entails examining not just the impact that relationship had on the Left in the years just prior to the Second World War, but also how the relationship shaped what was published and therefore what the dialogue was on the Left, which in turn determined how communism was received in the 1930s. Before looking at that relationship it is first necessary to discuss how this Thirties phenomenon – the Left Book Club – came about.

The creation and rise of the Left Book Club

Probably the most successful outlet for communism in the 1930s was not a communist organisation at all. The Left Book Club was launched following a meeting in January 1936 with leading Labour MP and Marxist convert, the so called 'Red Squire', Sir Stafford Cripps, by Gollancz in collaboration with journalist and former Labour MP, John Strachey, and Harold Laski, Professor of Political Science at the London School of Economics.

Strachey was perhaps the most influential English Marxist writer of the 1930s (and also a Gollancz author). Lewis comments that he had 'a first–rate knowledge of economic and political theory which Gollancz did not possess' (Lewis, 1970, p33). Born into a privileged Liberal background he became a Labour MP in 1929. He supported Oswald Mosley's proposal for an emergency measure to combat unemployment and, on leaving Parliament in 1931, he supported Mosley's New Party, leaving it when he saw the political direction it was taking. Although never a card–carrying member, Strachey's influence can be seen in *The Coming Struggle for Power* (published by Gollancz in 1932) which enshrined for many the need for violence in order to bring about change. According to Julian Symons 'Strachey's greatest appeal lay in his application of Marxist ideas to the history of Britain. Wars were seen as simply "a struggle for the market"' (Symons, 1960, p36). In the book Strachey's view

is that if individualistic capitalism is to fall then it can only be replaced by fascism or communism. If the Labour Party's stance is to stick with the capitalistic model, thereby restricting workers' rights and powers in a way that can only lead to fascism, then communism can be the only answer. For Symons 'The effect [of Strachey's argument] was not, in any case, to make people join the Communist Party – the membership of the Party during the Thirties was smaller than it is today [1960]. Rather *The Coming Struggle for Power* helped to create a whole climate of opinion, a climate in which certain assumptions were almost automatic' (Symons, 1960, p38).

Laski too came from a Liberal family, but he nevertheless remained on the left of the Labour Party. Lewis rather dismisses Laski's role at the Club when he says that although Laski 'brought the authority of his academic prestige' he 'did not in fact play a significant part in the development of the Club' (Lewis, 1970, p22). Rather Laski, who has been described as 'erratically brilliant' (Gardiner, 2011, p106), gave the Left Book Club the broader appeal Gollancz felt it needed and, as we shall see, acted as an important buffer against Pollitt, Burns and the other members of the CPGB who would seek to have a direct influence over the book club selections. A leading figure in the Labour Party he was a member of the 'think tank', the New Fabian Research Bureau (NFRB), and the Marxist Socialist League (the former being assimilated into the Fabian Society in 1938 and the latter dissolved by the Labour leadership a year earlier). Well-liked and highly respected, he was a gifted proselytizer; his books were widely read and he was popular figure in the media. Laski was in no doubt as to who the leader and figurehead of the Left Book Club was, however. At the Club's Albert Hall rally, Laski acknowledged Gollancz's leading role: 'Yours was the idea that gave it birth. Yours was the enthusiasm that brought it to maturity' (Edwards, 1987, p239).

Gollancz had an instinctive approach to politics. Not for him the brutally scientific language of the communists. His energy and embracing of marketing techniques was done in a way never seen before. This impatience may also explain why he looked to publish pacey

narrative tales as well as radical polemics. Some books tasked their readership, such as Hyman Levy's *A Philosophy for a Modern Man,* which was so difficult to understand that Levy had to tour LBC local groups to explain it, but the most popular book selections were those of reportage and memoir. All three at the head of the Left Book Club had a lifelong passion for politics and had all moved politically to the Left during the 1930s. Although he was not a card–carrying Communist, Strachey was openly supportive. Gollancz, on the other hand, was a Labour Party member and did not describe himself as a Marxist. Crucially, however, from the outside he appeared to be indistinguishable from one. It is this contrast between perceived and actual political affiliation that is important: it is not what political party, if any, they were members of, but which political affiliation they were seen as having that mattered.

The other main player at the Left Book Club was not a member at all, but the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain – Harry Pollitt. Pollitt was particularly influential over younger party members in the Thirties. Despite being around twenty years older than most of the members, his paternalistic and empathetic style encouraged devotion: 'It was Pollitt's special charisma to combine these human qualities with the willpower and firmness of purpose that middle–class recruits in particular sought in Communism' (Morgan,1993, p121). Something about his personality caused people to consult with him. Oxford communist, Gabriel Carritt, wrote that his wife was one of those drawn to speak to Pollitt:

> She would go and consult him, like going to the oracle. He didn't intend to, but he did create that feeling of knowing and authority and integrity, which made people go and talk to him; because he would listen, because he was wise, and because I think a lot the intellectuals and perhaps many of the workers too wanted the Party to be the authority, to lay down how it should be. (Morgan,1993, p122)

Ironically, rather like the Left Book Club, this was not a democracy, and Pollitt put Party unity above any individual grievance, even his own. Neither was he a theoretician – he left that to

Palme Dutt, Burns and Klugman. Gollancz claimed Pollitt 'distrusted, despised, disliked and even occasionally hated intellectuals' (Morgan, 1993, p124), but he had no difficulty getting on with them and indeed welcomed the middle–class recruits of the 1930s. Stephen Spender was impressed by Pollitt and was aware that he lacked Pollitt's authenticity. Pollitt, however, expected the same level of adherence to the Party line as he would from ordinary working–class members. His fiercest antagonism was to those who, passing through or close to the Party, thought to exempt themselves from its collective disciplines' (Morgan,1993, p124). Pollitt wrote to Ivor Montagu on 21st July, 1940 about Gollancz and Strachey: 'This type like to see long letters and longer replies because it gives their bourgeoisie souls the personal belief that they are important people' (Morgan, 1993, p134). Neither Gollancz nor Strachey would be inclined to sublimate their ego to that of the Party. In contrast, the aristocratic Montagu remained a communist and therefore a firm friend of Pollitt's until this death.

Unlike Palme Dutt and Burns, Pollitt had an ability to get on with, or at least have civilised communications with, significant people outside of the Party. For example, he had a good relationship with Stafford Cripps and used that relationship to influence the weekly *Tribune* newspaper that Cripps had started in 1937. He also got on well with Gollancz (despite it being a volatile relationship) and exploited the fact that the Gollancz publishing office was round the corner from the CPGB's King Street headquarters, to try and influence the output of the Left Book Club.

In February 1936 *The Bookseller* said that Gollancz 'had already been instrumental "in making books about Socialism respectable"' (Edwards, 1987, p228), but he had made almost no headway with books inspired by communism. As he wrote in the second volume of his autobiography, *More for Timothy* (1953), 'I was becoming successful, and my advertising was spectacular; but it was political publishing that I thought about night and day […] The passion to make people see […] now, I thought, I could really do something about it'

(Gollancz, 1953, p351). The invasion of Abyssinia by Italy in October 1935 and the lack of any strong response to this act of fascist aggression from Stanley Baldwin's National Government emphasised for Gollancz the need for a Popular Front government, similar to the ones in France and Spain, where communists and socialists had come together in the face of a common threat. In France the Popular Front had formed the government, and in Spain the election of February 1936 had brought about a left–wing conglomeration, including some communists, in the form of the Popular Front. With a clear majority of seats Manuel Azana of the Republican Left became Prime Minister (although trouble was already waiting in the wings in the form of the right–wing Generals, who were preparing for revolution even as the election was completed). In Britain, despite opposition from the Labour Party and a poor showing in comparison to the National Government at the 1935 general election, there was broad left–wing support for a communist–socialist United Front. Gollancz saw his main task in convincing members of the Labour and Liberal Parties that they had much in common with this left–wing coalition. To this end he felt that communist literature must be presented to a wider reading public through an organisation that had broad appeal – hence the launch of the Left Book Club.

Gollancz made the intentions of the Club clear from the outset. In an editorial for *Left Book News* (a sixteen–page publication given to all those who enrolled and which was later renamed *Left News*) of 4th May 1936 (the day he heard of the Popular Front victory at the polls in France) he wrote: 'what the Left Book Club is attempting to do is to provide the indispensable basis of *knowledge* without which a really effective United Front of all men and women of good will cannot be built. If we are to win, we must have, each one of us, not less but more knowledge than the best informed of our enemies' (Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/4/LB/1/1). Adverts for the Club appeared in February and March of 1936 in the *News Chronicle* and anyone responding received a twelve–page brochure outlining the aims for the Club. Members were committed to buying a book at 2s 6d a month for a minimum of six months, which would be chosen by the three selectors. Gollancz saw

the Club also as a specific response to the refusal of other publishers to publish left–wing books because of the 'ruling of the capitalist profit motive'. The subscription model was a tried and tested means of selling books, of course, but it had also been seen to be highly effective. As Juliet Gardiner points out 'Persuading people to "*undertake* to buy books" by subscription was, Gollancz believed, the way to bypass the "ninety–nine booksellers out of a hundred [who] quietly boycott socialism"' (Gardiner, 2010, p379). In this way Gollancz was able to circumvent the innate conservatism in the publishing industry at the time, albeit it using a conservative sales model. He believed there was a market for left–leaning titles if he could get the books to them without the barriers the industry put in the way. Gollancz writes in that 4th May *Left Book News* editorial,

> Our own belief has been for some time that if we could break this vicious circle and find a sufficiently large number of people who would *undertake* to buy books provided they were published at a sufficiently low price, then the whole situation would be transformed. The Left Book Club is the outcome of this belief. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/4/LB/1/1)

It was hoped to have 2500 members by May to start the Club, but in the end there were more than 6,000. By the end of the first year, membership had reached 40,000 and by 1939 it had peaked at 57,000. Between 1936 and the Club's demise in 1948 it published 257 books thereby putting millions of LBC books into circulation. The Club rapidly developed into a political movement that encompassed lectures, film shows, language classes and trips abroad, making it an all–round lifestyle choice. As Stuart Samuels put it, the LBC was 'Not so much a Book Club, more a way of life' (Samuels, 1966, p86). It spawned local groups, which initially formed to discuss the book choice, but became a looser social gathering. By 1939, there were over 1200 such groups with their own national organiser, John Lewis, who acted as liaison between the local groups and the national Club and whose wife, Betty Reid, ran the Left Book Club Groups Department office. These groups spread all over the world, including South Africa and Australia (where the Club had 98 groups and 4500 members). The majority of the British groups were in the South although the single largest group was in

Manchester. There were vocational groups, such as bus drivers, musicians, railwaymen, postmen and cyclists, but the most prestigious were the scientists groups, which included such worthies as JBS Haldane, known for his work in physiology, genetics, and evolutionary biology, x-ray pioneer JD Bernal, Scottish mathematician Hyman Levy, and biochemist and historian Joseph Needham.

These groups were ripe for satire, though, and in his novel *Coming Up for Air* (published by Gollancz in 1939), George Orwell brings his trademark acerbic and unflinching gaze onto a typical Left Book Club meeting. As Sutherland puts it, 'the observing Orwellian eye is cold and clear as ice' (Sutherland, 2016, p122). The book's protagonist George Bowling goes with his wife Hilda to a Left Book Club meeting held in 'a little wooden hall with a tin roof' (Orwell, 1939, p143) in West Bletchley. Orwell's view of the meeting's attendees is cruel – the lecturer's bald head 'which he tried rather unsuccessfully to cover up with wisps of hair', the LBC convenor Witchett with his 'pink, baby's bottom kind of face' (p144), the Trotskyist who's a 'Jew, of course' (p147) and Miss Minns with her long, thin neck. However, his depiction is touched by the same realistic first person view that he brought to his account of Wal Hannington's lecture in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. The lecturer was 'pitching into Hitler and the Nazis' –

> You know the line of talk. These chaps can churn it out by the hour. Just like a gramophone. Turn the handle, press the button, and it starts. Democracy, Fascism, Democracy. But somehow it interested me to watch him. A rather mean little man, with a white face and a bald head, standing on a platform, shooting out slogans. What's he doing? Quite deliberately, and quite openly, he's stirring up hatred. Doing his damnedest to make you hate certain foreigners called Fascists […] He *means* it. Not thinking at all – feels every word he is saying. He's trying to work up hatred in the audience, but that's nothing to the hatred he feels himself. Every slogan's gospel truth to him. If you cut him open all you'd find inside would be Democracy–Fascism–Democracy. (Orwell, 1939, p145)

There may be only fifteen or sixteen people in attendance, but Orwell skewers the meeting – not just the Jewish Trotskyist, but 'two old blokes from the local Labour Party […] You know the type. Been in the Labour Party since the year dot. Lives given up to the movement. Twenty years of being blacklisted by employers, and another ten of badgering the Council to do something about the slums' (Orwell, 1939, p147), three young members of the local Communist Party and a young teacher from the local Council School who is 'really listening, sitting forward with her big round eyes fixed on the lecturer and her mouth a little bit open, drinking it all in' (Orwell, 1939, p147). This is the idealism, political in–fighting and empty rhetoric of almost every political meeting in history, but it is nonetheless accurate for all that.

Raymond Williams would have been a member of his local Left Book Club at around the same time as Orwell was writing about it. There are similarities between the scene Orwell describes and Williams' experience:

> The Club in Abergavenny, which had about fifteen to twenty members, was run by Labour Party activists. They used to organize discussions and meetings and invite speakers. We weren't subscribers; I used to borrow books from whoever subscribed, so I didn't see them all. But it was from the Club that I read about imperialism and colonialism. […] Among the visiting speakers, I remember being especially impressed by Konni Zilliacus, who at that time was still working for the League of Nations; he seemed the first wholly cosmopolitan man I had met. (Williams, 1979, pp31–32)

However, this also reflects a more positive experience than the one Orwell describes. Williams ascribes much of his intellectual development, initially to the books he had access to at school, 'until sixteen or seventeen when I began to get access to the Left Book Club' (Williams, 1979, pp27–28). This would have chimed with Gollancz's intention that the Left Book Club's prime purpose would be an educative one.

By the late Thirties the reach of the Left Book Club was extensive, not to say global. It was successful in circulating more than 50,000 left–leaning books a month to people who would not usually have been able to access such reading matter. And yet there was a tension at the heart of the Club that was there from its inception.

Communism and the Left Book Club

There are two main questions that need to be addressed: Orwell's depiction of the LBC meeting included people from across the political spectrum on the Left, but how much was the Club merely a front for the Communist Party and how much was the Club a result of Gollancz's deeply held beliefs? Alternatively, was the creation of the Left Book Club the result of an expert publisher having an eye to the main chance and seeing the opportunity to make capital out of the political zeitgeist?

There can be little doubt that it was not Gollancz's intention, when setting up the Club, that it should become a 'front' for the Communist Party that many senior members of the Labour Party believed it to be. He initially envisaged the Club as an all–encompassing grouping that would embrace Communists, Labour, and Liberals and even 'enlightened' members of the Conservative party in a progressive Popular Front movement. At the time the Club was set up this was not as unrealistic as it may at first seem. Harold Macmillan, also a publisher and then a Conservative MP, called a small meeting in October 1936 in the offices of *New Outlook*, the magazine of the Next Five Years Group, to discuss uniting all progressives around a common political programme with an agreed strategy for action. Others at the meeting included John Strachey, Labour MP Aneurin Bevan, the Dean of Rochester and the Liberal, Dingle Foot, amongst others. An action committee was set up, which included G. D. H. Cole, who briefly became the leading spokesman for democratic unity. Their aim was to gather support for what they termed a 'People's Front' (to distance themselves from the Popular Front in France). Despite its credentials and support amongst heavyweight

intellectuals, such as Stephen Spender, by early 1937 the movement had failed. The Labour Party took steps to expel anyone expressing support for the 'People's Front' largely because of its similarity to a Comintern strategy of the same name. As historian Richard Overy writes, 'In reality the popular front movement was anything but a threat. Most of the leading figures who had flirted with a People's Front movement were far from communist in outlook, including the reform Conservatives around Macmillan, whose interest in a popular front waned once the radical left were involved' (Overy, 2010, p304). As it proved, given both Gollancz's temperament and the composition of the committee running the Club and its groups, communists were to take an increasingly strong guiding role during the Club's most successful early years.

Nonetheless the Club repeatedly tried to form alliances with the Labour Party. In August 1937 Laski offered two pages in *Left News* each month to give the Club's support to Labour's Autumn campaign. It also offered to devote two complete issues to Labour, which was rejected. Hugh Dalton, the Chairman of the Labour Party at the time, said there would only be co–operation if Labour controlled the Club. Lewis claims that the Club tried to secure books from what he calls 'the Labour Right', but for him they seemed to be 'intellectually exhausted' (Lewis, 1970, p94). Instead Labour started a rival Labour Book Service which was, perhaps unsurprisingly, short lived. The launch was, however, accompanied by a letter to all borough, divisional and local Labour parties, from Labour's National Agent G R Shepherd, that members could be expelled if they did not stop buying Left Book Club titles (Lewis, 1970, p94). Ernest Bevin, General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, declared the Club anti–Labour and accused it of trying to undermine Trade Unions, and Herbert Morrison, then Leader of London County Council, said the Club was interfering with the Labour Party's work. Despite this hostility from Labour, Lewis claims 'The Club, for its part, never, on any occasion attacked the Labour Party, though it frequently controverted the arguments of certain of its leaders and criticised its policy, as many well–known Labour members of parliament did' (Lewis, 1970, p92).

Lewis also believed ‘There were in fact very few communists among the authors of the Monthly Choice’ (Lewis, 1970, p107), but that claim appears as insupportable as Reid’s assertion that ‘another fallacy is that the Club was dominated by communists’ (Reid, 1979, p205). Given her closeness to the organisation of the Club, this assertion is not unexpected. The reality is that the Left Book Club appeared communist to the casual observer outside, the majority of the books it published during the first three years of its existence espoused a communist doctrine, and the leaders of the Club fiercely combatted any anti–Soviet sentiments; so it is inescapable that the Club appeared communist even if that was not its intention. From the beginning Gollancz’s determination to work through the usual distribution channels, by arranging that LBC books should be picked up from booksellers, caused an adverse reaction by his advocating using the Workers Bookshop as the preferred supplier. The resulting effect of this favouring of the Workers Bookshop was again to make the LBC look as it if it was communist–led in structure. This approach also aroused the suspicions of the book trade: subversion was suspected. As Lewis puts it, ‘Under–the–counter schemes to circulate forbidden literature were detected in this mysterious notice [the ‘Not For Sale To The Public’ that appeared on the front of all LBC titles]’ (Lewis, 1970, p31). The reality is, of course, more prosaic than that and Victor Gollancz Ltd published hardback versions of the titles at two or three times the price.

It could be argued that if Gollancz was aiming to promote a cross–Left, Popular Front perspective then he got it wrong politically from the start – the political structure of the selection committee, the tie–in with a communist bookshop and the selection of communist books as the first two choices– *France Today and the People’s Front* by Maurice Thorez, General Secretary of the French Communist Party, and *Out of the Night: a biologist’s view of the Future* by H. J. Muller – could be said to support the common view that the LBC was a front for the CPGB. The Club’s propaganda alienated Conservatives, most Liberals and anti–communist Labour. As a consequence, Gollancz increasingly turned to the communists

as the only major party to show any enthusiasm for his objectives. One columnist in *The Bookseller* wrote, 'I should say that even the name itself is a mistake; for to the unconverted the word "Left" simply means a policy directed by hate with the sole purpose of destroying middle–class prosperity and killing or starving middle–class families' (Edwards, 1987, p233).

Gollancz's biographer, Edwards, believes that his association with the communists was one of convenience and self–persuasion:

> Temperamentally needing his intimates to be in fundamental agreement with him, Victor sought the company of those who shared the beliefs into which he had, of necessity, persuaded himself: that the communist vision was in harmony with his own, and that the Soviet Union's infringements on personal liberty were merely a temporary and necessary stage in the development of a perfect society. (Edwards, 1987, p233)

An unfortunate side–effect of the belief that the Soviets were acting for the greater good was the undoubted personal conflict suffered by Gollancz appearing to be a Soviet apologist. As a member and then a vice–president of the National Committee for the Abolition of the Death Penalty, for example, it must have been intensely difficult to justify the executions in the Soviet Union following the anti–Trotsky trials in Moscow as he did in *Left News*. This party line also caused him to turn down *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell's follow–up to the LBC–published *The Road to Wigan Pier*, because of the author's service with the POUM in Spain. The POUM (the Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista or United Marxist Workers' Party) supported workers' control rather than the Spanish Popular Front government and was denounced as 'Trotskyite' by Soviet communists.

From 1936 communist censorship of all political manuscripts was overt. Emile Burns had been used to correct 'errors', and it appears that the sympathetic Sheila Lynd reviewed texts by highlighting their 'correct opinions' (Morgan, 1989, p258). Gollancz was personally close to Pollitt and full of admiration for the CPGB leadership's working–class credentials.

Gollancz and Strachey could be accused of being 'Café Communists', but Pollitt, Burns and Dutt could not be similarly criticised. Gollancz's admiration unfortunately blinded him to the CPGB's doctrinally intransigent adherence to Moscow's instructions. This lack of self–awareness was undoubtedly added to by the instant success of the Club, adding 3,000 new members within two weeks of the Club's launch, which increased his workloads, including the 'spontaneous demand' for local groups.

It appears there was a duality at the heart of Gollancz's relationship with the CPGB. He suffered from a mixture of dishonesty and self–delusion with regards to the closeness of the relationship between the Club and the communists. He co–opted party members onto the selection committee that gave advice on manuscripts and which was intended to give a veneer of even–handedness, but which in reality manipulated the propagandist aims of the text. He even claimed the LBC was 'essentially democratic' when 'it would have been more correct to describe it as essentially despotic with a veneer of oligarchy' (Edwards, 1987, p251). When seeking a sub–editor for the *Left News* he wanted the successful candidate to 'combine initiative with absolutely immediate and unquestioning obedience to my instructions, however foolish they may seem to him' (Edwards, 1987, p251). In an attempt at succession management and 'future proofing' which resulted in the appointment of Norman Collins (who ultimately rose to the position of Deputy Chairman before leaving the company in 1941), Gollancz wrote to Robert Lynd on 18th Oct 1932 saying,

> Since I started this business I have been looking for a kind of junior partner – someone who will really co–operate in building the business up, and, perhaps after five or six years, take a sufficiently active part as will enable me to devote a good deal of my time to other things […] as the years go on, and the business remains a one man business, the whole thing becomes rather anxiously urgent. I have formed the conclusion, during the last few months, that Norman Collins is the man for the job, as he seems to me to be that very rare thing – a <u>young</u> man (which is what I want) with most, if not all, of the qualities for which I'm looking. Also, I believe he will

> be able to get on with me: and there are not many men who can get on with me in an office. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/PUB/vi)

So Gollancz was under no illusions as to either the pressures or the singularity of working with him. However, it is true to say that despite Gollancz's personal dynamism the LBC could not have been run without the dedication of the Club's members. Lewis estimated that 75% of all LBC members were 'white collar workers, black–coated professionals and left–wing intellectuals' (Gardiner, 2010, p381), and Samuels characterises the Club as being 'composed of disgruntled liberals, professional communists, disillusioned labourites, and a large number of newcomers to the political arena' (Samuels, 1966, p76). Gollancz was keen to achieve a mass membership and he contrived various membership schemes that managed to drive membership to a peak of 57,000 by April 1939. However, growth was limited by several factors, such as the cost of joining, the intellectual demands of the publications, the Club's domination by middle–class intellectuals and communists, and the hostility towards the Club from the Labour Party and trades unions (this despite the fact that most members were Labour supporters rather than communists, it was the communists who held sway). The fact is, the majority of the most active members were communist and they had an influence within the Club that exceeded their numbers. Gollancz estimated that about a fifth of LBC members were communist and that many more followed the Labour Party, but were disappointed in the Labour response to various government policies, especially their one of non–intervention in Spain.

On the other hand, Gollancz recognised only too clearly the communist slant of the Club's publications and the alienating effect that this would have on those organisations he was attempting to forge closer links with. In his editorial in the *Left News* of May 1937 marking the first anniversary of the Club, Gollancz acknowledged the level of communist influence in the first year by stressing the more balanced publishing schedule to come:

> The first will be Alan Hutt's *The Post–War History of the British Working Class*, which will describe and analyse that history from the point of view of a Communist, and

> which leads to a vigorous advocacy of the United Front. The second will be *Labour Party in Perspective*, by C. R. Atlee, Leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party, which will deal broadly with the same topic from the point of view of official Labour. Finally there will be a brilliant book on *The People's Front*, by G. D. H. Cole, again dealing with the topic, but this time from a point of view that is neither Communist nor official Labour. (Callaghan and Harker, 2011, p136)

It is also clear from a letter that Gollancz wrote to Strachey that he was becoming worried about the allegations that the LBC was communist. He wrote that he was 'rather alarmed to discover how many of the writers were on the extreme left. Taking the list up to July (1937) and going back to the beginning of the club, the only choices that are not by members of the CP (more or less) are […] three out of fifteen […] I think we certainly ought to remedy this' (Edwards, 1987, p236). Laski suggested a tactical move – to publish a general book about Labour policy by Clement Atlee. The publication of the Labour leader's *The Labour Party in Perspective* was so notoriously dull that thousands of copies were left in bookshops unclaimed. Despite this, and the fact that the evidence of the archive indicates that Gollancz only kept positive reviews, there *were* some good notices for Atlee's book. *The Times* review of 10th August 1937 said of it,

> This promotion of an understanding between the older and the younger generations accounts for Mr Atlee's effort to set the Labour Party in a perspective which stretches forward into the future as well as backward into the past, and which balances a programme of policy for the next Labour Government against an analysis of the circumstances which brought the present party into being. The same promotion of good understanding governs the whole treatment. (Victor Gollancz Ltd Archive, MSS.318/7/QU/6/6)

The *Tribune* in its review of 13th August 1937 calls it (perhaps unsurprisingly) 'an interesting and attractive account of the party in its present phase' (Victor Gollancz Ltd Archive MSS.318/7/QU/6/6).

Gollancz also tried to dilute the stream of communist titles by commissioning G.D.H. Cole to write *The Condition of England*. Once again the Club's taint of communism forced Cole to declare that 'I am not, and have never been, a member of the Communist Party' (Overy, 2010, p309). These were non–communist aberrations in the publishing programme, however. It is fair to say that to the politically unaware the LBC's publishing policy was not obvious; its authors and reviewers were termed 'socialists' and the vetting of manuscripts by an internal and external communist cabal was not overt. However, the communist tag was one that the Club never successfully shook off.

Lawrence & Wishart – communist publishers

In contrast to Gollancz's ambivalent relationship with the communists, the most overtly left–wing and, indeed, communist of publishers in the 1930s was Lawrence & Wishart. Their links to the Communist Party were overt and clear with several senior members of the staff there being card carrying members[16]. Unlike Gollancz, Ernest Wishart was establishment by virtue of both his background and culture, yet he was if anything more committed to the communist cause than his fellow publisher. Wishart is a classic example of the middle–class intellectual communist of the Thirties: converted at Cambridge, total commitment to the cause, and the founder and publisher of journals and books with an overtly left–wing bias.

The staff of Lawrence & Wishart may have been more committed to the cause of communism than Gollancz, but they certainly brought none of his publishing or business acumen to bear on their business. The company was founded in February 1936 when Wishart & Co[17] merged with the Communist Party's publisher Martin Lawrence. It is worth

[16] Douglas Garman, for example, joined the newly founded Lawrence & Wishart in 1936 as a commissioning editor, but he had joined the CPGB in 1934 and remained a card carrying member all his life (Connolly, pp139-141)

[17] The publishing company was founded in 1926 by Ernest Wishart initially with the aim of supporting his friend and brother-in-law, Douglas Garman's new magazine, *The Calendar of Modern Letters*.

noting here that there was no ‘Martin Lawrence’ and that this was a somewhat laboured and obscure code for ‘Marx and Lenin’. Martin Lawrence had mainly dealt with political texts and translated fiction; its main success being the *Little Lenin Library* series. Wishart was the son of the Sheriff of the City of London, Sir Sidney Wishart, and he established his publishing company Wishart & Co, following his stint at Cambridge University. The new company’s aim was to publish more fiction by British writers, especially those by workers. Lawrence & Wishart published *New Writing* – a series of anthologies in book form rather than a magazine. There were also plans for a ‘New Writing Library’, although this was eventually dropped along with *New Writing* and publishing novels. This appears to be as a result of pressure from the CPGB; most likely from the Party's education and propaganda chief, Emile Burns, who frequently attempted similar interventions into Gollancz’s publishing schedule.

As has been previously noted, being a Party member attracted the attentions of both the police and security services. An anonymous member of the Bromley Communist Party pointed out how serious a commitment it was: ‘for one thing the police, including the special branch, took a great interest in the activities, however trivial, of even rank and file members of the party. Secondly, a great many employers refused to employ anyone known to be associated with the party’ (Gardiner, 2010, p182). Of the senior staff at Lawrence & Wishart, the one who attracted the most attention from the security services was Douglas Garman.

Garman had been interested in the CPGB from the beginning and eventually joined the Party in 1934. He remained a card–carrying member throughout his life, despite frequently disagreeing with the Party’s official policies. Garman made friends at Cambridge with Wishart, who he took to meet his family in 1925. Their relationship was cemented further when Wishart married Garman’s sister, Lorna, in 1927, when Lorna was just sixteen. Wishart backed a magazine called *The Calendar of Modern Letters*, which first appeared in March 1925, and for which Garman was the assistant editor and Edgell Rickword the chief

editor. Garman spent the latter years of the 1920s between teaching English in Paris and writing book reviews in London. In Spring 1933 he went to work for Wishart's publishing company. At around the same time Garman met the heiress Peggy Guggenheim through his friend, the writer John Holms. On Garman's recommendation Guggenheim bought a house, an Elizabethan cottage called Yew Tree Cottage, near Garman's mother's house in South Harting, which Garman would eventually share with her. It is perhaps indicative of Garman and his group's conventional sensibilities that when his wife Jeanne wanted a divorce Garman's response was highly conventional: 'As Peggy noted, "He was a revolutionary at heart, but all his habits and tastes belonged to the class in which he was born." He was already a Marxist living with an heiress – and an American one at that. But he had integrity, which demanded that Jeanne's name should not be sullied' (Connolly, 2005, p143). In time Garman became more closely involved with the Party. He was increasingly away lecturing and recruiting and, much to Guggenheim's annoyance, wanted only to mix with communists. Around this time, he met someone else, Paddy Ayriss, who was characterised by one of Garman's nieces as being 'the very epitome of a tender comrade – neat, efficient and with plaits around her head' (Connolly, 2005, p147). Eventually in 1937 Ayriss left her husband, George Hardy, for Garman, who she later married.

This political and sexual merry–go–round was of great interest to the security forces, who built up significant files on him. These show not only the extent to which being a communist exposed Garman to official scrutiny, but also the extent to which he blurred his home, political and working lives. A report of 1935 reports that Garman and his wife had travelled to Leningrad on 19th November 1926: 'They stated that they were proceeding to Russia to study the language' (The Security Service: Personal (PF Series) Files, Doc PF 44/20 23/4/35). The report also seems to think that Garman probably worked for the Foreign Office. Colonel Sir Vernon Kell, founder and first Director General of the British Security Service (or MI5) requested that enquiries be made into his extremist activities. However, the resulting report states that they can find little information to support that and that 'He

appears to lead a simple country life'. Although he is reported to be divorced with a daughter and co–habiting with an 'alien' called Guggenheim. By the following year he is firmly on their radar. Garman went to report on the Welsh Hunger Marches for the *Daily Worker* in October 1936. In a letter from the *Daily Worker* dated 19th October 1936 he is described as 'a literary chap, and has had no previous experience, either of reporting or of Hunger Marches, but is keen to tackle the job, and I hope will prove valuable from your point of view and ours'. This reporting assignment resulted in him being identified in a Monmouthshire County Constabulary report of 29/10/36 as a man 'in possession of a Talbot Two–Seater Car', who is described as having 'dark brown hair worn long and brushed back; medium build; speaks in a well–educated manner' (The Security Service: Personal (PF Series) Files, Report no. PF.44120). From a letter written to the author Lewis Jones on 6th December 1936 it is clear that Garman was also following the march in order to write a pamphlet, which was subsequently cancelled. Garman wrote that he could 'imagine many reasons why this should have happened but the ones given to me seem to be extremely inadequate and unsatisfactory'. He was clearly frustrated that bureaucracy had got in the way of producing an important piece of propaganda:

> I was given the job to do, as I understood, as party work. We are always being told that this is the kind of work we can usefully do, and that we ought to do. I did it, in the way I was instructed, and am then told by someone else that was the wrong way, and the result of a week's hard work is then just scrapped without a word of explanation from the people responsible, or even a word of useful criticism. (The Security Service: Personal (PF Series) Files)

Such is the life of a jobbing writer, but it is even more frustrating when your task is to further a political cause as well as to earn a living. It also makes clear that, unlike Gollancz and his staff, Garman was working on behalf of the CPGB, and that this relationship was an explicit one.

The security services continued to monitor Garman's communist activities, stepping surveillance up as CPGB activities become more high profile. A report of 3rd May 1938 states that Garman is 'a well–known communist who used to live at Petersfield, and directed the activities of the Portsmouth local from there. He was a liberal subscriber to Party funds, and is now a director of Lawrence & Wishart, the communist publishers' (The Security Service: Personal (PF Series) Files). He lives with Ayriss who is 'undoubtedly an agent of the Soviet Espionage Service'. However, there is no reason to suspect Garman as an 'object of special enquiry', but they think communication may be going through him. He was followed between home and work at Lawrence & Wishart and there was a proposal to intercept correspondence to both his home address and that at Lawrence & Wishart. By 1938 they are clearly tapping his phone and accessing his bank account as in a report dated 23rd May 1938, they intercept a phone call to Garman from a Mrs Poulton regarding the leadership of the local Portsmouth branch of the CPGB.

It is also clear that Garman used Lawrence & Wishart to pursue CPGB activities. A report of 21st October 1938 states that Garman rang Rosalie Turner to find out the address of 'an important individual who is a Party Member but who is not known in the Party under his real name'. Turner then rang Robert Page Arnot (the Scottish–born founder of the CPGB and a fixture on the Central Committee of the CPGB throughout the Thirties), who was 'furious' with Garman for ringing up about this matter, the presumption being that he was suspicious that his phone was tapped. A report of 27th October 1938 states that a call made by Garman from the Lawrence & Wishart office to order a wireless transformer was intercepted. A security service note on the file says that this was 'almost certainly for transmitting a low power transmission […] possibly be used for Moscow'. A subsequent note on the file from 25th February 1953 says that the transformer could equally be used for a number of other purposes, such as 'an electric shower'. Apart from the slightly farcical element to this exchange it shows that Garman (who died in 1969) was still a target into the 1950s.

Garman's importance at Lawrence & Wishart was further cemented, according to a report dated 3rd February 1939, by his replacing Henry Parsons as 'head of Lawrence & Wishart'.

The lack of clarity surrounding Gollancz's relationship with the Communist Party is in sharp contrast to that of both Wishart and Garman, and one that resulted in Gollancz undertaking some vexatious litigation.

Gollancz and litigation

Despite Gollancz's later disingenuousness about the matter and his reluctant acceptance, this link in the wider public between the communists and the Club was one that dogged it from its very inception. There is a sizeable file in the Gollancz archive at the Modern Records Centre in the University of Warwick that covers Gollancz's legal dealings. This is sizeable because Gollancz was highly litigious. The papers that deal with litigation for the first three or four years following the founding of the Club in May 1936 are all combatting libelous claims about the closeness of the Club and, in some cases, the closeness of Gollancz personally, to the Party, or misrepresentation of Gollancz and his views.

As described at the beginning of this thesis, the *Ashridge Journal*, organ of the Ashridge Business School, claimed that Gollancz had lied about the number of members the Left Book Club had and pretended to arrive at a Club summer school event with his 'comrades' on foot when he had, in fact, been chauffeur driven. That this was politically motivated there can be little doubt. In his book *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918–1945*, Stuart Ball describes the relationship between the business school and the Conservative Party. In the Thirties those who attended Ashridge were 'a mixture of the most politically committed and intellectually minded party members and those who had the necessary resources and leisure' (Ball, 2013, p296). The exclusivity of the school led to the

creation of elitist ‘Ashridge circles’, which ‘provided much of the readership for the *Ashridge Journal*, the most intellectual of the party’s publications’ (Ball, 2013, p296).

Gollancz’s response to the Ashridge libel was to instruct his solicitors, Rubinstein, Nash & Co, to threaten legal action. The letter of November 1937 sent by Rubinstein to the *Journal’s* editor states,

> A considerable amount of the matter is not only ludicrously inaccurate but also defamatory. The Left Book Club has never claimed to have 70,000 members: it has always published the exact figure of its membership, and the last figure it published was approximately 46,000. Mr Gollancz also did not say anything so ludicrous as that 40,000 members of the club belonged to the teaching profession: he said that many members of the club were in the teaching profession. Mr Gollancz did not ‘evade with characteristic skill…a pertinent question concerning the finances of the club’: in answer to a question, he explained the position in a full and frank way. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/LB/3/1–71)

And finally, ‘Unless an undertaking is immediately given to correct this statement in your next issue in agreed terms, we are instructed to issue a writ for libel without delay’. That apology was inevitably forthcoming:

> APOLOGY TO MR. VICTOR GOLLANCZ. In the Ashridge Journal of September it was stated that, when he visited the Left Book Summer School at Digswell Park, Mr Gollancz left his car in the village and joined ‘the comrades’ at the school on foot. There is not a word of truth in this allegation […] The editor of the Ashridge Journal and Mr C. J. Alport, the writer of the article, desire to express their unreserved apologies to Mr Gollancz both for the untrue statement and for its implication: and they regret exceedingly the pain and annoyance it has caused him. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/LB/3/1–71)

Gollancz was never one pass a challenge or any perceived slight, let alone one from such a politically partisan publication.

