

THE COMMUNIST PARTY IN LITERATURE by Andy Croft

No political organisation in Britain ever attracted so many distinguished writers as the Communist Party. Kingsley Amis, Robert Bolt, Elizabeth Bowen, Graham Greene, Doris Lessing, Iris Murdoch, John Prebble, Arnold Wesker, Raymond Williams and - for two weeks - Stephen Spender, were all Party members in their youth. Others who wrote their best work while they were Communists include Patrick Hamilton, Hamish Henderson, Cecil Day Lewis, Joan Littlewood, Ewan McColl, Hugh MacDiarmid, Edgell Rickword, Randall Swingler and Sylvia Townsend Warner. Moreover, a number of writers - notably Fred Ball, Len Doherty, Harry Heslop, Lewis Jones, Dave Wallis, Ted Willis and Roger Woddis - may be said to have learned to write while they were in the Party. Among Party leaders, Wal Hannington once wrote an unpublished novel, Willie Gallacher published a book of poetry and Palme Dutt a play about Dimitrov.

Unsurprisingly then, the Communist Party and individual Communists make a number of notable appearances in twentieth-century fiction. Arthur Seaton votes Communist in Alan Silittoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) ; the Party's principal publishing house, Lawrence and Wishart, turns up as 'Boggis and Stone' in Anthony Powell's *The Acceptance World* (1955) ; the gamekeeper in the first draft of DH Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is secretary of a Party cell in Sheffield.

The distinguished Cambridge crystallographer - and life-long Communist - JD Bernal appears in CP Snow's *The Search* (1934). The character of Guy Pringle in Olivia Manning's *Balkan Trilogy* is based on her husband, the legendary 'Red' BBC radio producer Reggie Smith. The 'finely featured' NUWM leader assaulted by the police in Walter Greenwood's best-selling *Love on the Dole* (1934) was the young Communist Eddie Frow, later AEU Manchester District Secretary, bibliophile and historian. Arthur Seaton in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) attends a factory-gate meeting addressed by John Peck - later a Communist councillor in Nottingham. CP National Organiser Dave Cook is one of the main characters in Alison Fell's *Tricks of the Light* (2003). There is a comic portrait of Palme Dutt in Nigel Williams's *Star Turn* (1985). And in *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) Christopher Isherwood based Sally Bowles, the most famous character in 1930's English fiction, on the Daily Worker film-critic Jean Ross.

For many novelists membership of the Communist Party was once a short-hand for Bohemianism, as in Howard Spring's *Shabby Tiger* (1934) or William McIlvanney's *The Kiln* (1996) ; the rock-star narrator of Ian Banks *Espedair Street* (1987) gives away large sums of money to the Party and the ANC. Elsewhere, Communists were frequently represented in British fiction as humourless and uncompanionable zealots, as in George Orwell's *Coming Up for Air* (1939), Cecil Day Lewis's *Child of Misfortune* (1939), JB Priestley's *Daylight on Saturday* (1943) and Evelyn Waugh's *Unconditional Surrender* (1961). The figure of the sad and solitary British Communist working for Soviet intelligence is a variation on this - Sawbridge in CP Snow's *The New Men* (1954), Halliday in Graham Greene's *The Human Factor* (1978), and George Blake himself in Ian McEwan's *The Innocent* (1990). But on the whole, whether they are knaves like Illidge in Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (1929), fools like Lord Erridge in Anthony Powell's *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant* (1960) or sympathetic characters like those in Storm Jameson's *None Turn Back* (1936), William Golding's *Free Fall* (1959), and William McIlvanney's *Doherty* (1975) British Communists were usually represented in fiction as lonely representatives of an idea rather than members of a real political organisation.

The following list is not therefore a comprehensive record of every reference in fiction to the British Communist Party, but a selection of those in which membership of the Party or the actions of Party shape the narrative, characters or argument of the novel in important ways.

Jim Allen, *Days of Hope* (Futura, 1975)
Revolutionary unrest in Britain from 1916 to the General Strike, culminating in the resignation of Trotsky's supporters from the Party.

Brian Almond, *Gild the Brass Farthing* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1963)
The Party's attempts to organise in the Lancashire textile industry in the 1930s, including a portrait of Bill Rust.

