

# DETROIT REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT RECORDS

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CCC RESEARCH MATERIALS

UAW STRONGMAN—

# REUTHER IN RETROSPECT

by Martin Glaberman

Detroit



I just finished listening to the eulogies delivered at the funeral of Walter P. Reuther, president of the United Auto Workers, and his wife. The most interesting eulogy was not delivered at the funeral. A few days ago Virgil Boyd, vice chairman of the Chrysler Corporation, said: "It's taken a strong man to keep the situation under control. I hope that whoever his successor may be he can exercise equal internal discipline."

This has been a recurrent theme in the career of Walter Reuther. In 1967, after he had ended a wildcat strike at a General Motors stamping plant in Ohio, the *Detroit News*, invariably hostile to union demands, raised the question: "What will happen when Reuther is no longer at the helm? . . . We hope Reuther is around a long time as head of the international, but we are concerned about the future of union-industry relationships when Reuther's special talents are no longer available." Their basic concern was that a successor to Reuther would not have his authority and would have to make concessions to local autonomy.

That is making the industry nervous today, on the eve of new contract negotiations. If there is any struggle for power in the UAW it will offer to the rank and file membership of the union the opportunity to influence decisions from which they have been long excluded. And once you start giving rights to members . . . who knows where that process ends?

The disciplining of the membership has been one of the keystones of Reuther's policy but it would be most deceptive to think of Reuther as simply a company man. He is a type of union leader formed in the thirties, the type that came to head most of the industrial unions, and he is not simply a sophisticated version of George Meany or the typical old-line AFL leader.

## Early life

Reuther was, in his early years, a socialist of a sort. It is hard to pin down solid facts about Reuther's early jobs in industry because facts tend to get obscured by the twin mythologies (pro- and anti-Reuther) that have been formed. He apparently worked as a tool and die worker and as a foreman. He also lost some jobs—whether as the result of union organizing or not is not clear. But there is agreement that at one point in the thirties he left Detroit to tour the world with his brothers and that he spent some time working in the Soviet Union. There was a time, in the late forties and early fifties, when

reactionaries tried to use that trip against Reuther and the UAW played it all down. With the thaw in the cold war there was no longer that concern to doctor the past.

But the trip to the Soviet Union remains an intriguing element in Reuther's career. He worked as a tool and die man in Soviet auto factories. He praised the Soviets in his letters home and to friends when he got back. What is interesting about this (apart from the fact that he would have gotten favored treatment as a visiting foreign worker with special skills) is that he became enthusiastic about Russian developments in the years of the purge trials, the slave labor camps, and the draconian labor laws designed to rapidly transform a peasant population into disciplined industrial workers.

In the years that followed, the formative years of the UAW, Reuther was a member of the Socialist Party. Within the labor fraction of the SP at that time, Reuther was basically viewed as a Communist Party sympathizer. There was never any assurance that Reuther would accept decisions of the SP caucus in the union. It was not, of course, at all a matter of political principle. It was pure opportunism. As soon as the CP (and the SP) became a handicap in his rise to power in the union he severed all connections with American radical movements and became, when necessary, a rabid red-baiter.

The nature of his opportunism is indicated by an incident during the great General Motors sit-down strike in 1937. During the winter of 1936-37 the GM strike had developed into a deadlock. One of the problems the union faced was that all of the Flint, Michigan, Chevrolet plant had not been shut down. Still operating was Chevy Plant 4, the motor plant, turning out Chevy motors which were being used to assemble Chevrolets in other parts of the country. It became clear that Plant 4 had to be shut down, but it was most heavily guarded by company goons. There are as many stories of how the strategy to take Plant 4 was devised as there are political factions claiming credit for the strategy. I was told what happened by Kermit Johnson, a Chevy worker, first president of the Chevy local and a member, with Reuther, of the Socialist Party. I think this story is true, not simply because I believed Kermit when he told it to me but because it has the ring of truth. It is the way things happen in workers' struggles.

## Social unionism

The strategy to take Plant 4 was clear to all of the union members in the plant. It was inherent in the situation and didn't take any special knowledge or skill. A diversionary move had to be planned to draw protection away from Plant 4. The key was execution. Only a handful of people could be informed of the strategy and there could be no leaks. This strategy was proposed at the SP fraction and was opposed by Reuther as unworkable. The fraction adopted it, however, and the SP people took it to the UAW. Reuther indignantly denounced the strategy and proclaimed that if it failed he would disclaim any connection with

it. It succeeded and, of course, Reuther took credit, if not for inventing it, at least for pressing for it.

The UAW has a reputation for "social unionism" and it is important to trace that in Reuther's career. In 1940 (abandoning his earlier political allies) Reuther endorsed Roosevelt's foreign policy and moved toward war. He came up with the first of his famous plans. It was a plan for the auto industry to produce 500 planes a day. It was at first bitterly attacked by the industry and ignored by the government (although, later, elements were adopted as the government organized for total war). In June of 1945, as the war was coming to a close, Reuther published a pamphlet, "The Challenge of Peace," which proposed converting aircraft factories to mass produced pre-fabricated housing.

Whether the particular plans were workable or not is purely incidental. What emerges, and remains a consistent feature of Reuther's leadership, is Reuther the social planner. Restrained by the limits of American politics and the American labor movement, he nevertheless clearly parts company with the business unionists of the AFL. He is the statist, the planner, ready to nationalize but not ready to relinquish control. It is all for the good of the workers, of course, but it has to be done for them, not by them. In the Soviet Union he would have been a functionary of the unions or a plant manager. In France he would have been at home as a leader of the CGT. In England he would have been head of a trade union or a member of Wilson's cabinet. His patriotism had no principle connected with it. It was simply the need to attach himself to a particular national capital and to act as its spokesman.

It is this which explains the peculiar combination of conservatism and militancy which seemed to characterize Reuther and which confused his radical opposition. The radicals assumed that Reuther was simply a sophisticated version of the company man and campaigned against him on the basis that they could have gotten more from the corporations in negotiations or in struggle. On the whole, that was nonsense and the auto workers knew that it was nonsense. If you grant the framework of collective bargaining, that is, the maintenance and continued existence of corporate capitalism, then it is not very likely that any other spokesmen for the union could have gotten significantly more than Reuther did. He was a shrewd negotiator and if, at times, someone else could have gotten a penny an hour more, it was just as likely to be a penny an hour less.

## STRIKE LEADER

This combination of opportunistic militancy and conservative adherence to the status quo is the basic feature of Reuther's career (and it typified other former CIO leaders such as Bridges and John L. Lewis) and it takes concrete form in the rise to power of Reuther and his management of the union as president.

At the end of the war, with most of the union leadership timid about embarking on a

major struggle in the face of reconversion to peacetime production, Reuther, as head of the GM Department of the UAW led a militant 113 day strike against GM in which he raised the kinds of public demands (such as no price rises) for which he became noted. He didn't win much, at least in part because his demands were undercut by settlements in steel and in the electrical industry. But it also established Reuther's reputation in the UAW as a whole as a militant and competent strike leader. This was made quite easy because it broke with four years of patriotism, strike-breaking, and collaboration with the government of the Addes-Thomas-CP administration of the union. At the 1946 convention of the UAW Reuther's defeat of Thomas for the presidency marked the emergence of the union from the total class collaboration of the war years. And without support on the International Executive Board, that is, without any power, Reuther was free to spend the next year campaigning, combining militancy with vicious red-baiting as the cold war began to take shape, and in 1947 was swept back into office with an overwhelming majority on the board.

He then began to set the pattern of bargaining in the auto industry which has remained to this day: militant struggle for wage increases and fringe benefits, including all sorts of precedent-setting demands such as pensions, health insurance, cost-of-living clauses, and the like, combined with the erosion of democratic rights within the union and the maintenance of discipline over the workers in production. That was the combination and it goes back a long way before Reuther — to Ford's five dollars a day of the 1920's, the highest pay and the worst speedup in American industry.

Interesting was Reuther's incorporation of the Trotskyist demand for an escalator clause, gearing wage scales to cost-of-living increases. He had consistently opposed it when it was raised within his union. Presumably he had accepted Trotsky's claim that it was a transitional demand, that is, that it seemed reasonable to workers in the existing context but was in reality incompatible with capitalism so that it would move workers to struggle against the system as a whole. But, lo and behold, he found the proposal put forward by General Motors in contract negotiations. That naturally made him a quick convert and he easily took credit for another precedent-shattering victory. C.E. Wilson, GM head, praised that settlement as the purchase of five years of labor peace.

## NEW MILITANCIES

That was the *prid pro quo*. High wages, pensions, cost-of-living allowance, etc. in exchange for an absolute no strike pledge absolute discipline of the workers in production, bureaucratization of the grievance procedure, erosion of the working conditions that had been won during the thirties and early forties. And with Reuther's one party state in iron control of the union machinery the workers turned elsewhere to seek redress of their grievances.

In 1955, the year that Reuther won the first breakthrough on the guaranteed annual wage (supplemental unemployment benefits), the contract victory was greeted by a wave of wildcat strikes in auto factories from coast to coast. The issues were "specific local grievances." The union and the grievance procedure was no longer able to deal with the problems that faced the workers directly. The separation between union and membership became almost complete and it imposed certain problems on Reuther. In the following two contracts he won nothing at all, basically because he could not offer anything in return. If the union's discipline could not prevent major wildcats from breaking out, there was no longer any reason for the auto corporations to sweeten the pot.