It is also true to say that the size of the publication mattered little to him. If he felt there had been an article published that equated the Club with communism he would pursue it legally, even when it was a regional newspaper, such as the humble *Reading Star*. In a report of the Reading Conservative Association meeting published on the 14th January 1938 it was stated that the Left Book Club was a branch of 'the Internationale'. Gollancz took immediate issue with this (the fact that the speaker reported at the Conservative meeting, V C Redwood, was also the organizing secretary of the Right Book Club, might have provided additional motivation) and wrote to Rubinstein on 21st January saying, 'By "the Internationale" is meant, of course, the Comintern'. The right–wing version of his book club was also firmly in his sights: 'Much the best thing would be to proceed against the Right Book Club. I have reason to believe that they would not like to fight an action'. Despite not being familiar with the publication ('I know nothing of the paper (not even its title!)') in a letter to Gollancz dated 24th January 1938, Rubinstein advocates approaching the speaker to see if was accurately reported: 'The first step, in any case, would I think, be to write to the man and ask if he was correctly reported in making the false and defamatory statement in question'. In the event the newspaper's parent company, The Reading Standard Limited, backed down straight away and in a letter of 28th January 1938 said the 'error seems to have been due to an inaccurate summary on the part of our reporter to whom we have spoken on the matter'. The apology printed in the newspaper of that day says that 'Redwood was stated to have said that the Left Book Club was a branch of the Internationale, and its head was in Moscow. This is not true. What Mr Redwood actually said was that the Communist Party of Great Britain is a section of the Communist International' (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/LB/3/17). This libelous comment concerned Gollancz on two levels. Firstly, either Redwood had made the link between the Club and the Communist Party or the newspaper had misreported it, but whichever way Gollancz regarded this as yet another example of misrepresentation. Secondly, Redwood's role within the Right Book Club brought all of Gollancz's commercially combative responses to the fore: he was not going to allow

himself to be calumnied and he was not going to allow an attack from a commercial rival to hit home.

Similarly, Gollancz pursued the *Kentish Express* for a report of a speech by Sir William Wayland (MP for Canterbury from 1927 to 1945) that claimed that the Left Book Club was 'the organ of the Communist Party and edited by a foreign communist'. In a letter to the paper's editor Rubinstein once again has to lay out the structure of the Club:

> Our clients are the proprietors of the Left Book Club, which is not the (or an) organ of the Communist Party, nor is any foreign Communist connected in any way with the enterprise. The selectors of the books published by the Club are Mr Victor Gollancz, a member of the Labour Party, Professor Harold Laski, a member of the National Executive of the Labour Party and Mr John Strachey who, while a prominent Marxist writer, is a member of no Political party. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/LB/3/1–71)

Once again, the apology was immediate and fulsome, using the exact wording provided to them in Rubinstein's warning letter.

There can be little doubt that Gollancz was in a constant state of vigilance for any slight or misrepresentation. Looking for right–wing apologists within local newspapers was one thing, but Gollancz believed the vendetta extended into religious groups as well, especially the Catholic press which Gollancz believed 'is carrying on a huge propaganda against us' (Letter Harold Rubinstein dated 6th December 1937). There is some support for that view at this time. For example, the *Catholic Times* of the 25th June 1937 carried an article that claimed,

> The Left Book Club was originated by the Communist Party, its purpose being to create a large supply of leftist literature and present it to the people at an easy price […] While the Left Book Club is supposed to issue 'Leftist books', only literature which is consistent with and approved by official Communism is to be published. Evidently the Communist claims that only his party is the Left Party, and that even

> Trotsky's works are as anathema as those of Fascism. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/LB/3/5)

In his letter to Rubinstein, Gollancz writes,

> There is not a single word of truth in this, and is exceedingly damaging. The November book of the club was Hannington's THE DISTRESSED AREAS, and Hannington has never had anything whatever to do with the League of Militant Godless. The December book is Koestler's SPANISH TESTAMENT, and the same thing applies. […] As you are probably aware, there is an arrangement by which club members can obtain any book published by Messrs. Lawrence and Wishart at two–thirds of the ordinary price: and in every copy of the 'Left News' there are a few lines headed 'News from Lawrence and Wishart' in which some of their new books are mentioned. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/LB/3/1–71)

In a letter to Rubinstein dated 9th Feb 1938 Gollancz says regarding the deal with Lawrence & Wishart, that

> Lawrence and Wishart allow Left Book Club members to have their publications at two–thirds of the ordinary price, and in return for this concession we allow them a free advertisement under the heading 'News from Lawrence and Wishart'. In this way they simply describe two or three of their outstanding books of the month. The Left Book Club makes no recommendation in this matter whatsoever. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/LB/3/4)

In their letter to *The Catholic Times'* solicitors, Hickson & Co, of 22nd December 1937, the central issue of Gollancz's litigious habits is addressed, that is, how much of the published coverage of the Left Book Club is opinion and how much is libelous. Rubinstein writes that he doubts the accuracy of the report and rather identifies a different motivation for *The Catholic Times*' publication, saying that,

> their real motive in publishing the report was to propagate their views, by exposing our clients to hatred, and contempt, and that any desire they may have had to inform

> the public as to what took place at the meeting can have been only a secondary consideration. In this connection, we have only to refer to the uniform character of the speeches reported in your clients' paper, and to gibes at our clients in former issues of THE CATHOLIC TIMES, including a further reference to them on page 10 of the issue in question. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/LB/3/10)

Rubinstein goes on to reference the Salmon v. Isaacs principle and is sure that,

> the defence of privilege will not avail your clients. Your clients are of course at perfect liberty to propagate their views and opinions, but if in so doing they publish false, defamatory and a malicious statements about others, they can hardly expect to shield themselves behind the plea of the privilege enjoyed by ordinary newspapers. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/LB/3/10)

Like many successful men Gollancz had a tunnel vision that brooked no argument. He was personally aligned with the Left Book Club and in many ways it was created in his own distinctive image. A contributing factor in Gollancz's individualism was his otherworldliness. As Overy puts it, 'Gollancz was one of many from the wartime generation who rejected the privileged world in which they had been brought up and embraced the cause of the radical left' (Overy, 2010, p304). It is likely that the nearest Gollancz came to knowing a member of the working classes was his friendship with Pollitt[18], and the fact that he failed to see the contradiction at the heart of giving up his free time to work on the accounts of the ailing Workers' Bookshop, but turning up there to do so in a chauffeur–driven car, says much about not only his personal commitment, but also his lack of the common touch. In the threat of litigation directed at the *Ashridge Journal*, Gollancz's use of a chauffeur–driven car is given by Rubinstein as one of the areas that the Journal had lied about:

> there is one statement of which Mr. Gollancz is disposed take notice – i.e. the statement that 'Mr Gollancz, on a visit to the School, left his luxurious automobile in the village and

[18] Pollitt had been born into a working-class family in Droylsden in 1890 and started work in a textile mill aged just twelve.

> arrived among his comrades on foot'. Without going into the question as to whether Mr. Gollancz's 'automobile' is 'luxurious' or not, the statement is a plain lie, as can be sworn to by his chauffeur and by innumerable people at the school. Mr. Gollancz visited the school many times during the fortnight, and invariably drove up right to the entrance of the school where all the other cars, luxurious or not, of people attending the school were assembled. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/LB/3/2)

In this way he fits in with those other privileged intellectuals that peppered the Party in the Twenties and Thirties. Not only was he not attempting to be 'at one' with the masses, but he was wearing it as a badge of honour that he did not. One thing that did differentiate him from the 'MacSpaundays' and other poets and writers was his hard–headed business nous. It is this head for business that brings us onto the second question regarding Gollancz and the Left Book Club – was the Club exploited for Gollancz's personal financial gain?

Gollancz and the Left Book Club's finances

The fact that Gollancz, who started his publishing business in 1928, was already a successful businessman, both contributed to the success of the Left Book Club, but also raised doubts in people's minds about his reasons for starting the Club. Although he had already published a series of political, economic and educational titles; it was detective fiction, principally that of Dorothy L. Sayers, that was the basis of the company's success. His decision to publish Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* despite fundamentally disagreeing with the second half of the book, shows that he was not prepared to let politics stand in the way of what he estimated would be a bestseller, thereby reflecting Murray's assertion that a combination of political naiveté and commercial cynicism is required for successful political publishing (Murray, 2004, p51). Nonetheless, even Reid acknowledges that doubts could be cast regarding his probity: 'The obvious accusation that he was a sharp businessman cashing in on the political movement was often made, both at the time and subsequently' (Reid, 1979, p201). However, there is no sense in which Reid and others closely connected

with both the Club and the publishing company, believed Gollancz's political crusade to be anything other than genuine. The assessment of Gollancz by Lewis was that, 'He placed the resources of his publishing house behind the Club, but any idea that he reaped a rich profit from it is quite false' (Lewis, 1970, p137). Given the acrimonious way the relationship with Gollancz and both Reid and Lewis ended, it would not have been surprising if either of them had taken the opportunity for some point scoring, but the fact that neither of them do is indicative that his motives were purely political.

Not everyone outside Gollancz's inner sanctum felt the same, however. A columnist in *The Bookseller* wrote that although the Left Book Club was the most 'original and vital development in book publishing in a decade' (Edwards, 1987, p265), it was nonetheless a profit–making capitalist venture. This sort of doubt gave credence to suspicions regarding Gollancz's more potentially mercenary motives. As the *New Statesman and Nation* also pointed out between April and June 1937, as part of their criticism of the Club's reluctance to publish non–communist titles; the Club had cornered the market in Left books and because they offered such relatively high captive sales (owing to Club members being tied into the subscription model), authors were tempted to engineer their conclusions in order to meet the criteria of the selection committee. They also claimed this damaged other left–wing publishing houses by monopolising demand in a capitalist fashion. However, as Edwards points out, this rather ignores Secker & Warburg's success in attracting the left–wing books that did not meet the triumvirate's demands.

The main reason doubt remains is that the Club did not have separate accounts, so it is impossible to determine whether Gollancz lost money on the venture or not. As Edwards puts it, 'Victor was not prepared to admit publicly either to making or losing money on the Club. The consequence of his secrecy was that people believed what they wanted to, and that although overall he may have lost financially by the Club, his detractors forever believed

it to have been a gold mine' (Edwards, 1987, p265). It is, of course, possible that Gollancz lost money on the Club; there is certainly some evidence that he subsidised it financially.

At Lawrence & Wishart, the financial support of Wishart's personal wealth and that of a number of wealthy sympathisers, was the only way in which the company could remain solvent. Indeed, there is a gulf in the professionalism between the two companies. Although similar in both outlook and publishing output Victor Gollancz Ltd was run as professional commercial outfit that utilised modern and relatively sophisticated marketing and sales techniques; whereas Lawrence & Wishart, in comparison, were barely competent. They were chaotic with creditors often having to wait for long periods before being responded to. It appears that no adequate file could be consulted if the staff member responsible was out of the office and there was no reliable system for controlling sales and royalties. Authors often complained that the firm was late in supplying them with royalty statements or that they never received sales statements for their books. The royalty statements for 1937–8 show that not a single title in print for the half year had accrued royalties in excess of the advance paid to the author. John Sommerfield, for example, asked the publisher to waive the rights to his next book, which he was going to offer to Gollancz, as sales of his previous works were so poor. According to Hilliard, 'Neither his novel *May Day* nor his first–person account *Volunteer in Spain* had sold enough copies to exceed the advances on royalties that Sommerfield had been paid' (Hilliard, 2006, p48). He received an advance on *May Day* of £40 of which £24 remained unearned and an advance of £35 for *Volunteer in Spain* of which £18 had yet to be earned.

There is no doubt that Gollancz was not a profligate man, but the set–up of the Left Book Club meant that every title was, in effect, a bestseller. This meant that Gollancz could attract the best authors and pay them accordingly. Attlee received £600 for his book (according to the Office for National Statistics composite price index, that is the equivalent of over £42,000 today) and Spender was given an advance of £300 for *Forward from Liberalism* (the Left

Book Club choice of January 1937). However, from the beginning Gollancz showed his typical mix of generosity and parsimony. He was generally determined to keep wages and royalties low, thus keeping money aside for organization and promotion. This care with money also extended to his fellow selectors. Strachey was paid the usual reading fee of two guineas a manuscript and Laski was offered one guinea on the grounds that he already had a job, although in the end Laski accepted no remuneration. Gollancz's businessman's instincts meant that he would not risk bankrupting the company nor was he prepared to waste money. However, he gave both his time and money freely. Edwards believes there is no foundation to the accusations: 'The frequent allegation that the Club was but a cunning entrepreneurial device to make yet more money in the name of anti–capitalism had no validity' (Edwards, 1987, p230). Gollancz detailed the financial outlay in a letter in May 1938 to his friend J. B. S. Haldane saying,

> the Left Book Club, with its 50,000 individual members operating through 5,000 agents, not only has overheads disproportionate to those of any publishing business, but is also now, of course, an expensive political organisation – and all the money has to come from somewhere. We spend £12,000 a year on advertising and general publicity (absolutely essential in order to keep up the increase in Club membership): £3,000 a year on the free 'Left News': and about £5,000 a year on Dr Lewis's department (which involves huge circularisation, travelling expenses etc.) for the local groups. These three items alone amount to £20,000 per annum. The total number of books in a year is between 500,000 and 600,000 (i.e. and average of about 48,000 a month multiplied by twelve months): and if you take into consideration the authors' royalty and the booksellers' discount of 33 1/3rd per cent, you will find the three items alone that I have mentioned themselves amount to something like 1/4d and 2/6d. (Edwards, 1987, p257)

The same letter went on, 'and we haven't begun to consider the colossal overhead expenses (an army of girls working on the cards alone), or the manufacture of the books themselves! The fact is that at the end of the first two years of the Club's existence there is a

very considerable loss' (Hodges, 1978, p135). Lewis is in no doubt as to the financial commitments of the Club: 'If the Club ever made any money it was after the advertising ceased and the Groups Department was closed down – that is to say after the Club as an organisation based on the groups had come to an end' (Lewis, 1970, p137).

In the final estimation it must surely be concluded that although Gollancz would have been determined not to lose money on the Left Book Club venture he was prepared to sink his own money, time and effort into a political cause he wholeheartedly believed in. Gollancz's life and career are peppered with lost and unpopular causes, from support of the Anglo–German Institute after the Second World War and his involvement with the Jewish Society for Human Service to his support for prisoner welfare and the abolition of the death penalty, his vigorous personality allowed no room for disagreement. He occasionally let his business instincts rule his political heart, but through submission to the Comintern's diktat he also missed publishing opportunities, such as turning down Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*.

Conclusion

The question was posed at the beginning of this chapter: why has the Left Book Club pretty much been forgotten? If, as has been said, history is written by the victors, then by the end of the twentieth century there was no sense in which communism had won. The Communist Party of Great Britain collapsed along with the Soviet Union in 1991, forty–five years after the Left Book Club published its last book. In his memoir of his activist parents, the journalist David Aaronovitch summed up the CPGB's impact,

> Measured by the conventional yardsticks of democratic politics – members and votes – the Communist Party of Great Britain was a failure from its inception to its demise. But the degree of failure varied and with this variation so rose and fell the hopes, illusions and disappointments of its members. (Aaronovitch, 2015, p15)

Gollancz is remembered, if he is remembered at all, as the publisher of Orwell and Sayers, and Pollitt was the notorious subject of the song 'Harry Was a Bolshie' (or 'The Ballad of Harry Pollitt') sung in folk clubs around the UK during the folk music revival of the 1950s, but nowhere else. This conflation of the Left Book Club and the Communist Party, Gollancz and Pollitt ultimately led to the Club appearing to be merely a glitch in history. The creation of the Club may have been flawed from the very beginning by unintentionally having communism in its DNA, and with the communists coming to dominate not just the membership, but the book selections. However, despite his disingenuousness in public, Gollancz was very aware of this and fought it litigiously from the time the Club was founded. The Left Book Club was so closely associated with Gollancz and his publishing company that as Gollancz faded, so did the Club. The association between Gollancz and the LBC was inextricably entwined – politically, socially, commercially and most of all financially. Morgan has written, 'without him [Gollancz] and his publishing house, the Club in the form that it emerged would have been inconceivable' (Morgan,1989, p259). It is likely, given Warburg's keenness to publish his later works, that the most significant book published by the Club, Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, would have found a publisher if Gollancz had rejected it. Nonetheless *The Road to Wigan Pier* is also the one title that caused Gollancz the greatest amount of soul–searching, making it emblematic of the inherent compromises faced by the Club in order to achieve commercial success as well as to make its political points, and is therefore worthy of closer study and the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 3 'The kind of thing that makes converts'. A publishing history of George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*

In his introduction to *The Road to Wigan Pier* the book's publisher, Victor Gollancz, writes that he had 'in point of fact, marked well over a hundred minor passages about which I thought I should like to argue with Mr. Orwell in this Foreword' (Gollancz, 1937, pxiv). As this indicates, *The Road to Wigan Pier* in many ways provides the perfect case study of the Left Book Club's conflicted stance regarding not just its relationship with communism and the CPGB, but also commercial gain versus political objectives, exemplifying the inherent contradiction at the centre of the Left Book Club in one title. Despite the concerns of the Security Services, Orwell was never a communist and many of the communists distrusted him. He was, however, the most high–profile author to publish with the LBC and Gollancz knew that in publishing the title he would both antagonise the occupants of the CPGB's King Street headquarters (indeed he referred to the book in a letter to GDH Cole as 'quite violently anti–communist'), but also attract the greatest amount of attention from both the media and his members, and was a guaranteed bestseller, with over 47,000 copies being printed. In many ways Gollancz's foreword crystallises the Left Book Club's central dilemma as it can be seen as an act of appeasement towards the communists after publishing a book he knew they would take issue with. In the end Gollancz's capitalist tendencies held sway: he published what he knew would be the most lucrative book the Club would publish despite the controversy it would inevitably attract. This in essence is the dichotomy at the heart of the Left Book Club – the tension involved in publishing anti–capitalist works within an inherently capitalist industry. Gollancz's personal dilemma makes clear the compromises identified by both Murray and Williams when it comes to political publishing. Murray believed compromise was necessary, but for the Marxist Williams, political compromise in order to achieve financial success is what turned the radical press of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries into the inherently conservative, capitalist behemoths of the twenty–first century that we currently know today. What makes the book even more fascinating is that

Orwell's internal struggle is played out in the very structure of the book – the social reportage of the first part and an exegesis of socialism in the second – in much the same way as the LBC's dichotomy is made corporeal in the publishing of the book. As Fredric Warburg put it, 'The first part of *Wigan Pier* was a cinch for the Left Book Club, all that they could ask for and a gift to the Stalinist doctrinaires and fellow–travellers of the day. The second part was a tougher nut to crack' (Warburg, 1959, p227).

In this chapter I will look not just at the publication of the title under the auspices of the Left Book Club, but also Gollancz's conflict over whether to publish it, the mixed critical reaction to it and, finally, the continuing life of the book and how its paratext has both reflected the book's longevity and also helped create it.

In fact, Orwell took little part in the physical publishing of his book, so the question must be asked: why is it worth considering its publishing history? There are many studies of *The Road to Wigan Pier* that scrutinise Orwell's politics, literary technique and the impact of his life on the text, but there is no study of the book's publishing history and the way that has impacted on the text. By looking at the book's paratext we can determine an alternative publishing history that shows how it developed from seminal socialist tract to mainstream set text, and how that paratext influenced how it was read and how it was interpreted.
In his book *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997), Gerard Genette outlines a new form of literary study; one that does not rely on close critique of the text or literary theory, but one that is based on the impact of the publisher on the text or what Genette terms, 'the zone that exists merely by the fact that a book is published and possibly republished and offered to the public in one or several more or less varied presentations' (Genette 1997, p16). In other words, that includes the format, typeface, paper and anything that is printed in the book that is not the text itself. Published originally in March 1937 by Gollancz for the Left Book Club, *The Road to Wigan Pier* polarised opinion amongst the political tastemakers behind the scenes of the Club to such an extent that Gollancz felt it necessary to write an

introduction distancing the Club from the arguments of the second half of the book. In his foreword Gollancz acknowledges the power of Orwell's text. He says of the first half of the book, 'these chapters really are the kind of thing that makes converts' (Gollancz, foreword to *The Road to Wigan Pier* 1937, pxiii). The paratext provides an insight into how *The Road to Wigan Pier* was transformed from propaganda tool to being accepted as intrinsic to political discussion and a mainstay of education. I shall be addressing how each subsequent edition of the book changed the perception of the author, positioning him within the mainstream and the continuum of literary history, and asking how the paratext made that transformation possible.

The commissioning and publication of *The Road to Wigan Pier*

The genesis of *The Road to Wigan Pier* has long been the subject of debate. There is little doubt that it was Gollancz who encouraged Orwell to write *The Road to Wigan Pier*, covering social conditions in the north of England. However, the rest is open to conjecture. There is some confusion as to Orwell's motivation for writing the book and also the amount of his advance from Gollancz. D.J. Taylor sums up the conventional view, 'which Orwell to a certain extent encouraged' (Taylor 2003, p174). That view can be summed up as: 'Gollancz had commissioned him, at considerable expense, to go north to research a piece of reportage for his newly founded Left Book Club. The experience had, inter alia, the effect of converting Orwell to Socialism or at any rate strengthening an already serious interest in it; the book sprang seamlessly from what he saw' (Taylor 2003 p174). However, the reality appears to be rather different. Bernard Crick, in his seminal biography, says that Gollancz gave Orwell the considerable advance of £500 to write the book (Crick, 1980, p278). That would have been two years' income for the writer and more than the £400 he had been paid for *all* his previous books with Gollancz. Given that Gollancz was rarely free with money it would seem that such a sum is unlikely. It is more likely to be, as Taylor contends, that Orwell was in fact given £50 and that the book's advance is being confused with its profit.

What is not in doubt is that Orwell could not have made the trip without Gollancz's contribution. It was also not written specifically for publication by the Left Book Club. The meeting that led to the formation of the Left Book Club was only held a couple of weeks before Orwell left on his travels. In fact, the Club was announced in a two–page advertisement in the *New Statesman and Nation* on 29th February 1936. However, as Stansky and Abrahams put it, 'The truth, not the legend, is that *The Road* would have been written by Orwell and been published by Gollancz whether or not there had been a Left Book Club' (Stansky and Abrahams 1979, p178). Even after Orwell had returned he was not sure what to do with his notes – he considered producing a book of essays instead. In a letter to Jack Common Orwell described the book as 'a sort of book of essays' (Stansky and Abrahams 1979, p173). As Taylor asserts, 'it would be wrong to present Orwell's acceptance of the offer that produced *The Road to Wigan Pier* as a Damascene conversion – the first step on the road to the full–blooded Socialism of the later 1930's' (Taylor 2003, p167). Irrespective of debates regarding the book's genesis there can be little doubt about its impact.

Orwell posted the manuscript to his agent on 15th December 1936. Orwell met Gollancz on 19th December when they decided it would be illustrated, and twelve weeks later *The Road to Wigan Pier* was published on 8th March 1937 by the Left Book Club with the simultaneous publication of a higher–priced trade version. In addition, the first part was published separately by the LBC in May 1937 for 'propaganda distribution'. However, by the time *The Road to Wigan Pier* was published Orwell was already away fighting in Spain. He did not even see a proof of the manuscript. Instead it was left to his first wife, Eileen, to make changes and act as a go–between between the author and publisher, Gollancz.

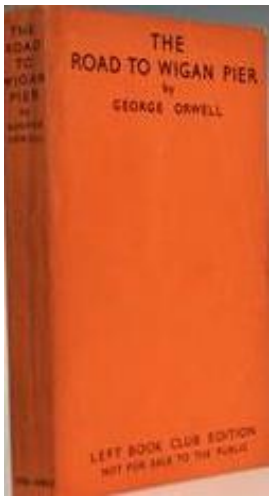


Figure 1: George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pie*r (Gollancz, 1937)

The original Left Book Club edition of *The Road to Wigan Pier* is in the Club's usual orange livery with 'Left Book Club' and 'Not For Sale To The Public' printed on the front cover, although not the distinctive Stanley Morison 'bottle–top' logo 'punched into the front covers, symbolically just left–of–centre' (Ian Holm, *New Statesman*, 16th May 1986). In that sense it is very much the Club and its aims that are being promoted and Orwell's book is just one of the 257 books published by the Club during its lifetime. Interestingly the trade version, published simultaneously, is a pale blue hardback. The only other LBC title to get a blue cover was the 'Additional' choice of July 1936, GCM McGonigle's *Poverty and Public Health*; leading LBC Groups convenor, John Lewis, to declare, '"Blue", good heavens! […] Vintage L.B.C. is in *orange* limp cloth binding' (Lewis, 1970, p56).

It was Orwell's fifth book following *Burmese Days* (1934), *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), and his second work of non–fiction reportage after *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933). By November 1939, 44,039 copies of the LBC edition, 2,150 of the trade versions and 890 copies of the first part had been printed, making a total of 47,079. In addition, a further 150 copies were destroyed in an air–raid.[19] Orwell and

[19] See Davison, A Note on the Text, (*The Road to Wigan Pier*, 2001, pxiii) where he details the initial print runs

Gollancz were never close and, as Crick puts it, 'they never got on first–name terms nor met socially; books were to be rejected and author and publisher were to quarrel' (Crick 1982, p278). When Orwell severed all ties with Gollancz in 1945, he wrote about Gollancz in a letter to Leonard Moore (Orwell's literary agent) on 3rd July, 'I have no quarrel with him personally, he has treated me generously and published my work when no one else would, but it is obviously unsatisfactory to be tied to a publisher who accepts or refuses books partly on political grounds and whose own political views are constantly changing' (Orwell, *Letters* 2011, p269). In reality, of course, Gollancz's political views, rather like Orwell's, tended to respond to changes in political circumstances. *The Road to Wigan Pier* was not published again in Orwell's lifetime (he died in January 1950), although the *News Chronicle* published a short section on 10th June 1937[20]. The first US edition was published by Harcourt, Brace in 1958 (and as a paperback under their Berkley Medallion imprint in 1961) and the next UK publication was when it was included in Secker & Warburg's uniform edition in 1959. It was first published by Penguin in 1962 and has been through several editions and versions since.

There are two myths regarding *The Road to Wigan Pier* that were perpetuated by renowned Orwell scholar Richard Hoggart, particularly in his introduction to the 1965 Heinemann edition of the book (and republished in *Critical Quarterly*). Firstly, the assertion dealt with above, that the book was commissioned specifically by the Left Book Club and, secondly, that Orwell believed the working classes smell – 'he tells us in this book that at first he found the English working–classes physically repulsive, much more repellent than Orientals' (Hoggart 1965, p73). It is Pollitt that first raises attention to Orwell's fascination with the implications of smell – 'What is the best way in which we can help them [the working classes]? And we don't do this by telling them they "smell"' (*Daily Worker*, 17th March 1937).

[20] Davison notes that this short section was published in a series devoted to 'young writers already famous among critics, less well–known by the public' A Note on the Text, (*The Road to Wigan Pier*, 2001, pxiii)

Hoggart perpetuates this view of Orwell and it is one that has taken such a hold that a recent book about Orwell, John Sutherland's *Orwell's Nose: A Pathological Biography* (2016), focusses on his olfactory obsession. Sutherland calls *The Road to Wigan Pier* 'the most smell–referential of his non–fiction books' (Sutherland, 2016, p13). An entertaining read though it is, Sutherland stretches credulity on the basis of almost no evidence, by claiming that, like James Joyce, Orwell's olfactory obsession had its root in a psycho–sexual coprophilia (Sutherland, 2016, p27). In fact, in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell was stressing that was a middle–class view of the lower classes, one that they found hard to break down:

> the real reason why a European of bourgeois upbringing, even when he calls himself a communist, cannot without a hard effort think of a working man as his equal. It is summed up in four frightful words which people nowadays are chary of uttering, but which were bandied about quite freely in my childhood. The words were: *The lower classes smell*. That was what we were taught – *the lower classes smell*. (Orwell, 1937, pp159–160)

This is what Sutherland calls 'The standard king–four–to–king–four defence […] that Orwell is not himself asserting that the lower classes actually smell but that we have been fooled, by social conditioning, into falsely thinking they do' (Sutherland, 2016, p153). Nonetheless there are fifty uses of the word 'smell' in *The Road to Wigan Pier*,[21] and as a result, this accusation of middle–class snobbery dogged him. Indeed, this accusation concerned Orwell so much that he wrote to Gollancz on 20th August 1937 saying,

> The statement that I think working people 'smell' is a deliberate lie aimed at people who have not read this or any of my books, in order to give them the idea that I am a vulgar snob and this indirectly hit at the political parties with which I have been associated. These attacks in the *Worker* only began after it became known to the Communist Party that I was serving with the POUM militia. (Orwell Letters 2011, p86)

[21] See Appendix III: 'The Smell Narrative of *The Road to Wigan Pier*' for key instances (Sutherland, 2016, pp240–241).

Orwell asked Gollancz to intervene on his behalf and to use his influence with *Daily Worker* staff, which he does. In a letter to Harry Pollitt, sent to the CPGB's headquarters in King Street, London, Gollancz writes, 'My dear Harry, you should see this letter from Orwell. I read it to John [Strachey] over the telephone and he assures me that he is quite certain that he said nothing whatever indiscreet' (Orwell *Letters* 2011, p87). Whatever the veracity of the attacks, they soon stopped. The criticism contained in Pollitt's review of Orwell's book was one of the many and varied responses. That this is unsurprising can be seen from the book's critical reception which will be covered later, but it was arguably the most divisive book Orwell wrote.

This accusation of class bias is one that once again highlights the tension at the heart of the Club. In its focus on education and a Popular Front agenda, the Left Book Club can be accused of 'talking down' to its audience. In publishing books, such as Hyman Levy's *Philosophy for a Modern Man* that had proved so difficult to understand that the author was required to explain it, the Club was driving a wedge between the Club activists and those they were seeking to influence. *The Road to Wigan Pier* dramatizes that 'wedge', not just in its content, but also in its production, such as Gollancz's foreword that takes issue with Orwell's text, and with the range of photographs depicting the misery of working life in Britain in the 1930s.

The design and production of *The Road to Wigan Pier*

There are two major differences between the original Left Book Club edition and future versions. Firstly, there is the inclusion of thirty–two photographs or plates and, secondly, there is Gollancz's Foreword. Orwell did not choose the images that were selected for that first edition and there is little to suggest that it was his idea to include them. The impetus appears to have come from a meeting Gollancz held with Orwell on 21st December 1936, just before Orwell departed for Spain. Also at the meeting was architect Clough Williams

Ellis (of Portmeirion fame) and it is probable that it was Ellis who suggested likely sources for the photographs, which Gollancz noted on a blotting pad and gave to Deputy Chairman Norman Collins to process. The illustrations were not used again until the *Complete Works* edition in 1986 and subsequently in the Penguin Classics version of 2001. In both cases the plates are of a slightly inferior quality than the original Left Book Club edition because they had to be reproduced directly from the LBC version. They presumably were not used in the Secker & Warburg and Penguin versions either due to cost or because it was felt that they did not add anything to the text, so the questions that spring to mind are what did the photographs add, if anything, and how important are they?

In one sense they are very much an afterthought in that, although they are redolent of the circumstances described in the book – poor quality housing and living conditions, slag heaps dominating the landscape – they are not explicitly tied into the text, as they are taken from all over the country, such as Blaenavon, Coatbridge, Bethnal Green and Stepney amongst other places. What they do add, however, is a visual depiction of what Orwell is describing – overcrowding, coalsearching, a miner washing in the scullery; which enhances the propaganda intentions of the text, thereby bringing home the realities of working–class life to the middle–class members of the Left Book Club. What Newsinger terms an 'informed, committed view of a middle–class visitor writing to influence a primarily middle-class readership' (Newsinger 1999, p34). The photographs also had an important propaganda role and they feature frequently in reviews of the book making them initially the most significant element of the book's paratext in its first edition. Douglas Goldring says of the first part of the book, 'This section is illustrated with thirty–two photographs of slums, which are calculated to shock even the most complacent' (*Fortnightly Library*, 19th April, 1937). Marxist journalist Goronwy Rees (another of those who turned anti–communist after the Soviet–Nazi Pact) wrote movingly of the illustrations especially the one called 'SOUTH WALES: Miners of the Fernhill Colliery come to the surface after a stay–in strike of nearly two weeks', which shows

a miner and his family leaving the pit, applauded by those above ground, and 'Overground' which depicts a family of seven crammed into one small room:

> These chapters are followed by 32 plates. It is a tribute to Mr Orwell that they fit the text exactly. They have the same power arousing emotion, and ideas, by a mere statement of fact. The most dramatic, perhaps, of these photographs is of the colliers leaving the pit after a stay in strike at Fernhill – the collier with his charcoal face, white eyeballs, gleaming teeth, cap aslant, baby on one arm and hanging to the other a girl with strangely dainty feet and slender legs who, in shyness, horror or disgust, hides her face from the photographers. The photograph has a macabre grandeur, like the passage in which Mr Orwell describes the aesthetics of industrial scenery; the photograph called 'Overcrowding' is a picture merely of hopelessness and misery. (*The Spectator*, 12th March, 1937)

Perhaps more significantly the plates place *The Road to Wigan Pier* within the English documentary tradition. They chime with the prevailing mood of documentary films such as Edgar Anstey's short films about the inhabitants of the London slums, *Housing Problems* (1935) and malnutrition, *Enough to Eat?* (1936). They also capture the zeitgeist of another kind of documentary project: the founding of Mass Observation in 1937 by film–maker Humphrey Jennings, the anthropologist Tom Harrisson, (whose *Savage Civilisation* about Malekula in the New Hebrides, the Left Book Club had published in January 1937*)* and the *Daily Mirror* journalist, poet and sociologist Charles Madge. Indeed, Jennings' biographer Kevin Jackson conjures up an enticing possibility that Orwell (or Blair as he would have been known at that time) may have tutored the teenage Jennings in the 1920s when both the Blairs and Jennings lived in Southwold. There was definitely a shared friendship with the poet Ruth Pitter and 'in adult life, Jennings would come to be a great admirer of Orwell's political writings, and there are a number of interesting affinities between these two fiercely independent–minded left–wing patriots' (Jackson, 2004, p10). Mass Observation was looking for 'scientific control of society' through mass observers 'who were asked to write a

report of what they saw and experienced in their ordinary lives on one day in every month' (Symons, 1960, p90). Indeed, Gollancz actually part–financed Mass Observation's Worktown survey on life in Bolton. Gollancz gave Harrisson, who was leading the Worktown project on behalf of Mass Observation, £500 in monthly installments as an advance on four planned books on politics, religion, pubs and holidays. Harrisson and his team had the reputation for a lack of organisation and it may well be that the promise of the four Gollancz titles had the beneficial effect of actually bringing some discipline to what might otherwise have been 'the seemingly unsystematic collection of often trivial observations in Bolton' (Hinton, 2013, p31). In the end, of the four books scheduled for publication by Gollancz in the autumn and winter of 1938, only John Sommerfield's *The Pub and the People* was published in a shortened form without the intended Humphrey Spender photographs, in January 1943. A version of the book on holidays, set in Blackpool, eventually appeared in 1990, but there was no attempt to revive the book on religion, and the book on politics was the source of considerable argument between Harrisson and the authors originally intended to write the book. It seems that by 1940 Gollancz had lost interest and Harrisson was too involved in Mass Observation's work for the Ministry of Information to look for an alternative publisher. Nonetheless this shows Gollancz's commitment to putting both his money and his publishing company into action with the aim of political change. Despite Harrisson's view that the Left Book Club, like most of the current forms of political interaction, lacked the contemporary language and awareness to make it effective to the working–classes (Hinton, 2013, p44), Gollancz shared his aim that the point of political observation was not just to understand the reasons for political apathy, but also to use the understanding to challenge popular indifference to the political process.

Within six months of the establishment of Mass Observation there were 1300 observers. Opinions on such events as Coronation Day and Armistice Day, plus assiduously gathered data on what people ate, what clothes they wore and what soap powder they used, led to a significant database of consumer information. As a result, what Mass Observation had

actually hit on was closer to consumer research than the 'scientific control of society'. In this sense the focus groups of the twenty–first century can all be said to have their roots in this market research of the 1930s. As Hinton states, 'Given the centrality of market research to the ways in which culture operates in contemporary Britain, one could rewrite the history non–judgmentally to trace MO's role in its development. But that would be to lose the uniqueness of what MO was in what I will argue was its prime during the war years' (Hinton, 2013, pvii). There can be little doubt that both Gollancz and *The Road to Wigan Pier* were both part of not just the success of Mass Observation, but also central to the period's general mood to capture and document life as it was *actually* lived.

If the excising of the foreword and photographic plates from future editions was a revolutionary development of the text, other paratextual changes were more evolutionary. We can see, for example, how the format and covers develop over time reflecting cultural changes, but also fixing Orwell iconically in the country's consciousness. For Genette, format is a marker of seriousness.[22] Even as the nineteenth century requirement for large, bound volumes became rarer we can still see today remnants of the traditional publishing process where a book is initially brought out as a large format hardback, then trade paperback, then pocket–sized paperback. The format of the original Left Book Club edition bucks this slightly because the first edition was paperback for Club members with a short run hardback for the trade market. The next edition is the Secker & Warburg uniform edition, which is hardback, before the small format paperback series starts with the Penguin edition of 1962. This movement in format reflects the ongoing change that had been in motion in publishing since the rise of the Penguin paperback as the dominant, mass–market size of choice. In that sense format mirrors the text's move itself from a specialist political tract with

[22] 'In the classical period, "large formats" (quarto) were reserved for serious works (that is, works that were religious or philosophical rather than literary) or for prestige editions that enshrined a literary work' (Genette, 1987, p17).

a small, if vociferous, audience, to its position as the key text for describing 1930s social deprivation.

The foreword that Gollancz felt impelled to write distinguishes the original edition from future versions of the text. Again, it captures a moment in time, much like the photographs. Indeed, in his opening paragraph he says that it is intended for Left Book Club members alone, 'members of the general public are asked to ignore it. But for technical considerations, it would have been deleted from the ordinary edition' (Gollancz, 1938, pxi). Thus indicating that the argument it lays out is not for a mass audience, but only those committed LBC members. Perhaps, therefore, it is right that it has been excluded from future mass–market versions. Nonetheless it shows the divide between the Club members and the wider public.

