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VICTOR GOLLANCZ AND THE LEFT BOOK CLUB

GORDON BARRICK NEAVILL

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 News*.

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.¹ 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.

¹ 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.² 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

² 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 booksellers and news agents.

Members also received a copy of the club's monthly periodical *Left News*.³ 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 booksellers. 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-

³ *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 anti-fascism, 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.⁴ 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

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,

⁴ 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.

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.⁵ 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 unsensational. 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.

⁵ 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 shipbuilding 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.⁶

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

⁶ 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);⁷ *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-

⁷ 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.⁸

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,

1939) by Hannah and Abraham Stone. Gollancz's interest in religion was reflected in several selections of Christianity and socialism.⁹ *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.¹⁰ In the club's first month members suggested that local discussion groups should be formed. Gollancz welcomed the idea,

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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].

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

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.¹¹ 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,

¹¹ The actors group included Michael Redgrave, Sybil Thorndike, Lewis Casson, and Miles Malleson; 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 presskings.
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 week-end. 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.¹² 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 assembled¹³ 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-

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].¹⁴

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

¹² The club provided some outstanding lecturers. Among the thirty lecturers at the 1938 summer school, when there were three one-week sessions, where 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.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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 *The Betrayal 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 a *Daily Worker* columnist declared that the title of a forthcoming Left Book Club selection, J. P. W. Mallalieu'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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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

¹⁵ Among those who offered their services as group conveners was Isaac Deutscher.

¹⁶ 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 Pollak (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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