In the sixties he was confronted with a new problem: the emergence of the black auto workers. They are in a majority in the Detroit metropolitan area and can therefore dominate the industry. The International Union has viciously attacked the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and pretends that it has always been ahead of its membership in fighting for equal rights for black workers. That the white membership of the UAW is more backward than its leadership on the race question is pure mythology. While there is not the blatant rhetoric of the building trades and while overt discrimination in union locals is disciplined by the International, one need only look around the auto plants and see the small numbers of black workers in tool and die, machine repair, and the cleaner and better jobs to be aware of the willingness of the union leadership in contract negotiations to accept the patterns of racial discrimination. Reuther's march with Martin Luther King was his way of campaigning for black votes where it was safe. The situation in the shops was quite different. One has only to compare the viciousness with which the union disciplined workers who violated the no-strike pledge with the moderation with which the union treated workers who discriminated against black workers to be aware of what Reuther's priorities were.

It was the growing separation of rank and file workers from the union and the militancy of the young auto workers, especially the blacks, that led Reuther to abandon the AFL for independent unionism. Once his ambitions to head the AFL had to be abandoned, it became clear that continued sharing of leadership in the AFL would considerably restrict Reuther's freedom of movement in relation to his own rank and file. He also had plans to incorporate the new militancy of the young in some kind of neo-leftist coopted political movement.

All this is now left to his successor, but with much less chance of success. The fears of the Detroit News and the auto industry are real. The power vacuum caused by Reuther's death raises the spectre of the self-activity of the rank and file auto worker.



## Report on Trotskyism

This report has been written to show all comrades and friends the dangers of Trotskyism in the proletarian revolution. Firstly, all existing Trotskyite organisations are in the service and pay of the C.I.A., F.B.I., and other secret-intelligent agencies of the U.S.N.A. Imperialists. Trotskyism is counter-revolution in disguise.

Secondly, we cannot "win over" Trotskyites — just as we can't make headway arguing with any other group of anti-communists. This report is to arm the comrades in the struggle of building a communist party. We must know how to handle Trotskyites. And we must know how to struggle against Trotskyite tendencies and views which certain sections of the petty-bourgeoisie will strive to bring into the proletarian revolutionary movement.

To do the above it is necessary to show historically what Trotsky was and how Trotskyism developed into its present function of wrecking the revolutionary movement. It is also necessary to expose Trotsky's so-called "theories" of the proletarian revolution.

Lastly, this report will attempt to show the roots and strength of the present Trotskyite organizations within the U.S.N.A.

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The October Proletarian Revolution was the greatest single event in the history of mankind. For the first time, the enslaved masses rose-up and overthrew their oppressors. For the first time, imperialism was breached and the dictatorship of the proletariat became a reality. But this victory was not achieved and consolidated without a ruthless struggle against all forms of opportunism. Trotskyism was one such form of opportunism.

The beginning of building the great Bolshevik party met with resistance by the petty-bourgeoisie. Lenin and Stalin, the great leaders of the Bolsheviks, waged tireless struggles against the Mensheviks who attempted to undermine the organization, principles, and tasks of the proletarian party. Trotsky's role was one of vacillation between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks, more often with the Mensheviks. Trotsky was interested in a personal following and fame in his attempts to lead the Russian revolution. Therefore, with every change of the revolution he vacillated — always jockeying for position. And therefore, his actions were always those of a petty-bourgeois intellectual opportunist and factionalist and not as one who firmly sided with the proletariat. In 1910, Lenin had the following to say of Trotsky's actions:

"Trotsky ... represents only his own personal vacillations and nothing more. In 1903 he was a Menshevik; he abandoned Menshevism in 1904, returned to the Mensheviks in 1905 and merely flaunted ultra-revolutionary phrases; in 1906 he left them again; at the end of 1906 he advocated electoral agreements with the Cadets (i.e., was virtually once more with the Mensheviks); and in the spring of 1907, at the London Congress he said that he differed from Rosa Luxemburg on 'individual shades of ideas rather than on political tendencies.' Trotsky one day plagiarises the ideological stock-in-trade of one faction; next day plagiarises that of another, and therefore declares himself to be standing ABOVE both factions." 1

In 1912 Trotsky formed the August Block with the intentions of liquidating the party. In 1915 he took a centrist position towards the imperialist war.

At this point it is appropriate to stop and discuss the class base of Trotsky — namely the petty-bourgeoisie — and its influence on the Russian revolution. Stalin said:

"Since the proletariat does not live in a vacuum, but in actual and real life itself with all its variety, the bourgeois elements which are reborn on the basis of petty production 'surround the proletariat on every side by a petty-bourgeois element, permeate the proletariat with it, demoralize it with it, call forth contin-

ually inside of the proletariat recurrences of petty-bourgeois lack of character, scatteredness, individualism, transitions from enthusiasm to melancholy' (Lenin: vol. xxv, p. 190) and thus bring into the proletariat and its party certain vacillations, certain waverings.

Here is the root and foundation of every kind of vacillations and deviations from the Leninist line in the ranks of our party." 2

With the coming of the proletariat revolution the bolshevik party rallied all forces which could be of use to the revolution. Trotsky represented the petty-bourgeois intelligencia and had a following among this strata and could be of use to the revolution. He was allowed back into the party and played an important part in the revolutionary upheaval — but was not leader of the uprising — only the most tested and trusted bolsheviks could be worthy of such tasks. 3 Trotsky was allowed to remain in the party and work for the proletarian dictatorship. But even during this period Trotsky's actions did damage to the revolution. He wouldn't sign peace with imperialist Germany and this resulted in larger losses of concessions when peace was signed later at Brest-Litevsk (this was necessary for giving the revolution time to consolidate). He failed repeatedly as a militarist, because of his vacillations, in the civil war and had to have his command taken away repeatedly. And after the civil war he was in favor of "forcing" the workers and peasants into communism.

In 1923 Trotsky resumed his opposition to the Bolshevik party, this time on a "higher" level. He formed factions and became the center of the counter-revolution within the party. In 1924 Stalin had the following to say about Trotsky:

"Wherein lies the danger of the new Trotskyism? In that Trotskyism, according to its entire inner content, has every chance of becoming the center and the rallying point of non-proletarian elements which are trying to weaken, to disintegrate the dictatorship of the proletariat.

"Trotskyism now comes forward in order to uncrown Bolshevism, to undermine its foundations." 5

In 1927, because of his activities of factionalism and anti-party plans, Trotsky was expelled from the party and then later from the country.

From the early 1930's on, Trotskyism was transformed from a trend (non-Bolshevik) in the working class to a unprincipled gang. In 1937, Stalin stated:

"...Trotskyism has ceased to be a political trend in the working class, which it was seven or eight years ago, into a frantic and unprincipled gang of wreckers, diversionists, spies, and murders acting on the instructions of the intelligence services of foreign states." 6

From vacillator inside the party — to counter-revolutionary within the party — to counter-revolutionary outside the party. Such was Trotsky's course.

The imperialists could not but use such a scoundrel to attack the Soviet Union and also the worldwide proletarian revolution. Trotskyites sabotaged the Spanish civil war and paved the way for fascism there. They attacked the communists everywhere, acting as stoop pigeons and wreckers. Trotsky made deals with Hitler and Imperial Japan to sabotage the U.S.S.R. He was willing to divide the U.S.S.R. among these fascists so that he could come to power in the remainder of the country. But the mighty Soviet Union routed the fascist "5th column" in their country and successfully prepared themselves for the 2nd imperialist war. 7 *The great conspiracy*

The reactionary imperialist Hearst was Trotsky's friend and supporter, Churchill noted and supported the counter-revolutionary activities of Trotsky.

To this extent did Trotsky and Trotskyism represent counter-revolution in practice?

From a vacillating petty-bourgeois deviation to a strong reserve and tool of imperialism!

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And now for a look at Trotsky's so-called Marxist theories on the "permanent revolution."

"Trotsky writes:

"Without direct state support from the European proletariat, the working class of Russia will not be able to maintain itself in power and to transform its temporary rule into a lasting socialist dictatorship. This we cannot doubt for an instant."

"What does this quotation mean? It means that the victory of socialism in one country, in this case Russia, is impossible 'without direct state support from the European proletariat,' i.e., before the European proletariat has conquered power.

"What is there in common between this "theory" and Lenin's thesis on the possibility of the victory of socialism 'in one country taken separately'? Clearly, there is nothing in common." <sup>8</sup> "uneven economic and political development" says Lenin, "is an absolute law of capitalism. Hence, the victory of socialism is possible first in several or even in one capitalist country taken separately. The victorious proletariat of that country having expropriated the capitalists and organized socialist production, would stand up AGAINST the rest of the world, the capitalist world, attracting to its cause the oppressed classes of the other countries, raising revolts in those countries against the capitalists, and in the event of necessity coming out with armed force against the exploiting classes and states." <sup>9</sup>

Further, refutation of Trotsky's so-called "theory" of "permanent revolution" would be incomplete without the exposure of his views towards the peasantry.

"Lenin speaks of the ALLIANCE between the proletariat and the laboring strata of the peasantry as the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Trotsky sees a "hostile collision" between the 'proletarian vanguard' and the 'broad masses of the peasantry.'

Lenin speaks of the LEADERSHIP of the toiling and exploited masses by the proletariat. Trotsky sees 'CONTRADICTIONS in the position of a workers' government in a backward country with an overwhelming peasant population.'

According to Lenin, the revolution draws its strength primarily from among the workers and peasants of Russia itself. According to Trotsky, the necessary strength can be found ONLY 'in the arena of the world proletarian revolution.'" <sup>10</sup>

History itself has confirmed the correctness of Leninism and doomed the bankruptcy of Trotsky's "theory" of "permanent revolution."