Victor Gollancz's Foreword

The foreword that Gollancz wrote for the first edition of the book is the second of two significant paratextual differences between the first LBC edition and subsequent ones. In many ways Gollancz's foreword is a matter of expediency. He disagreed with the second part of the book and knew that it would cause consternation with Strachey, Laski, the Club's membership and, most significantly, the Communist Party of Great Britain; the links to which dogged the path of the Club and contributed in no small part to its downfall. However, Gollancz was at heart a publisher and he had not made significant amounts of money from the crime novels of Dorothy L. Sayers without knowing a good publishing opportunity when he saw it.

The foreword was his way of both publishing the book and at the same time distancing himself and the Left Book Club from it:

> we find that many members – a surprisingly large number – have the idea that in some sort of way a Left Book Club Choice, first represents the views of the three

> selectors, and, secondly, incorporates the Left Book Club 'policy'. A moment's thought should show that the first suggestion could only be true in the worst kind of Fascist State. (Gollancz, 1937, pxi)

Richard Hoggart called the introduction, 'a classic minor document of English middle–class left–wing intellectualism and a striking example of much Orwell was attacking' (Hoggart 2001, pvi). Gollancz even has the temerity to suggest that this was not the right way to fight fascism, lecturing Orwell on the duplicity of words like 'freedom' and 'liberty' which are often used by a totalitarian Germany and which Orwell believes are more important than 'propaganda'. This at a time when Orwell was actually in Spain fighting the fascist Generals in the Civil War.

Gollancz takes particular offence at Orwell's view of socialists. He believes that Orwell finds them 'a stupid, offensive and insincere lot' (Gollancz, 1937, pxvi), which inevitably is not a description Gollancz recognises. One of the most notorious passages in *The Road to Wigan Pier* is Orwell's diatribe against socialists in which they are all described as cranks:

> One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit–juice drinker, nudist, sandal–wearer, sex maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist and feminist in England. (Orwell, 1937, p206)

Owen Hatherley views this as typical of what might now be termed Orwell's position as that of a 'Progressive Patriot',[23] a role that has inevitably been claimed by both sides of the argument: Left and Right. He says, 'This is chiefly an invective against the off–putting bohemians, radicals and cultists that he considered turned politics into a matter of lifestyle choice. It's also an attack on the Soviet sympathies and mechanized aesthetics of the interwar modernists' (Hatherley, 2017, p133). Gollancz, however, tried to see Orwell as a

[23] For Hatherley the notion of a Progressive Patriot includes the likes of Labour MP, Jon Crudas, and musician Billy Bragg, for whom Hatherley claims 'the "patriotism" that he refers to was that of tolerance and multiculturalism. The intended effect was to make radicalism a specifically English virtue' (Hatherley, 2017, p46).

product of his upbringing and background – 'a victim of that early atmosphere, in his home and public school, which he himself has so eloquently exposed' (Gollancz, 1937, pxvii) – but nonetheless he takes several pages to repudiate Orwell's assertions. Gollancz also takes issue with Orwell's rejection of industrialism; which Gollancz sees as the inevitable stage we have reached; believing that a socialist does not advocate industrialism any more than a man would advocate the sun or the moon. Rather, a socialist advocates socialist industrialism rather than capitalist industrialism. The irony of this coming from someone who operated very much within the capitalist industrialist system and who, as we have seen, took a dictatorial view of running both his publishing company and the Left Book Club, will not be lost on the modern reader. However, it is also part of Gollancz's 'explaining' what Orwell *really* means in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. Gollancz interprets what Orwell says in a way that is very much *not* the original meaning, claiming, for example, that Orwell's anti–socialist diatribe is him playing devil's advocate rather than the sincere rejection of socialism as it currently stands that it is.

On the face of it Orwell was accepting of the foreword. He wrote to Gollancz from Spain saying 'I didn't get an opportunity to write and thank you for the introduction you wrote to *Wigan Pier*, in fact I didn't even see the book, or rather the L.B.C. edition of it, till abt 10 days ago [...] I liked the introduction very much, though of course I could have answered some of the criticisms you made. It was the kind of discussion of what one is really talking about that one always wants and never seems to get from the professional reviewers' (Hodges 1978, p108). However, his second wife, Sonia Orwell, has since said that he actually disliked the introduction and only wrote in those terms because it was good manners to do so. In time, following the Soviet–Nazi pact which appalled so many LBC members, Gollancz became embarrassed about the introduction and was furious when it was reprinted by an American publisher in the Berkley Medallion version. Looking back as part of the fiftieth anniversary

commemoration of the launch of the Left Book Club in *The Observer,*[24] Hoggart wrote about Gollancz's introduction,

> His [Gollancz's] compromise was to publish the whole book but with a 3,000 word introduction by himself. It is still remarkable reading: Gollancz was desperately trying to be fair but was just as much anxious to assert the second half's unreliability and inaccuracy. This was not, it has to be said, a characteristic act of editorial intervention. But it happened and was not justifiable. Still, Gollancz, this time quite characteristically, had the decency to agree later that the Club did sometimes 'compromise with intellectual integrity. (*The Observer*, 18th May 1986, Victor Gollancz Ltd Archive, MSS.318/10/2)

Significantly it has not been reprinted, other than in anthologies, since, yet it stands as a document of the conflict at the heart of the Left Book Club: Popular Front ideology versus communist sympathy, the profit motive versus social progress, politics versus commerce, accrual of economic capital versus symbolic capital. This was an inherent conflict that was not lost on the first reviewers of the book.

Critical reception of *The Road to Wigan Pier*

The Road to Wigan Pier was very much a book of two halves and the impact of its publication was instantaneous and polarised. The collection of reviews held in the Gollancz archive highlight two things. Firstly, that all archives are curated. For example, Gollancz only preserved the good reviews, not the poor ones. Secondly, that all archives are partial, they are important as much for what they do not include as for what they do. That said the clippings file on *The Road to Wigan Pier* is the largest in the Gollancz archive, numbering into the dozens, compared to, say, the single figures for Attlee's *The Labour Party in Perspective*, and ranges from the responses of other authors to reviews in the media.

[24] In the piece, *The Observer* amusingly transposes the photographs of Gollancz and Strachey.

Walter Greenwood, author of *Love on the Dole* (1933), sums up the feeling of many of those reading it for the first time: 'I've just finished reading Orwell's "The Road to Wigan Pier" cover to cover. I found parts of it revealing, parts most interesting and still other parts downright infuriating. But I read it right through which is more than I can say of other books' (Victor Gollancz Ltd Archive, MSS.318/7/QU/6/4). Two things remain true about the archive – all the reviews held in it are positive and most are about the first half of the book only. This second point reflects the fact that in the main the reviews of the second half were less positive and, secondly, the second half was so controversial that it was not as much use as the propaganda tool Gollancz and the Club wished it to be.

It is clear that the first half of the book, however, was effective as a means of propaganda. Godfrey Winn's review in the *Daily Mirror* sums it up, 'I implore you to read every page of this book. It will horrify you, and make you very angry. It may make you sleep less comfortably in your bed at night, as it has made me. But you must read it' (*Daily Mirror*, 9th March 1937, Victor Gollancz Ltd Archive, MSS.318/7/QU/6/4). Or as V M L Scott on the *London Mercury* says,

> Part I, which is accompanied by an admirable collection of illustrative photographs, he devotes to a vivid, shocking and extremely salutary description of the working and living conditions in which thousands of our free citizens exist today. Part II is an attempt to answer the question, 'What, then, must we do?' (*London Mercury*, April 1937, Victor Gollancz Ltd Archive, MSS.318/7/QU/6/4)

The first half detailing living conditions in Wigan, Leeds, Sheffield and Barnsley were graphic enough to act as a wake–up call to anyone concerned about social conditions at the time. The people of Wigan, however, were less enamoured with Orwell's use of them as a yardstick for social deprivation. In its review of the book the *Wigan Observer* said,

> Mr Orwell has taken great care with his book, and all who wish genuinely to play their part in the modern world may profit in some way by reading it. But Wigan people, one feels, will feel a little hurt and heartsore that the blackest part of a borough that has

> fought well for centuries should be so held up for exhibition. This is only part of Wigan, as all who know Wigan well would agree. (McKie, *The Guardian*, 3rd April 2003)

The review of the *Wigan Examiner* preserved in the archive, appears more pedestrian, confining itself to a summary of the text. It does say, however, that Orwell 'describes with vigour and directness, many convincing and human pictures of slum life and overcrowding' (*Wigan Examiner*, 12th March, 1937). Other towns were included in the book, and the *Sheffield Telegraph* wrote that it 'stands out among the conglomeration of "journey" books about this country, and no one reading it will easily forget the contents or the author […] Mr Orwell went out with the object of getting the goods, and he did not fail' (*Sheffield Telegraph*, 11th March 1937).

The response also reassured Gollancz that he was right to publish it, especially as, according to Gollancz, it galvanised the Left Book Club membership. In a *Left News* editorial of April 1937, he wrote that it had produced

> both more, and more interesting, letters than any other Club choice. The book has done perhaps in a greater degree than any previous book, what the Club is meant to do – it has provoked thought and discussion of the keenest kind. I may confess now that the selectors chose this book with some trepidation, as there was so much in it that they personally found repugnant: but we are certain now that it has been a most valuable choice. (Hodges, 1978, p108)

He also wrote about its use as propaganda – the first part was, 'one of the best weapons in rousing public conscience about the ghastly conditions of so many people in England today' (Laity, 2001, p4).

The Road to Wigan Pier also brought Orwell to the attention of another group who were less interested in social change – the security services. It was Orwell's work during 1936 on *The Road to Wigan Pier* that first aroused suspicion, initially with the local police, but which

triggered the opening of Special Branch and MI5 files. There are two files on Orwell – Special Branch[25] and MI5[26]. Both are very slim files (a total of sixty–two pages) making him probably the least monitored writer on the Left during this period.[27] Part of the evidence against Orwell was simply guilt by association, in that he was published by Victor Gollancz Ltd who were noted as 'a firm which specialises in left–wing literature' (Special Branch report 11 March 1936 MEPO 38/69 serial 2a). The slimness of the files on him probably reflect the fact that Orwell was not only *not* a Communist Party member, but that he chose to follow his own idiosyncratically independent path through the Left's orthodoxies. The first report on him at this time was from a detective constable on 22nd of February 1936 who was suspicious because 'a member of the local Communist Party was instrumental in finding Blair [Orwell] accommodation [and because Blair had] attended a Communist meeting in this town addressed by Wal Hannington' (Smith, 2012, note 19 p188 MEPO 38/69 serial B). The detective clearly was not familiar with Orwell's published work, however. Although Orwell was gathering information for his book, it looked to the suspicious police that it was the activity of a communist spy. This was not the view of Orwell, of course, either in the book or in his diaries. The accommodation was arranged by Joe Kernan, who was a union member and member of the ILP, and Orwell was unimpressed with Hannington, calling him 'a poor speaker, using all the clichés of the Socialist orator, and with the wrong kind of Cockney accent (once again, though a Communist entirely a bourgeois), but he got the people well worked up' (p116 of the *The Road to Wigan Pier* diary in *Collected Essays* p201). In Orwell's diary, Pearce notes that Orwell is 'surprised by the amount of Communist feeling: there were loud cheers when Hannington announced that if England and the USSR went to war, the latter would win. The audience was 'rough…but very attentive', in sharp contrast to Orwell's judgement in the book that the working class had 'grown servile'' (Pearce, 1997, p427). By 1942 the security services had moderated their view of him and he was seen as one of the

[25] MEPO 38/69, 1936–42, 24pp
[26] The Security Service: Personal (PF Series) Files: KV 2/2699, 1936–51
[27] In contrast Stephen Spender's file is around 200 pages and W.H. Auden's almost 130 pages

non–communists on the Left – 'he has lately thrown in his lot with Victor Gollancz who as you probably know has severed all connection with the Communist Party. Blair undoubtedly [has] strong Left Wing views but he is a long way from orthodox Communism' (Smith, 2012, note 62 p190, 4th Feb 1942 KV2/2699 serial 8a). A cursory reading of the second part of the book would have made it clear to even the most unliterary Special Branch employee that Orwell was as far from communism as someone on the Left could be.

Nonetheless it was the second half that inspired the greatest response to the book. John Strachey (one of the triumvirate behind the Left Book Club along with Gollancz and Harold Laski) objected to it as did Harry Pollitt. In his review of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain, wrote that it was the work of 'a disillusioned little middle–class boy who, seeing through imperialism, decided to discover what socialism has to offer' (*Daily Worker*, 17th March 1937). Not only did Pollitt disagree with Orwell's conclusions, but he also took offence at the terminology Orwell used. As Kevin Morgan points out, this may well be because Pollitt came from a similar Lancastrian background to the one Orwell describes and Pollitt's mother was anything but the slatternly housekeeper described in the book. As if personally affronted, Pollitt writes, 'most Lancashire women who read this book would like to dust Orwell's pants for his insults and delicate nose' (*Daily Worker*, 17th March 1937). Reflecting his own house–proud mother, and in contrast to the squalor described in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Pollitt talks of

> the Lancashire homes of shining brass, gleaming steel, of clean curtains and stoned doorsteps, the spotlessly clean homes of a working class that were the backbone of the Chartist movement, that formed some of the first trade unions, that conducted historic fights for free speech long years before Orwell was born […] this is the Lancashire that Orwell has missed. (*Daily Worker*, 17th March 1937)

Despite this Pollitt is not blind to the potentially positive effects of the book – the way it brings the plight of the miners to the Left Book Club members and the book's indictment of

housing. In this Pollitt is highlighting again the educative role of both *The Road to Wigan Pier* and the Left Book Club itself.

Another of the reasons Pollitt disliked the book and rejected Orwell's take on the movement was that for Orwell, Socialism was about the personal and not about, for example, the ownership of the means of production. Raymond Williams's Marxist critique of Orwell takes a similar line; that Orwell's view is too personalised, too restricted by a nostalgic notion of England that is typical of his class, and that he is unable to see the monolithic structure that holds the economic and political system together: 'Orwell hated what he saw as the consequences of capitalism, but he was never able to see it, fully, as an economic and political system' (Williams, 1971, p26). For Williams, Orwell's personalising of class differences misses the point. He details the snobbery of accents, clothing, furnishing and so forth, all of which, for Williams, are 'often little more than external and trivial' (Williams, 1971, p24). Williams does, however, acknowledge the journey that Orwell is on in *The Road to Wigan Pier*: 'He thought of himself as an anti–imperialist and an anti–fascist, as a believer in equality, and only through these positions as a Socialist' (Williams, 1971, p55). By the time of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell sees socialism as the one political system that can prevent fascism in Britain:

> Yes I believe there is some hope that when Socialism is a living issue, a thing that large numbers of Englishmen genuinely care about, the class–difficulty may solve itself more rapidly than now seems thinkable. In the next few years we shall either get that effective socialist party that we need, or we shall not get it. If we do not get it, then fascism is coming; probably a slimy Anglicised form of fascism, with a cultured policeman instead of Nazi gorillas and the lion and the unicorn instead of the swastika. But if we do get it there will be a struggle, conceivably a physical one, for our plutocracy will not sit quiet under a genuinely revolutionary government. And when the widely separate classes who, necessarily, would form any real Socialist

> party have fought side–by–side, they may feel differently about one another. (Orwell, 1937, p263)

It is Spain, however, that ultimately makes Orwell a revolutionary socialist. Williams once again shows the educative process Orwell has gone through, thereby highlighting it as a sort of 'lesson' for the Left Book Club reader.

The movement from part one to part two is the tension at the heart of the book, one that is not resolved in the way Orwell presumably intended. As Robert Collis puts it,

> At first *The Road to Wigan Pier* wants to show us the problem, which is unemployment and exploitation, and then show us the remedy, which is Socialism. Orwell sets it up like this because that is how he wants us to read it. But in fact this is not how the book does read. Instead, Socialism emerges not as the solution but the problem, and the unemployed and exploited emerge not as the problem but the solution. (Collis, 2013, p61)

There can be no doubt, however, that it was a major talking point at the LBC group meetings. This can be seen in Ralph Glasser's comment in *Gorbal's Boy at Oxford*, 'I marvelled that "*The Road to Wigan Pier*", to me naive, had made such a stir. I could think of nothing in it that was not obvious, but when I said so in the Cole Group it was as if I had uttered a mortal heresy' (Glasser, 1988, p41). One convener wrote to Gollancz to say that the second half had caused a great deal of soul–searching at group meetings and that it, 'exercises our wits [...] we sit up and sharpen our brains so as to refute his erroneous notions' (Laity 2001 p4). It is significant, given the largely middle–class composition of the Left Book Club, that many members welcomed it as a call for them to face up to their class prejudices. Comments such as, 'perhaps the misery of class–prejudice will fade away and we of the sinking middle–class [...] may sink without further struggles into the working class where we belong, and probably when we get there it will not be so dreadful as we feared, for, after all, we have nothing to lose but our aitches' (Orwell 1937, p264), provoked one member to write to Gollancz saying,

> I was often on the verge of joining a Socialist party, but it needed Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* to make me realise that my middle–class background was no reason why I should not consider myself a convinced Socialist, without heeding the taunts of my acquaintances to the effect that it was ridiculous for me to identify myself with an organisation which would despise me as not being working class. I think differently now, thanks to George Orwell and the Left Book Club. (Laity, 2001, pp4–5)

In his review of the Secker & Warburg edition over thirty years after the original publication, Philip Toynbee wrote that *The Road to Wigan Pier* 'was received, as I remember, with obloquy by Communists and fellow–travellers, but with enthusiasm by many' (*Encounter*, August 1959, p81). As a communist of that period Toynbee dismisses the second half of the book as 'ill–tempered and extremely conventional attacks on the intelligentsia – who as a group is no better and no worse than the proletariat', but praises 'the degree to which Orwell understood the real nature of the English social problem and his own strange role in it' (*Encounter*, August 1959, p82).

In his essay *A Kitchen in the Morning*, academic and poet Charles Causley recalls being lent *The Road to Wigan Pier* along with works by Auden, Spender, Day–Lewis, MacNeice and Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* by 'a young, unemployed, linotype operator, six or seven years older than myself' (Causley, 1987, p104). Despite the fact that it was a miner who stepped up to speak about *The Road to Wigan Pier* at the Manchester Left Book Club group; according to Jonathan Rose, 'miners were not much interested in reading about miners' (Rose, 2010, p246), and he cites the lack of library withdrawals of *The Road to Wigan Pier* in mining communities as evidence for this. As was often levelled at the Left Book Club this may well be largely the middle–classes or educated working–class talking to their own.

The afterlife of the book, however, was considerable and extensive. It broke out of its confines as left–wing polemic and into, not just a key text for social historians, but also the fulcrum in Orwell's oeuvre; the point that he went overground and became, in a sense, the

author we know today. Key to this is the way in which future editions of not just this text, but others in Orwell's canon, were developed by publishers.

Further editions and developments in the publication of *The Road to Wigan Pier*

Despite having started life as a book club choice, it is notable that *The Road to Wigan Pier* has always been published as part of a series. Genette believes that the series acts as a way for publishers to control the classification of their output. In marketing terms, it is about branding or 'emblem' as Genette terms it. If we look at the colour coding of the original Penguins – orange for fiction, grey for politics, red for theatre and so forth – we can see that this is about the publisher imposing their classification on what they are publishing. This has the effect, as Orwell himself would have been acutely aware, of sublimating the author, who might well have categorised themselves differently, in favour of what might be termed a more 'totalitarian' imposition of category from above. What might, in fact, be expected from a capitalist industry. If Orwell's oeuvre can be boiled down to one phrase it is what Hoggart calls, 'a struggle towards a liberation, liberation from the constrictions of class' (Hoggart 2001, pvii). Ironically then, Orwell's books have rarely managed to break out of the constrictions imposed by publishers. First it was dressed in the orange livery of the *Left Book Club* series, then in the considerably duller colours of the Secker & Warburg uniform edition before flourishing in design terms with the Penguin versions, albeit always within the confines of an admittedly wide-ranging series. As with most of the paratextual elements of any published work, the series fulfils a marketing function fixing the books, particularly in the case of the iconic 1975 colourised edition of Orwell's titles, in the mind of the reading public.

A key part of fixing that image or what could be termed the Orwell 'brand', is the book's cover. As Genette points out, the printed cover is a fairly recent phenomenon from the early nineteenth century. Prior to that books tended to be bound in leather at the behest of the owner. Once having a printed cover became established, it was rapidly exploited to promote

both the author and the publisher. Following on from the original Left Book Club publication, the next version, the uniform Secker & Warburg edition, focuses on Orwell, but is very plain. In Genette's terms it is 'mute' with just the author, title and publishers name on it. In a sense this is something designed to look good on the bookshelf, but it imparts nothing to the reader. It is perhaps significant that this issue came nine years after Orwell's death, by which time his reputation was safe. Warburg notes that he paid Orwell an advance of £150 for the acquisition of *Homage to Catalonia*, but that it took until after Orwell's death for that advance to have been earned, fourteen years after it was given (Warburg, 1959, p232).[28] Perhaps, therefore it was unnecessary to embellish editions of Orwell given his high profile at that time.

The first, what could be termed 'modern' version, is the 1962 Penguin edition. The first of Orwell's books to be published by Penguin was *Down and Out in Paris and London* in 1940. This was under a contractual agreement that allowed Orwell to issue a cheap edition two years after the original publication, if Gollancz had not. In a 1943 letter Orwell suggested publishing *Homage to Catalonia*, *Inside the Whale* and especially *Burmese Days* as 'I should say *Burmese Days* was much the most hopeful' (Hare 1995, p103). Orwell had been critical of Penguin in the past. He wrote in *New English Weekly* in 1936, 'The Penguin books are splendid value for sixpence, it is, of course, a great mistake to imagine that cheap books are good for the book trade. Actually it is just the other way about' (Hare 1995, p101). However, it is the Penguin editions that did most to fix Orwell in the public consciousness.

The 1962 version is important for both Penguin and Orwell. In 1962 Penguin's art director Germano Facetti commissioned three designers to devise a new standard grid for the crime series covers. A grid that provided an area for an illustration or graphic image, but that still

[28] Warburg also notes that the initial print run of *Homage to Catalonia* was 1500 and that following sales of 683 in the first six months the title sold less than 50 copies a month until after Orwell's death when all the copies rapidly sold (Warburg, 1959, p238).

retained a clear, consistent typography. Romek Marber's grid was the successful design and he went on to design over seventy covers for Penguin. The typeface used was Intertype Standard and interestingly the design had a relaxed view of capital letters, which are used on *The Road to Wigan Pier* front cover, but not on the Facetti designed cover for *Nineteen Eighty–Four*. So successful was the Marber grid that it quickly spread from crime novels and was the design template used for the first tranche of Orwell Penguins.

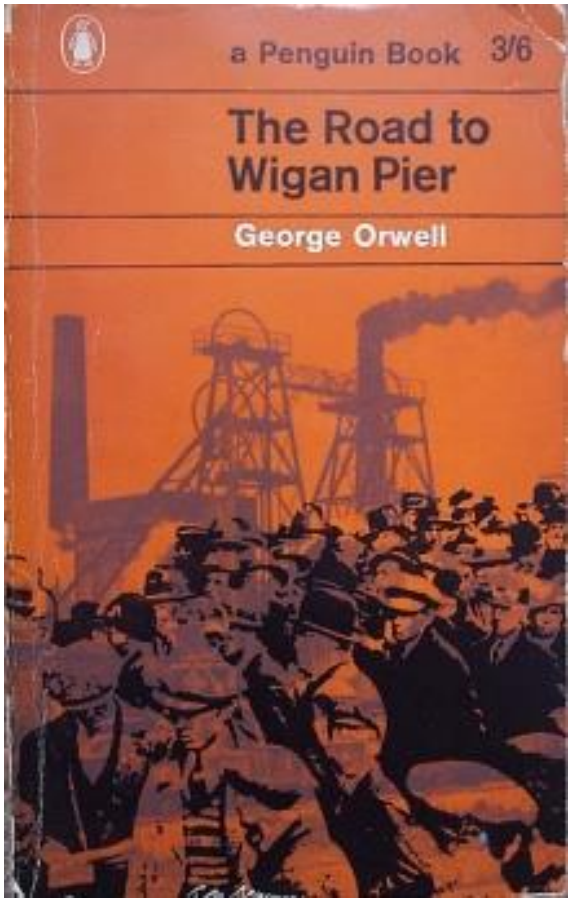


Figure 2: George Orwell*, The Road to Wigan Pier,* Penguin (1962)

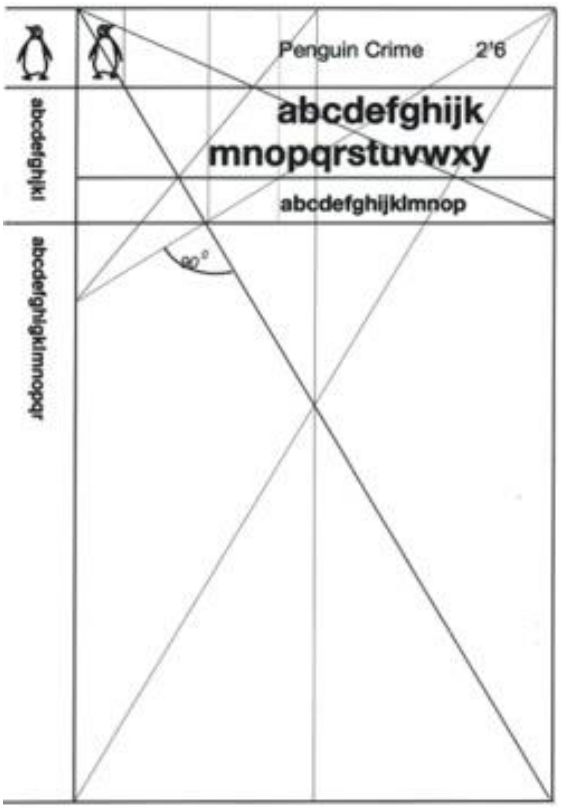


Figure 3: Grid created by Romek Marber for Penguin in 1962

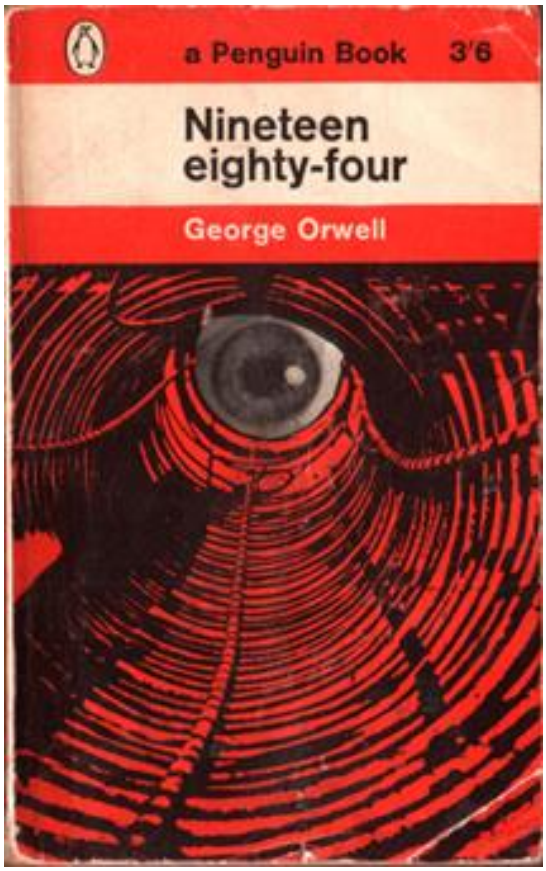


Figure 4: George Orwell*, Nineteen Eighty–Four* (Penguin, 1962)

The Road to Wigan Pier was designed by Alan Fletcher, who had been taken on as freelance designer by John Curtis, the previous art director. Fletcher designed many covers for Penguin and went on with Forbes and Gill to form the internationally successful Pentagram design group. Fletcher defined his style as, 'More of a visual jackdaw than a compulsive collector, I acquire stuff' (Fletcher 2001, p1). His claim that he looked at things from unlikely angles is borne out by the juxtaposition of images of a pithead and what looks like a dole queue on the front of the 1962 edition. Penguin's brand is reinforced by the famous logo and the familiar orange, used traditionally, of course, by Penguin for its fiction titles. It is on the back cover, though, that the Orwell myth begins to appear. Most striking is the now familiar BBC photograph of Orwell with his piercing eyes and ascetic features. The blurb focuses on the second, controversial part of the book claiming that he was 'Trained at Eton to be a snob but disgusted by the oppressive methods he had applied in the Burma Police, George Orwell set out as deliberately as William Cobbett to make contact with the working class in England.' The alignment with Cobbett's *Rural Rides* (Orwell's book is called an 'Urban Rides' in the blurb) is significant in placing Orwell within the canon of social reportage. That Orwell was by this time part of the canon can be seen in John Lewis' summary that 'Orwell, with great expertise, did for our time what Dickens and Zola had done

for theirs. He brought home to the sleeping imagination the real lives of suffering men and women' (Lewis, 1970, p36).

The next Penguin edition published in 1975 is arguably the most well–known edition of the book. It continues to align Orwell with Cobbett (although Cobbett is unnamed), but now mentions the Left Book Club, thereby placing him within the tradition of socialist writers. The

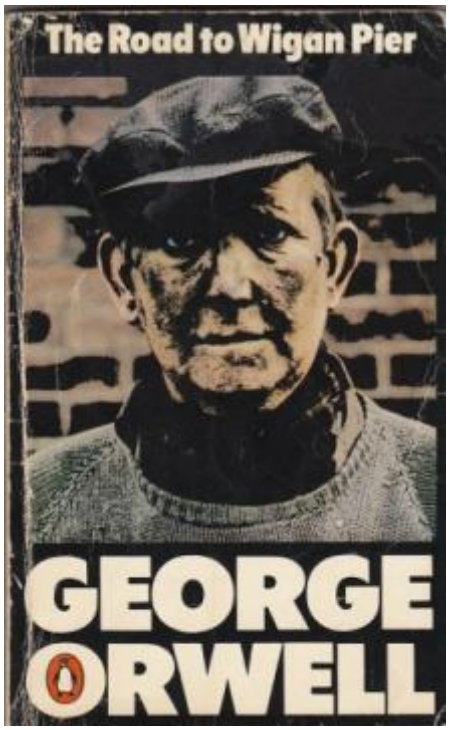


Figure 5 George Orwell*, The Road to Wigan Pier* (Penguin, 1975)

iconography of Orwell is now almost complete with a larger BBC image on the back cover and the author's name in large white out capitals. Significantly, the Penguin logo now sits within the 'O' of the author's surname, thereby making author and publisher synonymous. The front cover features a colourised photograph taken by Humphrey Sutton, whose photographs are on the front of all of this series. Given that most books on the shelves of bookshops are spine–out, the spine has become an important promotional tool and it is used much more strongly on this version than the previous edition.

Increasingly a book's paratext has become another word for marketing, in that all the paratextual elements of a book are harnessed towards its sales and promotion. It is about how well a title displays (in a bookshop window, say, or on a shelf) and how all of those

elements that are not the author's text, are marshalled towards the book's marketing message. This might be the cross–marketing of titles within the book, supporting quotes or, as we have seen, cover design and author photographs. Publisher Stanley Unwin was a keen advocate of using 'other publications' for promotional purposes. In his book *The Truth About Publishing* (1926), a key 'how to' guide to the world of publishing originally appearing in the twenties and then subject to numerous revisions and reprints, Unwin advises that this should be a key purpose of any new title, especially if they are being published as part of a series:

> Each book is made, as far as practicable, to advertise its fellows. Not only the jackets, but any spare pages at the end of the volume can be devoted to this purpose. The latter have special value, as they confront the reader when he has just finished a book and is most likely to be allured by a new one. (Unwin, 1976, p167)

In Orwell's case little opportunity was lost to cross–market his previous titles. In the original Left Book Club edition, on the page opposite the title page, Orwell's previous books are listed along with a supporting quote; including a particularly underwhelming one from the *Morning Post* about *A Clergyman's Daughter* saying only, 'The description of a night in Trafalgar Square is unforgettable'. There are however more effusive quotes from J. B. Priestley and Compton MacKenzie for the others. By the time we get to the 1962 edition, Penguin are taking stock of Orwell's oeuvre and are, surprisingly given his more well–known titles, choosing to focus on promoting *Coming Up for Air* and *Homage to Catalonia* in the back pages. The back cover features unattributed quotes from the *Guardian* and the *Daily Telegraph*. Supporting quotes have disappeared altogether from the 1975 edition, but significantly by this stage, as one of the most well–known writers of the twentieth century all of his titles are listed at the back of the book. It might be said that by this point the value of Orwell's symbolic capital was at its highest. The language of *Nineteen Eighty–Four* had seeped into the public lexicon, even if the public did not know where it had come from, and the term 'Orwellian' was a familiar one for describing a particular form of totalitarian dystopian future. Orwell as a socialist icon, while not as ubiquitous as the famous image of

Che Guevara, had become fixed in the public's mind, largely as a result of the paratext of the Penguin books. Perhaps owing to his poor health and the throat injury received whilst fighting in Spain, there is no existing recording of Orwell's voice and relatively few photographs, but what we have is that image carried by the Penguin paperbacks.

There are not many adaptations of Orwell's works into film or television programmes, but an early version of *Nineteen Eighty–Four* established some of the Orwellian iconography we are now familiar with. A heavily cut version of the book was aired on the CBS network in the US in 1953, just five years after it was first published and three years after the death of its author. Despite being reduced to just fifty minutes in length the image of Big Brother watching over the population of Oceania is there. It is not represented as the Stalin–like image of later films, however. Instead David Ryan describes the image as a 'hairless, freakishly distorted cartoon face [that] looks like something *Mad* magazine has commissioned from Picasso' (Ryan, 2018, p17). By the time the third and most recent film adaptation was released[29] the iconography is fixed in the public's consciousness, although the poster frequently appears only in the background rather than front and centre. There is a sense that in some ways lead actor, John Hurt's physical appearance has been chosen deliberately to be similar to that of the 'gangling, lugubrious, chain–smoking Orwell' (Ryan, 2018, p11), thereby reinforcing the ascetic image we have of Orwell from the covers of those Penguin editions.

One of the more unusual film adaptations of Orwell's work is the 1973 film of *The Road to Wigan Pier* as a musical documentary. Directed by the Canadian Frank Cvitanovich and broadcast on 16th October 1973 on ITV, it uses Orwell's words narrated by Michael Jayston, and throws 'archive footage, staged reconstructions, folk music, still photographs and Welsh male voice choir into the mix' (Ryan, 2018, p101). The black–and–white archive footage

[29] The Michael Radford–directed version of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was released in 1984 and starred John Hurt as Winston Smith and Richard Burton as O'Brien.

used in the film reflects the photographs included in the Left Book Club edition of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, which in a sense provide the template for the film in that they are suggestive of Orwell's subject matter rather than directly depicting it. The folk singer Bob Davenport sings songs that are interspersed through the narrative, until at the end of the film the director diverts from Orwell's source text and has Davenport address the camera and ask, 'Well, Mr Orwell, whatever happened to your dream of socialism?', thereby reinforcing the relevance of Orwell's book for a modern television audience in much the same way as each subsequent Penguin edition brought the book up to date for modern readers, causing them to reflect on the times they are living in and placing it in the continuum of a working–class narrative.

The paratext of the Penguin editions and the iconography and images of the various Orwell film and television adaptions are self–conscious constructions and could be said to be as fictional as Orwell's texts. Much textual research has been done on the disparity between Orwell's 'tramping diaries' for *The Road to Wigan Pier* and the final text, especially in *The Road to Wigan Pier* diary in *Collected Essays*.[30] However, Orwell used his observations and the 'facts' of what he observed to construct a persuasive political argument. As Newsinger puts it, 'It is important to acknowledge that his was a political endeavour, admittedly of considerable literary merit, but nevertheless a political invention' (Newsinger 1999, p33). If the Left Book Club could use the epitext, as Genette terms the marketing material, to promote the aims of the Club, via the famous 'PLEASE' leaflets included in their version of the book saying, 'PLEASE show this book to a friend...' and pointing out the price difference to club members (2/6) compared to the 'cloth–bound edition for the general public' (10/6), then Orwell could use his text to promote his political doctrine.

[30] *The Road to Wigan Pier* diary is included in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters, Vol.3: As I Please, 1943-1945* edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus

Once an author is dead there is little he can do to control how his image is used. As Crick says in his introduction to his biography of the writer, 'Orwell's reputation and influence have increased since his death and show no sign of diminishing' (Crick 1982, p16). In effect the paratext of *The Road to Wigan Pier* and Orwell's other titles have repackaged him for public consumption. The book's paratextual history reflects his development from just one of many left–leaning writers with a visual representation that reflects the uniformity of his position as a Left Book Club writer, to a clearly defined image that can be summed up in a photograph and a few phrases. The Orwell identity emerged, as it were, from the paratext. The LBC version solely reflects the ethos of the Club – it is a plain 'manual' without frills. Indeed, like the posthumous versions, Orwell himself played little part in the publishing of the book. By the time the Penguin edition was published Orwell's profile was on the rise, but the book's paratext still reflects the publisher more than the author. When the next edition is published the symbiosis of publisher and author is complete – Orwell is a 'Penguin author' and they are as closely entwined as the logo and the author's surname on the cover. The paratext helped construct the myth, a myth that persists to this day. As McKie notes at the end of his *Guardian* article – 'In two big London bookshops where I looked for it this week, *The Road to Wigan Pier* is shelved under fiction' (McKie, *Guardian*, 2003). *The Road to Wigan Pier* always had a purpose, whether that was to convert people to socialism or whether it was impart a version of 'George Orwell' constructed by the publishers. In the end the paratext is simply a vehicle to help carry that message to the reader. By examining the circumstances of the book's publication, its reception by readers and reviewers and evaluating it against the main tenets of Genette's paratextual theory, it is clear that the paratextual elements were both affected by the culture of the time, but conversely those same paratextual elements influenced how it was read and received. In a broader sense it can also be seen how the book moved from being taken as 'fact', as a political travelogue, to a 'fiction' that is open to interpretation and misrepresentation. A development aided and abetted by the book's paratext.

Conclusion

Although it is unlike any other book published by the Left Book Club and is arguably the most controversial of the Club's choices, *The Road to Wigan Pier* has in many ways come to define not just the Left Book Club, but also Gollancz's dilemma regarding his and the Club's close relationship with the Communist Party of Great Britain. Additionally, there is some irony and not a little contradiction in the paratext of this and the other Orwell titles being used to promote the works of capitalist publishing companies. Despite starting life with the instructive aim of educating those not familiar with the impoverished areas of the North, presenting the locals rather like an anthropologist 'just returned from studying the conditions of an oppressed tribe in Borneo' (Toynbee, *Encounter*, August 1959, p81), the book becomes part of a marketing phenomenon, where the paratext of the published title is used as a billboard to cross–sell the publisher's wares. That this was to be the case became clear soon after *The Road to Wigan Pier's* publication. None of the books that Orwell had written to this point – fiction or non–fiction – had significant sales. They had caused ripples in the shallow pool in which the intelligentsia (and to some extent the security services) paddled, but not with the general public. Gollancz originally rejected Orwell's *Burmese Days*, which was published by American publisher Harper's. Out of an original print run of 2,000 copies 976 were remaindered within months of its publication. After the publication of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, however, Orwell's backlist became more attractive and the Penguin edition of *Down and Out in Paris and London* (Orwell's earlier work of non–fiction and for which he had received an advance of £40 from Gollancz in 1933) had a print run of 55,000 when it was published in December 1940

The publication of *The Road to Wigan Pier* was in stark contrast to Orwell's next book, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), which was rejected sight unseen by Gollancz because of Orwell's service with the POUM in Spain and presumably so as not to antagonise Strachey and Pollitt. The POUM was a small revolutionary party which preferred workers' control to

that of the existing Spanish Popular Front government. It was denounced for its Trotskyite tendencies, which as Edwards says, was 'now a useful catch–all term for all left–wingers opposed to the Soviet brand of communism' (Edwards 1987, p246). *Homage to Catalonia* was instead published by Secker & Warburg with a considerably lower print run of 1,500. In his autobiography, *An Occupation for Gentlemen*, Warburg claims that Orwell spoke to him to discuss *Homage to Catalonia* prior to going to Spain, but this must be mistaken as Orwell offered the book initially to Gollancz. By the time *Animal Farm* was published in 1945 Orwell is a recognised voice of the BBC and ready for the recognition (and notoriety) that book, and the subsequent *Nineteen Eighty–Four,* would bring. Despite its move into the mainstream, its position as a touchstone for 1930's social deprivation, and its inspiration for a number of subsequent books, such as *Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the 80s* by Beatrix Campbell (Virago, 1984), Stephen Armstrong's *The Road to Wigan Pier Revisited* (Constable, 2012), and Darren McGarvey's recent *Poverty Safari: Understanding the Anger of Britain's Underclass* (Picador, 2018), *The Road to Wigan Pier* divided opinion even before its publication, in its critical reception and, as we have seen, was still causing a mixed reaction when the Left Book Club was being reappraised fifty years after its inception. Nonetheless it remains the pivotal book in Orwell's oeuvre, the point at which he works out his position on politics and establishes his own idiosyncratic path. It is also emblematic of the move within publishing companies during the twentieth century to turn into the commercialised marketing machines we understand them as today. Throughout its publishing history *The Road to Wigan Pier* can be seen as a signifier of the tension between the commercial and the political. As a Left Book Club title its sales figures were higher than any similar piece of non–fiction polemic might have reasonably expected (see the previously mentioned, much lower print run for Orwell's next work of non-fiction, *Homage to Catalonia*). As a publisher Gollancz published it because he knew it would have an educational and political impact, which was after all the aim of the Club, but he also knew that it would sell in large quantities, which as a commercial publisher was his priority. Gollancz may not have expected the book to have the long life that it has given the very specific time period Orwell

is writing about, but one of the reasons for the longevity is the profile that Gollancz's marketing skills had given it. Even before the founding of the Left Book Club Gollancz had the reputation as an advertiser *par excellence*. His inspirational techniques are ones that we would easily recognise today in our large trade publishers. In the next chapter I will look at how Gollancz applied the techniques he had honed marketing the likes of Dorothy L Sayers, to the Left Book Club and its publications.

Chapter 4 ‘The age of shouting had arrived’. Victor Gollancz and the marketing of the Left Book Club

Introduction

When George Orwell’s advertising copywriting anti–hero, Gordon Comstock, declared in the 1936 novel *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (Gollancz, 1936), ‘advertising is the rattling of a stick inside a swill–bucket’ (Orwell, 1936, p55), he was expressing the dichotomy between the creation of art and the pursuit of revenue. A struggling writer, Comstock gives up a respectable middle–class job in advertising to work in a bookshop and to concentrate on his failing writing career. This conflict between the accrual of money or the gaining of artistic credibility theorised by Bourdieu, is seen nowhere more keenly than in publishing during the period. It is also significant that the third of Orwell’s novels was once again published by Gollancz, because, despite the widespread view that generally, in publishing, it was a time of inertia, of maintaining the status quo, it is, of course, not as simple as that. As Stephen Brown notes, ‘The production of literature has always been beholden to the marketplace. The myth of the struggling artist in a garret is an artefact of the Romantic Movement of the nineteenth century, many of whose leading lights made the most of their anti–marketing marketing positioning’ (Brown, 2006, pp13–14). Despite a lack of innovation in the industry in the 1930s, reading numbers increased, more books were sold than ever before, the industry commercialised to an extent unseen in previous decades, and three of publishing’s most innovative men – Gollancz, Lane, and Unwin – came to prominence.

This chapter seeks to explain how this came about. How an inherently conservative industry, with its prices and profit margins stabilised and protected by the Net Book Agreement, became radicalised in a way not seen before. To what extent did that very conservatism make innovation both necessary and inevitable? The growth in readership and disposable income during the period made commercialising the publishing industry necessary if it was

to grow and prosper, and business in general was waking up to the possibilities offered by marketing, meaning that publishing needed to harness the power of marketing if it was not to fall behind the business curve. The Net Book Agreement was not going to protect publishers forever (the growth of book clubs, with their discounted prices, showed that), so in effect it was innovate or die, and most of the business innovation was taking place in marketing and advertising.

Marketing can sometimes be about art or politics, but it is always about business. In sales and marketing, economics is the baseline and Return on Investment is King, and the main focus is on the accrual of economic capital, to use Bourdieu's term. In a sense it is the interface between the publishing company and capitalism. The editorial department, for example, can argue that it has the accrual of symbolic or cultural capital in mind when it is deciding which books to publish, but sales and marketing are solely focused on the financially beneficial disposal of their publishing stock. The rise of the marketer and the ubiquity of marketing practices over the course of publishing in the twentieth century would be a completely understandable development for Murray, who would regard it as a necessary part of the compromises political publishers would need to make to stay in business and be successful. Others, such as Williams, would disagree that it was a price worth paying. However, where does that leave a personally wealthy, philanthropically inclined, but commercially–minded publisher, such as Gollancz? His enthusiastic take up of the new marketing tools and processes that had come to prominence in the 1920s started with his time at Ernest Benn, accelerated with the founding of his new publishing company in 1928, and reached its zenith in 1936 when the Left Book Club was founded. It is true to say that Gollancz's success was founded on three pillars: an unshakeable faith in his own abilities; an uncanny knack of selecting the 'right' titles commercially; and a thorough embracing of all that marketing and publicity had to offer, with little thought as to how it might appear to others as long as it was working for him.

Marketing and advertising within publishing also breaks (or at least intrudes into) two of the dominant book history theories of recent years: Robert Darnton's Communications Circuit and Gerard Genette's Paratext. In his seminal essay 'What is the history of books?', which first appeared in *Daedalus* in the Summer of 1982, Darnton defines book history as the 'social and cultural history of communication by print [arising] from the convergence of several disciplines on a common set of problems, all of them having to do with the process of communication' (Darnton, 2006, p9). In this essay, Darnton proposes a communications circuit, starting (and finishing) with the author and including publisher, printer, shipper, bookseller and reader. What is noticeable by its absence is marketing and advertising. Darnton acknowledges this when he writes 'the whole subject of book advertising needs investigation. One could learn a great deal about attitudes towards books and the context of their use by studying the way they were presented – the strategy of the appeal, the values invoked by the phrasing – in all kinds of publicity, from journal notices to wall posters' (Darnton, 2006, p18). In addition to this impact on the perception and reception of the book, marketing and advertising breaks the circuit as it can appear multiple times throughout the cycle, such as prior to publication, on publication, and to promote future editions. Despite his acknowledgement of this lacuna, Darnton's focus on the eighteenth century inevitably leads to questions about the circuit's applicability to later publishing processes, especially that surrounding promotion in its many forms, and consequently the circuit has been revised and reformulated by book historians and publishing studies scholars many times since it was first devised.

Genette's theory of paratext, however, expressly avoids much discussion of marketing, advertising and publicity material. He acknowledges it, yet dismisses it, giving it less than a page of coverage. Genette's work on paratext revolutionised how we consider 'the book'. He defined paratext as 'what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public' (Genette, 1997, p1). In effect that means everything, except the text itself. Having divided paratext into two elements – peritext

(everything contained within the published work) and epitext (external connected material, such as interviews, letters, diaries and so forth) – Genette focusses on the role of the publisher in what he terms the publisher's peritext – 'the zone that exists merely by the fact that a book is published and possibly republished and offered to the public in one or several more or less varied presentations' (Genette, 1997, p16). It is the public epitext – 'any paratextual element not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in the virtually limitless physical and social space' (Genette, 1997, p344) – and in particular the publisher's epitext, that concerns us here. Genette is highly dismissive saying that he 'won't dwell on the publisher's epitext because 'it's basically marketing and "promotional" function does not always involve the responsibility of the author in a very meaningful way; most often he is satisfied just to close his eyes officially to the value–inflating hyperbole inseparable from the needs of trade' (Genette, 1997, p347). That this situation was already changing is clear from Juliet Gardiner's article, '"What is an Author?" Contemporary Publishing Discourse and the Author Figure', when she writes, 'The author not only writes the text, increasingly in various ways she or he speaks it, circulating its meaning through media interviews, reviews, business reports and so–called news items, in "personal appearances," at readings and literary events.' (Gardiner, 2000, p65). Genette defines publisher's epitext as covering posters, advertisements, press releases, and commercials on radio and television, but, despite both authors and their publishers needing to participate in media activity, whether for reasons of necessity or enjoyment, he seems unwilling to engage with its impact on the book primarily owing to its proximity to trade and commerce. Nonetheless all of the above (and more besides) shaped how the book was produced and received, and there is no publisher in the 1930s that understood the power of that more than Gollancz.

The commercialisation of publishing in the 1930s

For Jonathan Rose the British book trade first became modern around 1890. It protected its interests with the Net Book Agreement (NBA) and the Society of Authors secured international copyright protection. The NBA, in particular, became the basis of the British publishing industry for most of the twentieth century and reflects the publishing industry's position at the time as an essentially conservative one, dedicated to preserving its assets and the status quo. As Feather also argues, the NBA 'achieved precisely the objective for which it was designed: the stabilisation of prices and the de facto regulation of profit margins to guarantee a reasonable income to the publisher and bookseller' (Feather, 2006, p152). That, however, created problems: how were modern entrepreneurs going to make a living in a publishing world created and circumscribed by the literary establishment, and how was a politically progressive publisher going to achieve both their political aims and meet their sales targets in the face of a restrictively conservative industry?

The first challenge came from an unexpected source – *The Times* Book Club. Set up in 1905 primarily as a way of boosting circulation, as subscribers to the paper were entitled to borrow books from the Club or buy them at a significant discount, *The Times* manager, Moberley Bell, was influenced by the business and advertising practices of two American booksellers, Horace Hooper and W. M. Jackson, whose practices were very much not the norm in British publishing. With the NBA fixing the retail price of books, part of the Club's appeal was that members could buy books at greatly reduced rates, thereby undercutting the restrictions of the NBA, and making a significant impact on expanding the range of reading habits. Initially publishers were compliant in this, believing that *The Times* had signed up to the NBA. When it emerged that the Club was actually selling books at 33 1/3% discount on the net price, which in many cases was similar to the discounts offered to booksellers by publishers meaning that books were effectively being sold at cost, publishers withdrew their books from the Club, beginning a 'book war' that went on through 1906–7.

The NBA remained in place, however, with little challenge to its primacy until after the Second World War.[31]

The first British book club proper was the Book Society, founded in 1929. Unlike its US antecedents it was a bulk buyer of books direct from the publishers, rather than a publisher in its own right. It took Gollancz's Left Book Club to really challenge the publishing trade's hegemony. Unlike the Book Society, the Left Book Club published original titles especially for Club members, charging members less for them than the commercial rate for non–members.

The other challenge to publisher margins came from changes within society itself. The twin pressures of increasing readership and decreasing paper supplies meant that the commercialisation of books during the 1930s was a financial necessity to cope with the increasing demand. According to Joseph McAleer, reading increased after the First World War (McAleer, 1992, p43), and the reduction in reading matter available as a result of paper rationing only seemed to increase demand, despite mass unemployment and the increase of alternative forms of recreation, such as the wireless and cinema. According to figures from *The Publishers Circular* (later *The Bookseller*), the number of reprinted and new adult fiction titles peaked in 1935 and remained high for the whole of the Thirties (McAleer, 1992, p43). Clearly these production levels were not affected by the Depression. It is worth noting that during that same period adult fiction reprints outnumbered the publishing of new titles, presumably because publishers favoured proven titles rather than the financially risky new ones. *The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* also records that there were 263 British and Irish publishers in 1930 and 320 in 1939, and by 1950 there were 572 (McAleer, 1992, p47).

[31] The Net Book Agreement was investigated by the Restrictive Practices Court in 1962, before finally being dissolved in March 1997

During the inter–war period paper rationing had an impact on the publishing trade. Indeed, it took until 1936 to recover from the post–First World War low in fiction publishing. Paper rationing in the First World War was not as severe as during the Second World War, which was intended to release as much paper as possible for military use. The Control of Paper Order of February 1940 restricted publishers to 60% of the total stock they had used in 1939. Publishers complained that this was unfair as 1939 had been a comparatively bad year, given the outbreak of the War. By 1943 it was down to 6.5%. That this was an issue for the under–resourced publications of the Left can be seen in documents collected in the archive of leading member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (and its sometime General Secretary), Rajani Palme Dutt. A letter from W. G Hubbard, the Manager of the Leicester Co–operative Printing Society Ltd, of 29th September 1930 states that the cost of printing 3,000 copies of the sixty–four page (plus cover) *Labour Monthly* was £49/10/. By December 1939 *Labour Monthly* includes an appeal to its readers for additional money to combat the increase in paper costs:

> A LABOUR MONTHLY reader, living on a very meagre pension, on first hearing that paper and printing costs had forced up the price to 1s. 6d., at once took out a six months' subscription, saying 'I can't afford to do without it'. (Rajani Palme Dutt Papers, CP/IND/DUTT/10/03)

In a note to Sir Andrew Duncan, the Minister of Supply, of January 1943 it is stated that *Labour Monthly* used 420 cwts (or hundredweight) of paper in the 12 months to August 1939 although based on the number of copies printed it would seem to be closer to 200 cwts. Declaring *Labour Monthly* to be 'a non–profit–making theoretical and scientific journal, devoted to the elucidation of the Marxist viewpoint of philosophy, science, economics, political and cultural questions' (Rajani Palme Dutt Papers, CP/IND/DUTT/10/03), the note makes claim to being a special case and requesting an increase in its paper supply. Part of the special case is based on the increase in the paper's circulation:

> The pre–war circulation of the LABOUR MONTHLY at September 1939 was 9,200 copies. Wartime growth raised the circulation to 50,000. Subsequently this had to be

> cut down as paper restrictions increased and the present circulation stands at 15,000 in very reduced format.
>
> Compared with pre–war, the LABOUR MONTHLY has reduced the number and size of its pages so that it is only 31% of its former size. In addition, it has greatly lightened the weight of both its text paper and cover paper, decreased it margins and reduced its type size to the extreme minimum. (Rajani Palme Dutt Papers, CP/IND/DUTT/10/03)

Such were the privations of publications that did not have special access to government, especially a government not known for being sympathetic to those on the Left. Additionally, there were also restrictions on the number of new titles and reprints, and an increase in the number of small publishers of light fiction during the War that made the paper shortage even worse. As McAleer wrote, the result was that publishers 'were forced to cater to the tastes of a specific audience (in this case the lower–middle and working classes) more closely than before in order to ensure the maximum sale and to cover rising production costs' (McAleer, 1992, p70).

Furthermore, during 1935 seven million readers borrowed 208 million books from public libraries. This increased until by 1949 twelve million readers were borrowing 300 million books. Plus, there was the expansion of the 'Pay as you read' or 'twopenny' libraries during the 1930s, usually run alongside newsagents, tobacconists or department stores. They were seen as 'loss leaders' to get people into the shops. Their stock consequently reflected the nature of the users, being lighter in content than public libraries. This democratisation of reading was not welcomed everywhere. For the Mass Observation project, sociologist and, (from 1941), member of the LSE's Political and Economic Planning group, Kathleen Box, rather sniffily differentiated between middle class intellectuals who generally bought books and were the members of book clubs, and the working class people who 'like reading from public libraries, twopenny libraries, and grubby little sweet shops [rather] than from Charing Cross Road' (McAleer, 1992, p7). By 1938 average wages were a third higher than they

were in 1913 and some of that increase was being spent on books and reading. Consequently, there was also an expansion of chains such as John Menzies and W H Smith.

Faced with this economic pincer movement of growing demand and falling margins, it was left to canny publishers to innovate wherever possible. For McAleer the Thirties was ‘the first time the mass reading public was commercially managed and exploited in a recognizably modern way’ (McAleer, 1992, p7). With production costs rising after the First World War it was necessary for publishers to increase revenue, and the most effective way of doing that was to produce more lower–priced, ‘inferior’ fiction. Where before the War selling half of a 1000 print run of a new title would take a publisher into profit, in the post–First World War period it was necessary to sell 1800 out of 2000 copies to avoid a loss. This had an inevitable impact on small publishers and new authors as publishers were less likely to take a risk on an untried author when margins were so tight, and almost inevitably larger publishers came to rely on cheap editions of previously published titles. The inevitable result of this was that books had to be produced and marketed ‘along commercial lines. These included “commodity–style” techniques: fiction had to be carefully planned and packaged, often as a series, all with an eye on potential sales. Hence, books and magazines became commodities to be marketed and sold like soapflakes’ (McAleer, 1992, p54). To use Bourdieu’s terminology, publishing at that time was focused on the accrual of economic capital. The tight fiscal margins meant that thoughts of any symbolic capital to be gained were secondary to staying afloat financially.

Publishing was not to remain like that, however, and according to Jonathan Rose the new publishers of the turn of the century embraced modernist literature, which until fairly recently was regarded by critics as rejecting commercialisation. However, publishers’ ledgers and literary agents show they were in fact ‘shrewd profit–maximising entrepreneurs’ (Rose, 2009, p343). For example, at the Bodley Head, the company’s publication of poetry, using large

type and margins, and leaving the pages uncut, made it appear that people were getting something akin to a private press book. The small print runs and advertising style only emphasised that. The company has been called by Margaret Stetz 'the first [modern sales campaign] to focus not on individual authors or titles, but on an entire line of new and unfamiliar merchandise; the first to create and to sell an image of the publishing firm itself' (Rose, 2009, p344).

In a period of development for publishers, the Thirties saw three of the great innovators rise to prominence – Unwin, Gollancz and Lane. On the face of it they were all different, but they had certain things in common, one of which was that they all began their careers in conventional publishing houses.

Perhaps the greatest publishing innovator of the period was Allen Lane at Penguin Books. Penguin, founded in 1935, pioneered the introduction of low–price, high quality paperbacks. Lane was not the first to publish competitively–priced paperback versions of contemporary works. McCleery argues that Lane's innovation was a particularly Anglo–American centric view of book history and that German publishers had been combining commercial success with a 'mission of the democratization of knowledge through provision of good books at low prices' (McCleery, 2015, pp165–166), since the turn of the century. He acknowledges that the establishment of Penguin 'can be rightly perceived as a transformative moment in the history of British publishing but not in a wider global context' (McCleery, 2015, p166). Nonetheless, Penguin were undoubtedly influenced by Albatross Books, who had been publishing out of Germany for the UK market since 1932, and McCleery has identified a direct link between the two publishers.[32] That there was not a co–publishing deal between Penguin and Albatross appears to be the result of issues surrounding copyright licensing

[32] See Alistair McCleery's essay *The Return of the Publisher to Book History: The Case of Allen Lane* (*Book History*, Vol 5, 2002, p166) for a discussion of a memo from 1934 that details discussions of a co–publishing deal between Penguin and Albatross that would have resulted in the setting up of a 'Modern Library' in the UK with Albatross publishing the titles elsewhere.

rather than any ideological or business disagreements. The real innovation came from Lane's sales strategy – very low–price, high–volume, high break–even point (typically 17,500 out of the first print run of 20,000) and sales conducted through unconventional outlets. Rose calls Penguin 'perhaps the first truly classless books in Britain: affordable for everyone yet packaged in an attractively democratic format that would appeal to all readers, however genteel' (Rose, 2009, p345). As John Feather puts it, 'His [Lane's] idea was simple: publish cheap and attractive books, but publish good books, and sell them where people bought other goods' (Feather, 2006, p171). Publisher Fredric Warburg, too, credits Lane with galvanising a moribund industry in the mid–1930s. In the first volume of his autobiography he wrote,

> There can be no doubt that in 1935–6 the publishing world was having a difficult time. The daily newspapers had been selling large quantities of books at give–away prices in a frantic effort to increase their circulation above those of their rivals […] These sales, and many others like them, which did not pass through the bookshops, were damaging to booksellers and publishers alike […] However, hope sprang in the hearts of some publishers besides myself in 1935–6. Mr (now Sir) Allen Lane was to produce in June 1935 the first ten titles of a new series of cheap reprints, bound in strong paper covers, to sell at 6d. a volume. The series was to be called 'The Penguin Books'. (Warburg, 1959, pp178–179)

In the first year three million copies of fifty titles were sold, giving a turnover of £75,000 (McAleer, 1992, p59). Innovative marketing techniques, such as a vending machine (the Penguincubator) and sell–through via department stores, such as Woolworths and Marks & Spencer, bypassed traditional bookselling. Many publishers copied them but, despite Rose's contention, Penguin did not appear, in fact, to appeal to working–class readers. According to a Mass Observation study commissioned by Penguin after the Second World War, working–class Penguin readers only made up 9% of the total reading public. Perhaps it was as McAleer contends that 'working–class readers were few, a result of both the quality of fiction published and of the ingrained resistance among these classes to book–buying even at

sixpence a copy' (McAleer, 1992, p59), or perhaps Lane's bold move was still too innovative for the working–classes in those cash–straitened times. Nonetheless, the 1930s saw major innovations in publishing, the most significant of which, was largely down to Lane.

Gollancz was also quick to see the potential of the paperback, even if others, such as Jonathan Cape, did not. Perversely perhaps, this resulted, in Gollancz's refusal to allow any of his titles to be published in the paperback format. Nonetheless, typical of Gollancz's thick–skinned pragmatism, according to Gollancz's biographer, Ruth Dudley Edwards, this did not prevent Gollancz offering his 1942 pamphlet *Shall Our Children Live or Die?* to Penguin once the hardback market appeared saturated. Unsurprisingly 'Lane refused with great courtesy' (Edwards, 1987, p365). Gollancz had attempted a paperback series before. He set up a subsidiary company called Mundanus in September 1930, with the express purpose of publishing paperbacks. With a uniform set of covers designed by Stanley Morison, and printed on thin paper, the aim was to publish fiction in a paperback format at a price that would be both affordable to the reader and commercially viable to the publisher. The first three titles were Louis Marlow's *The Lion Took Fright*, John Heygate's *Decent Fellows*, and *Gunman* by Charles Francis Coe, and which sold 14,000, 20,000, and 10,000 respectively (Hodges, 1978, p51). It ran for two years and, although initially successful, the reviews for the early titles were lukewarm and the launch of Penguin Books in 1935 flooded the market. The new company had a cohesion that the Mundanus list lacked and ultimately Gollancz's imprint failed because Gollancz would not take the same risks over long print runs as Lane. Ironically, Gollancz, the great innovator and experimenter, failed through being too conventional.

Being conventional was not an accusation that could be targeted at Gollancz after this time, however. The Left Book Club broke with every convention the publishing trade regarded as sacrosanct during the Thirties. It bypassed the Net Book Agreement by publishing its own titles and by–passed the majority of booksellers, liaising only with those sympathetic to

Gollancz's Popular Front cause. However, Gollancz was not just a publisher of political causes, he was also skilled at selecting which titles to publish. His first bestseller was the autobiography of dancer Isadora Duncan and although Gollancz may have had a talent for selecting good detective and middlebrow fiction, as Feather argues, he 'recognised that there was more to publishing than choosing good books. They had to be sold. In this aspect of publishing he was a genius, and it is perhaps here that his true originality lies' (Feather, 2006, p168). Indeed, more than any publisher of the period, Gollancz harnessed the power of the new–fangled marketing techniques that were coming to prominence during the period. From the beginning Gollancz made sure his titles stood out. All Gollancz books had eye–catching yellow and black covers, and regular newspaper advertising made his firm's logo familiar. He took advice from typographer Stanley Morison, who ensured that Gollancz's books and adverts were well designed and, most importantly, distinctive.

Whilst the publishing trade at large retrenched to what it knew best – classics and old favourites – and protected its margins through the Net Book Agreement, there were publishers who were not prepared to settle for the status quo. It may have been that, like Allen Lane, they had an aim of democratising reading and bringing high quality, low–cost books to the masses, rather than the masses being excluded from 'high–brow' literature for reasons of cost and snobbery. Or it may be that like Gollancz, there was a political aim that could only be achieved by circumventing the monoliths of the trade. Whatever it was, new commercial business practices, and marketing in particular, were key to achieving those aims. Before discussing how Gollancz embraced those practices, it is important to understand the rise of the marketer within business during the Thirties, and the impact they had.

The rise of Marketing in the 1930s

The ubiquity of marketing and advertising practice are common nowadays and everyday life is so saturated with advertising that few take issue with it and most accept it as simply part of our cultural experience. This is particularly the case in publishing because, as Stephen Brown attests, 'publishing provides rich pickings for marketing' (Brown, 2006, p9):

> The tools and techniques of marketing are ideally suited to a situation where supply exceeds demand, inter– and intra–type competition is getting ever–fiercer, channels of distribution are in a state of flux, innumerable identikit products vie for consumers' attention, buzz–building promotional tactics are par for the course and the old rules of doing business, such as price controls and gentlemanly carve–ups, are going the way of MG Rover. Marketing may be passé in certain sectors of the economy, or in the throes of a mid–life crisis at least, but in publishing it is being embraced with evangelical fervour. (Brown, 2006, p9)

However, it was not always the case and 'in both Europe and America, advertising only achieved significant ascendancy in the early 20th Century' (*European Journal of Communication*, p269). Jones and Shaw contest, however, that the practice of marketing is ancient. They examine the ideas about markets and marketing posited by Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle. However, there is no doubt it took until the early part of the twentieth century for it to be studied and taught. The most well–known study of the development of marketing thought comes from Robert Bartels across three *History of Marketing Thought* books (1962, 1976, 1988), which provide us with 'one of the most comprehensive overviews of the development of marketing as a discipline during the past 100 years' (Jones and Shaw, 2002, p40).

Bartels characterises the decade 1930 to 1940 as 'The Period of Development'. For him 1910 was the year the term 'marketing' was first used to name the discipline. This is controversial, however, as Bartels is referring to the term as a noun to name marketing

thought, rather than as a verb to identify marketing practice, plus there are other authors who have found the term being used as a noun as far back as 1856.

The 1920s was seen by Bartels as a 'Golden Decade' – 'The Period of Integration'. The decade following was one of developing the principles of the previous decade. The 1930s also saw the establishment of the *American Marketing Journal* (1934), which became the *Journal of Marketing* in 1936, establishing marketing as not just a practice, but as a subject for academic study and discussion, and making it clear that the *Journal* 'undoubtedly represents one of the most dominant influences on the development of marketing thought' (Jones and Shaw, 2002, p48).

In the US during the period there was something of a backlash against what was seen as the duplicity of the advertising trade. A belief that advertising should 'guide rather than seduce and deceive consumers' (*European Journal of Communication*, p269). During the New Deal period, a consumer movement posed a radical threat to advertising norms – 'Its radicalism appeared in its criticism not only of abuses and excesses but also of normal techniques (mainly emotional appeals) and advertising's very existence and function in American society' (Pennock, 2008, p192). In her admirable book, *Advertising on Trial*, Inger L Stole demonstrates that corporate interests thwarted much of the burgeoning 1930s consumer activism movement.

In the United Kingdom there was no such conflict, but there was, however, a similar growth of marketing as both a practice and a suitable subject for academic discussion. It is therefore no surprise that the launch of *Marketing* magazine in September 1931 coincided with 'unprecedented economic, social, political and technological upheaval in Britain' (*Campaign*, 2007). One of the aims of the National government after it came to power in August 1931 was to fight against hyperinflation. Businessmen at the time also felt that it was their duty to revitalise the economy, particularly in the face of Britain losing the pre–eminence of its

empire. It is also into this environment that *Marketing* appears. An article in its first issue, 'A Business Man's View of the Crisis', focuses on the need to reverse the negative trade balance.

Along with marketing's consolidation as a trade, as suggested by Bartels, marketing as a career also came to the fore in the 1930s. At that point it was largely seen as an adjunct to sales and it largely meant advertising, merchandising and some nascent market research and, as such, was largely the province of sales managers. The 1930s were a period of major change. The advent of electrical power transformed manufacturing and marketing techniques to make distribution more competitive, and sophisticated field marketing operations ensured that merchandising, such as promotional and other display materials, got into shops.

Early issues of *Marketing* reflected several commercial concerns, such as improving exports and training a new generation in marketing techniques. An article from November 1931 by H Bleasdale states, 'I believe the way out of our difficulties is to be found in the creating of bold, aggressive policies by the businessmen of today […] Entirely new ideas must be tried out in those markets which have grown out of the habit of taking just what we cared to send. Change must be the order' (*Campaign*, 2007). Bleasdale could have been talking about Gollancz.

Victor Gollancz and Stanley Morison – the great marketing innovators

One thing is clear: as publishing began to evolve in terms of marketing, advertising and design, no–one liked it. Not the booksellers, not the salesmen, and not the other publishers. So what made Gollancz believe he was right to pursue the highly individual approach that he did? Firstly, people he trusted supported him. Secondly, he did not really have anything to lose. His new publishing company was in its infancy and, through a highly frugal approach,

costs had been kept to the minimum, so financially Gollancz was in a good position. Finally, and most importantly, Gollancz had unwavering self–belief. Warburg described Gollancz as 'a demon of energy, capable, trustworthy, and possessed of so overwhelming a belief in the righteousness of his opinions as to bear a recognizable resemblance to the ancient Hebrew prophets' (Warburg, 1959, p222). Moreover, Gollancz had another great innovator in his camp: Morison.

Morison, a director of Victor Gollancz Ltd from its inception in 1928, was not just the commissioner of some of the great typefaces of the twentieth century, such as Times and Gill Sans; he was also an advocate of upsetting the status quo when it came to advertising and design. As one of the firm's original directors, Morison was paid £300 a year, but by 1936 this sum had decreased to £150, probably as a result of the demands on Morison's time from *The Times* and the Monotype Corporation. Gollancz wrote to Morison on 20th February 1930 saying, 'My dear Morison: I have a sort of feeling that we have been rather drifting out of touch […] Is there any dissatisfaction of any kind at the back of your mind? Have I offended in any way?' (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/PUB/28/6). Morison replies the following day,

> There is no feeling of offence – I do not luxuriate in feelings of that kind.
>
> The explanation is that since I took on working at The Times I have had much more to do and all the endeavours I have made to fit in visits to Henrietta Street have been frustrated. I hate making appointments and not keeping them. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/PUB/28/8)

Morison may have had an uneasy relationship with Gollancz over the course of their friendship. As one of Morison's biographers, James Moran, put it: 'Morison was not fond of Gollancz's back–slapping approach and unauthorized use of his first name' (Moran, 1971, p120). But their partnership, when it came to the design of the iconic yellow Gollancz book jackets, and their radical approach to advertising, was nothing less than revolutionary – what the firm's historian, Sheila Hodges, called 'a form of typographical jacket design that became

one of the most brilliant and successful innovations in publishing this century' (Hodges, 1978, p30). This is arguably the first time that the book's dustjacket was used as a sales and marketing tool. It was as much an advertisement as the large spreads Gollancz placed in the national newspapers. For Edwards, it was Morison 'next to Victor, [who] played the most distinguished part in its tremendous impact on the book world. Victor knew that he wanted arrestingly designed advertisements and books; Morison had the skill to translate Victor's ideas into compelling reality' (Edwards, 1987, p167). An unlikely pair – the lapsed Jew and the practising Roman Catholic – they nonetheless comprised a significant force for change in the publishing industry in the 1930s.

The influence of Russian Constructivism, and other artistic movements on the Left, can be seen in the work of both McKnight Kauffer and Morison, and there will be further discussion of this in the next chapter. Suffice to say, the jacket designs conceived by Gollancz and Morison for Victor Gollancz Ltd, fitted perfectly with Gollancz's world view; which was innovative, outspoken and politically aware, whilst at the same time being cost effective. A curious mixture that also became the watchwords for Gollancz's other great Thirties venture: the Left Book Club. One of the key successes in the launch of the LBC in 1936 was its use of advertising and this, once again, had been pioneered by Gollancz and Morison with the parent publishing company.

Gollancz, was, claimed Warburg, 'very high horse–power' (Warburg, 1959, p118). For Warburg the writing was on the wall. The publishing status quo at that point in time could not stand:

> We saw the shape of things to come. Instead of the dignified advertisement list of twenty titles set out primly in a modest space, there was the double or triple column, with the title of the book screaming across it in letters three inches high. The forces of modernity had been loosed, the age of shouting, the period of the colossal and the sensational, had arrived. (Warburg, 1959, pp118–119)

Gollancz was ‘the great innovator and the lettering of his advertisements the biggest and blackest of all’ (Warburg, 1959, p119). Warburg was caught between two philosophies. His natural inclination was that of a patrician publisher with a set of values that reached back to the great publishing dynasties. However, as arrivistes in publishing, the Secker & Warburg publishing company, which was established in 1936, needed to harness innovation and a distinctive approach (what in marketing terms would be termed a Unique Selling Proposition or USP) as much as Gollancz or Lane. His instinctive snobbery (and perhaps a little fear) can be seen when Warburg writes,

> Amid all this clatter, how could the quiet whisper of a Routledge [Warburg’s former employers] advertisement, the gentle nudge of a Routledge promotion, be heard or felt by an over–stimulated public. If the merit of books was now to be measured by the height of the letters that advertised them, publishing, it could well be said, was no longer an occupation for gentlemen, but a real business, even perhaps a rat–race. (Warburg, 1959, p119)

On the other hand, Warburg could see that one of the ways Gollancz attracted authors to his new publishing venture in the late 1920s was the boldness of his promotion: ‘It [a new imprint] can, for instance, develop hitherto unused and exciting methods of promoting; in this way Gollancz advertised himself to success with huge spaces and types’ (Warburg, 1959, p181). He was no stranger to the power of advertising himself, however. Secker &


BEHIND THE SPANISH BARRICADES

JOHN LANGDON-DAVIES the brilliant correspondent of *The News Chronicle*, has written a momentous book. For years he has known Spain and its people, its language and its customs. Now, back from a prolonged first-hand investigation, he depicts unforgettably

A WHOLE PEOPLE RISEN

to oppose ruthless oppression. In Madrid, Barcelona, Toledo, in every village and township, the Spanish worker and peasant, united as

THE ARMY IN OVERALLS

is fighting desperately for his living and his life. We are given close-ups of the rank-and-file, portraits of the principal leaders,

CABALLERO, COMPANYS, DEL VAYO.

We are forced to realize the poverty of the masses and what they are struggling for; to understand their courage, their faith, the tragedy of their lot. We grasp the almost mystical fervour with which the

BURNING OF THE CHURCHES

is accomplished. Finally, we are shown their enemies, the forces of reaction, with their cruel weapons and sinister ambitions. We see

THE FASCIST INTERNATIONAL

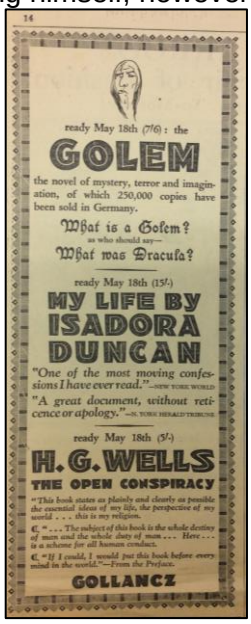
intervening against democracy, decency itself; and are warned of the grave perils to Britain, if we allow Fascism to triumph in Spain.

A most moving, exciting and important book, and one that demands your instant attention!

503 pages 55 illustrations 12s. 6d. net

MARTIN SECKER AND WARBURG

Figure 6: Advert for John Langdon–Davies, *Behind the Spanish Barricades (*Secker & Warburg, 1936), from Fredric Warburg, *An Occupation for Gentlemen (*Hutchinson, 1959*)*


ready May 18th (7/6): the

GOLEM

the novel of mystery, terror and imagination, of which 250,000 copies have been sold in Germany.

What is a Golem?

as who should say—

What was Dracula?

ready May 18th (15/-)

MY LIFE BY ISADORA DUNCAN

"One of the most moving confessions I have ever read."—NEW YORK WORLD

"A great document, without reticence or apology."—N. YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

ready May 18th (5/-)

H. G. WELLS

THE OPEN CONSPIRACY

"This book states as plainly and clearly as possible the essential ideas of my life, the perspective of my world . . . this is my religion.