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As previously shown, the base upon which Trotskyism flourishes best is the petty-bourgeoisie — in fact this was Trotsky's class origin. In the U.S.N.A. the petty-bourgeois classes are large enough to generate plenty of Trotskyism — on one condition, that the political situation be favorable to the Trotskyites.

And the political situation is extremely favorable for the Trotskyites in the U.S.N.A. The revisionism of the Communist Party U.S.A. (C.P.U.S.A.) creates very favorable conditions for Trotskyism to flourish. From the very beginning of the factionalist C.P.U.S.A.'s history there has been capitulation to the Trotskyites. Foster used (or they use each other?) the Trotskyites in order that his faction could defeat the Lovestone faction. Foster knew that such politicking of his faction meant weakening, nay, undermining the party. Stalin states on this:

"Did not Comrade Foster know that he should have aloof from the concealed Trotskyites that were in his group? Why, in spite of repeated warnings, did he not repudiate them at the time? Because he behaved first and foremost as a factionalist.

Because in the factionalist fight against the Lovestone group even concealed Trotskyites might be useful to him. Because the blindness of factionalism dulls the party sense in people and makes them indiscriminating as to the means they employ. It is true, such a policy is bad and irreconcilable with the interests of the party. But factionalists as a rule are inclined to forget the interests of the party — all they can think of is their own factional point of view." 11

It was only after Lovestone was defeated that the CPUSA expelled the Trotskyites. And it was these same Trotskyites which formed the main (largest, strongest, etc.) Trotskyite organization (to this day, Socialist Workers Party — SWP); and every other Trotskyite group in the U.S.N.A. owes it's origin to this mother group.

With the victory over fascism in the W.W.II, the Soviet Union and international communism were held in very high esteem by the working class and all progressive people. In 1946, the Trotskyites were nearly wiped out politically and in numbers. But the attacks on Stalin by Kruschew (and the CPUSA's echoing of these attacks) sounded the clarion call for the scum of the whole world to unite — Trotskyism rose from it's grave and has been living off the good grace of the CPUSA and the bourgeois state ever since. The attacks on Stalin being the form of the attacks on Marxism-Leninism, the dictatorship of the proletariat in the U.S.S.R., and revolution <sup>who created the</sup> the world over. And it is these attacks by the modern revisionism <sup>conditions for the</sup> re-birth

both attack Stalin and therefore both attack the proletarian revolution. And therefore, the strength of Trotskyism today is not just confusion within the petty-bourgeoisie; not just the financial backing of the bourgeoisie; but the revisionism of the CPSU and CPUSA. For Trotskyism

Some say that what makes Trotskyism so dangerous is that they "skip over stages of the revolutionary struggle." True they appear to skip over stages of the revolutionary struggle, but is that the real danger of Trotskyism? It certainly is not. The real danger of Trotskyism is their attempts at sabotaging the revolution — of counter-revolution. The Trotskyites will constantly push some line, idea, etc., which will divert or split the revolutionary movement. And this is their real purpose of existence. They are not interested in the success of the proletarian revolution.

Trotskyites will try to do everything they can to divide up the working class. They push the idea of forming new organizations where existing mass organizations already exist, for example, in the trade unions, in order to confuse and divide the workers.

They push the artificial division of the working class along national lines. Take for example, this quote from Trotsky:

"It is very possible that Negroes also through self-determination will proceed to the proletarian dictatorship in a couple of gigantic strides, ahead of the great block of white workers. They will then furnish the vanguard." 12

What is this but the setting up of the Negro people for slaughter?

But the main task of the Trotskyites is to attack the revolutionary vanguard — the communists. At every chance the Trotskyites will attempt to discredit the communists and communism. And by such actions they hope to confuse and divide the working class and the revolutionary movement.

How do the Trotskyites struggle in the working class? Do they present their views in a democratic way for the working class to decide? Hell no. They practice their "politics" by wheeling and dealing, by being stool pigeons to the employers and the

government, by making secret deals, by threats and gang-like attacks on communists and progressive minded workers.

At this time, most of the Trotskyites are on the campuses and more bribed jobs, such as hospitals, and so we don't run into them in the factories or communities that much. But the more the revolutionary movement grows, the more the bourgeois will send their agents the Trotskyites into the movement to sabotage it. Therefore, we must be prepared to expose these counter-revolutionaries to the working class and all of the revolutionary movement.

How do we fight Trotskyism? Firstly, to repeat, we do not defeat Trotskyism by arguing with the Trotskyites (it is the equivalent to talking to the police). We defeat Trotskyism by winning over the masses to the proletarian revolution. We defeat Trotskyism by building a communist party. We defeat Trotskyism by understanding their role — as that of counter-revolutionary wreckers in the pay of the state department. By building a communist party and defeating the revisionist CPUSA we will be well on our way to defeating the opportunism that allows Trotskyism to grow so rampant. By building a communist party we will be able to win the masses in their millions and bury Trotskyism once and for all.

**DEATH TO TROTSKYISM!**

**BUILD A COMMUNIST PARTY!**

- 1). Lenin's Selected Works — Vol. 3, p. 517.
- 2). From M.J. Olgin's "Trotskyism — Counter-revolution in disguise", p19.
- 3). See J.V. Stalin — "October Revolution", p71, for further information.
- 4). See Olgin, Ibid, p 14, for further information.
- 5). From Olgin, Ibid, p 25.
- 6). J.V. Stalin — "Mastering Bolshevism", p 9.
- 7). Herb Tank, "Inside Job", p 17, New Century Publishers, 1947.
- 8). J.V. Stalin, Vol. VI, p 389.
- 9). Ibid, p 388.
- 10). Ibid, p 384.
- 11). J.V. Stalin, "Speeches on the American Communist Party, p 28, Workers library Publishers, 1929.
- 12). Leon Trotsky, "On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination", Mint Publications.



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## VICTOR GOLLANCZ AND THE LEFT BOOK CLUB

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### ABSTRACT

The Left Book Club, which existed from 1936 to 1948, was the first modern book club in Britain. It distributed left-wing political books aimed at the political education of the mass public. It attempted to mobilize British opinion against Hitler and agitated for a Popular Front and a collective security alliance. The Left Book Club was founded and directed by the publisher Victor Gollancz, who remained the most important influence on the club throughout its history. The Left Book Club was a highly successful publishing enterprise, and it developed into the leading left-wing political movement of the 1930s in Britain. It attracted wide-ranging support, from Communists to left-wing Labourites and many Liberals. Its selections document the outlook of most of the British Left of the 1930s and indicate the range of its interests. The author outlines the history of the club. The club is placed in the context of the political events of the 1930s and in the context of Gollancz's publishing career, his political beliefs, and his concern for political education. Its organization as a book club is described, and the range of its selections and activities is indicated. The last years of the Left Book Club, although of declining influence, illustrate the course of the British Left from the disillusionment following the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the split with the Communists to the concerns of the non-Communist Left during World War II and the election of the Labour government in 1945. Although it failed in its original goals, the Left Book Club helped shape the political thinking of a generation of British leftists. The article is based on a variety of sources, especially detailed records of the club's activities in its monthly publication *Left Now*.

### BEGINNINGS

The Left Book Club was founded in the spring of 1936 by the English publisher Victor Gollancz for the purpose of "equipping people to fight against war and Fascism." The club was intended as an educational organization. Gollancz hoped that, if enough people could be awakened to the danger of fascism, the British government would be forced to take strong measures against Hitler in time to prevent a second world war. The first advertisement announcing the club appeared in

March, and the first month's books were distributed in May. The plan was to distribute one political book a month to members at the bargain price of two shillings and sixpence. The books were to be published by Gollancz and selected by a committee consisting of Gollancz, John Strachey, and Harold Laski. They hoped the club would find a membership of 5,000.

The response was good. There were 9,000 members to receive the first month's books. Within twelve months membership had passed 40,000, and at

its peak in 1939 the membership stood at 57,000. Starting as an ordinary book club, the Left Book Club developed into the leading left-wing movement of the 1930s in Britain. In 1939 David Lloyd George called the Left Book Club "one of the most remarkable movements in the political field in two generations" [1, no. 37 (May 1939), p. 1258]. At its peak there were 1,200 Left Book Club discussion groups throughout Britain; specialist groups for poets, scientists, actors, and many others; and Left Book Club organizations overseas. The club sponsored mass rallies, summer schools, political-education classes, speaking tours by Left Book Club authors, and amateur left-wing theatrical productions. It attempted to reach an even larger audience through pamphlets and leaflets. By the time it ceased activities in October 1948, the Left Book Club had issued 257 books, ranging from volumes filled with facts and analysis to volumes of propaganda, with a number of books of enduring merit.

"The aim of the Club," announced an early brochure, "is a simple one: it is to help in the terribly urgent struggle for World Peace and a better social and economic order and against Fascism, by giving (to all who are determined to play their part in the struggle) such knowledge as will immensely increase their efficiency." Gollancz also hoped that the club would attract "the very many who, being fundamentally well disposed, hold aloof from the fight by reason of ignorance or apathy."

The driving force behind the Left Book Club was Gollancz. Strachey has described him as "Capitalist and Socialist: man of the world and latter day saint: Jew and Christian: rationalist and theologian: rebel and traditionalist" [2, p. 217]. "I have lived . . .," Gollancz wrote in his autobiography, "with

a horror, the sort of horror that goes about with a man and never leaves him, of two abominations . . . : poverty and war" [3, p. 33]. Gollancz's background was Liberal. He moved to the Labour party early in life, and in the 1930s his socialism became strongly influenced by Marxism. In the early years of the Left Book Club he worked so closely with the Communists that a favorite topic of debate among his associates was whether he was actually a member of the party.

Gollancz held a passionate belief in the need for political education. When the Left Book Club was founded, he later recalled, "our very salvation depended on the political education of the masses" [1, no. 110 (August 1945), p. 3252]. For two years, during World War I, Gollancz taught at an English public school. He found widespread political ignorance at the school, and in response he introduced political education and civics classes. Years later, one of his students wrote that he had been "imbued by Gollancz with the liberal faith that the evils of the world could best be set right by more and more liberal education" [4, p. 78]. It was a faith that Gollancz would carry with him throughout his publishing career.

In 1928, after seven years as managing director of the firm of Ernest Benn, Gollancz founded his own publishing firm. He was a daring and innovative publisher, and he was determined to reach and influence the mass audience. His distinctive and economical house style, designed by Stanley Morison, was enormously successful. The typographic book jackets on cheap yellow paper instantly identified a book as one of Gollancz's and practically shrieked for attention from the bookseller's table. Gollancz issued many of his books in

huge editions at unusually low prices and startled the dignified book world by promoting them with spectacular advertising campaigns. Gollancz ensured financial security for his firm with a general list based on popular fiction and detective stories. But his central mission lay in publishing progressive political books.

The depression struck Britain shortly after Victor Gollancz Limited was founded. "I asked myself," Gollancz has written, "what little could I do?— and answered . . . 'You can help to enlighten people; you can show them that, if capitalism persists, this sort of crisis is inevitable, and the final result will be war.' That was the beginning of my active political publishing" [5, p. 351].

When Hitler came to power in 1933, Gollancz's political publishing accelerated. "Before, it had been a question of enlightening people, in a general sort of way, about the causes of war: now it was a question of preventing a war that was just round the corner. Sense of urgency gave way to maddened feverishness: no more than a split second, now, in which to pull up one's feet from the quagmire!" [5, pp. 352–53]. In a letter written at the time the Left Book Club was founded, Gollancz declared, "I have spent very many hours a day during the last five years thinking of nothing but how to use this business (a) for general Socialist propaganda, (b) to lead that propaganda further and further to the Left" [6].

Some of Gollancz's political books were highly successful. G. D. H. Cole's *Intelligent Man's Guide through World Chaos* (1932), for instance, sold 50,000 copies. But Gollancz was far from satisfied. Many of his political books sold poorly. Gollancz blamed the booksellers, who were sometimes reluctant to stock left-wing books. Between the pub-

lisher and the reader, he said, lay "an invisible barrier across which it was almost impossible to get progressive literature into the hands of the general public" [1, no. 110 (August 1945), p. 3252]. One incident in particular infuriated him. In 1934 he published a book by R. D. Charques and A. H. Ewen called *Profits and Politics in the Post-War World*. Gollancz had been impressed by the book and hoped it would be widely influential. But the booksellers were uninterested and refused to accept more than a few copies, even after personal messages from Gollancz stressing its importance.

Gollancz was convinced that a public existed for his political books, if only it could be reached. A book club was the ideal solution to his dilemma. With a book club he would have a guaranteed audience, and it would enable him to offer political books at the lowest possible price. In the United States the Book-of-the-Month Club had been operating since 1926, but in Britain there were as yet no book clubs in the modern sense.<sup>1</sup> The Left Book Club was to be the first.

The original idea for the Left Book Club did not come from Gollancz. In 1935 the Workers' Bookshop, the leading Communist booksellers in London, had proposed a book club to offer titles chosen from the lists of all publishers of left-wing books. Gollancz and several other publishers were interested, but independent capital was lacking and nothing came of the plan [7, 8]. The idea continued to interest Gollancz, and early in 1936 he decided to start a club of his own. He asked Strachey and Laski to join him on the selection committee, and in May the Left Book Club was launched.

<sup>1</sup> The Book Society, founded in 1929, distributed regular trade editions at the publishers' prices.

The spring of 1936 was an auspicious time to start a book club catering to the Left. A sense of looming catastrophe was in the air. The depression had seriously challenged capitalism as a viable system. Forebodings of war were growing stronger. The train of events that would carry Europe into World War II had already begun. Italy had invaded Abyssinia in the autumn of 1935, and in March 1936 Hitler reoccupied the Rhineland. The Spanish Civil War would begin in July. The example of France, where Léon Blum's Popular Front government had just been elected, raised hopes that a similar left-wing coalition could be forged in Britain.

In Britain, recovery from the economic crisis had been incomplete; large areas of the country remained in acute economic distress. The National government under Stanley Baldwin (who was succeeded as prime minister by Neville Chamberlain in May 1937) had no effective program to combat poverty. Its policies against the threat of Hitler were nonexistent. Most people in Britain did not take the threat of Hitler seriously. For those who did, the time in which catastrophe might be averted seemed to be rapidly running out. The task of awakening the majority from its complacency was undertaken with a sense of desperate urgency. The opposition Labour party was in a state of confusion and gloom. The next opportunity to influence policy at the polls might not come until 1940. A movement outside the arena of party politics seemed to offer the best hope for effective action.

#### HOW THE CLUB WORKED

Membership in the Left Book Club was simple. Members were required to subscribe to the club for a minimum of

six months. They were required to accept the club's monthly choice, for which they paid two shillings and sixpence (62 cents in 1936). Nearly all of the selections were new books from Gollancz's own list. Many were commissioned especially for the club. The books were distributed to members in special Left Book Club editions shortly before they appeared, at two to four times the club price, in hardbound trade editions. Early in the club's history optional books were made available in addition to, but not in place of, the regular monthly choice. These appeared in five series: Additional Books, Supplementary Books, Topical Books, Educational Books, and Reprints of Classics.<sup>2</sup> The optional books, of course, sold far fewer copies than the monthly choices. Their cost ranged from sixpence to seven shillings and sixpence in their Left Book Club edition, but most were just slightly more expensive than the monthly choice.

The books were not posted directly to the members but distributed through local booksellers. This saved Gollancz the burden of maintaining thousands of small outstanding accounts and helped retain the goodwill of the booksellers. One London bookseller wrote, "It is simple . . . for the bookseller. All that he must do is pass on the names and addresses of enrolling members to the headquarters of the club, and post off the books to each member once a month. . . . There is very little trouble for him in so simple a function in the scheme, and there is still a certain margin for expenses; and so he has raised no real objections" [9, p. 2546]. By the beginning of 1938, Left Book Club members

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper, monthly choices referred to will be identified by month and year, and optional selections by series and year.

were registered with 4,000 British book-sellers and news agents.

Members also received a copy of the club's monthly periodical *Left News*.<sup>3</sup> This was much broader in scope than the ordinary book club journal, and subscriptions were available to non-members. Ranging from 32 to 48 pages a month, it included an editorial about the club by Gollancz, reviews of the selections, and news and announcements of club activities. A regular feature was the "Topic of the Month," a long article usually written by Strachey. In the first year there was a monthly article on the Soviet Union by Ivor Montagu. Occasionally there were special features, such as a reprint of the draft of the Soviet Constitution of 1936. From time to time an entire issue was devoted to a special topic such as Spain or China.

Much of the club's success was due to the dedication of Victor Gollancz and the missionary zeal of the members. From the time of its founding to the outbreak of war, Gollancz devoted the major part of his energy, business acumen, and organizational skill to the Left Book Club. He wrote all of the club's advertising and brochures himself. He retained control over every aspect of the club, to such an extent that discontented members sometimes criticized him as its dictator.

Gollancz constantly sought ways of increasing the club's appeal. After four months the familiar orange, limp-cloth bindings of the Left Book Club replaced paper covers because he feared that prospective members might consider paperbound editions an insufficient bargain. For potential members who could not afford to buy a book every month, and for those who found

some of the choices too difficult, Gollancz provided an alternative, the "B" membership scheme. Members of the "B" scheme were only required to buy a book every other month. Choices for the "B" months were those with the widest appeal, and "B" members paid sixpence more for them than regular members. Other potential members insisted on the right to choose for themselves which books they would buy. In 1938 Gollancz announced the "C" membership scheme. These members had to accept a minimum of four choices a year and paid three shillings and sixpence per volume.

By the club's second month Gollancz was talking of what could be achieved when the membership reached 100,000. He repeatedly exhorted the membership to recruit new members for the club. Yellow enrollment forms were included with each book. One month, it was calculated, 140,000 enrollment forms went out to members and 86,500 more to book-sellers. Gollancz provided Left Book Club posters, streamers, and gummed correspondence labels to assist members in publicity and recruiting. Members distributed Left Book Club circulars at public meetings and outside cinemas. Members were urged to place piles of enrollment forms in public libraries—and, if the librarians frowned on this, members were told to slip the forms inside books and periodicals likely to attract readers with left-wing sympathies.

#### POLITICAL ORIENTATION

The club's leadership (Gollancz, Strachey, and Laski), while sharing a generally Marxist outlook, represented different positions on the British Left. Gollancz was a member of the Labour party. His strong ethical and spiritual beliefs formed the foundation of his so-

<sup>3</sup> *Left Book News* for its first 7 issues.

cialism. In the early years of the Left Book Club he worked closely with the Communists, attracted by their antifascism, their energy, and their willingness to cooperate with the non-Communist Left. He did not know until later that the Communists, who in the late 1920s and early 1930s had consistently attacked other left-wing parties, had ever had any other policy than the Popular Front [10, p. 529]. In his autobiography Gollancz wrote, "I personally allowed myself . . . to get into a false position, intellectually, with the communist movement itself: which I can express perhaps by saying that for fifteen months I was as close to the communists as one hair to another and that for every minute of those months I was billions of light years away from them" [5, p. 357].