". . . The subject of this book is the whole destiny of man and the whole duty of man . . . Here . . . is a scheme for all human conduct.

"If I could, I would put this book before every mind in the world."—From the Preface.

GOLLANCZ

Figure 7: Advert in the *Observer* for the first three titles published by Victor Gollancz Ltd 1928

Warburg's first bestseller was Jocelyn Godefroi's translation of Gabriel Chevallier's *Clochemerle*. By the end of 1936 it had sold 4,734 copies (well exceeding the typical first print–run for an unknown author of 1500) making a gross profit of £700 that year, having spent £222 advertising it. Aware of the importance of advertising, Warburg comments,

> Enormous though this sum was for those days, at least double the maximum considered prudent by the pundits, it was probably money more usefully spent than any in the history of the firm before or since. (Warburg, 1959, p192)

In *The Truth About Publishing*, Unwin suggests that 5% of a publisher's turnover should be allocated to advertising (to which we should include marketing and publicity costs). He acknowledges that the older titles that make up the majority of a publisher's list need little or nothing spending on them in advertising terms, with the result that the percentage spent on new titles is relatively high. The figures he quotes are remarkable similar to Warburg's estimate:

> The gross turnover of a novel, of which about 1,000 copies are sold, may not exceed £1,500 and yet on such a book it is usual for a publisher to spend at least £300 – in other words over 20 per cent of his gross proceeds – despite the fact that on a first edition there may be no margin of profit at all. (Unwin, 1976, p169)

Unwin also identifies the common complaint of marketers down the decades:

> Taking it as a whole, book advertising is fairly well done. Criticism is easy; improvement difficult. We could many of us do wonderful things if we had not to ensure that the expenditure on advertising brought a commensurate return. (Unwin, 1976, p169)

Similarly to Gollancz, Warburg was not against using his promotional budget and muscle to promote a political cause he believed in, in this case, John Langdon–Davies' *Behind The Spanish Barricades* (1936) – a first–hand account of the Spanish Civil War. Of the £487 profit, £320 was spent on leaflets and advertising. Warburg felt that this was his contribution to the anti–fascist effort. His advert for the Langdon–Davies title follows something of Morison's rules – there are headings and mixtures of capitals and lower case, but overall it

lacks Morison's flair and above all it lacks Gollancz's trademark copywriting brio. A comparison between Warburg's advert and that by Gollancz in the *Observer* for Gustav Meyrink's *The Golem* (1928), *My Life* (1928) by Isadora Duncan, and *The Open Conspiracy* (1928) by H.G. Wells shows the gulf in style between the two publishers, despite Warburg's limited attempt to break with advertising convention.

Of the £7618 made by Secker & Warburg in that first year (a tenth of Routledge's turnover during the same period), £1250 was spent on advertising:

> We had, of course, spent far too much money on advertising, three times as much as the textbook pundits considered prudent. But it seemed to me money which had to be spent, if we were to survive. A publisher must not only publish books, he must demonstrably appear to be publishing them. (Warburg, 1959, p194)

Warburg might have initially disparaged 'the age of shouting', but he was forced to join in: 'Even though we could scarcely breathe, I thought, we too must shout at the top of our voices, and shout we did despite the agonizing strain' (Warburg, 1959, p195).

Elsewhere other publishers continued to cry foul about Gollancz's advertising practices. Even before he started his own publishing company, Gollancz's advertising bravado and gift for publicity were in evidence at Ernest Benn. His copywriting style in advertisements was closer to consumer advertising. For example, rather than making an announcement regarding a publication in the way that was typical of the time, Gollancz's approach was to *tell* people what to read: 'Be careful. On Friday the most important book of the century is coming out. You will look a fool at dinner if you haven't got a copy and read at least the first few pages' (Edwards, 1987, pp 149–50). Like many contemporary publishers Stanley Unwin was sceptical about the value of advertising, seeing it as necessary to keep authors happy, but of very little commercial value. He was particularly scathing about the sort of advertising copy Gollancz was habitually in favour of, saying, 'The most blatant type of advertisement may be suitable for vulgar works intended for the vulgar–minded, but such advertisements

would merely repel the more cultured bookbuyer' (Unwin, 1976, p163). In fact, Gollancz was in favour of the boldest, brashest statements he could make. As Sheila Hodges put it, 'Victor had the art of making the books sound important and exciting even when they weren't necessarily so' (Hodges, 1978, p26).

That Gollancz was a pioneer in advertising within publishing can be seen by the invitation to to address The Publicity Club of London[33] on 27th February 1928. He was one of three speakers (and the only publisher) along with author Alfred Tressidder Sheppard and Mr S H Hunt of WH Smith, asked to speak on the subject of 'Publishers' Advertising – What is Wrong with It?' According to the invitation he was asked to do this because, 'so many of us feel that much of the advertising put out by publishers is not as good as it should be, and the object of the meeting will be to do whatever is possible to help put the matter right' (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/PUB/iv/6).

The promotional material for the event goes on to ask:

> Is Publishers' Advertising generally poor and ineffective, or does it serve its purpose well and promote the maximum sale of books?
>
> What are the special considerations that control the advertising of books? Does 'book copy' call for the qualities that appear essential for other commodities? Can the modern Advertising man indicate ways and means of increasing the sales of books by new and better advertising? (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/PUB/iv/8/2)

In a letter of 17th February 1928, it appears initially that Gollancz had to decline owing to the time pressures of publishing his first titles:

[33] The Publicity Club of London was self-described as 'An Organisation of Men and Women connected with Advertising and providing facilities for Lectures and Debates and for gathering and recording information upon matters related to Advertising'.

> As I approach nearer the time for the publication of my first list of books, I find myself doing two days work in one in the office here, and having every evening crammed up. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/PUB/iv/5)

However, in the end he clearly did speak at the meeting as a letter to members of the Publicity Club attests.

Gollancz's copywriting dash and verve needed an expert communicator to shape and fashion it to catch the reading public's eyes and ears. Once again, Morison was just such a man. It is difficult to assess Morison's impact on the design of the Gollancz adverts as Morison's papers were destroyed in an air raid and there are only a handful of letters between Gollancz and Morison in the Gollancz archive regarding this. It is known that Gollancz himself did most of the adverts. They were eye–catching with bold type and a lot of white space and there were often line drawings, some from the books themselves and others by Gollancz's wife, Ruth, who also painted the colophon that hung outside of Gollancz's office; but Morison certainly had a hand in the early ones. Gollancz's adverts had a distinctive border, designed by Gollancz himself and set in brass by Ingham, the manager of the Fanfare Press, who set the company's adverts and jackets. Many of Gollancz's competitors felt that his approach to advertising was unfair, but this held little sway with Gollancz, who wrote in a letter to Charles Evans on 6th April 1934, 'For better or worse (and you do not need to tell me that a number of people think for worse) my advertisements have a particular flavour which I regard as one of my chief stocks in trade' (Hodges, 1978, p29). In Morison, Gollancz found the partner to translate his copywriting hyperbole into type. When, in a recorded message to the Double Crown Club's 176th dinner in October 1964, Morison said that the publisher was 'a steward for the reading public, and acts as a moderating influence on the eccentricities and excesses of designers, who left to themselves might easily perpetrate all manner of absurdities' (Moran, 1971, p99), he might have been describing his role in curbing Gollancz's excesses as well his own role in ensuring the practicality and, therefore the commercial effectiveness, of the design.

Morison is, of course, primarily known for his work in typography, but type for him was all about communication. As Moran put it, 'The making of type is only a means to an end – the printing of a communication meant to be read […] if the design is poor, if it is illegible or unreadable, communication is impaired and the object of the printing is rendered useless' (Moran, 1971, p12). Nowhere is this more true than in advertising. In an article called 'On Advertising Settings', written by Morison for *Signature: A Quadrimestrial of Typography and Graphic Arts* published in July 1936, he set out his manifesto for the perfect synthesis of

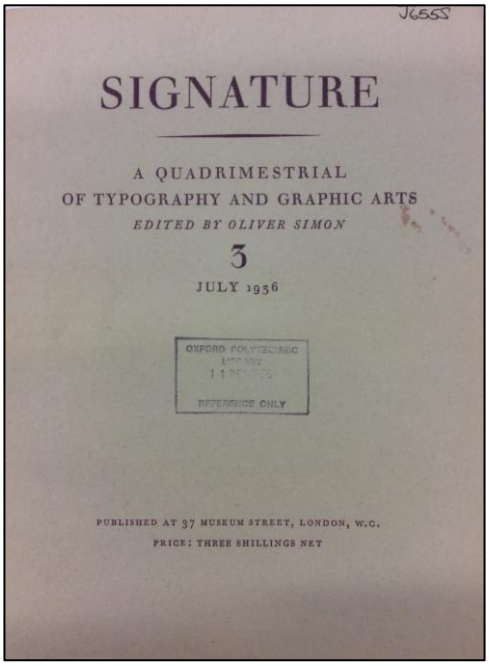


Figure 8: Title page of *Signature: A Quadrimestrial of Typography and Graphic Arts,* 1(3), 1936

type and message. A review of the issue of *Signature* in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 11th July 1936 states,

> The current number [of *Signature*] starts off with an article by Mr Stanley Morison on 'advertisement settings', which reveals an intimate and unexpected knowledge of the special problems which confront a national agency, and the purposes which its 'layout department' so often fails to achieve. (*Times Literary Supplement*,11th July 1936)

Morison provides a practical, insider guide to breaking up the large blocks of text that are used in most British and American advertising, and which make it difficult to read. He also questions the ubiquity of illustrations on most current advertising in favour of the copy, a fact that would have endeared him to Gollancz:

> I am disposed to entertain the private opinion that illustration plays a disproportionately large part in the composition of most advertising, and that the more important part of the advertisement, namely, the ‘copy’ has yet to be sufficiently studied – both in writing and setting. There is, I believe, a considerable body of evidence which points to the relative success of long, as against short, copy. Evidence also points to the conclusion that one or two display lines do not, by themselves, carry conviction – at least where the commodity is of more than temporary use and more than trifling cost. Without wishing to exalt the copy writer at the expense of the artist, I have the opinion that a critical investigation would prove that the thought given to copy writing and copy setting, considerable as it is, might well be greater. I am disposed to think that, just as some ‘copy’ is too literary in style, it is too literary in its typography, and when it is not literary it is still set in a bookish style. (Morison, 1936, pp2–3)

In an ironic echo of Warburg’s complaint about ‘shouting’, Morison advocates copy that raises its voice, changes its emphasis and adopts ‘any of those variations of tempo and tone by which the attention of the jury may be kept’ (Morison, 1936, p3). Indeed, Morison suggests that advertising is, in fact, like addressing a public meeting.

Ever the practical man, Morison believed that it was not enough for copy to be legible, it had to be readable, thereby focusing on the commercial purpose of advertising: ‘the problem is to turn the spectator into a reader; the reader into a buyer’ (Morison, 1936, p3). This is where the typesetter comes in. Simply setting a square block of text gives the reader the impression that he can pass over it without reading it. Morison advocated more white space and less decoration: ‘white space is the essential element of display, and the most valuable’ (Morison, 1936, p4), especially more space after a full stop, with sentences rarely running together into a paragraph.

If sentences must be run together then Morison suggests varying type size, using capitals for the first words, using a bold typeface and so forth, in order to attract the reader's attention. He also suggests putting the word you want the reader to stop on and remember, in capitals. Attracting the reader's attention is a physical thing, not an artistic one:

> You ought not to expect even readers whose attention had been caught in an instant by the cunning of your illustration to give anything like the thirty seconds of will power necessary for intelligent perusal of a solid square of text. (Morison, 1936, p5)

Radical in 1936, such focus on key messages and 'take–aways' are second nature to the modern marketing person, but in the mid–Thirties this would have been a hugely disruptive message, especially when heard in the sedate world of publishing. Morison closes with a final call to pragmatism:

> I conclude by reporting my conviction that the more cunning your illustration, the more provocative your headlines, the more necessary is it to abandon solid blocks of 10–, 11– and 12–point in favour of semi–displayed text which shall continue the momentum of interest from the displayed line over the illustration to the displayed name–block or order at the tail. (Morison, 1936, p6)

Such practicality and commercial focus would have been exactly the approach Gollancz would have wanted to take. Never financially extravagant – his regular memos to staff telling them to save string and brown paper are evidence of that – Gollancz's only extravagance was on advertising and he never regarded that as wasteful. According to Edwards, Gollancz had a natural instinct 'regarding the efficacy of each advertisement or stunt' (Edwards, 1987, p178). Gollancz was not, of course, the only autocratic publisher who liked to keep a tight grip on the purse–strings. Diana Athill discussed Andre Deutsch in much the same light, writing that Deutsch 'urged us to recycle used envelopes, switch off lights behind us, and generally exercise the strictest economy in every possible way' (Athill, 2000, p23). Gollancz was prepared to loosen his grip when it was financially prudent to do so, and that was often found to be the case with regards to advertising.

As Warburg wrote, Gollancz's competitors 'did not lag far behind. Hutchinson, Hodder and Heinemann, Cassell, Chatto and Constable, beat the big drum in an ever more shattering tattoo' (Warburg, 1959, p119). Gollancz's success meant that inevitably competitors tried to mimic his style, but Gollancz's instinct for innovation and publicity kept him ahead of the pack. This caused a lot of resentment amongst his peers and it was his advertising in particular that his competitors objected to. Gollancz wrote to an author in 1931 that he was

> suffering from a concerted attack by a big group of publishers, apparently because I advertise my books! I have been subjected to this sort of thing ever since I started, though the method has constantly changed: first of all I was going broke, then I was stealing other people's authors: now it is that I am advertising, which is apparently immoral. (Edwards, 1987, p169)

Others claimed that Gollancz's advertising was not just exaggeration for commercial effect, but sometimes downright lies. Such claims were a throwback to his days at Ernest Benn, where his hyperbolic style drew much attention and criticism. Author JB Priestley was annoyed when Gollancz claimed in an advertisement that Louis Golding's *Magnolia Street* (Gollancz, 1934) was the biggest hit since Priestley's *Good Companions*. Priestley pointed out that his *Angel Pavement* had actually had higher sales than *Magnolia Street* (Edwards, 1987, p169). Once again, such claims are now the natural territory of a publishing firm's marketing department in their aim of creating a bestseller, but then this was anathema to the genteel world of 1930s publishing. However, in this case, being naturally argumentative and easily aggrieved, this criticism inevitably upset Gollancz who responded with a pedantic interpretation of the phrase 'biggest hit' in order to justify his claim.

He might have been able to attract authors with his swashbuckling ways (much to the annoyance of his rivals), but Gollancz was also able to rile those same authors. Although he was scrupulous in his payment of royalties and the like, he did, however, persuade some authors to 'take small advances or a lower scale of royalties than they were used to in order to leave more money available for advertising' (Edwards, 1987, p171). That said, he

baulked, however, at agreeing to guaranteed advertising spends to authors. This seems to spring from the same dislike of being *compelled* to do something, which resulted in a parsimonious approach to staff salaries, but notable generosity if that same member of staff needed financial help. Gollancz wanted to spend extravagantly on advertising, but only when *he* wanted to do it and not when he *had* to, a policy which delivered a successful sales return nonetheless.

Gollancz was a paragon of probity compared to the way in which Lawrence & Wishart managed their authors. One of the main aims of the publisher was to attract and publish working–class authors: however, they were run in such a haphazard manner that only those with independent means could publish with them. As Christopher Hilliard put it, 'the firm treated its writers in a way that could discourage working–class writers' (Hilliard, 2006, p49). It would appear that the worst culprit was D. J. F. Parsons. He had come from Martin Lawrence rather than Wishart, and his tactic was to get the office boy to tell anybody who was chasing him that he was out of the office. A letter from the Marxist author F. A. Ridley to Wishart on 23rd September 1937 shows the lack of sensitivity towards those undertaking writing but with no other means of financial support and pinpoints the dilettante attitude that seems to be endemic within the organisation. He writes, 'being a rich man you may not have realized that for a man without "private means" to waste several months on an entirely unremunerative work is an extremely serious matter for him' (Hilliard, 2006, p49). Such treatment of working–class authors could have more disastrous effects. The publisher's prevarication over a contract and terms with the highly–rated writer, George Garrett, contributed to him having a nervous breakdown which ended his writing career. Garrett wrote that a letter from Douglas Garman 'set me thinking that most of the disagreeable things I have heard about L&Ws are correct […] Perhaps later on, I can collect my scattered mind a bit to write again, but under the present conditions it is impossible. I dare not risk it' (Hilliard, 2006, pp50–51). Even if you were of independent means, like the heiress and political activist Nancy Cunard, Lawrence & Wishart kept you at arm's length. Despite

repeated chasing letters, it took her four months to receive her statement of sales and a royalty cheque for her anthology, *Negro* (1934).

There was no such chicanery from Gollancz. Having tested many of these new marketing and publicity skills, borrowing from the best of consumer marketing to shake up an apathetic and complacent industry, Gollancz was ready to apply what he had learned to his most ambitious venture yet – the Left Book Club. Here the stakes were higher than commercial success and revenue. At stake for Gollancz was nothing less than world peace and for this he would once again turn to Morison, although this time they found that they were less in agreement.

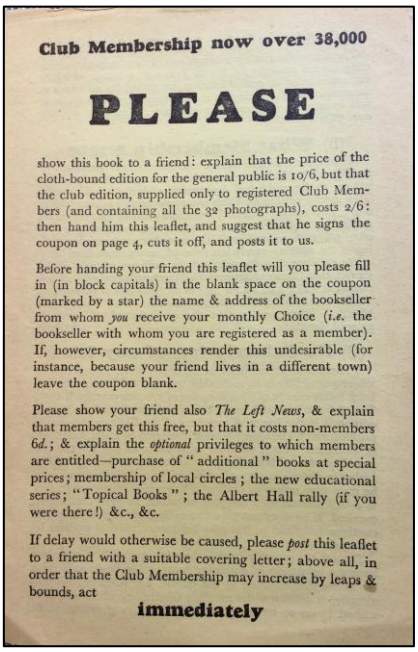
Marketing the Left Book Club

In addition to an inbuilt need to upset the status quo (as well as that being a commercial requirement), Gollancz and Morison were initially united over similar political aims. In their early days both were of a left–wing persuasion, essentially socialists with pacifist leanings. However, it was most likely that Morison's Roman Catholicism caused him to move to the right over time. By the time the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, Morison was not attracted to any political party on the left, finding that 'the confrontation of Church and Communism was a new moral crisis, requiring stringent self–examination and determination' (Barker, 1972, p352). It is reasonable to assume that Morison and Gollancz must have had heated debates especially as the Left Book Club 'was not only solidly anti–Franco but was actively helping the Spanish Republican forces' (Moran, 1971, p122). There can be little doubt that Morison 'must have found the atmosphere at Gollancz's Henrietta Street offices uncongenial, and his relationship with the Left Book Club, although at one remove, a positive embarrassment in Catholic circles' (Moran, 1971, p122). If the Spanish Civil War was the beginning of the end for Morison's relationship with Gollancz, it took until 1939 for him to resign from Victor Gollancz Ltd. Nonetheless, Morison's influence on Gollancz's publishing

output should not be underestimated. It influenced not just the book jackets, but also the promotion of those titles, and even if by 1936, the year of the Left Book Club's foundation, his influence had started to wane, it can still be seen in the way the Club was launched and promoted itself, especially during its early, most influential years.

From its very inception, advertising was key to the success of the Left Book Club. It was announced in a double–page spread in the *New Statesman* of 26th February 1936. In the advert the Club is described as a 'service for those who desire to play an intelligent part in the struggle for World Peace and a better social and economic order, and *against* Fascism'. It is as bold as a Gollancz advert would be expected to be. The USPs are clearly stated; the books will have a low price; the titles will be originals ('the selected books will *not* be reprints: each book will be a book never before published'); and there is no fee for membership. There is also a typically clear call to action – 'send a post card *now*'. This first announcement was followed up a week later by a similar one in the *News Chronicle*. The advert is probably too text heavy for Morison's complete approval, but all the other Morison tenets are there, including a particularly striking typeface being used for the headings.

Where Gollancz and the Left Book Club really came into their own were the leaflets included in all the Club's book choices. In modern parlance, this would be called 'cross–marketing' and, though typical now, it was highly innovative for the time. The sort of marketing material seen in the Secker & Warburg advert mentioned above, and frequently criticised for being 'too literary' by Morison, would have been that of a formal announcement. As we have seen this was not the Gollancz way. It was especially not his way when the political stakes were so high, and Gollancz was inclined to employ every weapon in his marketing armoury, including many not usually seen in publishing. Prime amongst these weapons was the leaflet – cross–selling other books or promoting causes or simply an invitation to join the Left Book Club. What become known as the 'PLEASE' leaflet defined the promotional output of the Left Book Club during its early years.



Club Membership now over 38,000

PLEASE

show this book to a friend: explain that the price of the cloth-bound edition for the general public is 10/6, but that the club edition, supplied only to registered Club Members (and containing all the 32 photographs), costs 2/6: then hand him this leaflet, and suggest that he signs the coupon on page 4, cuts it off, and posts it to us.

Before handing your friend this leaflet will you please fill in (in block capitals) in the blank space on the coupon (marked by a star) the name & address of the bookseller from whom *you* receive your monthly Choice (*i.e.* the bookseller with whom you are registered as a member). If, however, circumstances render this undesirable (for instance, because your friend lives in a different town) leave the coupon blank.

Please show your friend also *The Left News*, & explain that members get this free, but that it costs non-members 6*d.*; & explain the *optional* privileges to which members are entitled—purchase of "additional" books at special prices; membership of local circles; the new educational series; "Topical Books"; the Albert Hall rally (if you were there!) &c., &c.

If delay would otherwise be caused, please *post* this leaflet to a friend with a suitable covering letter; above all, in order that the Club Membership may increase by leaps & bounds, act

immediately

Figure 9: 'PLEASE' leaflet included with Left Book Club publications

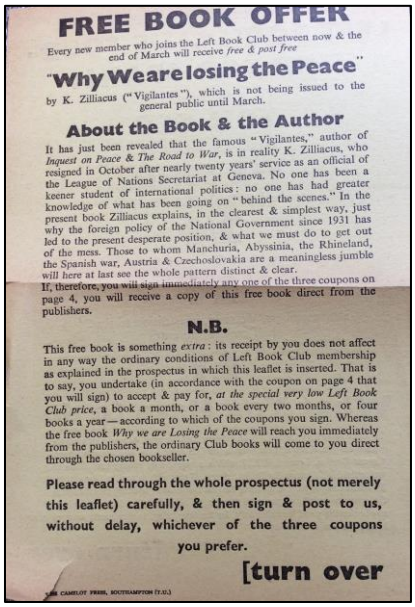
The 'PLEASE' leaflets were key to recruitment to the new Club. John Lewis is clear where the success of these leaflets lay: 'This depended on the advertising genius of V. G., his skill in choice of type, layout, crisp clear wording, and intelligibility' (Lewis, 1970, p22). The famous yellow leaflet was included with every book, with an appeal to 'PLEASE use this leaflet to get a new member'. The leaflet included a blank form on the back that was to be returned to the publishing office on Henrietta Street. At the increasing number of LBC

lectures and public meetings, these yellow leaflets were handed out. Importantly, the leaflets did not ask for enrolment, but rather for people's name and address, so that information could be sent to them. The impact was sizeable. According to Lewis, 'in a meeting of 500 people, one could easily get two or three hundred PLEASE applications signed' (Lewis, 1970, p23).

The 'PLEASE' leaflet referred to above is typical. Like most of them it was printed on thin yellow stock, usually by Camelot Press, who were based in Southampton. Gollancz had worked with Camelot at Ernest Benn, and they supported him when he started his new publishing venture – even offering him long credit terms. Along with the Fanfare Press and Leighton Straker Bookbinding, they handled most of Victor Gollancz Ltd's printing, binding and advertising. It was not until 'about 1937 and the vast – and always rushed – printings for the Left Book Club did the Camelot Press have to relinquish some of their work for the firm' (Hodges, 1978, p62). In a reciprocal gesture for their early support, Gollancz offered to pay Camelot in advance to provide financial ballast after the printers was badly burnt and bombed in December 1940, destroying a large proportion of the Gollancz stock.

The 'PLEASE' leaflets varied over the years, focusing on whatever cause Gollancz and the Left Book Club were pursuing at the time, such as the start of the Club, driving membership, supporting the Spanish government during the Civil War, or opposing appeasement. They were mostly on yellow stock, although a leaflet included in the February 1939 choice, GER Gedye's *Fallen Bastions*, is on pink.

Significantly all the leaflets adhered to the principles of advertising laid down by Stanley Morison. There are few illustrations, and most of the designs are text heavy, and there is a wide variety of typefaces with varying sizes and emboldening used to emphasise the leaflet's key points. As per Morison's style guide, diverse devices, such as arrows, pointing fingers and editing marks are used to signpost the text. There is a strong 'call to action' and in the later leaflets a classic marketing technique is employed, that of the time–limited offer



FREE BOOK OFFER

Every new member who joins the Left Book Club between now & the end of March will receive *free & post free*

"Why We are losing the Peace"

by K. Zilliacus ("Vigilantes"), which is not being issued to the general public until March.

About the Book & the Author

It has just been revealed that the famous "Vigilantes," author of *Inquest on Peace* & *The Road to War*, is in reality K. Zilliacus, who resigned in October after nearly twenty years' service as an official of the League of Nations Secretariat at Geneva. No one has been a keener student of international politics: no one has had greater knowledge of what has been going on "behind the scenes." In the present book Zilliacus explains, in the clearest & simplest way, just why the foreign policy of the National Government since 1931 has led to the present desperate position, & what we must do to get out of the mess. Those to whom Manchuria, Abyssinia, the Rhineland, the Spanish war, Austria & Czechoslovakia are a meaningless jumble will here at last see the whole pattern distinct & clear.

If, therefore, you will sign immediately any one of the three coupons on page 4, you will receive a copy of this free book direct from the publishers.

N.B.

This free book is something *extra*: its receipt by you does not affect in any way the ordinary conditions of Left Book Club membership as explained in the prospectus in which this leaflet is inserted. That is to say, you undertake (in accordance with the coupon on page 4 that you will sign) to accept & pay for, *at the special very low Left Book Club price*, a book a month, or a book every two months, or four books a year — according to which of the coupons you sign. Whereas the free book *Why we are Losing the Peace* will reach you immediately from the publishers, the ordinary Club books will come to you direct through the chosen bookseller.

Please read through the whole prospectus (not merely this leaflet) carefully, & then sign & post to us, without delay, whichever of the three coupons you prefer.

[turn over

Figure 10: Promotional leaflet issued by the Left Book Club in February 1939

or a free gift. In the February 1939 leaflet that is a book called *Why We Are Losing the Peace*, which would be available to anyone joining the Club before the end of March 1939. The leaflet promoting Left Book Club membership in September 1938 uses *A.R.P.* by JBS Haldane as the incentive – getting it for 2/6 [two shillings and sixpence] instead of 7/6. More interesting is the use of hyperbole that is typical of Gollancz's copywriting style: 'By reading this book, you may save millions of lives, including your wife's, your children's, your own' (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/LB/4/2/6).

David Franks makes the point that unlike the Penguin Specials series, which were largely focused on current events in Europe (Franks suggests fifty–seven out of the seventy–three Specials published fit that criteria), Left Book Club choices were less to do with events in Europe, and more about education and equipping yourself with the knowledge to understand and interpret those events. This is borne out by the leaflet promoting Left Book Club membership in October 1938, which stresses the Club's educational aims: 'Vitally Important Book that explains the International Crisis' (MSS.157/4/LB/2/9).

CHRISTMAS 1938

The following is reprinted from the 'News Chronicle' of December 20th:

Refugee Baby Frozen To Death

From our Special Correspondent

ZBONZYN, Monday.

AN 11-day-old child was frozen to death today in a provisional shelter in "No Man's Land" at Zbonzyn, on the Polish-German frontier where 5,000 Jewish refugees, driven out of Germany on October 28, are still living.

The child's mother was severely frost-bitten and taken to hospital. They were found lying on a straw sack in the shelter.

Twenty-seven other children kept in a children's home are reported to have lost limbs owing to frost-bite, and the whole camp population is suffering terribly from the frost, which is reaching 30 degrees below (Centigrade) zero (equal to 54 Fahrenheit degrees of frost).

500 IN OLD MILL

About 2,000 people are crowded in an old stable with only one stove to keep them warm. Five hundred are living in an old mill with no heating facilities whatever.

As most of the refugees were driven from Germany without proper clothing many are unable to leave their tents and stables to fetch food from the field kitchen. A number of them were frozen while waiting in the long queue for food.

Three hundred are reported to be suffering severe hunger in Drawski Miyn, near Zbonzyn. They have to walk four miles in the cold to fetch such food as they can get.

About 1,100 of the refugees are reported to have fallen ill in the last two days.

APPEAL TO PRESIDENT

They have sent a heartrending appeal to the Polish President and to the Jewish relief committees in Warsaw. They appeal in the name of their "suffering and freezing little children" to send them warm clothing and above all find for them proper shelter to escape the biting frost and suffering.

"Left here as we are now," the appeal states, "we are all doomed."

A number of refugees are reported to have committed suicide. The Jewish senators and deputies, moved by the appeal, summoned an emergency meeting for tonight to decide on future action and means to save the sufferers.

Several motor lorries are to leave Warsaw tonight, I understand, with iron stoves to heat the refugees' shelters.

The Jewish Relief Committee is also to make another appeal to the Polish authorities to allow the Jews to leave the camp and go to Warsaw and other towns, where they could be provided with proper shelters.

Christmas is the season of peace and goodwill: can it be denied, in view of what you have read above, that fascism is the antithesis of peace and goodwill? Help to strengthen during 1939 democracy in our own country: for if we go the way of the fascist powers or strengthen fascism abroad by our policy, the world is doomed.

★★ It is requested that this leaflet should be handed on from one to another ★★

This leaflet is published by the Left Book Club, 14 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London, which strives for peace and democracy and opposes fascism and war. Full particulars from the Club at the address just given.

Harrison & Sons, Ltd., London

Figure 11: Promotional leaflet issued by the Left Book Club in January 1939

Gollancz was also not above utilising whatever news item came to hand. The leaflet entitled 'Christmas 1938' (printed this time on blue stock by Harrison & Sons printers) reprints an article from the *News Chronicle* of December 1938, to drive his point home. Headlined 'Refugee Baby Frozen to death', the leaflet opens with,

> An 11–day old child was frozen to death today in a provisional shelter in 'No Man's Land' at Zbonzyn, on the Polish–German frontier where 5000 Jewish refugees, driven out of Germany on October 28, are still living. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/4/LB/2/9)

It closes with a typically strong 'call to action':

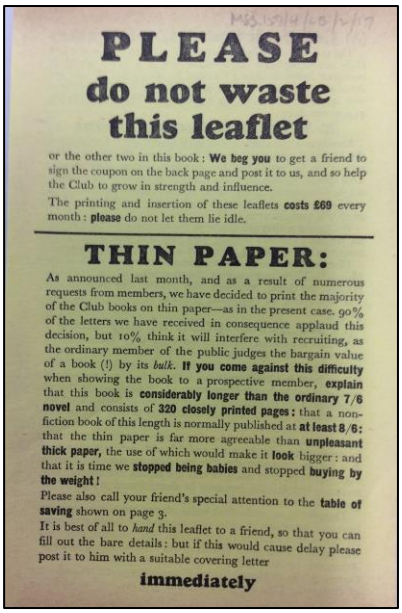
> Christmas is the season of peace and goodwill: can it be denied, in view of what you have read above, that fascism is the antithesis of peace and goodwill? Help to strengthen during 1939 democracy in our own country: for if we go the way of the fascist powers or strengthen fascism abroad by our policy, the world is doomed. It is requested that this leaflet should be handed on from one to another. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/4/LB/2/9)

Leaflets became an important communication mechanism as war loomed. Two million of 'The Hitler Menace' (September 1938) warned against allowing the annexation of Czechoslovakia by Germany. Two months later the 'There is a Grave Danger' leaflet was issued, warning about the Government considering granting 'belligerent rights' to Franco in Spain. Almost eight million leaflets were distributed with the heading:

> THERE IS A GREAT DANGER
>
> that the Government will, during the next week or so,
>
> ACTUALLY HELP THE FASCISTS TO
>
> STARVE THE SPANISH PEOPLE INTO SURRENDER

According to Lewis, Gollancz 'envisaged a continuous process of leaflet propaganda over the years' (Lewis, 1970, p98), but there were, in fact, just the three; the third being the 'Save Peace' leaflet issued in April 1939, which was issued after the necessary funds were raised at the Club's Empress Hall rally. This leaflet called for agreement between Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. 1¾ million leaflets were distributed, but, as Lewis puts it, 'Every endeavour to persuade the Government to negotiate an agreement failed' (Lewis, 1970, p100), and by 23rd August 1939 the Soviets had notoriously signed their own non–aggression pact with Germany.

In typical swashbuckling style, Gollancz also used necessity as a virtue, making the thin paper publishers were compelled to use into another promotional tool:



PLEASE
do not waste this leaflet

or the other two in this book: **We beg you** to get a friend to sign the coupon on the back page and post it to us, and so help the Club to grow in strength and influence.

The printing and insertion of these leaflets **costs £69** every month: **please** do not let them lie idle.

THIN PAPER:

As announced last month, and as a result of numerous requests from members, we have decided to print the majority of the Club books on thin paper—as in the present case. 90% of the letters we have received in consequence applaud this decision, but 10% think it will interfere with recruiting, as the ordinary member of the public judges the bargain value of a book (!) by its *bulk*. **If you come against this difficulty** when showing the book to a prospective member, **explain** that this book is **considerably longer than the ordinary 7/6 novel** and consists of **320 closely printed pages:** that a non-fiction book of this length is normally published at **at least 8/6:** that the thin paper is far more agreeable than **unpleasant thick paper,** the use of which would make it **look** bigger: and that it is time we **stopped being babies** and stopped **buying by the weight!**

Please also call your friend's special attention to the **table of saving** shown on page 3.

It is best of all to *hand* this leaflet to a friend, so that you can fill out the bare details: but if this would cause delay please post it to him with a suitable covering letter

immediately

Figure 12: Promotional leaflet issued by the Left Book Club

> PLEASE do not waste this leaflet. The printing and insertion of these leaflets **costs £69** every month: **please** do not let them be idle […] As announced last month, and as a result of numerous requests from members, we have decided to print the majority of Club books on thin paper – as in the present case. 90% of the letters we have received in consequence applaud this decision, but 10% think it will interfere with recruiting, as the ordinary member of the public judges the bargain value of a book (!) by its *bulk* […] it is time we **stopped being babies** and stopped **buying by the weight**. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.147/4/LB/2/17)

It is difficult to imagine any other publisher calling his customers 'babies', but then Gollancz was not any other publisher. If the cause was right he would berate, cajole, plead, emotionally blackmail, and insult his audience if he thought it would achieve his ends; and marketing in all its varied forms was the perfect vehicle to achieve those ends.

Conclusion

If it can be said that there was a revolution in publishing during the 1930s, then it could be argued that it started in 1928 when Gollancz founded his publishing company. That it was a startling change from the publishing that had gone before was no surprise, given that Gollancz embraced the revolution of the 1930s that was taking place in marketing. Although by nature a patrician publisher with a touch of elitism, even Warburg acknowledged that it was necessary to break with tradition in order for a new publishing company to succeed. He may not have been able to fully embrace this new cavalier style of publishing, but there is no doubt that it influenced both his publishing output and the way he promoted it.

It was Gollancz and Lane who were the real pioneers – Gollancz for his copywriting verve and style as much as the titles he published, and Lane for the manner in which he published books and where and how he sold them. Lane did not follow Gollancz's advertising and promotional lead, although the latter's influence can be seen in the covers of the Penguin Specials produced between 1937 and 1941. Although the Specials had some similarities with the standard Penguin cover design, they also have more than a little resemblance to a Gollancz book cover as well. The cover had a standard Penguin top and bottom but 'it was in the middle of the cover that a dizzying variety of types, sizes and combinations of bold black headlines, boxes, cartoons or maps set the Specials aside from the previously common and conservative three–band format' (Franks, 2015, p15). For his part Gollancz could not fully embrace Lane's business model with its very high break–even point. The Mundanus imprint was not a success partially because Gollancz was not prepared to commit to the high print runs and low margins that were to make Penguins so successful. However, Lane's style of selling his books via alternative methods, such as vending machines and non–book shops, may well have influenced Gollancz when considering different sales channels for his Left Book Club venture.

The 1930s may have been what Bartels terms a ‘Period of Development’ for marketing, but for publishing, then as now behind the curve when it comes to innovation, it was a period of revolution. What was revolutionary in marketing in the previous decade had a huge impact in publishing in the Thirties. For those willing to wield them these new marketing tools had tremendous power, and Gollancz’s particular use of them made all other publishers look staid and old–fashioned. There was another product of the 1920s and 1930s that had a profound impact on the look and feel of Gollancz’s publications, both for Victor Gollancz Ltd and the Left Book Club, and that was the design style coming out of Soviet Russia. A mix of art for the masses and a pragmatically inexpensive attitude to design, this was to appeal Gollancz both philosophically and economically, and, as will be seen in the next chapter, was to have as big an impact on his publishing output as the rise of marketing during the period.

Chapter 5 ‘Art at the service of the people’. Victor Gollancz, Stanley Morison, and the rise of the Constructivist dust jacket

Introduction

In his monograph *Stanley Morison Displayed*, Herbert Jones wrote, ‘In conversation Gollancz did not mince his words, he shot them out loud and clear to his listeners, whether they were standing by his side, downstairs or on the telephone a hundred miles away. V. G. was seldom misunderstood’ (Jones, 1976, pp103). In a sense the dust jacket on a Gollancz book was simply an extension of that need to be understood, and there are very few people who understood Gollancz better than designer and typographer Stanley Morison. At least in terms of the design of the publishing company’s dust jackets. Elsewhere they were less likely to see eye to eye. As Jones also wrote with regards to the jackets, ‘They were essentially the joint product of Gollancz, the brilliant copy–writer, and Morison who invented a way of typographically articulating that copy, with the aim of giving every word the utmost chance of being read’ (Jones, 1976, p103). For both Gollancz and Morison communication was key, and the book dust jacket was simply another conduit for communicating ideas, be they political or design oriented. That this was an important communication tool was very much in tune with the times, as the dust jacket had assumed a new importance in the industry by this time.