In the 1930s Strachey considered himself a Communist, but he was never formally a member of the party. He was an economist and a writer.<sup>4</sup> From 1929 to 1931 he had been a Labour M.P. He moved leftward under the impact of the economic crisis, and economics remained at the core of his communism. During the war Strachey returned to the Labour party. He served as a cabinet minister in Clement Attlee's postwar government.

Harold Laski, the well-known professor of political science at the London School of Economics, was one of the leading intellectual spokesmen of the Labour party's left wing. Throughout the existence of the Left Book Club he served on the Labour party's National Executive Committee.

The Left Book Club attracted both

<sup>4</sup>Strachey's *The Coming Struggle for Power*, which Gollancz published in 1932, was one of the most influential books of the decade. It appeared in a Left Book Club edition (Reprints of Classics, 1937), and six other books of his had their first publication by the club.

the politically committed and the politically uncertain. Labourites, Communists, Liberals, unattached progressives, and even a few antifascist Conservatives joined the club. Many of the members had never been active in politics before. The events of the 1930s had left a large number of people confused and deeply concerned. The Left Book Club offered them explanations and guidance and provided its members with a sense of direction and action. It quickly acquired the characteristics of a crusade.

The membership was predominantly middle class. It was estimated that 75 percent of the members were white-collared workers, black-coated professionals, and newly converted Left intellectuals [11, p. 75]. The club failed to attract widespread working-class support. Its attempts to gain a foothold in the trade union movement were limited and largely unsuccessful.

Gollancz emphasized the club's function of developing political awareness and understanding. Stressing that the club was not a political party, he was careful not to commit the club formally to a platform of particular policies. Even socialism, Gollancz said, could not be considered the official policy of an organization that welcomed Liberals and antifascist Conservatives. Gollancz hoped that Left Book Club members would use the knowledge they gained from the club to become politically active as individuals. He encouraged them to play an active role in the established political parties, and both the Labour and Communist parties gained many new members from the ranks of the club. In *Left News* Gollancz wrote, "Thought is the most revolutionary thing in the world, and the more desperate the situation, the greater becomes the necessity for it. It *must*, of course,

be united with action—the action being part of the process of education: but the point is that the member of the Left Book Club thinks as a member of the club and acts as a member of his organization” [1, no. 31 (November 1938), pp. 1033–34].

Gollancz was convinced that the best chance for preventing war lay in a strong defensive alliance between Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. Before the National government could be forced to adopt collective security, Gollancz believed, all antifascists in Britain would have to be united in a Popular Front. In practice both the Popular Front and collective security were Left Book Club policies. As Gollancz put it, “The Popular Front is not the policy of the Left Book Club, but the very existence of the Left Book Club tends towards a Popular Front” [1, no. 9 (January 1937), p. 195]. The club agitated constantly before the war to develop support for collective security and a Popular Front. Nearly all of the club’s members favored these policies. Only one selection, Clement Attlee’s *The Labour Party in Perspective* (August 1937), argued against a Popular Front.

Although the Left Book Club was critical of many of the Labour party’s policies, in general it viewed the Labour party favorably. The club had close relations with the Labour party’s left wing, and almost certainly the largest single group of Left Book Club members came from the Labour party. Constituency Labour parties often cooperated with local Left Book Club groups, and some dormant constituency parties were revitalized by Left Book Club members. The club’s support for a Popular Front, however, led to increasingly strained relations with the Labour party’s leadership. Although a large minor-

ity of the Labour party’s left-wing members favored Popular Front cooperation with the Communists, the Labour party repeatedly rejected Communist applications for affiliation. Some Left Book Club members joined the Labour party specifically to agitate for a change in its policies. One member wrote, “A ‘natural’ Socialist . . . a trade unionist from the age of 16 yet not a member of the Labour Party because I felt critical of them. Strachey’s *Theory and Practice of Socialism* was my first book, and immediately my outlook changed. I soon saw my place to criticise the Labour Party was from within not out, and in a few weeks was in the ranks” [1, no. 40 (August 1939), p. 1353].

In 1937 the club offered to put two double-sized issues of *Left News* at the disposal of the Labour party for its autumn publicity campaign. The club also offered the Labour leadership a monthly column in *Left News* to run side by side with Strachey’s “Topic of the Month.” Both offers were refused. At the end of 1938 Ernest Bevin and Herbert Morrison attacked the Left Book Club [12, 13]. In 1939 the Labour party warned its constituency parties against cooperation with Left Book Club groups. The same year, the Labour party started its own book club, the Labour Book Service, to compete with the Left Book Club.

Communist influence was strong in the Left Book Club before the war. The Communists were among the most energetic antifascists, and they set the pace in Popular Front movements everywhere. When the club was in the planning stages, Gollancz hinted that he might consider a formal link with the Communists. In a letter written in April 1936 he said, “As Harry [Pollitt, the leader of the British Communist party] also knows, I am extremely

sympathetic to the idea, once the Club is thoroughly and firmly established, of broadening its basis, if a really practicable and workable method can be found of doing so—though I have been careful not to commit myself in this matter" [6]. No such formal "broadening" took place, but the Communists were among the club's most active supporters. Communist members set up many of the local groups, and Communist intellectuals dominated the scientists, poets, and readers and writers groups. In his autobiography Gollancz wrote, "It is clear now . . . that the communists were far more influential in the Club than they ought to have been, if indeed this could have been avoided" [5, p. 357]. But Gollancz retained control. When he broke with the Communists in 1940, most of the Communist members resigned; and the club went on without them.

#### THE BOOKS

As it developed into a political movement, the Left Book Club gained a wide range of associated activities. But the books themselves remained at the center of its existence.<sup>5</sup> Some of the books, Cole and Raymond Postgate have written, "may have been shallow, some no doubt were sold but unread, some were criticized as following blindly official Communist policy; but the majority were books of value and depth, likely not to cause momentary excitement so much as to make solid converts" [15, p. 602].

Left Book Club authors represented, in unequal proportions, nearly the entire range of the British Left. Gollancz had no difficulty in securing books from Communists. Nearly a third of the

monthly choices before the war, and a smaller percentage of the optional books, were written by Communist authors. Many Left Book Club authors, such as Attlee, Sir Stafford Cripps, Philip Noel-Baker, Ellen Wilkinson, Konni Zilliacus, and G. D. H. Cole, were prominent members of the Labour party. Most of these represented the Labour party's left wing. Gollancz tried to obtain more manuscripts from Liberals, but only a few, such as Richard Acland and Sir Ernest Simon, wrote for the club. Many of the authors had no party affiliation. A surprising number were Americans. "We have excluded," Laski told the members, "only one type of book that some people consider, we think erroneously, to fall within the purview of the Left Book Club—viz., Trotskyite attacks on the Soviet Union" [1, no. 16 (August 1937), p. 456]. The Trotskyites could not have participated in any organization containing the Communists, and they found their publisher in Gollancz's rival Frederic Warburg.

Many Left Book Club selections were designed to mobilize opinion against fascism. Most of these were not crudely propagandistic but informative and un-sensational. The choice for the club's second month was Rudolf Olden's biography *Hitler the Pawn* (June 1936), written, as Strachey complained in his review in *Left News*, from a liberal, non-Marxist point of view. The liberal historian Gaetano Salvemini analyzed Mussolini's Italy in *Under the Axe of Fascism* (October 1936). Robert A. Brady subjected Nazi Germany to similar treatment in *The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism* (September 1937). Aurel Kolnai's *The War against the West* (Additional, 1938), which Gollancz considered one of the club's most important selections, provided an influential analysis of Nazi philosophy.

<sup>5</sup>A complete list of Left Book Club selections is included in John Lewis, *The Left Book Club* [14, pp. 139-56].



André Malraux's *Days of Contempt* (August 1936), one of the few novels issued by the club, described the fate of a political prisoner in Germany.

Many other selections concerned government policy and international affairs. Cole, the club's most prolific author, argued the case for a Popular Front in *The People's Front* (July 1937), and Acland advocated it from a Liberal point of view in *Only One Battle* (Topical, 1937). Zilliacus, writing under the name "Vigilantes," provided a series of books on foreign policy. Eleanor Rathbone, the Independent M.P., argued for collective security in *War Can Be Averted* (Topical, 1938). Max Werner presented military arguments for collective security in *The Military Strength of the Powers* (April 1939). Several selections were devoted to Czechoslovakia and Central Europe. Simon Haxey's *Tory M.P.* (July 1939) examined the records of Conservatives in Parliament. A Communist interpretation of recent history was provided in R. Palme Dutt's *World Politics, 1918-1936* (July 1936); Cripps wrote *The Struggle for Peace* (Additional, 1936); Noel-Baker contributed *The Private Manufacture of Armaments* (Additional, 1936); and J. B. S. Haldane criticized the government's provisions for air raid precautions in *A.R.P.* (September 1938).

A series of influential Left Book Club selections and the activities of the groups focused attention on poverty in Britain. A Left Book Club distressed-areas group was formed to study and publicize conditions in South Wales, where unemployment in many of the mining towns lingered at more than 50 percent. The Stepney group conducted tours of the slums of East London. G. D. H. Cole and Margaret Cole assembled a mass of data in *The Condition of Britain* (Additional, 1937).

The club's first optional book was G. C. M. M'Gonigle and J. Kirby's influential *Poverty and Public Health* (Additional, 1936). Wal Hannington, the leader of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, discussed *The Problem of the Distressed Areas* (November 1937). Wilkinson's *The Town That Was Murdered* (September 1939) exposed conditions in the Tyneside ship-building town of Jarrow, where two-thirds of the population was permanently unemployed. George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (March 1937), probably the best book the club ever issued, described life among the unemployed in northern England.<sup>6</sup>

Between 1936 and 1939 the Left Book Club issued 15 books on the Soviet Union. Many socialists in the 1930s regarded the Soviet Union, then the only socialist nation, as the hope of the future. Socialists followed events in the Soviet Union with great interest. Some assumed that the inevitable alternative to the apparently impotent democracies would be either fascist or communist totalitarianism and preferred, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, the latter. Gollancz believed that greater understanding of the Soviet Union was needed before a collective security agreement could be achieved. The Left Book Club sponsored Russian-language classes and tours to the Soviet Union. No Left Book Club selection seriously

<sup>6</sup> Gollancz commissioned *The Road to Wigan Pier* for the Left Book Club, but Orwell thought its chances of being a selection were small [10, p. 256]. The first part of the book was ideal for the club's purposes, but in the second part Orwell, although writing from a left-wing point of view, was strongly critical of doctrinaire socialism. Gollancz published the book with a long foreword in which he indicated his profound disagreement with Orwell's views. Later the club issued a special edition of the book for propaganda purposes which omitted part 2 altogether.

criticized the Soviet Union until after the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

Some of the books, such as Lion Feuchtwanger's *Moscow 1937* (Topical, 1937) and Seema Rynin Allan's *Comrades and Citizens* (November 1938), were informal accounts of Russian life. Others were more serious and informative works. There were valuable studies on Soviet education and the position of women in the USSR. Henry E. Sigerist, a professor of the history of medicine at Johns Hopkins University, wrote *Socialised Medicine in the Soviet Union* (Additional, 1937). There was a special Left Book Club edition of Sidney and Beatrice Webb's *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation* (Additional, 1937), which was reviewed in *Left News* by George Bernard Shaw. The Webbs's book was one of the most detailed and comprehensive studies of the Soviet Union published in the 1930s. It was also one of the least critical: the Webbs imagined that Soviet society worked in practice as it was supposed to work on paper. By special arrangement with Longmans, Green, who published the trade edition at thirty-five shillings, Gollancz offered the 1,200-page book to Left Book Club members for five shillings and sold more than 10,000 copies. Some selections were of more dubious value. Pat Sloan's *Soviet Democracy* (May 1937) explained how the Soviet Union, lacking the "bourgeois freedoms," was in fact more democratic than any Western nation. Two books supported the official Soviet version of the Moscow purge trials.

The Spanish Civil War, which broke out in the third month of the club's existence, became the most electrifying issue of the 1930s. The conflict was seen as a confrontation between democracy and fascism, in which a Republican victory might stem the tide of fas-

cist aggression. A massive campaign was launched in behalf of the Spanish government. The Left Book Club sponsored rallies for Spain, the club stocked and launched a food ship for Spain, and Left Book Club women knitted sweaters for volunteers in the International Brigade. The club's first selection on the conflict, *Spain in Revolt* (December 1936), was a shallow propagandistic account by two American Communists Harry Gannes and Theodore Repard. Seven other books followed. These included Arthur Koestler's *Spanish Testament* (December 1937);<sup>7</sup> *The Nazi Conspiracy in Spain* (Topical, 1937), a book of documents edited by Otto Katz which established German assistance to Franco; and Frank Jellinek's *The Spanish Civil War* (Additional, 1938), a historical account which remains of some use today.

The club issued only a few books on socialist theory. The 1930s was not a notable decade for the development of socialist thought: most socialists were writing polemical books in response to conditions of pressing urgency. Strachey's *The Theory and Practice of Socialism* (November 1936) was a widely studied choice. John Lewis edited *A Textbook of Marxist Philosophy* (Additional, 1937), and there was a Left Book Club edition of Emile Burns's anthology of the basic Marxist classics, *A Handbook of Marxism* (Reprints of Classics, 1937). Members who wished to make a more thorough study of the works of Marx and Lenin could take advantage of a special arrangement with the British Communist publishers Law-

<sup>7</sup> Koestler was still a Communist when he wrote *Spanish Testament*. He has never allowed the first part of the book, which contained a certain amount of fabricated atrocity propaganda, to be reprinted. The second part, *Dialogue with Death*, which described Koestler's confinement in a Franco prison, remains in print.

rence and Wishart, who offered their publications to Left Book Club members at a discount of one-third.

To fill gaps in the general education of the members, the club offered the highly popular optional series *Educational Books*. Gollancz described the Educational series, which ran to 25 volumes, as a kind of *Left Home University Library*. The books were short introductions to various subjects, and the 96-page volumes sold for sixpence in their Left Book Club editions. The topics ranged from *The Civilisation of Greece and Rome* to *Understanding the Atom*, and the authors included H. N. Brailsford, Benjamin Farrington, and Joseph Needham. Members bought between 5,000 and 7,000 copies each month.<sup>8</sup>

Other Left Book Club selections ranged from Edgar Snow's *Red Star over China* (October 1937) to David Daiches's *Literature and Society* (Additional, 1938). Leo Huberman's *Man's Worldly Goods* (April 1937) and Allen Hutt's *The Post-War History of the British Working Class* (June 1937) were two outstanding choices. Stephen Spender contributed his political autobiography, *Forward from Liberalism* (January 1937). One of the most popular early choices was Wilfrid Macartney's *Walls Have Mouths* (September 1936), a firsthand account of life in an English prison. There were a few historical works, such as Jellinek's *The Paris Commune of 1871* (February 1937) and A. L. Morton's *A People's History of England* (May 1938). Two popular optional selections were *Modern Marriage and Birth Control* (Supplementary, 1937) by Edward F. Griffith and *A Marriage Manual* (Supplementary,

<sup>8</sup> Figures supplied by John Bush, chairman and joint managing director of Victor Gollancz Limited.

1939) by Hannah and Abraham Stone. Gollancz's interest in religion was reflected in several selections of Christianity and socialism.<sup>9</sup> *Christianity and the Social Revolution* (Supplementary, 1937), edited by John Lewis, Karl Polanyi, and Donald Kitchin, included essays by W. H. Auden, John Cornford, John Macmurray, Needham, Reinhold Niebuhr, Conrad Noel, and others.

Although Gollancz often pointed to the range of opinion represented in the Left Book Club, he would have preferred more points of view in order for the club to be better balanced. In a self-critical mood following the Munich agreement, Gollancz wrote: "Passionately believing in certain ideas, I have allowed myself, I think . . . , to become too much of a propagandist and too little of an educator. I would go further and say that my eagerness to express certain ideas has, in the rush of day-to-day work, tended to overlay what I hope I have never forgotten: namely, that only by the *clash* of ideas does a mind become truly free. . . . In my view 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" [1, no. 31 (November 1938), p. 1035].

#### THE CLUB AS A POLITICAL MOVEMENT

Almost at once the Left Book Club began to develop from a simple book club into a political movement.<sup>10</sup> In the club's first month members suggested that local discussion groups should be formed. Gollancz welcomed the idea,

<sup>9</sup> In 1938 Gollancz tried to start a Christian Book Club to complement the work of the Left Book Club, but only one selection, A. S. Duncan-Jones's *The Struggle for Religious Freedom in Germany*, was issued.

<sup>10</sup> The club is discussed as a political movement in Samuels [11]. A detailed account of the club's activities may be found in Lewis [14].

delighted at the enthusiastic response to the club and glad that the books might be discussed as well as read. Discussion would reinforce the knowledge gained from the books, and local groups could reach out in their communities with the club's message, helping to convert more people and recruiting new members for the club. By August 1936 nearly 100 groups had been formed. By April 1939 there would be 1,200 of them, in every part of Great Britain.

"The whole success of the groups," members were told, "really depends on one thing, the conduct of regular discussions of the books" [1, no. 13 (May 1937), p. 351]. Participation in the groups was entirely voluntary. The local groups met fortnightly or monthly, and their membership ranged from half a dozen to over 100. Gollancz tried to ensure that no point of view was excluded from the groups, and the conveners were instructed to devote the first part of each meeting to soliciting all opinions and raising questions. Syllabi were prepared for most of the choices to assist group leaders in their discussions. Occasionally Communist conveners used groups for their own purposes, and Gollancz once strongly rebuked a group that disregarded discussion to chalk slogans in the streets. It was observed that the syllabi for non-Marxist books presented contrasting points of view for discussion, while the syllabi for Marxist books commonly did not [16]. Koestler compared Left Book Club group meetings to those of the Pickwick Club, and Orwell referred to the members as "the West Bletchley revolutionaries" [17, p. 382; 18, p. 146]. But on the whole the groups fulfilled their intended function with great success.

In December 1936 Gollancz appointed John Lewis as a full-time officer of

the club to direct the activities of the groups. Lewis was an able organizer, and under his direction the groups blossomed with a wide range of activities—lectures, film shows, theatrical productions, political-education classes, and social gatherings. Some groups issued their own bulletins, many of the larger groups acquired their own premises, and area committees were set up to coordinate the activities of groups in nearby towns. The groups became the means through which the Left Book Club could launch a nationwide campaign at a moment's notice. In an emergency members stood ready to blanket a town with pamphlets and leaflets.