Amongst book historians, as much as book collectors, the book dust jacket has become a prized artefact. Originally intended to be discarded after the job of literally protecting the books from dust and damage prior to being bound, it took some time before the dust jacket was seen to have an intrinsic value outside of its protective qualities. Nineteenth century publishers were slow to see the promotional potential of the dust jacket, despite examples going back to 1830 (such as *Friendship’s Offering*). However, they were more common by

the twentieth century, and by the 1920s the jacket as we are familiar with it today, came to be a common sight, face–out in bookshops.

The work of Gerard Genette has done much to legitimise the position of the book dust jacket as something worthy of study, a legitimacy reflected by Martin Salisbury who also highlights that not only can an original jacket on a rare first edition increase the value to book collectors, but that if the jacket design is by an acclaimed artist then that value is further increased. Salisbury questions whether 'the jacket should be seen as part of the book itself or as an entirely separate, ephemeral addition' (Salisbury, 2017, p11), but he convincingly argues that, 'it would seem clear that the jacket is a historically important indicator of, and contribution to, contemporary graphic style and visual culture' (Salisbury, 2017, p11).

There are two elements of Genette's assessment of what he terms the peritext – in this case the dustjacket and the typographic element thereof – that are particularly relevant here. In this chapter I will evaluate both of these elements in the light of the rise and influence of the Russian Constructivist design movement of the early part of the twentieth century, and how it was adopted by British publishers of the period, primarily Gollancz, and adapted for his, occasionally idiosyncratic, purposes. The dustjacket is an active part of the theory of the printing press as an agent of change. Its sole purpose is to carry information or to convey a 'message', and Gollancz used it make very specific political and cultural points. Design, copy, and imagery when used, where all exploited to Gollancz's ends in a way not seen before in publishing.

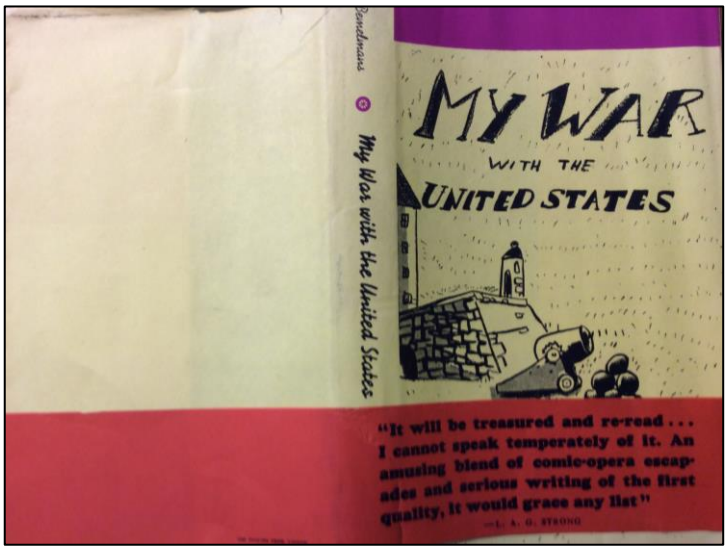


Figure 13: Example of promotional 'belly band' on Ludwig Bemelmans*, My War with the United States (*Gollancz, 1937)

Although the dust jacket is ephemeral in that it is detachable (as is the 'belly band' that is sometimes fastened around a book), there is in this an inherent invitation to throw both of these things away because of this detachability, making the conservation of them more problematic. There is a striking example of the 'belly band' on Ludwig Bemelmans' *My War with the United States* (Gollancz, 1937). It is unusual for a Gollancz cover in that it has an illustration on the front and a hand–written font, but what is most striking is the red band wrapped around it featuring a recommendation from LAG Strong:

> It will be treasured and re–read […] I cannot speak temperately of it. An amusing blend of comic–opera escapades and serious writing of the first quality, it would grace any list. (British Library, 25/517)

After its protective qualities, the most obvious function of the jacket is to attract attention. That could be what Genette calls 'a garish illustration, a reminder of a film or television adaptation, or simply a graphic presentation more flattering or more personalized than the cover standards of a series allow' (Genette, 1997, p28). Alternatively, a jacket may be added to a later edition to promote a film adaptation, for example. Technically speaking, in terms of the book's production and also in a paratextual sense, for Genette, the additional effect of

the rise of the dust jacket has been to push the cover ‘back toward the inside of the book and to make it into a second (or rather, a first) title page’ (Genette, 1997, p31). It is this call to the reader’s attention that Gollancz makes full use of, eventually largely eschewing the pictorial or photographic dust jacket in favour of the purely typographical version.

This would have found favour with Genette who believed that too rarely is there identification of the typeface. He claims that ‘the reader has the right and sometimes even the *duty* […] to know the typeface used for the book he holds in his hands, and he cannot be expected to be able to recognize it by himself’ (Genette, 1997, pp32–33). Both he, and Gollancz before him, were highly aware that the typeface and the arrangement of the words on the page influence the reader, which is why Gollancz used it to such masterful effect. In her 1961 article on Morison in *Architectural Review*, Beatrice Warde claims that typography ‘has two separate roles to play. It can stop you, distract you from what you intended to do, interrupt your train of thought – as a successful display–line does in an advertisement. It can also coax you on, and imperceptibly guard you from distraction in uninterrupted reading’ (Warde, 1961, p343). This statement aptly encapsulates the pivotal role Morison brought to Gollancz in the early years of his publishing company.

Even when a jacket was purely typographical the eye of a talented designer was necessary to maximize the potential of this prime promotional opportunity. Salisbury stresses the importance of the balance between type and image and claims that the best designs are those done by the artists most comfortable with the ideas of typographic design (Salisbury, 2017, p12). There was no designer in the thirties who was more comfortable with type than Morison. For him it was about consistency. In his essay ‘On the Classification of Typographical Variations’ collected in the volume *Letter Forms* (1968), Morison said that bibliography, which he described as ‘the science that identifies, separates and classifies details of the physical construction of surfaces and single sheets, tablets, books, and all other materials to which signs, alphabetical and otherwise, are applied’ (Morison, 1968, p1),

required ‘as exact a study of the calligraphical and typographical aspects of the composition, and the execution of a consistent terminology for the variations in letter–forms as they appear in manuscript and print’ (Morison, 1968, p1). For Morison it is through the consistent application of the rules of typography that the greatest communication is achieved.

There has been very little research into the dust jackets produced for Gollancz’s publishing company, and most of that is by way of the technicalities included in the biographical works of Hodge and Edwards. Evaluating the connection between Gollancz’s dust jackets and the Constructivist art movement has entailed careful examination of the actual jackets and comparison with examples of Constructivist art in order to arrive at the conclusion that the jacket designs were influenced by this burgeoning artistic force. Constructivism was the foremost new art movement at the time and it was emanating from the revolutionary government in Russia. It had clear political motivations, and given the influence on the content coming out of Gollancz’s publishing company by the Communist Party, it is important to assess how much of an influence this new artistic movement had on the physical appearance of Gollancz’s output. The influence on covers, typefaces and other components of book design may have been more subtle than the overt influence that the Communist Party of Great Britain sought to have over the content, but it appears no less pervasive. Gollancz would have been persuaded as to the efficacy of the cover design, which would have appealed to him for reasons other than political philosophy, but that would not have meant that he was unaware of the impact – cultural, political and otherwise – it would have. Indeed, that impact would have been an added bonus. To pick up on the work of Febvre and Martin, and Eisenstein, this was very much the printing press as well the availability of cheap industrial dyes that enabled cost-effective colour printing, acting as an agent of change. The dust jacket was carrying a message that was both explicit and implicit. The political exhortations that adorned the many of the Gollancz covers were one thing, but the very act of the dust jacket design with its Constructivist influence, carried a more nuanced message that spoke to those attuned to hear it.

In the 1930s there was no greater influence on the design of book covers than the Modernist movement, and for those on the Left a persuasive version of this was the art revolution coming out of Russia, known as Constructivism. There were a number of advantages to this design approach for a progressive publisher, such as Gollancz. Firstly, it was modern and allowed him to stand out from his competitors, which was essential when he was setting out on his new publishing enterprise. Secondly, it gave him plenty of space for copy, which was especially useful for his non–fiction titles, where it was most necessary to 'sell' the book's content and message. Thirdly, it was an approach that lent itself to branding and reproducibility, which had the attraction for Gollancz of being a relatively cheap way of keeping his identity in the reading public's eye. It also had a benefit recognised by Genette, that 'The series emblem […] therefore amplifies the publisher's emblem, immediately indicating to the potential reader the type of work, if not the genre, he is dealing with' (Genette, 1997, p22). Finally, it was relatively cost–effective, in that it meant that Gollancz could have minimal printing on the book binding itself. It took until the mid–1920s for this new artistic movement to reach the shores of Western Europe, but it had its roots in the turmoil of an earlier decade.

The rise of Russian Constructivism and its influence on the dust jacket

The roots of this design movement are to be found in the rise of the Bolsheviks in Russia. When they came to power in 1917, there was a cultural revolution every bit as profound and seismic as the political changes. The Tsarist government had kept a tight control on all forms of expression: controlling the media, outlawing anti–Tsarist political parties and censoring books. Although avant-garde artistic movements had flourished in exile during the Tsarist period, post–1917 radical artists were in the ascendance, pragmatically utilised by a revolutionary government embracing modernism and the rise of abstraction in Western European art. In his book *Radical Russia* (2017), Peter Waldron describes the seizure of

power by the Bolsheviks and how that provided an unexpected opportunity to radical artists to bring their work to the attention of a wider public with, at least, the implicit backing of the new Bolshevik regime (Waldron, 2017, p66).

The new regime used popular celebrations and festivals marking significant dates in the revolutionary calendar as a way of presenting itself to the Russian people. This included artistic displays by Kuzma Petrov–Vodkin. Natan Alt'man was a key figure in the 1918 Petrograd festivities, in which he concealed the city's traditional historical views and buildings behind modernist facades. The new regime also invested heavily financially, such as its contribution of two million rubles to the establishment of new museums, with new artworks to be displayed in them. Tightly controlled to achieve the maximum propaganda effect, there was a list of 143 artists to be exhibited, including Lexionov, Malevich, Tatlin, and Rodchenko; and the Moscow Museum of Painterly Culture became the main place for displaying avant–garde works.

One of the key designs of the period was that of the 400m tower designed by Vladimir Tatlin intended to straddle the river Neva in Petrograd and to house the Communist International. As Waldron says, this was central to the new government's view of itself, as 'locating the Communist international inside the tower suggested the inherent dynamism of the new socialist state and the way in which radical art was able successfully to combine the politics of the new era with controversial and provocative cultural forms' (Waldron, 2017, p80). Although it was never built, the designs remained an inspiration for the politicians and artists of the era and a central tenet of the government's cultural philosophy (Waldron, 2017, p80).

One of the means by which the Bolsheviks persuaded the new Soviet citizens of the benefits of the new revolutionary regime was by using revolutionary symbols and imagery on everyday objects to constantly reinforce the Bolshevik message. These included the red star

Figure 14: SSSR (USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). Poster published by Kubuch publishing house in a print run of 1,000 in Leningrad, 1925

and the hammer and sickle. The hammer and sickle came to prominence in Sergei Chekhonin's designs. This was ideal for the Bolsheviks because, as Waldron says, it suggested that 'their regime promoted the interests of both the city and countryside and, indeed, wanted to unite the disparate sections of Russian society' (Waldron, 2017, p74). It was all part of the Bolshevik aim of differentiating themselves from the previous defeated regime. If Tsarist art was art for the elite, then Bolshevik art was art for the masses and it would use all the everyday and commonplace means of communication open to them.

As Frances Morris, the Director of Tate Modern, states in her introduction to the museum's exhibition catalogue:

> Propaganda on the streets transformed everyday culture, giving a public face to the ideals and ideology of the new state. The vast range of material took many forms,

> from cheap postcards to imposing monuments. The state message conveyed in these works was further distributed through the documentary photographs that appeared in newspapers and journals, creating a broad and powerful impact. (Morris, 2017, p4)

Postcards, posters and public placards became key to the new government's propaganda. They were bold and dramatic and, above all, modern. Picture postcards had been a regular method of communication from the end of the nineteenth century, for both propaganda and anti–government purposes. Part of their appeal to the new revolutionary regime was that they were quick, easy and cheap to produce, which was also one of the reasons they had become a widely used method for soldiers to write home during the First World War.

Cost and speed of production influenced the government's other communication choices. Political propaganda posters appeared in August 1918 that were aimed largely at soldiers as well as peasants, most of whom were illiterate. Consequently, the posters used short, attention–grabbing headlines and strong colourful images that people would recognise. Over 450 different organisations and institutions were given the job of producing posters. Their distribution was overseen by a new government department called Litizdat (the Literary Publishing Department of the Political Directorate of the Revolutionary Military Council). The most famous of its early productions was El Lissitzky's first propaganda piece, 'Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge', printed in 1920 by the Litizdat branch of the Political Directorate of the Western Front. Lissitzky also designed the Soviet pavilion at the 1928 International Press Exhibition in Cologne, intended to display the latest trends in mass media, publishing and advertising. Lissitzky used his architectural training to create what Gale and Sidlina call an 'immersive environment animated by three–dimensional features and props, dramatic lighting, mobile displays and photographic montages' (Gale and Sidlina, 2017, p49).

Pragmatism was central to this new mass art, so, given the shortage of materials, a new form of poster was devised using stencilled images, giving a quick means of communication in the form of a cartoon. As a result, there was no need for a printing press, and a new method of distributing the propaganda – the agitprop train, covered with posters and slogans – came into being.

This new art needed a modern medium and photography became the dominant one. As Gale and Sidlina say, photographs were 'powerful visual statements [that] helped the new Bolshevik government to construct the revolution as a coherent event, giving it a clear visual identity and creating iconic images of heroes, the leaders and the victorious masses' (Gale and Sidlina, 2017, p18). A focus on technology was key to the new regime, and the camera in particular was embraced by radical artists. Lissitzky, who moved to Germany in 1921, and who used his knowledge of typography to illustrate books and to design book jackets, used it to show the modernity of the Soviet state. It is entirely appropriate that these sort of industrial processes should be applied to book design for, after all, as Benedict Anderson remarks, 'In a rather special sense, the book was the first modern–style mass–produced

Figure 15: Photomontage created by Gustav Klutsis for a commemorative issue of *Young Guard*, January 1924

industrial commodity' (Anderson, 1983, p38). Rodchenko mixed a documentary approach into his photographs, which he used in advertising and packaging design, and one of the first to apply photomontage to mass–produced propaganda materials was Gustav Klutsis, which he called Agitation Art. The technique is best seen in his illustrations for the commemorative issue of *Young Guard*, published following Lenin's death in January, 1924.

Radical artists were able to take advantage of the new regime's desire to create a new everyday life, and to create cultural forms that were far removed from the traditional elitist art that dominated Tsarist Russia.

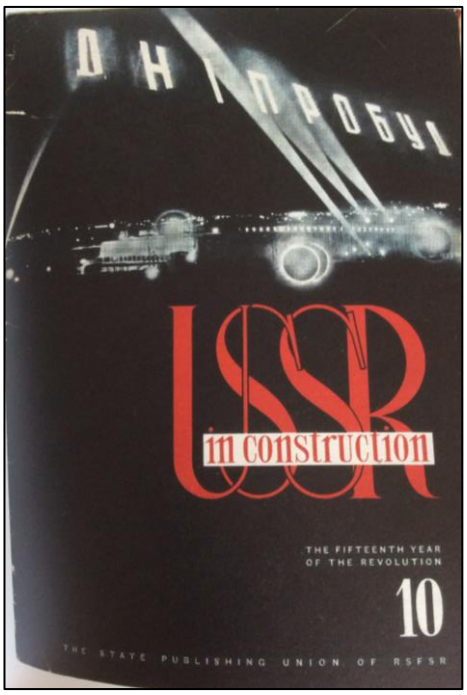


Figure 16: Front cover of *USSR in Construction*

The key publication at the time was *USSR in Construction*. Published between 1930 and 1941, it was the most widely distributed periodical in the country. Focussing on construction and industrialisation, its aim was to showcase the achievements of the new Soviet regime, and, to stress its modernity, it was produced in Russian, German, English, French, and Spanish. Lissitzky designed nineteen issues, often with his wife, Sophie Lissitzky–Kuppers.

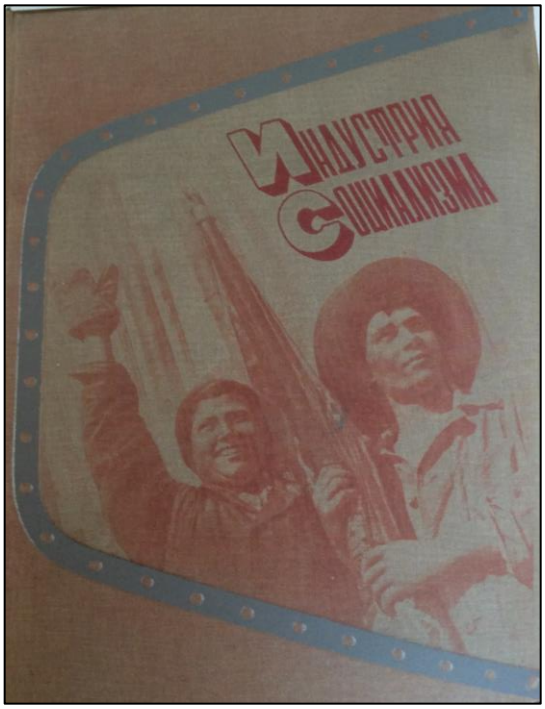


Figure 17: Cover o*f Industry of Socialism* designed by El Lissitzky

The pair also created a new genre of photobook that they called a ‘montaged book’. Essentially a book put together like a film, such as *Industry of Socialism*, which ran to seven volumes and had metallic covers. Lissitzky called his design work ‘book construction’ and he became a major influence on designers working on book covers for publishers in Britain, such as Edward McKnight Kauffer. For example, the red and black ink that dominates Lissitzky’s work on the 1923 edition of poet Vladimir Mayakovsky’s work where ‘on the left is a hammer and sickle and the right–hand margin is stepped like an address book to index the poems’ has echoes in Kauffer’s later work for Gollancz and others; an influence that will be discussed further later in this chapter. This design for Mayakovsky’s *For the Voice* is created in such a way that ‘he formed the book with an index, so that ‘the book form is given a functional shape in keeping with its specific purpose’, allied him to Constructivism’s fusion of the technical and the artistic’ (Lodder, 1983, p191).

The work of Lissitzky and others became known as Constructivism. Constructivism, as a term, first emerged to describe this new Russian artistic style in the early 1920s. It linked work, specifically that of the factory, with art and the practice of artists, leading ultimately to identifying a new social and political order. This is in contrast to modernist authors in Europe at the time. John Carey claims that 'the principle around which modernist literature and culture fashioned themselves was the exclusion of the masses, the defeat of their power, the removal of their literacy, the denial of their humanity' (Carey, 1992, p21). Despite coming from the same intellectual wellspring, the Constructivist artists in revolutionary Russia and those visual artists influenced by them, embraced the masses and generalised forms of mass communication. In the leading work on the movement Christina Lodder characterises Constructivism as being linked to 'the concept of the merging of art and life through mass production and industry' (Lodder, 1983, p3). In short, Constructivism is utilitarian in content and exhibits the artist's social commitment. Constructivism, however, is a complex term, with many different interpretations, including 'production art', which is linked to the mass–produced industrial object. That, in itself, is not clear as it could mean the embellishment of an already manufactured object, or it could mean the artist's perfect melding of form and function, from initial concept to production.

Ostensibly Constructivist graphic design is a contradiction in terms, as Constructivism was originally applied to three dimensional objects. However, in truth it was most successfully used for poster and exhibition creation and, as a result, became synonymous with the agitation posters and panels that became a key aspect of Constructivist activity during the late 1920s. Despite having formed in the years post the 1917 revolution it was 1922 before the West became aware of the developments of post–revolutionary Russian art following the Erste Russiche Kunstansstellung in Berlin in that year. However, as Lodder notes, it 'viewed Russian Constructivism pre–eminently as an art movement. In reality it was something much wider: an approach to working with materials, within a certain conception of their potential as active participants in the process of social and political transformation' (Lodder, 1983, p1).

This restricted interpretation of it, however, probably served to guarantee its longevity in the West when it was already being superseded by a new Soviet Realism in the country of its birth.

By 1932 the only Bolshevik–approved art form was a bright and colourful social realism – 'social in context, realistic in focus' – resulting in the suppression of the avant–garde. Waldron argues that the rise of Socialist Realism, what he terms 'Stalinism applied to the world of art and literature' (Waldron, 2017, p98), was to dominate and stifle Russian culture for the next fifty years, resulting in the disappearance of radical art and writing, and the death or incarceration of many of its major proponents. Despite Stalin's policies having their roots in the preceding Leninist period and in the Revolution itself, Lodder agrees that 'The traditional interpretations of the decline of Russian avant–garde activity in general and Constructivism in particular has always been that of a vital artistic activity cut off in its prime by a repressive and reactionary regime' (Lodder, 1983, p5). Ironically Constructivists use and championing of photography and the photomontage as the prime artistic tool may have helped sow the seeds of the movement's demise. As Lodder says,

> Fostered by Party preferences for an art comprehensible to the masses Realism became a positive element in the cultural atmosphere of the time and the Constructivists' use of the photograph will be interpreted here as a compromise with that powerful move towards Realism and the attempt to create a popular Soviet art. (Lodder, 1983, p181)

It did, however, ultimately destroy Constructivist principles, reliant as it was on a reality, rather than a 'projected reality'.

In many ways the movement's work was done by this point. Its theories and design styles had been adopted in the West and were seen to flourish in more enlightened regimes. Nowhere was this more true than within publishing. Major Constructivist artists, such as Rodchenko, Klutsis, and Lissitzky had focused their work on book and magazine design,

creating a modern, utilitarian approach to design, and it is this approach that found favour with its adherents in the graphic arts in Europe and America.

Edward McKnight Kauffer and 'the importance of the formal geometry or dynamics of shapes'

Edward Kauffer was born in Great Falls, Cascade County, Montana, on 14th December 1890 (he adopted the name 'McKnight' as an homage to his mentor Joseph E. McKnight, a Professor of Elementary Education at the University of Utah who sponsored Kauffer's study in Paris). Having first encountered European avant–garde art, as many American artists did, at the 1913 International Exhibition of Modern Art (now commonly referred to as the Armory Show) in Chicago, he came to England in August of the following year. His biographer Mark Haworth–Booth notes that while he came to prominence, particularly in Britain, during the early part of the twentieth century, relatively little is known about him:

> In the thirties Kauffer became a very public figure in Britain, while remaining a very private man. The glimpses of him to be found in published recollections by friends and colleagues are few and far between. (Haworth–Booth, 2005, p59)

These days he is probably best known for his design work for the London Underground, mostly for the renowned Frank Pick, who was in charge of publicity there from 1908. Kauffer's first posters for the London Underground appeared in 1915, and he continued to design for them for the following twenty–five years. However, in tandem with that, he also became a noted illustrator and designer of book dust jackets. Beginning with designing covers for his close friend, Francis Meynell's Nonesuch Press, Kauffer also worked with many of the leading publishers at the time, including Chatto & Windus, for whom he designed the cover of Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1921), John Murray, Faber and

Faber, and the Hogarth Press. Perhaps most successfully, for a brief period at least, he was a designer at Gollancz's newly founded publishing company.

Figure 18: Covers designed by Edward McKnight Kauffer for Hulbert Footner*, Anybody's Pearls* (Gollancz, 1930) and Roland Dorgeles, *Departure* (Gollancz 1928)

His relationship with Gollancz was relatively short – just one year, 1928 to 1929 – but it yielded eighteen book jackets. Additionally, Kauffer also contributed drawings and illustrations to Gollancz titles as this extract from the 1928 list of publications shows:

> 'Dinners long and short' by A H Adair. With an introduction by X Marcel Boulestin, with decorations by E *McKnight* Kauffer, and with a portrait of the author by Marie Laurencin. (Victor Gollancz Ltd Archive, MSS.318/4/1)

Of the thirty-eight fiction and non-fiction books published by Gollancz in 1928, the majority of them were influenced to some extent by modernist art-forms, with at least four being designed by McKnight Kauffer, and Stanley Morison having a hand in two works of typography - *German Incunabula in the British Museum* and *A History of the Old English Letter Foundries*.

Kauffer also designed the square VG logo that appeared on many of the book covers.

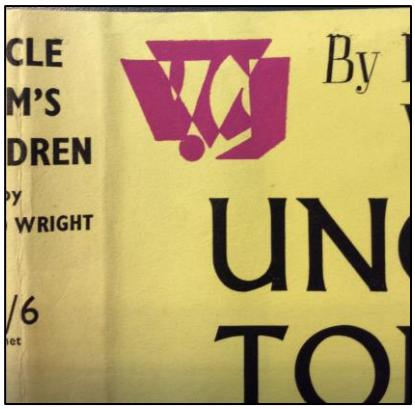


Figure 19: Victor Gollancz Ltd logo designed by Edward McKnight Kauffer

Appearing almost exclusively on works of fiction, it continued to feature long after Kauffer's association with the company ended. Significantly it also features, what Salisbury called, Kauffer's strong belief in 'the importance of the formal geometry or dynamics of shapes to capture attention' (Salisbury, 2017, p119). A style heavily influenced by what Kauffer had seen coming out of Russia, especially, with its red wedges, the work of Lissitzky.

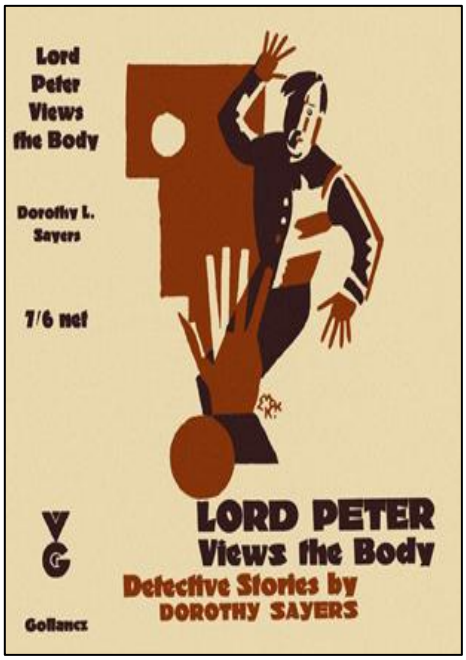


Figure 20: Cover designed by Edward McKnight Kauffer for Dorothy L Sayers, *Lord Peter Views the Body* (Gollancz, 1928)

As Hodges notes, Kauffer's designs for Gollancz, 'were used almost exclusively for detective stories' (Hodges, 1978, p33). Arguably the most prominent of which was for Dorothy L. Sayers' book of short stories, *Lord Peter Views the Body* (1928), and which features that same geometric design style. Kauffer employed the same style on other novels, such as Tod Robbins' *The Unholy Three* (1928), which Salisbury correctly notes, avoids 'sensationalist imagery on the jacket design' (Salisbury, 2017, p118), which was not easy given the book's subject matter of three circus 'freaks' on the run, 'instead constructing a dynamic formal composition of type and image in two colours' (Salisbury, 2017, p118).

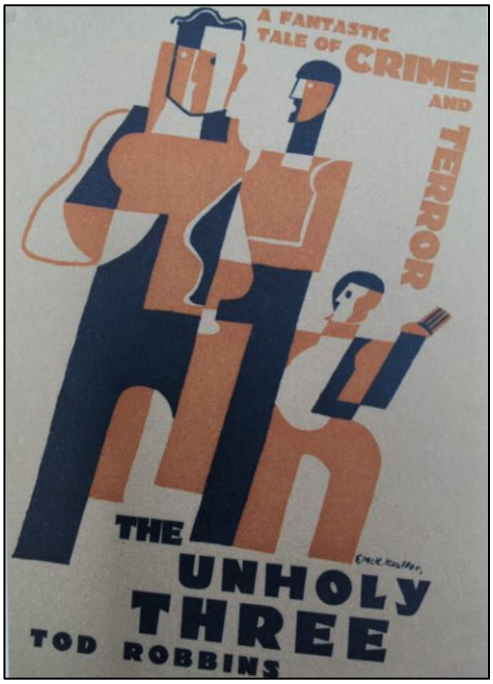


Figure 21: Tod Robbins, *The Unholy Three* (Gollancz, 1928)

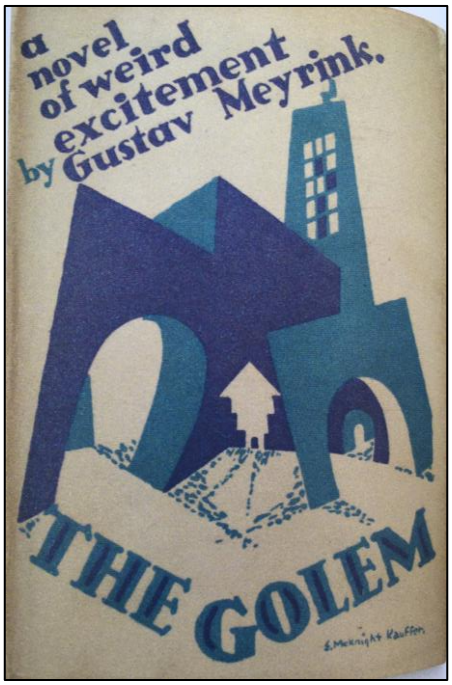


Figure 22: Gustav Meyrink, *The Golem* (Gollancz, 1928)

Again, a similarly angular design style can be seen on what the jacket declares 'a novel of weird excitement' – Meyrink's *The Golem* (1928). As Nate Evuarherte states, these and similar designs for *Departure* (1928) and *Anybody's Pearls* (1930), 'diagonal integration of typographic and rectilinear elements summons immediate comparison with Russian Constructivist publications of the 1920s' (Evuarherte, 2015, p3). Looking at these covers as a collection it may be that Kauffer's designs were mainly used on detective and related titles, but what Kauffer achieves, without recourse to heavy–handed graphics, is a sense of menace and foreboding. This is where the angularity and monolithic structures of the

Constructivist aesthetic are employed most successfully. The figures and structures on the covers loom over the reader using the brutalist imagery of Rodchenko and Lissitzky. Like Morison following him, Kauffer and Gollancz worked in tandem to some extent, and the copy on the covers must be attributed to Gollancz as 'A novel of weird excitement' (*The Golem*), 'Crook versus crook versus crook' (*Anybody's Pearls*), and 'A fantastic tale of crime and terror' (*The Unholy Three*), evidently came from the pen of that king of copywriters, Gollancz. Even a version of the cover for *Lord Peter Views the Body* has emblazoned on it

Figure 23: H G Wells, *The Open Conspiracy: Blueprints for a World Revolution* (Gollancz, 1928)

'An incredibly delectable book!', thereby imparting some of the sleuth's upper–class idiosyncrasy in one memorable phrase.

Not everyone was as impressed, however. Hodges' view was that Kauffer's designs 'although they were striking were on the whole not particularly attractive or calculated to help the sales' (Hodges, 1978, p33), but this is difficult to agree with on the evidence of the jacket designs. This is especially the case for Kauffer's design for HG Wells' *The Open Conspiracy: Blueprints for a World Revolution* (1928), which is a masterpiece of post–Constructivist design: utilitarian and sparse, but also stylish and modern, communicating clearly and succinctly with the reader and positioning it appropriately for the buying pubic. Not only is it Kauffer's purest representation of the Russian Constructivist aesthetic (a comparison particularly with the work of Lissitzky shows that), but it also contains two other very interesting devices. Firstly, this piece of non–fiction is being cross–marketed with Gollancz's

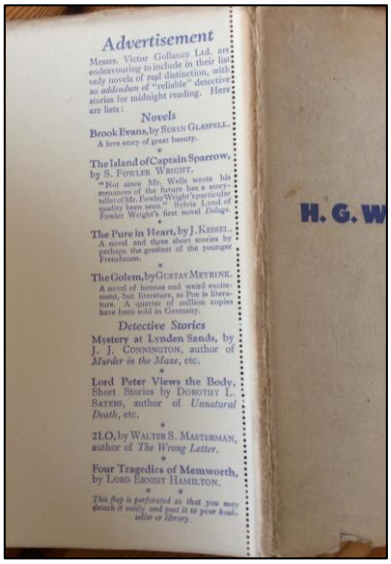


Figure 24: Advert on the inside flap of the dust jacket of H G Wells, *The Open Conspiracy: Blueprints for a World Revolution* (Gollancz, 1928)

fiction list, presumably to maximize Wells' reputation as a novelist. The copy on the inside back flap differentiates between the publisher's 'novels of real distinction' with their '*addendum* of "reliable" detective stories for midnight reading'. More interesting than that, however, this inside back flap also acts as a marketing piece reflecting the sort of commercial innovation discussed in the previous chapter. In this case the flap has been perforated 'so that you may detach it easily and post it to your bookseller or library'. This was unlikely to have been Kauffer's doing, but such pragmatic use of the material of the dust jacket admirably reflects the utilitarian nature of the jacket's design.

More significant than any of this, however, was Gollancz's personal view of the dust jackets. Kauffer met many of Gollancz's requirements, which is probably why he did so many covers in such a relatively short space of time, and, as Evuarherte states,

> Often he accommodated his client's preference for typographic covers and disdain for ornamentation and what Gollancz termed 'picture jackets'. In spite of these constraints, Kauffer produced a series of striking designs that adopted an economic approach to form and frequently displayed an intellectual engagement with contemporary art movements. (Evuarherte, 2015, p3)

However, Hodges' assertion that Gollancz, 'always disliked spending large sums on jackets, and after a while probably balked at having to pay an artist's fee and high production costs' (Hodges, 1978, p33), explains the fairly short–lived acquaintance between the artist and publisher. As Hodges also points out, Kauffer 'liked to think deeply about each book before he began work' (Hodges, 1978, p33), and he was therefore unlikely to feel satisfied working on detective stories, which may explain why his best work for Gollancz is one of non–fiction. Equally, given his natural impatience, it is unlikely that Gollancz appreciated Kauffer's deliberations over his art.

Figure 25: Cover designed by Edward McKnight Kauffer for Leonard Woolf, *Quack Quack!* (Hogarth Press, 1935)

By 1929 both men had gone in different directions. By this time Kauffer had fully embraced Modernism and, in particular, the Constructivist style of photo–collage or montage, most

likely influenced by his work with the WS Crawford advertising agency. His ease with the medium is probably best seen on his design for the jacket of Leonard Woolf's *Quack Quack!* (Hogarth Press, 1935). Gollancz on the other hand eschewed photographs on book jackets almost completely, and, instead, devised, with Morison, the distinctive typographically–led yellow jackets for which the publishing company became so well–known. It is significant that Morison joined the Gollancz publishing company as Kauffer ends his association. For Warde, despite some of the Gollancz book jackets up to this point displaying 'the genius of McKnight Kauffer', they were merely 'pleasant–looking examples of decorative art' (Warde, 1961, p341). According to Warde, when Morison came in he

> saw nothing there to offer him any real reason 'why' (as he said) 'a man who was approaching a new book, with any curiosity about its contents, should be fobbed off with a picture on the jacket'. Off went the picture, in came the wholly–typographic jacket – with a bang that shook the whole book trade. (Warde, 1961, p342)

Stanley Morison and the typographical Gollancz dust jacket

The distinctive yellow jacket that continues to be a key part of the Gollancz brand to this day[34] had its roots in work Morison was undertaking for Doubleday publishers in the United States of America. There is a similar range of bold typefaces, and even if they tended to be printed on a printed yellow background rather than the yellow paper of Gollancz, there are, what Moran called, 'perhaps the beginnings of the Gollancz "style"' (Moran, 1971, p108). Morison's initial typographical cover design, featuring the title and 'selling copy' for *The Life and Letters of Woodrow Wilson* (Doubleday, 1927) could be seen as the prototype for the Gollancz book jacket of the future. However, 'the idea did not catch on: salesmen and booksellers clung to the "picture jacket" to which they were used' (Barker, 1972, p219).