Between 1937 and the outbreak of war a Left Book Club speakers' circuit developed. Appearances by many of the best-known Left Book Club authors and supporters stimulated great interest in the groups. Among those who undertook extensive tours were Koestler who spoke on Spain, Zilliacus on foreign policy, Haldane and J. D. Bernal on air raid precautions, Hannington on poverty, and Hyman Levy on his Left Book Club choice *A Philosophy for a Modern Man* (January 1938). For these meetings the groups usually hired a local hall and invited nonmembers.

"We should take every opportunity," John Lewis told the groups, "to develop our cultural contacts through the theatre, the film, and literature, and to get our point of view across not only by lectures and study but through the medium of art" [1, no. 26 (June 1938), p. 851]. As an example of how persons whose primary interest was not politics could be attracted, John Lewis pointed to a public lecture by C. Day Lewis, "Byron, the Poet of Freedom," sponsored by the Wolverhampton group. Left Book Club groups presented films on poverty in Britain, the Spanish Civil

War, China, and the Soviet Union. In the spring of 1937 the Left Book Club Theatre Guild was formed to assist groups in the production of left-wing plays. The play most frequently performed by local theater guilds was Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty*. Other popular plays included Bertolt Brecht's *Senora Carrar's Rifles* and Jack Lindsay's mass declamation *On Guard for Spain*.

A wide range of specialist groups were organized for Left Book Club members in different professions. Centered primarily in London, these included groups for poets, actors, scientists, readers and writers, musicians, film workers, teachers, doctors, lawyers, civil servants, journalists, clerical workers, accountants, and commercial travelers.<sup>11</sup> The poets group, which had branches in over twenty cities, sponsored poetry readings, operated a poetry workshop to which its members could send their poems for criticism, and offered training in mass declamation. The group published a little magazine, *Poetry and the People*. First in duplicated and then in printed form, it ran to 20 issues between 1938 and 1940. Its dedication to proletarian literature and political commitment among artists was expressed in one of the poems that appeared in its pages:

So come, you private poets,  
out of select saloons,  
out of your mountain lairs,  
into the public bars,  
into the market squares.  
Come to the Labour exchange,

<sup>11</sup> The actors group included Michael Redgrave, Sybil Thorndike, Lewis Casson, and Miles Malleon; the scientists included J. B. S. Haldane, J. D. Bernal, and P. M. S. Blackett; the readers and writers included Stephen Spender, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Mulk Raj Anand, Edgell Rickword, and Alick West and sponsored lectures by C. Day Lewis, John Lehmann, Rex Warner, Arthur Calder-Marshall, and Langston Hughes.

come to the factory yards—  
there, where the hungry masses are,  
hungry for beauty as well as bread.  
Where the rough and tumble,  
crude and able,  
boss-beggared,  
soul-sucked  
masses are.

Fire bullet-words at the pressings.  
Hurl bomb-poems at class.  
Riddle illusions with syllables.  
Shrapnel cheap boss-songs with rhythms.  
Batter—ram—scatter with rhymes.

[19, pp. 8-9]

Left Book Club rallies in London became the annual high point of the club's existence as a national political movement. The club's first rally in 1937 filled the Albert Hall. For the 1938 rally the 2,500-seat Queen's Hall was taken in addition to the Albert Hall, and the speakers were shuttled back and forth by automobile. The 1939 rally was staged in the gigantic Empress Hall at Earl's Court. The rallies featured the best-known and most influential supporters of the club, and Gollancz tried to ensure a broadly representative platform. At the 1939 rally Gollancz was in the chair, and the speakers included Strachey; Cripps; Harry Pollitt, the leader of the Communist party; Acland, the club's leading Liberal supporter; Hewlett Johnson, the "Red" Dean of Canterbury; the veteran peace crusader Sir Norman Angell; and Lloyd George. Paul Robeson sang.

After the success of the first Albert Hall rally, Gollancz scheduled smaller rallies at the largest halls of cities and towns throughout Britain. Gollancz spoke at nearly all of them. He appeared most frequently with Strachey, Pollitt, and Acland. Among the many others who spoke at some of these rallies were Laski, Hewlett Johnson, Aneurin Bevan, Jennie Lee, Kingsley Martin, and A. S. Neill of Summerhill. In the

autumn of 1937 there were forty rallies, at the grueling pace of three per weekend. In the following year's autumn series there were twice as many.

The club also ran summer schools, which combined intensive political education with recreation.<sup>12</sup> And it sponsored several smaller London rallies and conferences. There were conferences for teachers and religious leaders, one-man lectures in Queen's Hall by Hewlett Johnson on the Soviet Union and Jawaharlal Nehru on India, and a rally in 1938 for nonmembers only. At the beginning of 1939, when the Spanish Civil War was nearing its end, Gollancz called an emergency "Act for Spain" meeting. With less than a week's notice, an impressive platform of speakers was assembled<sup>13</sup> and the membership notified through the group conveners. Queen's Hall was packed, and Kingsway Hall was nearly filled with the overflow. But Barcelona fell to Franco's troops the following day.

Shortly after the Left Book Club was founded, inquiries about membership came from overseas. Eventually the club had members throughout the world, with its strongest overseas ties in Aus-

<sup>12</sup> The club provided some outstanding lecturers. Among the thirty lecturers at the 1938 summer school, when there were three one-week sessions, were Richard Acland, Sir Norman Angell, R. Page Arnot, J. D. Bernal, Maurice Dobb, Benjamin Farrington, Wal Hannington, Allen Hutt, Hyman Levy, Dr. Joseph Needham, and Barbara Wootton. Victor Gollancz and John Strachey also attended.

<sup>13</sup> Gollancz was in the chair, and the speakers included J. B. Priestley, the cartoonist David Low, and Sir Stafford Cripps, who had just been expelled from the Labour party. Aneurin Bevan and Ellen Wilkinson represented the Labour party, and Wilfrid Roberts and Lady Violet Bonham Carter the Liberals. Other speakers included Alfred Barnes, the chairman of the Co-operative party; Will Lawther of the Mineworkers' Federation; and Vernon Bartlett, the popular journalist and broadcaster whose election to Parliament the year before as an Independent with Labour and Liberal support had partly been inspired by the Left Book Club.

tralia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Canada. Nehru supported the club, but *Left News* was placed on the prohibited list by Indian censorship. Since many Left Book Club titles were also issued by American publishers, copyright restrictions prevented the club from selling its books in the United States. But the *New Republic* suggested that its readers could have friends in England send over the books privately [20]. The strongest overseas support came from Australia, which had its own Left Book Club summer schools and issued its own bimonthly journal. New South Wales alone had 1,550 members and thirty groups. But the club never had the same impact abroad that it had at home. An Australian writer noted at the end of 1938, "The Left Book Club in this country does not seem yet properly to have 'come alive.' It has not touched the public consciousness as it has done in Britain. It has not attracted to its very broad platform any of the outstanding figures in the religious, cultural, educational and political spheres in this country" [21, p. 25].<sup>14</sup>

As time grew shorter, the urgency of the club's mission increased. Gollancz sought out ways of spreading the club's message to more and more people. But he never conceived of the club itself as a true mass movement. "If the Left Book Club choices were to consist exclusively of books palatable to the millions," Gollancz wrote, "it would mean that the Left Book Club had become a propagandist and agitational body rather than a serious educational movement. The whole conception is that it should produce a (politically) highly educated corps of men and women, prepared to dedicate themselves to the

<sup>14</sup> I am grateful to Ronald Gray of the Hammett Bookshop, London, for drawing my attention to this article.

work of spreading the knowledge that they have acquired and of awakening the political consciousness of the indifferent and apathetic. . . . It is the millions that the Club members must *themselves* reach" [1, no. 31 (November 1938), p. 1034]. To assist its members in reaching the millions, the Left Book Club provided pamphlets and leaflets.

The club issued its first twopenny pamphlet, Strachey's *Why You Should Be a Socialist*, in May 1938. Gollancz told the members that he wanted to sell a million copies. Members pressed the "twopenny Strachey" upon their friends and distributed it on street corners. The groups formed mobile units to sell it from door to door. The club sold 250,000 copies. Four other pamphlets followed: *The Truth about Spain* (1938) by H. R. G. Greaves and David Thomson; *How to Be Safe from Air Raids* (1938) by Haldane; *Act Now: An Appeal to the Mind and Heart of Britain* (1939) by Hewlett Johnson; and Gollancz's *Is Mr. Chamberlain Saving Peace?* (1939).

Although the pamphlets were highly successful, at times of crisis Gollancz wanted to reach people by the millions, in simple, compelling form. During the Munich crisis in September 1938 the club rushed into print a one-page leaflet pleading against appeasement of Hitler. "If we stand firm," it concluded, "we, the French, and the Russians, even at this eleventh hour, and say we will not let Hitler destroy Czechoslovakia by armed might, will he fight? Most improbable, for the superiority of the three of us *now* is enormous. And if he were mad enough to challenge us, he would certainly be defeated" [22]. Within a few days Left Book Club members had distributed more than 2 million copies. In November 1938, 8 million

leaflets were distributed on the Spanish situation. In April 1939, after Hitler had occupied all of Czechoslovakia, the club issued a "Save Peace!" leaflet calling for a collective security agreement. Gollancz wrote the leaflet on a Wednesday afternoon; by the following evening the first half-million were on their way to the group conveners.