[34] The Gollancz imprint is now part of the Orion publishing conglomerate

He was a leading advocate of the approach that a dustjacket was not just for protection, but that it also had a selling purpose. According to Morison, the reader, 'should first be compelled to look at a jacket and then induced to start reading at once. This combination demanded typographical audacity – a mixture of both eye–catching display and more sober

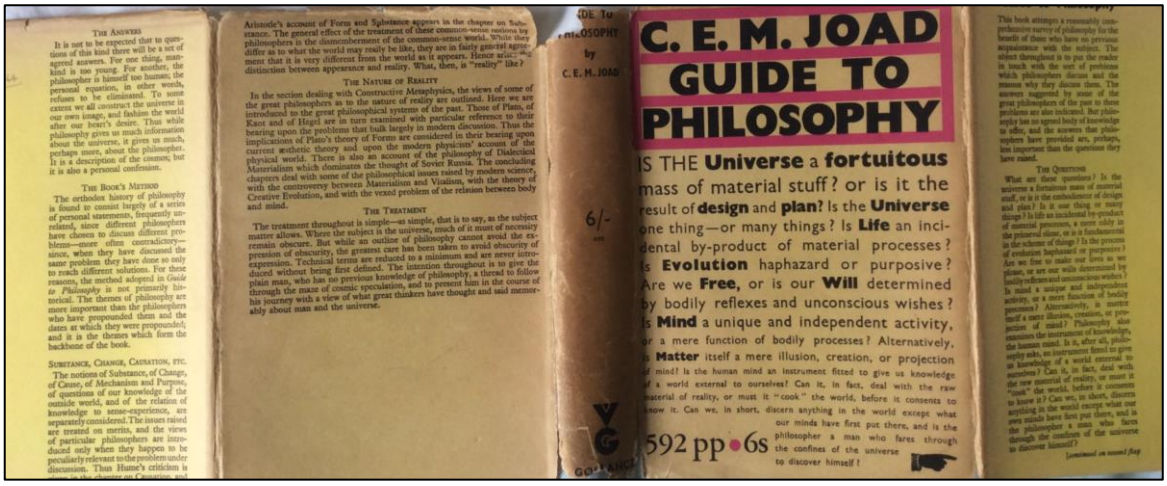


Figure 26: C E M Joad*, Guide to Philosophy* (Gollancz, 1936)

editorial setting' (Moran, 1971, p121). That the jacket was a selling tool was clear from the outset. He began the discussion of the book's contents on the front of the jacket with the intention of making the reader turn to the flap and then to the book itself. This was particularly the case with Joad's *Guide to Philosophy* (1936), where the copy started on the front cover and then proceeded across the inside flaps before concluding on the back cover. To make sure the jacket would stand out from others, black, red, and magenta printing on a special bright yellow paper (Morgan's Yellow Radiant) was used. Gill Sans was a valuable weapon in his battle of the bookstalls, as a glance at the jacket of Joad's *Guide to Philosophy* shows, but Morison used all the display faces he could lay his hands on, particularly the new bold faces being issued by German typefounders. These jackets were not welcomed by the book trade – publishers and booksellers – who thought they were unfair (Moran, 1971, pp121–122). In addition to the typefaces,

> The jackets reflected perfectly Morison's conviction that their prime function should be to surprise and startle the reader. The front cover boldly stated the contents and the purpose of the book – often in a great variety of types and rule combinations. Morison enjoyed using devices such as pointing fingers, paragraph marks, double

daggers and quotation marks, exaggerating their size so that they sprang boldly from the text. (Hodges, 1978, p30)

This accusation of unfairness from rival publishers was one that continued to dog Gollancz through the early years of his publishing venture, as can be seen even more clearly when it came to advertising. There was also an additional advantage of this approach to dustjacket design (a not insignificant one in this case) which was that it also allowed Gollancz to save money by having a simple binding (usually black) with minimum over printing; just title, publisher, author.

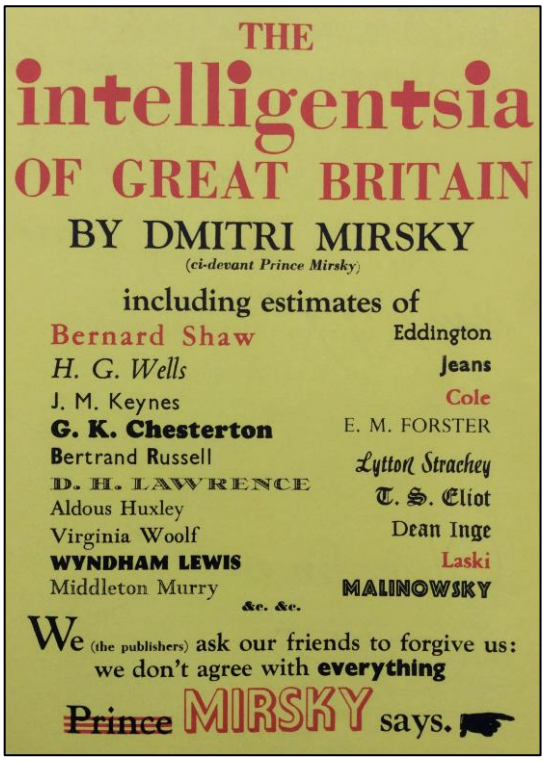


Figure 27: Dmitri Mirsky, *Intelligentsia of Great Britain* (Gollancz, 1935)

In many ways the most audacious of the Gollancz/Morison jackets was that conceived for Russian émigré and CPGB member, Dmitri Mirsky's *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain* (Gollancz, 1935). Featuring what Warde calls a 'remarkable example of silly–season ingenuity' (Warde, 1961, p343), the jacket reflects the erstwhile–Prince Mirsky's 'estimates' of his literary contemporaries in a variety of different types, the tone of which is reflected in

the tongue–in–cheek comment underneath the names: ‘We (the publishers) ask our friends to forgive us: we don’t agree with **everything** Prince Mirsky says’

It is notable that the red lines that obscure the debatable nature of the author’s status, perhaps actually have the effect of highlighting the question instead. Warde summed up this example of the bravado of the book jacket designer’s art, thus:

> The jobbing printer’s type book has never been more recklessly pillaged in the interests of ‘allusiveness’, and not all of it is as obvious to the layman as the corpulence of the face used for Chesterton, or the assignment to JM Keynes of Gill Sans. Forster was a shrewd choice for Perpetua (or *vice versa* if you like) and there is subtlety in the difference between the sort of ecclesiastical black–letter used for Mr Eliot and the mixture which nominated Dean Inge. (Warde, 1961, p343)

Audacious it may have been, but successful it certainly was and continues to be: a star in the dust jacket firmament. Not all jackets needed to have such an ostentatious display, of course. Many of the Gollancz dust jackets got on with their job in a quieter, but in their own

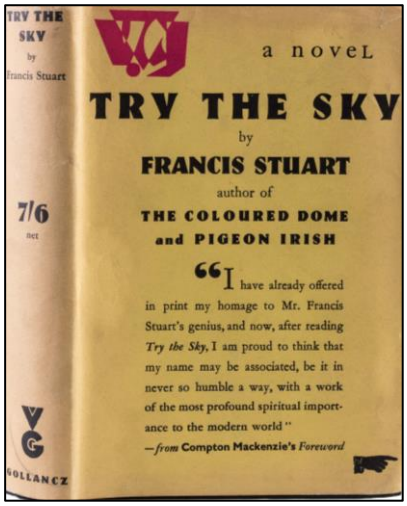


Figure 28: Francis Stuart, *Try the Sky (*Gollancz, 1933)

way, equally radical manner. For example, the jacket for Francis Stuart’s *Try the Sky* (Gollancz, 1933), hooks the reader’s interest with a quote from the foreword by novelist and co–founder of the Scottish National Party, Compton Mackenzie, and, as Warde notes, ‘the

"fist" that jerked readers over to the inside flap [which] was another shocker for its day' (Warde, 1961, p343). Most eye–catching is the capital 'L' on 'a noveL' which puts the capital letter at the end of the word. As well as playing controversially with the norms of language and typesetting (a favourite trick of Morison's), it most importantly draws the eye to the fact that this is a work of fiction.

Also using this 'printer's fist' or manicule, and extensive copy on the front, Bert Birtles' later *Exiles in The Aegean* (Gollancz, 1938) describes the Australian journalist–poet and his wife's travels in Greece to paint what the cover calls 'a picture of one the blackest dictatorships'. What is striking here is the way the jacket, as it does on Joad's *Guide to*

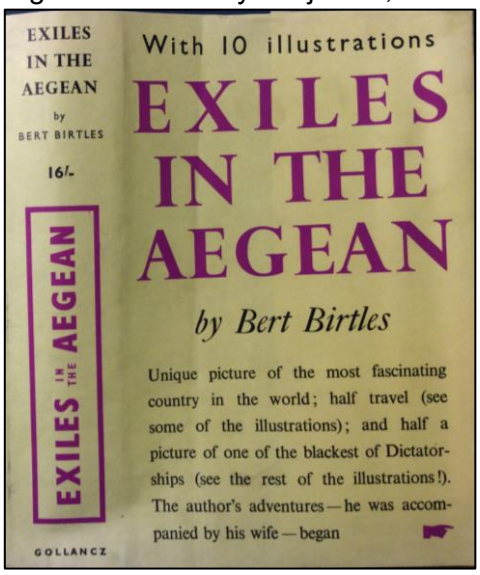


Figure 29: Bert Birtles, *Exiles in the Aegean (*Gollancz, 1938)

Philosophy, runs the copy from the front onto the inside flaps. This gives the copywriter plenty of opportunity to draw the casual reader in. In the best traditions of reportage, the blurb has the drive of a novel:

> When the author actually came to visit the prison island of Anaphi, he expected the police to forbid him the right of entry, but it is typical of the inconsequential administration of the country that, though the author and his wife were later arrested and sentenced to ten 'days' imprisonment for the most trifling of technical offences, no objection was raised to their visiting those dangerous enemies of the State – the

> Communist prisoners. They lived with the prisoners in their camp, shared their very limited rations, learnt of the appalling sufferings during the hunger strike a couple of months earlier and learnt how, after the prisoners had broken their fast upon promise of their freedom, they found that the King had altogether forgotten that promise! (British Library /25/5/4)

With a set–up such as this, the casual browser is surely tempted to read more.

Not that the road to dustjacket design revolution was smooth (nothing ever was when there was a contradictory voice to Gollancz's involved). As Warde says, the new jackets were a 'series of uninhibited typographic audacities which first set the booksellers clucking with dismay, and in due course reversed the complaint into that of Unfairness to Other Publishers, whose prettily uninformative jackets were being sorely handicapped at the sales–counter' (Warde, 1961, pp342–3). Although Kauffer had designed the original square VG logo, the yellow jackets and logo were, according to Barker,

> the result of a council of war between Gollancz, Morison and [Ernest] Ingham […] The cause the admitted failure of the first jackets, done by Gollancz himself in his best *Sunday Times* advertisement style, for two Dorothy Sayers novels. As at Doubleday's the salesmen preferred picture jackets, but Gollancz was prepared to risk 'the only test – of experience'. It was a startling success. (Barker, 1971, p238)

The flaps contained a description of the book's contents, and the author's name and the book title were always prominently displayed on the front because Gollancz believed that was the jacket design's most important purpose. Gollancz carried out research into the most arresting background colour for the covers, before settling on a yellow stock (the aforementioned Morgan's Yellow Radiant), which Ingham sourced from Germany. Booksellers disliked the covers because they marked easily when handled, but with the red/magenta and black type on the yellow background they were undoubtedly eye–catching.

Figure 30: Cover by El Lissitzky for *Die Kuntisman* (1925)

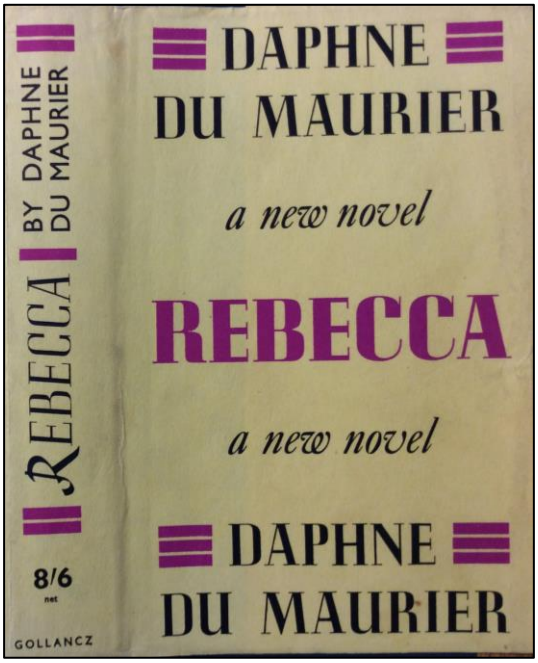


Figure 31: Daphne Du Maurier, *Rebecca* (Gollancz, 1938)

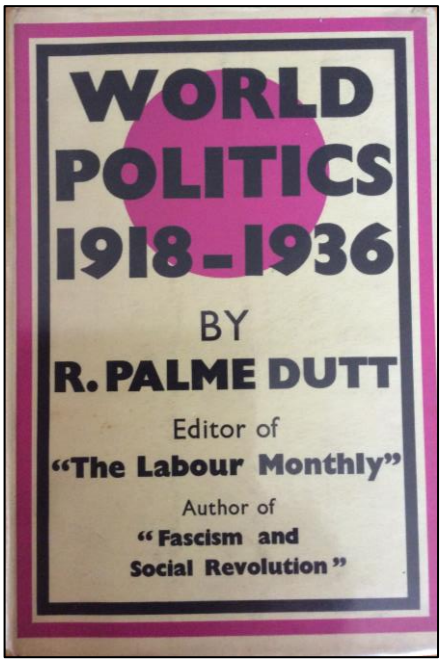


Figure 32: R Palme Dutt, *World Politics: 1918–1936* (Gollancz, 1936)

The influence of typographically–led Russian Constructivist books and posters can clearly be seen on Morison's covers for Gollancz. Take Lissitzky's cover for *Die Kuntismen* (1925), for example. There are distinct similarities between that and the cover of R Palme Dutt's *World Politics 1918–1936* (1936) or even Daphne Du Maurier's famous bestseller *Rebecca* (1938). Note as well here how the author's name is prominent, appearing twice, while there is no publisher logo, and the Gollancz name merely appears at the bottom of the spine. Much of this approach is owed to Aleksei Gan who laid down many of the theories of how constructivism could be applied to books, magazines, and newspapers. He worked mostly as a typographer, and in his 1922 treatise *Constructivism*, he used typography to reinforce his message. As Lodder terms it,

> He had slung short sharp phrases diagonally across the pages like slogans on banners, he had utilised heavy underlining and different thicknesses of type, and he varied spacing and used different typefaces (serif and sanserif) to emphasise his points. He had even enclosed his statement that 'Art is Dead' within black borders.

> All these efforts had given the pages of his book the visual impact of a poster. (Lodder, 1983, p183)

There is no publisher that liked a slogan more than Gollancz and many of Gan's instructions and beliefs mirror those of Morison.

Conclusion

Morison had a dictum that informed his work throughout his long and varied career, that 'one must distinguish between things that differ'. Many things can be gleaned from this, but at all times it is about communication. Whether that is creating a clear, new typeface to help differentiate within a body of text or whether that is creating advertisements or book dust jackets that highlight most effectively what he wants the reader to take away from the text, Morison is focusing on communicating with the reader.

In many ways that is what Constructivism was attempting too. In a post–revolutionary environment, the artists of the Bolshevik era were communicating subliminally the difference between the new government and previous elitist regime. They did this through a series of formats and signifiers that spoke directly to the newly enfranchised populace. The method of communication via postcards, posters, agit–trains and the like, was also significant in a largely illiterate country. This was the printing press being used as an agent of change in the most direct sense. Like a Morison advert, communication to the masses needed to be brief, clear, and to the point. That the artists of Modernism and the *avant garde* chose print media as one of their prime methods of communication, caused the magazine cover and the book jacket to be similarly direct means of communication.

The works of Rodchenko and Lissitzky among others, heavily influenced that new wave of designers and artists coming to prominence in Europe and America. Nowhere is that influence more obvious than in the work of Kauffer. His light shone only briefly at Gollancz,

but while there he established a sort of bridgehead between the old, fustian book design of previous years and other publishers, and a new, clear design rooted in the industrial processes of Constructivism. This utilitarian approach would reach its apotheosis with Morison's typographical covers, that in one sense rejected the deliberately *artistic* approach of Kauffer, and in another, built on the radical strides forward made by the American.

Both designers could be said to be perfect for Gollancz's new publishing company. Firstly, they broke the mould in terms of creating a new visual style for book jackets, much as Morison and Gollancz had done in advertising and marketing, but they also helped establish Gollancz as a new, different, and powerful voice in British publishing in the Thirties. Once this was allied with Gollancz's trademark mix of publishing nous and ground–breaking content, there was no holding him. Despite being thirty–five when he started his own publishing company, Gollancz's status as the *enfant terrible* of British publishing was built on his devil–may–care attitude to promotion and design, an attitude that was in many ways as much built in Russia as it was in his offices on Henrietta Street. That this design style was rooted in the cultural revolution of Communist Russia would only later appear problematic, particularly when allied to the publishing list of the Left Book Club that seemed to be increasingly dominated by Soviet–approved content.

Being perceived to be this close to the Communist Party, in both content and appearance, eventually proved to be the Left Book Club's downfall. There is one single event that ultimately condemned the Left Book Club to the footnotes of pre–Second World War history and that event is the Soviet–Nazi pact of August 1939. That one act pulled the philosophical and doctrinal rug from under the Club, disrupting its foundations in a manner that it was never to recover from. In discussing that event it is important, however, to not lose sight of the Left Book Club as perhaps one of the most pivotal organisations in the history of the twentieth century.

Chapter 6 Communism at the crossroads. The crisis at the Left Book Club in the wake of the Soviet–Nazi pact.

Former Left Book Club supporter, Philip Toynbee, wrote that the Left Book Club 'came to represent for many people much that they wanted to forget in their lives; for other, younger people it was a symbol of all that they thought worst about the Thirties' (Laity, 2001, pxxxi) Perhaps if the Club had ended at the height of its powers around the time of the Earl's Court rally in April 1939 then it would have been regarded as a beacon of unity on the Left, drawing together the disparate strands of the Left into a righteous voice of opposition to the act of appeasement undertaken by the incumbent Conservative government. As it was, 1939 saw the Left Book Club riven with conflict both internally and externally with perhaps its greatest sponsors, the Communist Party.

In this chapter I will look at how the Club imploded at the height of its influence, and how the dichotomy at the heart of the Club between needing the support of the communists to galvanize the Left Book Club groups, whilst also needing to distance themselves from the Party in order to meet the Club's political aims, finally caused the Club to fracture irrevocably. Also, how that fracture occurred both at the very top of the Club and also in its relationship with the leadership of the CPGB. Finally, I will assess how the rift not only damaged the Left Book Club, but the also the Communist Party, and consider what the legacy of the Club actually is. Whether it contributed in a real way to the Labour Party victory at the general election of 1945 or whether it is an embarrassment that contemporaries wanted to forget, as Toynbee suggests (Laity, 2001, pxxxi).

The catalyst for this division and self–immolation was the Soviet–Nazi Pact of August 1939. There is, of course, much coverage of this agreement as a pivotal moment in the lead up to the Second World War, and all the major works about the 1930s cover it. However, there has been little coverage about how this unlikely pact impacted on the major publishers of the

time; principally Gollancz and the Left Book Club. To fully understand how fundamentally and structurally destructive this agreement was it is necessary to investigate the Gollancz archives. Kevin Morgan has touched on the effect of the pact on the Communist Party and in particular how it caused tension at the heart of the CPGB, especially for its leader, Harry Pollitt, and Ruth Dudley Edwards, discusses it in her seminal study of Gollancz the man, but in this chapter I aim to go deeper to fully understand why the crisis caused by the Soviet–Nazi Pact had such a profound effect on the Club and how that crisis played out amongst the personalities that led it. It could be argued that the cause of the fissure at the top of the Left Book Club was not just the result of the differing reactions to the Pact, but also the strain that the compromises Gollancz had been prepared to make had been, that were too much for the other colleagues associated with the Club when placed under the existential crisis caused by the Russo–German rapprochement. Simone Murray may be right in that for political publishers to survive a deal needs to made between left–wing sympathies and capitalist necessities, but also Williams may be right that when that deal is struck something else is lost. He would argue that would be integrity, but for Gollancz it was more fundamental than that that – it was a crisis of faith in his political beliefs and anxiety as to whether his 'ideological tapdancing' had been in vain.

The impact of the Soviet–Nazi Pact

For much of the Thirties the focus of Gollancz's legal activities centred on the perceived connection between the Left Book Club and the Communist Party. However, by August 1939 Gollancz had bigger concerns that were to throw the Left Book Club into disarray, cause rifts at the very top of the organisation, provoke much soul searching on behalf of Gollancz (especially into his personal relationship with the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain) and ultimately mark the end of the Club as a significant source of left–wing information (despite its continuing to publish until 1948). The signing of the Soviet–Nazi pact by Joachim von Ribbontrop and Vyacheslav Molotov in Moscow on 23rd August 1939, had

caught the British government off guard. Britain was still holding talks with the Soviet government in Moscow when news of the pact filtered through. As Juliet Gardiner writes, 'Lord Halifax admitted that the news of the pact came as a surprise to him and the rest of the government, and a Labour MP queried why so much money was being spent on the intelligence services if they hadn't managed to get wind of it' (Gardiner, 2011, p756).

It also seemed to confirm what George Orwell had always said, which is 'the old, true and unpalatable conclusion that a Communist and a Fascist are somewhat nearer to one another than either is to a democrat' (Orwell, 1968, p160).[35] News of the pact also led to a crisis at the very top of left–wing circles in Britain. There was no bigger crisis than the one amongst the leadership of the Left Book Club. Firstly, this pact of non–aggression between the forces of fascism and communism could only lead Gollancz to question his relationship with those at the very top of the Communist Party of Great Party and to ask himself whether, in fact, those people who had been criticising the Club's book choices had been right in their concern about the communist taint to many of them. Secondly, this questioning led to a division of opinion between Gollancz and Club luminaries, such as Sheila Lynd, Betty Reid and John Lewis, that ultimately led to a schism that damaged the Club's effectiveness.

Even before the signing of the Soviet–Nazi Pact Gollancz was having concerns about the closeness of the relationship between the CPGB and the Left Book Club. In a letter to Harry Pollitt, leader of the CPGB, of 16th January 1939, Gollancz stood firm about the origins of the Club: 'The first thing to be said, I think is that the Left Book Club was not founded as an organ of the Communist Party, nor was it ever intended that it should be such' (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/1.1), and that he had been 'perfectly sincere' that the Club was not just 'the Communist Party camouflaged'. He then talks about his own relationship with the Party,

[35] Stated by Orwell in an unsigned editorial for the third edition of *Polemic* in May 1946 (Orwell, 1968, p160)

> I have always had a sense of the immense importance of the Communist Party for the bringing about of the things in which I believe: and since the Seventh Congress I have agreed in general with its line. But, as I think everyone must have realised, there have always been certain things with which I could not agree. And, while I have, I think, a full theoretical understanding of the arguments in favour of a rigidly disciplined party, and of being a member of it, nevertheless, though from time to time I may have been carried away, fundamentally the preservation of intellectual liberty,[36] and the refusal to support anything in which one did not believe, have been for me personally exceedingly important. And as the Fascist menace to all this range of values grows, so grows my conviction of their importance. In other words, it is now quite clear to me that, made as I am, I cannot, nor could ever have been, anything but a 'fellow traveller' – though an immensely admiring and sympathetic one. And it is in that capacity that I believe I can render infinitely the best service to the cause which both of us – I as passionately, I am sure you agree, as you – have at heart. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/1.1)

Gollancz positioned the Club once again within the broader Popular Front approach against a communist–led one:

> The very essence of the value of the club to the socialist movement, and more significantly to the Popular Front movement, was precisely that it honestly wasn't an organ of the Communist party: and it was also this fact which, in my view, has made it so valuable to the Communist Party itself (for the club has been as valuable to the Communist Party as the Communist Party has been to the club). It was, indeed, a unique and, in my view, most valuable situation: here was a body in radical agreement with the C.P. over a great part of the field, but at the same time genuinely (I specially underline the word genuinely) independent. I couldn't imagine anything of

[36] In the letter 'liberty' is crossed out and replaced with 'independence'

> greater value to the Popular Front movement. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/1.1)

After broadly praising the role of the Communist Party, Gollancz then tackles what he knows will cause friction with Pollitt – 'I beg of you not to misunderstand anything I have said, or to draw conclusions from it which should not be drawn. As I see it, the Communist Party and the Left Book Club are the two most vigorous political organisations in this country' (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/1.1). Typical of Gollancz's disingenuousness he writes of his 'joy in working people of your type', but stresses his concern at the loss of the Club's independence and objectivity:

> Almost insensibly the club <u>was</u> tending to become an organ of the Communist Party: and the time arrived when I had to write letters denying this, while wondering for the first time whether I was being honest in denying it. And this was having a really serious effect on the club as a broad educational instrument of the kind I had envisaged. Moreover, it was doing grave danger to its Popular Front work: for the difference between an independent body, going a very large part of the way with another organisation, and a branch, so to speak, of that organisation, is one that cannot for long be concealed. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/1.1)

Significantly Gollancz chooses to highlight Pollitt's appeal (begging, Gollancz calls it) to not publish August Thalheimer's *Introduction to Dialectical Materialism* as the book choice for May 1937. Perhaps surprisingly for one so disinclined to listen to other's opinions when they contradicted his own, Gollancz agreed to pull the title from the list:

> My first big pull up, I think, was the Thalheimer episode. What was the situation? Here was a little theoretical book of very slight importance, by a man who had had a row with, or with whom a row had been had by, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (or of Germany – I forget which). It was a very elementary theoretical book, and, while I have since carefully studied the onslaughts on it by some of the experts, and although I have had (if I may say so without immodesty) some training in

> philosophy, I found myself unable to appreciate the earth–shaking differences between this little book and official theory. But, be that as it may, the book in any case was a trifling one, and was a mere 'additional'. But you begged me (and begged me a second time when at first I objected) to withdraw the book after it was announced: and you begged me to do so because 'the club is now so closely identified with us' (those were your exact words) 'that if you publish it it will create a most serious impression on the other side'. This, as I say, really did draw me up with a start: you will say, I am afraid, that I show myself to be an unashamed bourgeois liberal, but this business did offend against all my ideas of intellectual integrity. However, against my better judgement I yielded (and I should not have yielded, had not this constant atmosphere of complete identity grown up). And what was the result? As I foresaw, there was the most widespread criticism, and it was said all over the place that here was proof positive that the Left Book Club was simply a part of the Communist Party. And then, when I got letter after letter to this effect, I had to sit down and deny that I had withdrawn the book because I had been asked to do so by the C.P. – I had to concoct a cock and bull story to explain the substitution. I hated and loathed doing this: I am made in such a way that this kind of falsehood destroys something inside me. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/1.1)

These extracts are from a much longer letter that mixes a certain bullishness typical of Gollancz's style with a more poignant self–awareness, that marks Gollancz's realisation that the perception about the Club might actually be correct. In his memoir, *More For Timothy* (1953) Gollancz claimed that 'I allowed myself […] to get into a false position, intellectually, with the communist movement itself: which I can express perhaps by saying that for about fifteen months I was as close to the Communists as one hair to another' (Gollancz, 1953, p357).

The turbulent relationship between Gollancz and Pollitt is crucial to understanding this period in the Club's history. If Gollancz was, along with Lane at Penguin, the most significant radical figure in publishing in the 1930s then in many ways it could be argued that Pollitt was his political equivalent. Despite the difference in their backgrounds neither brooked any argument and took the stance that those not in agreement with them were effectively in opposition to them. Both held a guru–like status unusual in both publishing and politics, and it was their hubris and adherence to their principles in the face of overwhelming odds (in Gollancz's case Popular Front politics and exercising a personal domination of the LBC, and in Pollitt's his support for Communist Party policy as a tenet to live by even when he privately disagreed with it) that contributed to their many challenges. Pollitt had unsuccessfully stood for Parliament for the constituency of Rhondda East at the 1935 election, losing to Labour by 8,433 votes (Morgan, 1993, p89), however, during his tenure as leader of the CPGB he oversaw its growth in membership from 7,700 in July 1935 to about 18,000 in September 1939. At the 1945 election the Communist Party received 103,000 votes and had two MPs elected; Pollitt again standing in Rhondda East and this time losing by only 972 votes.

Gollancz had started to have doubts about Pollitt and the Communist Party's influence within the Left Book Club after the Munich agreement of September 1938, that allowed the annexation of sections of Czechoslovakia by the Nazis. The view of many Popular Front supporters, 'was neither to wish for British rearmament nor thank Chamberlain; it was rather to feel that although War would have been terrible, peace on such terms was even worse' (Symons, 1960, p125). This act of appeasement provoked an article in *Left News* called 'Thoughts After Munich' (November 1938) in which Gollancz wrote, 'the publications of the Club have tended to concentrate to too great a degree (though by no means exclusively) on two or three points of view'. There was no immediate breakdown of the relationship between the Communist Party and the Club, however, by September of the following year, Emile Burns, Communist Party Executive Committee member, wrote to Gollancz to say,

> until last September [1938] I had absolute confidence in your general line. Then I got my first shock in the LEFT NEWS article you wrote after Munich. I blame myself for not gatecrashing on you then; but I kept hoping you would ask me to have a talk. I realised later that you were seeing me as little as possible […] there was a time when you used at least to let me know what you were doing – but the impression I get is one of drawing back just when the biggest advance is possible […] I think you are making the only really big mistake you ever made in your life. And in doing this you are missing a really great opportunity. You alone have the complete anti–fascist record as a publisher; and the L.B.C. has carried it forward. And don't forget that the Party has helped in no small way. If you follow your present line it will mean that you lose the following which is there waiting to go on and get bigger as the situation develops. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/14.11)

What is remarkable about this is not just the tone, which is similar to that of a jilted lover, by turns pleading, flattering and ultimately threatening; it is the realisation on the part of Burns that the CPGB has no other means of communication as effective as the Left Book Club and that Gollancz's acknowledgement of the too close relationship and his subsequent repositioning is likely to have a significant impact on the Party's ability to communicate effectively to a group wider than its membership. Gollancz's reply of 18th September 1939 is conciliatory, but firm:

> All sorts of possibilities are opening out: but it is a matter of temperament to me, at a time like this, to test and try out as I proceed […] I feel that what is necessary is to avoid at the moment any exacerbation of what has inevitably been a difficult situation. I shall certainly try on my side to avoid anything of the kind. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/15)

The letter to Pollitt quoted above is typical of Gollancz's attempts to distance himself from the Communist Party.

He also commissioned Leonard Woolf to write a book that defined the values of freedom and tolerance. *Barbarians at the Gate* (published by the Left Book Club in 1939) was written before the Soviet–Nazi pact and the outbreak of the War, but published after, but, as Woolf says in his foreword, 'Its general argument and conclusions seem to me to be confirmed by these events' (Woolf, 1939, p7). In the book's conclusion Woolf writes provocatively, given the treaty with Nazi Germany, 'The ultimate object of Communism is a civilised society based upon freedom. This is incompatible with the growth or even the existence of Fascism' (Woolf, 1939, p215). Instead he claims, 'On the other wing the Soviet Government remains a dictatorship. It has accepted and largely established the economic foundations necessary for a civilized society. But it still obstinately rejects the other postulates of civilisation' (Woolf, 1939, p217). The publication of *Barbarians at the Gate* also caused problems with the LBC groups themselves. In a letter from E H Stevens of Progressive Books in Swindon to Gollancz, which is undated but appears to be 21st November 1939, she writes:

> Among our local L.B.C. membership panic seems to reign […] It concerns the coming book, BARBARIANS AT THE GATE by L. Woolf, and our members are up in arms at what they call 'anti–Soviet propaganda', saying they get this every day in the capitalist press. We are threatened with wholesale resignations or else many copies being refused acceptance. Is it too late to change the November choice? I fear it is, but locally we are in a real quandary and would like some advice. (Rajani Palme Dutt Papers, CP/IND/DUTT/05/09)

Gollancz's response of 28th November 1939 not only rejects this, but also reinforces the fact that the LBC is a *club*:

> The suggestion that a member can pick and choose cannot be accepted for a single minute. This is made explicit in the prospectus, which says 'members must, of course, accept the books selected and printed for them'. We have had this sort of thing on many occasions in the past: we had, for instance, threats of mass resignations from I.L.P. members when, for reasons which seemed to us sufficient, we decided not to publish Thalheimer's book: and a small minority will certainly

> threaten to resign in December because, just as many members talk about 'anti–Soviet propaganda', this minority will say that the Dean's book is 'Soviet propaganda'. To all such threats of resignation we are bound to present an absolutely determined resistance. (Rajani Palme Dutt Papers, CP/IND/DUTT/05/09)

He also notes the financial implications to booksellers of Left Book Club members not picking up the books to which they have committed:

> If, nevertheless, they should leave the book on your hands they will be doing you, and presumably the whole movement, a very great disservice: for you will owe us the money, but will find difficulty in paying us owing to the fact that the members are not paying you: and we should be bound to take a serious view if that occurred. (Rajani Palme Dutt Papers, CP/IND/DUTT/05/09)

Interestingly Gollancz copies the letter to Palme Dutt, who he is contacting regarding Palme Dutt submitting a manuscript to a new series he is planning:

> This letter is symptomatic of a good deal of feeling of this kind: I feel pretty certain that a great number of Left booksellers will be left with the book on their hands by members who will not honour their obligation (just as Atlee's book was) and that the result of this will be more financial difficulties for Left booksellers and more crippling debts for us. (Rajani Palme Dutt Papers, CP/IND/DUTT/05/09)

Despite this hand–wringing within the Left Book Club and the fact that Gollancz wrote a personal letter of condolence in warm terms to Pollitt on the death of Pollitt's mother in November 1939 saying that 'She seemed to me, if I may say so, a great woman' (Harry Pollitt Papers, CP/IND/POLL/3/9), it is no wonder that Pollitt was losing patience with Gollancz and the Club. The crisis with the Communist Party deepened and Lawrence & Wishart ended their relationship with the Left Book Club at the end of 1939 (although the Club published books by leading Communists Wal Hannington and Palme Dutt after this time). This was exacerbated by Gollancz's publication of a pamphlet in May 1940 called

Where are you Going? An Open Letter to Communists, which was critical of the Party, but which appealed,

> for the last time – to you whom a passion for human freedom as great as has ever been known in the world's history first dedicated to communism, and who number among yourselves so many of the finest fighters for the workers' cause – to realise what our defeat would mean in terms of human slavery. (Gollancz, 1940, p29)

By this time, however, the relationship with the Communist Party was in tatters and the Club itself had been cleft in two. April 1939 had perhaps seen the Club's high–water mark as unifying force of the Left with its biggest ever rally held at the Empress Stadium at Earl's Court. The meeting had been addressed by Lloyd George, Sir Stafford Cripps, the Liberal Sir Norman Angell, Pollitt, and Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson. By September Gollancz and Laski were openly supporting the War whereas Strachey opposed it and did not leave the Communist Party until the Spring of 1940. According to Julian Symons the contemporary view of Club supporters was that,

> the attitudes of Gollancz, Laski and Strachey seemed a betrayal of another kind. How, in the name of what was rational, could they support the Government that they had been abusing for years? Wasn't the attitude of Lloyd George, who wanted a negotiated peace, or even the defeatism of the Communists more logical? (Symons, 1960, p139)

The outbreak of the war was the first test of Gollancz's leadership in which he was found wanting. In the December 1939 issue of *Left News*, Strachey argued against the war saying 'we can help to free the Czech people by our struggle against our own government'. Whereas Laski defended it, and Gollancz insisted in the January 1940 issue that there should be no Club line on the war, but rather open discussion. This inevitably condemned the Club to many months of open debate. This laissez faire approach to the war also applied to the variety of new books being published by the Club, such as the communist and Soviet–baiting *Barbarians at the Gate*. Strachey's review of the book in that month's *Left News* was highly critical, but Laski was in turn critical of Strachey's views. Leonard Woolf's book was in marked contrast to much of the hagiographical work published by the Club about Russia

previously, such as Sidney and Beatrice Webb's naïve, rose–tinted and self–delusory *Soviet Communism, a New Civilisation* (October 1937), which at 1200 pages was also one of the longest books the Club published. *Barbarians at the Gate* also shocked many of the Club's members, but more significantly it 'indicated a reversal of Club policy of great significance. In future the Club did not stand for *one* faith. It was now prepared to publish books critical of Marxism and to encourage within the Club a variety of conflicting opinions' (Lewis, 1970, p119). As Lewis also noted the Soviet–Nazi Pact had been the turning point 'in the development of the Club's thoughts and policies' (Lewis, 1970, p115). The Pact was, in fact, the beginning of the end for the Left Book Club.

The Left Book Club in crisis

Over thirty years after the Soviet–Nazi Pact it was clear that the division within the Left Book club still ran deep. Lewis acknowledged that for Gollancz and many members of the Club

> the Pact appeared to be an act of shameful perfidy, a base betrayal of socialist principles. To make an agreement, an *alliance*, as it seemed with the worst enemy of all progressive causes and of democracy, appeared to be a shocking example of the doctrine that the end justifies the means even if that end was the preservation of Russia from invasion and the destruction of socialism. (Lewis, 1970, p115)

In that final sentence it is possible to still see the ambivalence of a former Party member to the communist doctrine. Lewis can see how startled the Club members were at this most unlikely of alliances, however, there is a sense that he believes Russia was only doing what was necessary to preserve itself and, by extension, to preserve socialism. There's no doubt that Russia was pivotal to Hitler's plans for progression and, having looked for some time to Russia as an alternative to the unemployment and poverty caused by capitalism, it is also true that the Left Book Club had been calling for a military alliance with Russia for some time. According to a report in *The Guardian* of 1st January 1970 the then recently released Cabinet Papers for 1939 suggest that the British government had never had any intention of

supporting Russia if it came to war. It is clear 'that Britain could have had an acceptable alliance with Russia if only Chamberlain and his Ministers had wanted one. Russia needed the alliance and wanted it. Britain needed it but did not want it' (Lewis, 1970, p114). For William Rust writing in his history of the *Daily Worker*, it was not just the government that was opposed to any form of treaty with Russia, it was the mainstream press, as well. He wrote:

> It is tragic to recall that during those vital years leading up to the war the hysteria created by the Press made it practically impossible to obtain a dispassionate hearing for the proposal that Britain and the Soviet Union should consider the question of common action against Hitler. In those years the Press Lords were very fond of the Nazis primarily because they regarded them as a means of crushing Communism. Fleet Street hated Communism much more than it did Fascism. (Rust, 1949, p94)

This continued into the war itself. The 'Munichite Tory Press' called for an Anglo–German settlement against the 'common danger' of Bolshevism. For Lewis and many others in the leadership team at the Club, given the resistance to any sort of Anglo–Soviet alliance, Russia was only doing what it had to do. This was not the view of Gollancz, however. That conflict at the heart of the Club can perhaps be best seen in Gollancz's letter to Strachey, which by also emphasising Gollancz's ultimate control of the Club, points at the difficulties to come:

> I fundamentally disagree with your remark that the Club must be either Communist or anti–Communist. I don't believe that: if it were true the Club would be really meaningless. I want the fullest representation of the Communist point of view: but I want that representation on an equal footing with the Labour Party point of view and with all 'progressive' points of view. Incidentally, I have discussed this also with all my directors (and you must remember that the Left Book Club is technically simply a publishing department of Victor Gollancz Limited) and they all agree with my point of view. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/10.ii)

Not all the directors did agree, however. Not only that, but Gollancz aimed to take greater personal control. He says in the same letter to Strachey,

> I have always consulted you and Harold before making any major decision and every such decision has been unanimous: and, of course, this will apply to the future every bit as much as to the past. But I do feel that I must keep the day–to–day direction in my hands. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/10.ii)

Part of this taking control of the Club's direction was to move the whole publishing company to Brimpton, near Reading, at Gollancz's property, Lane End. He asked both Lynd and Reid to make the move, but both refused. It is fair to say that both Lynd and Reid regarded the Club as something they had an equal responsibility in building. Lynd, who had been with Gollancz since before the foundation of the Club, felt particularly betrayed. She had consulted with Pollitt prior to the posited move to Brimpton, Gollancz regarded as a question of loyalty: putting the Communist Party before the Left Book Club. She wrote to Gollancz on 30th August 1939,

> You are evidently in no mood for discussion at the moment […] since yesterday I have felt that I may be partly responsible for your present hostility and suspicion, through having let you get away with a complete misunderstanding of my conversation with Harry last Friday […] I certainly never meant to give the impression that either Harry or I questioned your courage […] If I was hostile, as I know I was, when I gave you this decision last Friday [not to go to Brimpton], it was not Harry but yourself who made me so: I am sick of putting up with lectures on the stupidity of the Soviet Government, and scoldings for not believing they have gone into isolation. Since then, as perhaps you don't realise, I have been too angry to sleep, and find it very hard even to write and try to clear up misunderstandings with you for which I feel to blame. I don't know how clear Betty has made the position, so I will re–explain why we feel like this: since the beginning of the Groups we have worked at building them, regarding it as our main Party work, using our position in the Party to win greater understanding of the importance of the Club. We understand the Groups and

> the way the Club must work as well as you, and have hitherto worked with you in everything the Club has done. We have been regarded as officers of the Club. But when the situation becomes critical, we find that we are not officers, but office boys – and office boys who are not to be entirely trusted in the building, just because they are Communist office boys. Apparently we are even suspected of considering slipping some Party appeal into the debilitating circular you sent to conveners last Friday, and are not to be trusted to answer inquiries about the Soviet Pact in a reasonable manner. Don't you think your suspicion that we could do anything so disruptive and so assinine [sic] is a good deal more insulting than my imagined doubt of your courage? (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/3.ii)

Lynd here is clearly furious, frustrated and aggrieved. Her position as one of the prime movers at the Left Book Club had been undermined by Gollancz's autocratic tendencies, but it also makes clear how close she thinks the Club's links to the CPGB are and, consequently, how divisive Gollancz's strategy of balancing left–wing politics with capitalist motives had been. A man of contradictions, indeed. In his obituary of Reid in *The Guardian* of 11th February 2004, following her death on 4th January, Morgan claims that although the Soviet–Nazi Pact was the breaking point for Gollancz, 'for Reid, Lewis and many others, it tested – but cemented – commitments to the [Communist] party'. A long and impassioned letter from Reid reflects this:

> You continue to believe that we are angry because you will not swing the Club behind a demand for an Anglo–Soviet Pact, and because of your violent reaction to the Russian–German pact. That is not, for a moment, my position. Of course there will be a number of Party members who will be angry because you are not doing that, just as they were about conscription and so on. But that doesn't mean that we are taking up that attitude. Indeed the situation revealed is a far more serious one than disagreement on immediate issues. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/9.iii)

However, the depth of the gulf between the two positions can be seen when she writes,

> after innumerable discussions which we held in the branch and in our groups, after reading the statements and hearing Harry [Pollitt] speak, and most of all, by the events, I feel absolutely convinced that by this stroke [the Soviet–Nazi pact] Russia has enormously strengthened the peace forces, and has altered the whole tempo of the fight against Fascism. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/9.iii)

Also guaranteed to provoke Gollancz, she takes issue with his personal control of the Club:

> I feel that you entirely equate yourself with the Club. Now I could never accept for a moment political loyalty to an individual. And isn't that really what you are asking? I feel that this is the crucial point. I feel very deeply that by not acting you have altered the whole basis of the Club. Maybe it can be defended on new grounds. That is not the point. The point is the decision and the policy. Can we do anything but feel that here is an enormous organisation for which we have asked members to sacrifice their time and energy to build. Yet this vast organisation is entirely dependent on one man (leaving aside the Laski Strachey Myth) who may at any moment decide that the whole thing has been wrong, that it should be shut down, that it is necessary to shut it down, that it should be swung behind the Government (this, of course, is just an example), and in fact that the whole organisation is dependent on your individual judgement. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/9.iii)

With a philosophical and political gap this wide it is not surprising that Gollancz decided to take control of the Left Book Club groups as well. In doing this Gollancz dismissed Lynd from the company, prompting another angry letter on 13th September:

> Both in justice, since I am a much older member of the firm, and in common sense, as I am a much more capable one, it would obviously have been natural to keep me to run the groups rather than Lewis, or with Lewis in place of Betty, rather than retain them and dismiss me. For I know exactly how low is your opinion of Dr Lewis's efficiency and clear–headedness: I remember, if you have forgotten, that at your own

> urgent request Harry asked me to give up all other Party work to devote myself to the Club because even 2½ years ago you had so little confidence in Dr Lewis: I took over the rallies for the same reason. But apparently non–membership of the Communist Party is a more important qualification than anything else. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/18.i)

Despite claiming that he was not going to respond, Gollancz, being highly sensitive to personal slights, he of course did and on 18th September he wrote a five–page letter saying that she had not been dismissed, but that he had asked her to move with the company to Brimpton, which she had refused 'in an exceedingly cavalier fashion' despite the difficult position it would leave him in because 'it was more amusing to stay in London!' Gollancz had, throughout his life, a need to explain and to show himself to be in the right. This case was no different. After several pages of self–justification, he ends on a note of wounded pride – 'you have constantly treated me, who have spent my life in thinking about politics and trying to be as useful as I was able, with a mixture of amusement and contempt' (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/18.i). Nonetheless the end result was a parting of the ways.

In May 1940 Gollancz finally suspended the groups, taking control for correspondence into his own hands and dismissing both Lewis and Reid, although Reid continued to work for the Communist Party into her 70s. He wrote to the conveners on 27th May 1940 blaming the war situation and the paper shortage, and saying that

> It is the earnest hope of Dr Lewis, Miss Reid and myself that sooner or later circumstances will so change that once again they can take up the work with us to which they have devoted themselves with such skill and single–minded enthusiasm. (The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/4/LB/2/20)

He signs off that Lewis will be writing to them. However, this was to prove another division at the top of the Club. Gollancz did not like the letter to the Conveners that Lewis had drafted and so wrote one for him, which Lewis in turn rejected saying,

> In that case I'm afraid I must refrain from writing any letter at all. I quite see your point of view of course, but I don't agree with it. You cannot compel a state of permanent suspension of judgement in the people you yourself have educated merely because you don't like the conclusions they are coming to. (31st May 1940, The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/102)

Gollancz ends the conversation with a curt: 'As you wish: but nevertheless, come off it!' (3rd June 1940, The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/3/DOC/1/103). In his history of the Left Book Club, Lewis makes no mention of either this discussion or his falling out with Gollancz. He paints a picture of Gollancz as a passionately driven man with huge reserves of energy and resourcefulness, but one who could be exacting and difficult to work with. He brushes over the move Brimpton: 'Gollancz moved a skeleton staff to Brimpton (his country house) and the rest found other work' (Lewis, 1970, p124), giving no sense of the devastating effect this move had on the Club. Perhaps thirty years' hindsight had encouraged him to let bygones be bygones and not to try and settle old scores, especially as Gollancz had no opportunity to reply having died three years earlier in February 1967.

This rift with the communists and at the very head of the Club itself, however, spelt the end of the Club as a political force. Many members left and Gollancz suggested rebuilding the Club as a League of Victory and Progress (acerbically referred to by Lynd as 'Strength through Joy'). This suggestion was met with little support elsewhere:

> We can hardly believe that the new name will readily appeal to many of those who have worked most enthusiastically for the Club in the past. A large proportion of them are certainly in agreement with the war policy of Mr Gollancz, Mr Strachey and Professor Laski, but the new title has an ideological flavour that is likely to repel many who are by no means Communists. Dr John Lewis, who before the war was the organiser of the Left Book Club, has replied to Mr Gollancz in the *Daily Worker*. He argues that the present attitude of *Left News* follows inevitably from Mr Gollancz's

> ‘one man’ control. (*New Statesman and Nation*, 7th Dec 1940, The Personal Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz, MSS.157/10/LB/2/1–12)

The name change had originally been highlighted in the *Daily Worker* of 27th November 1940 as ‘an attempt to bestow a crude jingoistic title on an organisation originally formed for progressive educational purposes [and the claim that] large numbers have already left and this Gollancz latest will drive many others’ (Rajani Palme Dutt Papers, CP/IND/DUTT/16/06). In an article for the *Daily Worker* of 3rd December 1940 entitled ‘Why Has the Left Book Club Failed the People’, Lewis sees the potential name change as part of a more existential malaise within the Club:

> It is proposed to the rename the Left Book Club, ‘The League of Victory and Progress.’ This announcement in the *Left News* marks the closing of a chapter. The Left Book Club has now departed so far from its former principles as well that it should cease to bear a name that once stood for all that was best in working–class education. It has become increasingly apparent that the Club now plays not a progressive but a reactionary role, and we anticipate a final secession from the Club of all those remaining members who understand what is meant by the struggle against Fascism. (Rajani Palme Dutt Papers, CP/IND/DUTT/16/06)

As this indicates, the truth is the Left Book Club’s time was done. As Morgan puts it, ‘From this point on, it is impossible to speak of the Left Book Club as a political movement. Although it dragged out its existence until 1948, henceforth the Club was little more than a means of distributing cheap books’ (Morgan, 1989, p271).

The Soviet–Nazi Pact had perhaps ended the Left Book Club’s time as a credible voice of the Left, although there were still occasional reminders of the Club’s relevance even after that time, such as the publication of *The Betrayal of the Left* (February 1941) edited by Gollancz and featuring articles by Gollancz, Strachey, Laski and Orwell, that centred on criticism of the Communist Party for not attacking Germany: what they termed ‘revolutionary

defeatism'. It had also left the CPGB with a problem of their own: how to broadcast their message to those outside of the Party now the Left Book Club was not available to them?

Communication problems for the communists

The Communist Party were left with the problem of how to fill the role left by the Club, both as an outlet for its books and the politically active network of groups. The Communist Party also paid the price for not maintaining its own propaganda tools – *Labour Monthly*, *Communist Review*, and *Discussion* – as they had been relying too heavily on the Left Book Club's success and its subscription model, which had served them well.

The start of the war coincided with a difficult reality: the French and Spanish Popular Front governments were both defeated, Chamberlain was still in power, and the Soviet Union had found a meeting of minds with fascism. It also left the CPGB with a problem. They may not have endorsed Gollancz's one–man control of the Left Book Club, but they were certainly prepared to exploit it. However, once the Club had outlived its political usefulness and influence the Party had nothing to take its place. Nothing with the breadth and reach of over 50,000 people receiving a communist–related book every month and nothing like the LBC groups that communists had infiltrated to such good effect.

In terms of communication the Party was left with *Labour Monthly.* Founded in 1921 by Palme Dutt, who remained its editor until his death in 1974, it inevitably followed the serpentine convolutions of Communist Party policy during this period. For example, Palme Dutt used his 'Notes of the Month' column of January 1928 to posit the failure of the Labour Party as a vehicle for achieving change and improvement for the working classes:

> how far has a point been reached, with the development of the class struggle, with the increasing domination of the Right–Wing leadership, and with the moving of the masses to the left, when the machine of the Labour Party has become primarily and

> overwhelmingly a means to hold back and stifle the political expression and advances of the working class, and to tie the workers as a body to corrupt reactionary politics, which are considerable mass–section of the workers has outgrown. (Callaghan and Harker, 2011, p111)

Palme Dutt then goes on to outline the New Line policy that would be adopted by the CPGB a year later,

> This is the stage to which the whole militant Left–Wing needs to advance. It is necessary to cease looking backward to the dead (and largely imaginary) ideal of an old–time purity and independence of the Labour Party, and look forward instead to the revolutionary working–class future in which alone true political independence, only partly achieved in the transitional stage of the Labour Party, can become fully realised. It is necessary to go beyond a merely negative defensive opposition to the reformist Right–Wing leadership, who are themselves continually taking the offensive and intensifying the fight against the left, and instead to advance to the offensive against them. The revolutionary Left must lead. The workers cannot afford to lose the measure of hard–won independence and politics they have in the past gained at the expense of so many battles, by being now in the day of their growing strength dragged at the tail of the coalitionist Labour leaders into the support of capitalism and the stultification of all by fight. The duty of the guardianship of that independence lies with the revolutionaries left. (Callaghan and Harker, 2011, pp111–112)

This is an appeal to the Labour Left, which Palme Dutt saw as the rank and file, who were being led by a 'Right–Wing leadership'. He exhorted them to take control of the Labour Party in order to not lose the gains they had made. In essence it is a divide and rule strategy the CPGB are using to undermine the oppositional Labour leadership and to cause unrest among Labour members. As Morgan says, 'there was never any doubt as to the political reliability of the *Labour Monthly*, [but] there was sporadic debate within the CP as to its precise political function' (Morgan, 1989, p272). Palme Dutt insisted that although the publication's outlook was communist it must be aimed at non–party workers (in 1930 Palme

Dutt estimated that two–thirds of the circulation was to 'non–party workers'). The Party's Political Bureau proposed merging it with the Party's hardline *Communist Review* or scrapping one of them. Palme Dutt disagreed, believing that would lead to narrow isolationism. The Party capitulated and the two publications continued separately. By 1935, however, both had financial problems and Palme Dutt agreed they should be combined into *Labour Monthly*, confirming *Monthly* as the mouthpiece of the Communist Party. Palme Dutt attempted to maintain the more general propaganda stance, but by 1939 *Labour Monthly* 'merely presented the different aspects of the Party line' (Morgan, 1989, p273).

To mark fifteen years of *Labour Monthly*, and also perhaps indicating the relationship between the CPGB and the Left Book Club, which had launched two months earlier, John Strachey wrote in the July 1936 issue of *Labour Monthly*:

> In its own way the LABOUR MONTHLY has become a world publication (the embryo of those gigantic publications which we can conceive of in a unified socialist world). And it has become so for a very good reason: R.P.D. in a sense always writes of world politics. Naturally his closest attention and most detailed knowledge are concerned with the British situation; but even if he is discussing some apparently intimate point in the relationship between British political parties there is always these sense of the world scene as a background to his analysis'. (Rajani Palme Dutt Papers CP/IND/DUTT/10/03)

Despite the global impact that Strachey perceives, the last *Labour Monthly* pamphlet was published in 1936 and the last conference was held in February 1937. This is likely to be because the Left Book Club was better equipped to undertake both of these activities, with a much wider breadth of influence. Also *Labour Monthly* could afford to become solely a conduit for Party policy as the LBC's *Left News* had a far greater circulation. The outbreak of war and the Soviet–Nazi Pact brought a stop to that. Following Gollancz's cleansing of the Left Book Club of any hardline communist supporters or influence, the *Labour Monthly's* circulation trebled from 7,000 in August 1939 to 20,000 in December 1940 (Morgan, 1989,

p272). There had also been a concerted effort by the Party to increase the circulation from within communist circles. They restarted their conferences in February 1940 and began publishing pamphlets again in 1941. *Labour Monthly's* Readers' Discussion Groups started towards the end of 1939 and by the end of 1940 there were around fifty groups (far fewer than the 1200 groups run by the Left Book Club at its height, of course), many of those being restarted LBC groups. There was a major difference, however. Although they strived to keep the Discussion Groups non–partisan, *Labour Monthly* had no such aim and therefore was no use as a means of a more broad–based discussion.

This hardline doctrinal publication was no replacement for the Left Book Club or *Left News*, so the Party set up the monthly *Discussion* in 1936. Its aim was to establish a dialogue between the Party and non–supporters. Perhaps unsurprisingly there was little interest from non–communists and it ceased publication in early 1938. It became clear that 'the CP paid the price for having neglected to maintain its own channels of broad propaganda and broad discussion and for having concentrated its efforts on the Left Book Club' (Morgan, 1989, p276). The Party's opposition to the War made it increasingly isolationist. The abuse heaped on Strachey and Gollancz by the Communist Party and its leadership during this period was not likely to make them return to the CP fold any time soon and the Party's work with trade unions and workers struggles always ignored the War; a stance the Left Book Club could not countenance.

The legacy of the Left Book Club

In assessing the success of the Left Book Club and whether it was a catalyst for change or a minor footnote in the margins in the lead up to the Second World War to some extent depends on an estimation of what the Club was *for*. If it was to bring about the sort of Popular Front government that had been successful in France and, briefly, in Spain then it can only be viewed as a failure. It was also unsuccessful in its declared aim to prevent the

war and was split apart in the process. However, if it as an organisation whose aim was to educate and inspire then that conclusion might be slightly different. After all, as John Lewis wrote, 'The Club never moved to create a union of parties or a new *ad hoc* party embracing representatives of all the parties. Its sole object was to enlighten, to educate' (Lewis, 1970, p13).

Graves and Hodge dismissed the Left Book Club, saying of the monthly book choices: 'often, after the first enthusiasm had died down, they merely served to decorate bookshelves: glanced at, but never fully read' (Graves and Hodge, 1940, p334). From a similarly contemporary vantage point, however, Malcolm Muggeridge wrote, 'on the whole Mr Gollancz's flock held together, and were satisfied with the books they added monthly to their libraries, a row of the yellow volumes they received soon coming to signify a truly progressive household' (Muggeridge, 1940, p253). Samuel Hynes was more dismissive:

> Of the other titles offered only one, or perhaps two survive: Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier* certainly, and perhaps Koestler's *Spanish Testament*. To say this is not to judge either the Club or its books – permanence is not necessarily a part of the value of topical writing – but simply to note that the Club was topical, that it belonged to its time, died with its time, and left virtually nothing behind. (Hynes, 1976, p209)

Not dismissive, but more concerned, Philip Gibbs wrote in *Ordeal in England* (published by the Right Book Club in 1938) the unsurprisingly critical assessment that the Left Book Club was 'one of the most subversive influences in this country, if I'm not mistaken' (Rodgers, 2003, p10), which although it is critical simultaneously acknowledges the Club's influence. In his history of the Left Book Club, Lewis writes persuasively about why many of those now forgotten titles mattered at the time, even if his claim that 'some of the books were to become classics in their own right' (Lewis, 1970, p31), may seem a little optimistic now. Nonetheless the Club influenced much of the conversation on the Left. Whether that was explaining Marxism, highlighting the plight of those in 'the distressed areas', warning of the

rise of fascism, lauding Russia as an alternative way, or publishing novels and plays, the Left Book Club created much of that dialogue.

For Julian Symons, 'The development of the Left Book Club was remarkable as a publishing feat, and as a social movement that could have occurred in no other place and time' (Symons, 1960, p81). However, the Club organised the Left in a way that political parties could not – on a town and village level. The real testament to the success of the Left Book Club is that when the Labour Party came to power following the Second World War they were to some extent the fruition of Left Book Club thinking. As Gollancz himself noted in the August 1945 issue of *Left News,* many in the new Labour government had been members, authors and speakers for the Club, including the Prime Minster himself, Clement Atlee, Sir Stafford Cripps (initially President of the board of Trade and from 1947 Chancellor of the Exchequer), Jarrow MP Ellen Wilkinson, Minister for Health and architect of the National Health Service, Aneurin Bevan, Emmanuel Shinwell, Strachey (by now Minister of Food), future Labour Party leader, Michael Foot, and Stephen Swingler. Ironically, following over a decade in the political shadows and a refusal to form any sort of alliance with the Left Book Club, the Labour Party had come to power on what was almost an LBC 'ticket'.

Left Book Club members had infiltrated all levels of society – culture, education and the armed forces. Former Groups convener, Lewis, was appointed Staff Lecturer to His Majesty's Forces in 1940 and in 1944 he joined the Army Bureau of Current Affairs working on a post–war Britain and a series of booklets called 'British Way and Purpose'. It is significant that Lewis feels he was only able to do that job because of the work at the Club and the books it had published. Not only that, but he found 'the keen Educational Officers were often former Left Book Club members and from time to time men in uniform would come and speak to me after a lecture and announce themselves as members of one of the groups or former members of the Left Book Club' (Lewis, 1970, p125).

The Club had publicised the cause in Spain and moved the Left from pacifism to militancy prior to the War, and it had acted as a touch point for all those on the Left resistant to the British government's attempts at appeasement in Munich. Despite the opposition from many in the leadership at the Club, once war was inevitable Gollancz moved the Club firmly in support of it. As Samuels puts it, 'If the Club failed in its task to prevent war, its leaders could at least feel satisfied that 57,000 Englishman knew why it happened, where it was taking place, and who was the enemy' (Samuels, 1966, p84). Laity quotes a Captain Smith, who wrote to Gollancz in 1945, saying 'The Labour Party's magnificent victory at the polls is due in very much greater degree than has been recognised to the work of ex–LBC members in both forces and factories' (Laity, 2001, pxxx). As Morgan puts it, 'The Club's value in unifying diverse tendencies on the left is undeniable' (Morgan, 1989, p256). He references Eddie Frow, a Communist shop steward in Manchester:

> The Left Book Club books did have an impact. After the outbreak of the war I went into the factory at ten o'clock to address the nightshift and as I walked up the aisle a man opened the door of one of those great big cupboards and showed me row after row of these books. They were reading them on nights, so they did have an influence. (Morgan, 1989, p257)

For Lewis the Left Book Club was in the main down to one man and would not have existed 'but for Victor Gollancz, or someone of his qualities, and the backing of an established publishing house' (Lewis, 1970, p15). Yes, the Left Book Club was of its time, but there can be no doubt that despite its waning as a political force in the wake of the Soviet–Nazi pact, much of its work had been done by that stage. There may not have been a Labour government in 1945 without it or if there had been it might not have had the broad remit of social justice that it had. That none of this would have happened without Gollancz's drive and determination is undoubted, but his populist vision, broadly communist views, and publishing acumen were a necessity too.

Conclusion

So was Toynbee right? Has the Left Book Club no lasting legacy beyond the embarrassment of its former members? Clearly that is not the case. From its launch in May 1936 to the Club's huge rally in Earl's Court in April 1939, there was no other organisation that spoke for the Left in the way that it did. The Club's refusal to set itself up as an alternative political party and to focus its attention on education must ultimately secure its legacy. Had it been just another minor political party, such as the United Empire Party,[37] then its time would have come and gone leaving little trace. With its focus on education, however, there were 57,000 members who can claim to have been directly educated and influenced by the Left Book Club's publications and groups; by the lectures and conversations had with other members, many of whom went on to lead hugely influential lives in society, taking something of the Left Book Club into their futures. The theatre trips, cinema and holidays just added to the sense of the Club as a way of life, and not just another political party.

As a publisher also, the Left Book Club, especially during its key years of 1936 to 1939, managed to achieve what few other publishing companies do. Through its growing membership, expertly chosen titles, and astute marketing, the Left Book Club was economically successful and accrued considerable symbolic capital, as well as valuable political capital. It may have been impossible to sustain, but for those three years the Left Book Club was at the sweet spot of political publishing. Ultimately, its economic viability waned and, following the Soviet–Nazi pact, so did its political influence. Its symbolic capital remained, however, and that is, at least in part, the reason it had the influence post 1945 that it did. Society, politics and publishing all moved on, but none of them were left unmarked by the publishing activities of Gollancz and his colleagues at the Left Book Club.

[37] The United Empire Party was formed in February 1930 by Lord Beaverbrook, who was soon joined in his aim of promoting Empire Free Trade by Lord Rothermere. Heavily supported by the *Daily Express*, after mixed success in a series of by–elections, Beaverbrook and Rothermere disbanded the Party in March 1931.

Conclusion

When the arrival of Victor Gollancz at Digswell Park in August 1937 was misrepresented by the *Ashridge Journal*, it was not simply a case of smearing a political rival or ideological threat. Neither was it just the forces of capitalist conservatism preserving itself against the forces of change that had been gathering on the horizon from the beginning of the decade. It was also old money versus new money, the traditional versus the modern. The constructivism embraced in the jacket designs at Gollancz's publishing company is appropriate given that the forebear of constructivism in post–revolutionary Russia was modernism. In the sense of his embrace of radical, sometimes avant garde ideas (as evidenced by his use of constructivism), Gollancz could be termed a modernist publisher.

Gollancz was a man both *of* and *for* his time. A man prepared to embrace publishing as an agent of change, to use both his symbolic and economic capital to achieve something he felt was more important than either of Bourdieu's definitions: genuine political change. That he did not directly achieve what he set out to do was a combination of hubris, mismanagement and misfortune, but then there is no other publisher of the period who could have achieved what he did. Indeed, he may have achieved many of his aims indirectly. The policies of the 1945 Labour government were evidently heavily influenced by the Left Book Club, and Gollancz, along with Allen Lane, served to revitalise an ailing publishing industry.

Simone Murray argues that publishing for social change calls for a rare combination of skills and attributes – political optimism mixed with market knowledge, perhaps even commercial cynicism. Gollancz was perhaps unique in the 1930s for embodying this unusual combination. His background in the traditional publishing world of Ernest Benn gave him the outlook of an industry veteran, with all of the opinions and expectations that came along with that experience and status. However, throughout his life, Gollancz was conspicuous for his political and social advocacy. Whether that was the broadly unpopular causes that he

espoused later in his life or his backing for that ultimate in Thirties optimism, the Popular Front, Gollancz believed that a better future was achievable and that he could help bring it about. He may have had many less attractive personality traits, but his enthusiastic application to the cause was infectious. As his biographer Ruth Dudley Edwards put it, 'Victor applied to his good works a vigour, iconoclasm and intensity that struck a powerful chord in the public imagination: Bob Geldof without the advantages of modern communications' (Edwards, 1987, p13). In Murray's terms then, Gollancz was one of the few, perhaps the only, publisher at the time who could have combined political optimism with business acumen in the quantities needed to utilise commercial investment to achieve social change. Not that it was an easy path for Gollancz to take and, as this study makes plain, one on which he made several errors of judgement, but ultimately it was a successful one. In a sense, perhaps Gollancz acted as a bridge between traditional publishing and a more modern media that encompassed innovative marketing techniques combined with old–fashioned publishing know–how. Perhaps, therefore, it is inevitable that Gollancz's name is not as well–known as other publishers of the period because those in the advance guard are inevitably forgotten by those who come after, and who build on the success of the innovators and disrupters. Even if many people have forgotten his influence, they are nonetheless living in a world influenced by him.

To illustrate the differing fates of publishers on the Left, it is worth considering briefly the recent histories of Gollancz and the more doctrinal left–wing Thirties publisher, Lawrence & Wishart. The trajectory for both publishers since the heady days of the Thirties has been one of severe contrast. Both publishers still exist, but although Lawrence & Wishart remains an independent publisher, Gollancz is simply an imprint of the Orion publishing group, the core of which is Weidenfeld & Nicholson, and which includes Cassell, the owners of the Gollancz name. Perhaps such differing fortunes were inevitable. For all his political commitment Gollancz was at heart a commercial publisher. He was a populist who wanted to make the titles published by the Left Book Club as widely read as the Dorothy L. Sayers' Lord Peter

Wimsey detective novels he published. When Gollancz died in 1967 his daughter Livia inherited the business. She sold it to Houghton Mifflin in 1989, who in turn sold it to Cassell in 1992, making the independently–minded Gollancz simply part of one of the conglomerates who dominate modern publishing. In fact, consolidation in publishing has continued into the twenty-first century with Cassell being bought by the Orion Publishing Group in 1998, who are now owned by Hachette, whose parent company is Paris-based multinational media company, Lagardère: plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

Lawrence & Wishart in contrast continue on their own idiosyncratic path. Their mixture of print and electronic journals and books are still heavily political. Their list both reflects their history; familiar themes such as the Spanish Civil War and trade unionism, Gramsci and Marx continue to be prevalent, and also the present with books covering contemporary political issues such as neoliberalism, New Labour, and the rise of Jeremy Corbyn. Running through the list, like lettering through a stick of rock, however, is the Communist Party of Great Britain. Life during and after the Communist Party continues to be the bedrock of their publishing output.

Gone are their attempts to publish fiction, by working–class authors or otherwise. The dilettantism that afflicted the editorial board of the merged company in the Thirties has been replaced by a focused, if highly niche, list. Those running Lawrence & Wishart in the 1930s were products of their time and background. They had no grounding in running a business or dealing with the day to day concerns of authors. Most of all they had no conception of what it was like to *not* be independently wealthy. The bohemian streak that ran through Garman and Wishart (and also through Garman's highly artistic family) gave them an otherworldliness that made dealings with the real world difficult and frustrating. What they did have, however, was a burning political conviction about the necessity for social change and a belief that communism was the right vehicle to bring it about. For all their lack of

business sense the key staff at Lawrence & Wishart remained members and committed to the communist cause for the rest of their lives.

Gollancz, on the other hand, was always something of a fellow traveller, and although he acknowledged his closeness to the Party later, he became keen to disassociate himself from the Communist Party following the Soviet–Nazi pact of 1939. Although he retained a belief in social justice it was as likely to have a religious basis as a political one. The Left Book Club was in some ways the catalyst that made this happen, which may in fact be the Club's greatest legacy. Until then he had been a publisher first and foremost, but following the success of the Club he became more of a campaigner. Until the pact Gollancz was undoubtedly in thrall to communism and also, if not under direct Soviet instruction, at the very least mindful of its views. This must have made the disillusion felt following the striking of the pact all the more difficult to take. His need to be surrounded by like–minded people (that is: people who agreed with him) meant that he was blind to the detrimental effect this was having on his publishing output. Allowing the likes of Emile Burns direct access to the texts was a mistake that appeared to support the Labour Party view that the Left Book Club was nothing but a communist front.

One can only concur with Edwards, that it is highly unlikely that Gollancz set up the Left Book Club in order to exploit political developments to increase his personal financial worth. Indeed, it is most likely that he put his own money into bolstering up the Club. The fact that the Club had no separate accounts was probably to allow Gollancz to siphon money from the main publishing company when necessary, without calling attention to any financial difficulties the Club may have been facing (or perhaps without needing to run it past other shareholders). The accusations Gollancz faced in the Thirties, that he was feathering his own nest, were as much to do with professional jealousy as real concern. In much the same way that other publishers objected to Gollancz's eye–catching dustjackets and advertising material, the success of the Club meant that other publishers who could not offer the print

runs and potential readership that Gollancz could, missed out on authors and books they would have liked to publish. Little wonder, then, that rumours were started to undermine the Club, its aims and, most specifically, its leader.

In the end we have two publishing companies both heavily affected and influenced by the political upheavals of the time. Both were publishing companies led by men with strong communist (or at least left–wing) convictions and a desire for social change. One company, Gollancz, a commercially led and innovative publishing house; the other, Lawrence & Wishart, a well–meaning if ineptly run company that did not fulfil its promise. How ironic therefore that Lawrence & Wishart remains an independent political publisher; a company that Ernest Wishart and Douglas Garman would still be able to recognise seventy years after its CPGB heyday, whereas the great Gollancz name has been reduced to a science fiction and fantasy imprint in a global capitalist enterprise. It is unlikely that Gollancz would appreciate the irony.

However, there is another way of measuring a publishing company's success and that is by assessment of their accumulation of different forms of 'capital'. John Thompson's extension of Bourdieu's theories of capital provides another way of assessing how and why publishers make the economic and cultural impact that they do. In what way do these definitions help us determine the reason for the difference in success rates between Gollancz and Lawrence & Wishart, however? Although both companies were of different sizes, they may be said to be comparable in terms of economic capital in that the key people behind both organisations were independently wealthy and they could, if necessary, bail out their companies financially or call on the help of wealthy supporters to do so. It is in the other areas that we see the most significant differences. Human capital or the knowledge and expertise of the staff employed by the company, was of a markedly different quality. They were equally committed ideologically, but for the likes of Garman and Rickword this was often at the expense of what they were publishing. Whereas, for John Lewis and Betty Reid at the Left Book Club, they

were both committed to the Club's political aims and also to the quality of the Club's service to its members. Both publishers were similarly well placed with regards to social capital, that is the network of contacts and relationships, but as a long–term, successful publisher Gollancz was able to negotiate the sort of highly favourable agreements with printers and binders that Lawrence & Wishart were not.

However, the scope and range of Gollancz's publishing gave him the intellectual capital or copyright that Wishart could only have dreamed about. This contributed to the greatest area of difference between the two publishing companies – symbolic capital. Gollancz had credibility before he started the Left Book Club whereas as Wishart appeared to toy with the notion of publishing; starting and closing magazines on what appeared to be a whim. With a membership of 57,000 at its peak authors *wanted* to publish with the LBC and were prepared to have their work scrutinised and indeed doctored in order to achieve those sorts of sales figures. Even Orwell, who was no friend of Gollancz, would have published *Homage to Catalonia* with him if it had not been rejected (instead he had to settle for a print run of 1,500 with eventual publisher Secker & Warburg). The 'brand' that the Left Book Club and Gollancz represented was a broad enough movement with a track record successful enough to attract authors who would not normally be associated with communism, such as Labour leader, Clement Attlee. Lawrence & Wishart's credibility, on the other hand, stretched only as far as the small coterie of middle–class intellectuals in their circle. Their attempts to broaden their appeal outside of the partisan had little success as can be seen with the sales figures (which were hardly something to attract an aspiring author). It was not perhaps until 1955, when Lawrence & Wishart published the first full version of Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, that they finally achieved some level of popularity. It could be said that there was a sixth resource that had a major impact on the two companies: what might be termed 'ideological capital'. By paying strict adherence to communist policies and intrinsically involving Party members in the running of the organisations both companies amassed significant political credibility within the Party. However, history tells us that

success lies probably somewhere in the broad middle ground. Gollancz stuck to his principles, but rarely at the expense of the commercial main chance, such as publishing Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, for example, knowing it would be controversial in communist circles, but also knowing that it would be a bestseller for the Club. Lawrence & Wishart, in contrast, allowed their principles to get in the way of executing a professional publishing service.

The personal identification in the outside world, between Gollancz and the Left Book Club was absolute, so it is therefore inevitable that the Club and Gollancz's fortunes were closely intertwined. Gollancz made little attempt to separate himself from the Club and he made clear to others, including Strachey and Laski, that in the final analysis the Left Book Club was simply an adjunct or imprint of the Victor Gollancz Ltd. In a sense the paratext of the Club's books make this abundantly clear. Pick up any Left Book Club title and once past the distinctive orange cover, instantly recognisable logo, and declaration that the book is 'Not For Sale To The Public', on the title page will be found:

LONDON

VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD

The bibliographic details in a book are where the legal information is held and this makes clear that although it may say Left Book Club Edition on the front cover this is a Victor Gollancz Ltd title. It is not unreasonable to ask why this matters? The legal and personal connection between Gollancz and the Left Book Club meant that when the Soviet–Nazi pact brought divisions at the Club to a head, it was this exercising of Gollancz's personal control of the Club that marked its final death knell, at least as an effective political force. However, it did mean that when the Club's reputation underwent a certain amount of rehabilitation in the years after the Second World War, so Gollancz's reputation benefitted also. His position as a both a publisher and campaigner was secured.

In the dark days of 1939 this outcome would not have seemed certain. The high–handed manner of Gollancz's proposed move of the whole Gollancz publishing operation to his property in Brimpton caused divisions with Sheila Lynd and Betty Reid. Whilst it was Lynd who reacted most violently to the proposed change, it was Reid who pinpointed the dictatorial approach of the publisher, taking issue in a letter to Gollancz, with his personal control of the Club. Dismissing the notion of any sort of democracy at the Club, what she calls 'the Laski Strachey Myth', she makes it clear that this in fact a deal breaker for her. The resulting dismissal of Lynd, Reid, and John Lewis marked the end of the Left Book Club as a campaigning force. Brief moments of success, such as Leonard Woolf's *Barbarians at the Gate* and the compilation, *Betrayal of the Left*, could not hide the fact that the Club was a spent force.

If the Left Book Club had been based on a more democratic foundation, would it have been more successful? It seems unlikely. As all the key participants make clear, even those that Gollancz fell out with, such as Lewis, without Gollancz driving the Club forward there would have been no Left Book Club, and Gollancz was constitutionally unable to compromise and share leadership responsibilities. It is perhaps surprising that he was to accept as much interference from the communists as he did, but this never jeopardised his overall control. Not even Harry Pollitt would have dared to try and wrest control from Gollancz, not while they were exercising such influence. No, Gollancz stood or fell along with his Club. When the Left Book Club was revived in 2015 by Pluto Press, Gollancz was the reference point[38] with Veruschka Selbach, managing director at Pluto, declaring that 'The world needs a Left Book Club for the 21st Century.'

[38] The new LBC website encapsulates the Club's history, saying, 'Pioneering British publisher Victor Gollancz founded the original Left Book Club in 1936. His aim was to popularise the ideas of the left and combat the rise of fascism' (www.leftbookclub.com/about).

It is time, then, to rethink publishing in the 1930s. The general view of Feather and others that it was a decade of conservatism and consolidation no longer rings true. If in 1931 the country was in political turmoil, then it is no wonder that the publishing industry's natural inclination would be to retrench and protect what it has. However, by the end of the decade, despite the country being enveloped into a second world war, the publishing industry was unrecognisable from that of ten years earlier. Courtesy of Allen Lane at Penguin, the paperback format was the standard format for general book publishing, its production and distribution commodified and made utilitarian in a way that offended many of publishing's old guard. Despite the failures of the Left Book Club and his personal struggle with the forces of communism, Gollancz helped usher in both a broad left Labour government in 1945 and, more pertinently, changed how books were sold forever. Fredric Warburg may have looked on Gollancz's promotional techniques with a mixture of wonder and dismay, but he knew, as did others, such as Jonathan Cape, that a new die had been cast and that publishing would never be the same again. The Thirties may well have been an age of shouting, but that voice – occasionally hyperbolic and coarse – can still be heard resonating in publishing in the twenty–first century.

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