After the Munich agreement Gollancz was spurred to a frenzy of activity. "Between Munich and the outbreak of war eleven months later," he has written, "I must have spoken almost every night in cities and villages up and down the country, and sometimes in several on a single night. A sort of fever had got hold of me. I would travel by train to wherever it was, have the car sent up, and leave in it near midnight. . . . I would normally arrive home between three and six, have a bath, get as much rest as possible, read a huge pile of newspapers, and leave for the office at a quarter past eight. When I got there I would prepare for more meetings" [5, p. 375].

On August 23, 1939 the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed. World War II began eleven days later.

#### THE CLUB IN WARTIME

The news of the Nazi-Soviet Pact came as a profound shock to the Left. "Nothing," Strachey had proclaimed earlier in 1939, "is so certain amid the shifting sands of politics today as the absolute knowledge that the Soviet Union will never yield an inch to Nazi Germany" [23, quoted p. 207]. Disillusionment with the Communists, however, did not develop into a real split until several weeks after the beginning of the war. At first British Communists endorsed the war. They were soon reminded of the Soviet Union's non-aggression pact with Germany and in-

structed to reverse their position. The British Communist party executed one of its disconcerting ideological somersaults. Instead of as a struggle against fascism, the Communist party now interpreted the war as a shabby conflict between capitalists, an imperialist war that did not deserve socialist support.

The leadership of the Left Book Club was itself divided. Gollancz and Laski supported the war from the beginning. Strachey opposed it. The membership was also deeply split. Many members did not know what to think and looked to the club for guidance. At a time when firm leadership was desperately sought, all Gollancz could do was offer the excuse that the club itself should not take an official position.

The confusion was reflected in the club's choices in the autumn of 1939. For the first time the club was serving as a forum for genuine debate. The November choice was Leonard Woolf's *Barbarians at the Gate*. Woolf leveled his attack against Soviet as well as fascist barbarians. It was the first book issued by the club to criticize the Soviet Union. (Gollancz had commissioned Woolf to write a book on the values of Western civilization.) He published it only after some hesitation. After reading the manuscript, Gollancz, Strachey, and Laski summoned Woolf to a two- or three-hour meeting, during which they made various suggestions to Woolf for toning down his criticism of the Soviet Union. Woolf refused to modify his text, and in the end the book was published without alterations [24; 25, pp. 11-13]. Before the Nazi-Soviet Pact Gollancz might not have published the book at all. Some Left Book Club members were so outraged that they refused even to read the book. Angry letters flooded the Left Book Club offices, and some members resigned in protest.

The December choice was Hewlett Johnson's *The Socialist Sixth of the World*, a rapturous celebration of life in the Soviet Union. The book would have been a popular choice if it had appeared a few months earlier. Now, many members no longer shared the Dean of Canterbury's adulation for the Soviet Union, and the book had the additional disadvantage of being received just as Soviet troops were invading Finland. More angry letters arrived at Henrietta Street.

In the spring of 1940 Strachey broke with the Communists and began supporting the war. With the club's leadership again united, the strains with the Communists increased. Gollancz attacked Communist influence in the groups, some of which were agitating for Communist policy in the name of the Left Book Club. In May Gollancz wrote and published the pamphlet *Where Are You Going? An Open Letter to Communists*, but it was not a Left Book Club selection. In the summer of 1940 John Lewis was dismissed. Early the following year, the club issued *Treachery of the Left* (Additional, 1941), an important examination of Communist policy edited by Gollancz and with contributions by Gollancz, Strachey, Laski, and Orwell. Most of the remaining Communist members resigned. No more selections were written by Communist authors. At the end of 1940 *Daily Worker* columnist declared that the title of a forthcoming Left Book Club selection, J. P. W. Mallabey's *Rats!* (February 1941), would be an appropriate comment about the club [26].

With the outbreak of war, the central purpose which had motivated the Left Book Club throughout its prewar existence was gone. The club's strength was much reduced. Some members resigned



for ideological reasons, and others were forced to resign because of disruptions caused by the war. The club curtailed its activities to the publication of the monthly choice; only three more optional books were issued. With John Lewis's departure, the groups declined, and the club's existence as an organized national political movement came to an end.

But the club did not expire. Gollancz turned his attention in new directions. The Left Book Club's principal wartime objectives became the defense of toleration and democratic values at home and the planning of the postwar world. Among the monthly choices were Strachey's *A Faith to Fight For* (January 1941), Laski's *Faith, Reason and Civilisation* (February 1944), and Gollancz's *Our Threatened Values* (July 1946). A series of articles on ethics appeared in *Left News*; another regular wartime feature was the column "From the Christian Left." Selections on the postwar world included Acland's *What It Will Be Like in the New Britain* (December 1941); Simon's *Rebuilding Britain—a Twenty Year Plan* (December 1944); and three books by G. D. H. Cole: *Europe, Russia, and the Future* (October 1941), *Great Britain in the Post-War World* (November 1942), and *The Means to Full Employment* (October 1943).

When war was declared, Gollancz said that he expected the club's membership to drop by half [27]. By April 1940 it had declined from its prewar peak of 57,000 to 36,000, and it continued to decline. By the end of 1941 Left Book Club selections were being printed in editions of 10,000–11,000. After the Soviet Union entered the war, and especially after the defense of Stalingrad at the end of 1942, the Left regained much of its appeal. The Left

Book Club enjoyed an increase in membership, and there was even an attempt to revive the groups.<sup>15</sup> By the end of the war Left Book Club selections were being printed in editions of nearly 18,000 (see n. 8, above).

Beginning in 1941, *Left News* included a monthly supplement, the *International Socialist Forum*, edited by the distinguished Austrian Socialist Julius Braunthal.<sup>16</sup> British, American, and exiled continental Socialists, all non-Communist, conducted wide-ranging discussions in its pages. The contributors described conditions in their own countries and devoted much attention to the future of Europe after the war.

One of the club's major wartime campaigns was to work for a more charitable attitude toward the enemy. In the heat of war it was easy to condemn the German people as naturally warlike and barbaric. The leading exponent of this view was Sir Robert Vansittart, whose enormously popular pamphlet of 1941, *Black Record*, characterized Germans as "butcher birds." This attitude struck Gollancz as essentially fascist. Gollancz's own book, *Shall Our Children Live or Die? A Reply to Lord Vansittart on the German Problem* (1942), was serialized in *Left News*. Braunthal defended the German people in *Need Germany Survive?* (May 1943). Articles challenging

<sup>15</sup> Among those who offered their services as group conveners was Isaac Deutscher.

<sup>16</sup> The advisory committee of the *International Socialist Forum* included Louis de Brouckère (Belgium), Lydia Ciolkosz (Poland), Karel Kriz (Czechoslovakia), Louis Lévy (France), Hakoon Lie (Norway), Richard Löwenthal (Germany), Pietro Nenni (Italy), A. Ramos Oliveira (Spain), Oscar Follak (Austria), Kurt Schumacher (Germany), Paolo Treves (Italy), Hans Vogel (Germany), and three British representatives: Mildred Bamford, Jim Middleton, and Harold Laski.

the Vansittartist position appeared in *Left News* and in the *International Socialist Forum*.

After the defeat of Germany and the election of the Labour government in 1945, the issues which had sustained the Left Book Club no longer existed. The intellectual climate of its most active and significant years had been colored by the economic crisis, the rise of fascism, the Spanish Civil War, and the agitation for collective security and a Popular Front. The momentum built up by these issues helped carry the club through the war, as did its concerns of preserving democratic values at home and of planning for the postwar world. During the war Gollancz's interest in the club declined. After the war his attention turned away from the Left Book Club to other campaigns, such as relief for defeated Germany and, later, nuclear disarmament.

The Left Book Club survived for three more years. Membership was falling sharply. The price of monthly choices remained at two shillings and sixpence, while the costs of book production were rising. In March 1947 *Left News* was discontinued. When the membership fell below 8,000 Gollancz disbanded the club. Its last selection, in October 1948, was G. D. H. Cole's *The Meaning of Marxism*.

The Left Book Club had enjoyed an extraordinary success in its early years, but it failed to sway a nation from its apathy, and it failed to prevent the war. Most of the causes for which it struggled were lost. The closest the Popular Front came to being achieved in Britain was within the ranks of the Left Book Club itself. The alliance with the Soviet Union was achieved only in the midst of the war which it had first been conceived to prevent. None of the club's selections had the impact or influence that Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man*

had had on the British labor movement nearly 150 years before. But the cumulative effect of the books was not insignificant. The club deserves much of the credit for focusing attention on poverty in Britain. The club helped shape the view that the country's prewar Conservative leaders were guilty of the neglect of Britain's genuine interests. The majority of the British people emerged from World War II with the ambition of creating a better society. Few yearned for a return to prewar conditions. Gollancz and Strachey both believed that the Left Book Club had contributed significantly to the climate that made the election of the Labour government possible. In 1945 eleven Left Book Club authors sat on the Labour benches in Parliament, and six of them, including the prime minister, were members of the government.

Throughout the twelve and a half years of its existence, the most important influence on the Left Book Club was always Gollancz himself. Gollancz never doubted that the majority of the population was well meaning and, if it could be reached, would listen and could be convinced to think and act differently. It is primarily to Gollancz's credit that the Left Book Club remained, on the whole, a serious educational movement and did not degenerate into a simple propaganda machine. The club could not have achieved its remarkable success without Gollancz's energetic leadership or the backing of his publishing firm. Gollancz kept strict personal control of the club. Some of his personal interests, such as Christian socialism, were reflected in the club. When Gollancz lost interest in the club it quickly came to an end. It was once suggested to Gollancz that he should hire someone to run the Left Book Club for him. "But," he protested, "the Club is myself!"

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