James Barke, *Major Operation* (Collins, 1936)
Cinematic novel of Glasgow life, starring an heroic NUWM leader and the Party organiser in Patrick.

James Barke, *The Land of the Leal* (Collins, 1939)
Family saga beginning in rural Galloway in the 1820s and ending in Glasgow in the 1930s, it includes a portrait of the Party and YCL in Glasgow.

Alexander Baron, *Seeing Life* (Collins, 1958)
Set in London in 1956, and includes a character allegedly based on John Gollan.

Ralph Bates, *Lean Men* (Peter Davies, 1934)
British Comintern agent arrives in Barcelona in 1931 to organise the PCE.

Anthony Bertram, *Men Adrift* (Chapman and Hall, 1935)
Experimental novel whose many plot lines include the murder of a Party member.

Simon Blumenfeld, *Jew Boy* (Jonathan Cape, 1935)
Whitechapel Bildungsroman which rejects the immigrant culture of the Ghetto and the inaccessible culture of England in favour of the universal and international claims of the Communist Party.

Robert Bonnar, *Stewartie* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1964)
Labour Party corruption in a small town in Fife helps a young railwayman decide to join the Party.

Alec Brown, *Daughters of Albion* (Boriswood, 1935)
Picture of unhappy middle-class society where emotional and sexual honesty is enjoyed only by those who have joined the Communist Party.

Alec Brown, *Breakfast in Bed* (Boriswood, 1937)
The intellectual journey of an English Liberal couple - one towards Fascism, the other to the Party and Spain.

Arthur Calder-Marshall, *Pie in the Sky* (Jonathan Cape, 1937)
Experimental state-of-the-nation novel which includes several Party members and a character possibly based on Harry Pollitt.

Cecil Day Lewis, *Starting Point* (Jonathan Cape, 1937)
Story of four friends from Oxford in the 1920s, as they make their ways in the world, one as a scientist, one as a writer, one as a philanthropist and one as a Communist who fights in Spain.

Len Doherty, *A Miner's Sons* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1955)
Party life in a South Yorkshire pit village.

Len Doherty, *The Man Beneath* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1957)
NUM politics in South Yorkshire coalfield, including CP fraction.

Peter Elstob, *The Armed Rehearsal* (Secker and Warburg, 1964)
Spanish Civil-War novel (by ex-Iber) containing portraits of Douglas Hyde, Kit Conway, George Nathan, Fred Copeman and Tom Wintringham.

Lewis Grassic Gibbon [Leslie Mitchell], *Grey Granite* (Jarrolds, 1934)
The third of Grassic Gibbon's celebrated A Scots Quair trilogy, in which Ewan leaves Glasgow with the 1932 Hunger Marchers to work full-time for the Party in London.

Willie Goldman, *Light in the Dust* (Grey Walls Press, 1944)
An ambitious young writer is torn between the attractions of literary London and the intellectual culture of Whitechapel Communism to which he belongs.

Graham Greene, *It's a Battlefield* (Heinemann, 1934)
The events surrounding the trial of a Communist bus-driver charged with manslaughter after the death of a policeman on a demonstration.

Frank Griffin, *October Day* (Secker and Warburg, 1939)
The battle of Cable Street.

Bruce Hamilton *The Brighton Murder Trial : Rex v Rhodes* (Boriswood, 1937)
Supposed verbatim record of the trial in 194- of a Brighton Party member framed with the murder of a local Fascist. The novel was dedicated to fellow NCCL activists Dudley Collard and Neil Lawson.

Bruce Hamilton, *Traitor's Way* (Cresset, 1938)
Fast, anti-Fascist period thriller which begins with the death of a Party member at an anti-Fascist demonstration ; Hamilton was the older brother of the novelist and playwright Patrick Hamilton.

Margot Heinemann, *The Adventurers* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1960)
Study in the rise and fall of the British Left from 1943-1956. Includes portraits of Arthur Horner and the young EP Thompson.

Harold Heslop, *Last Cage Down* (Wishart, 1935)
Late Third Period novel inspired by the 1929 dispute at Dawdon Colliery, dramatising the clash between opportunist lodge officials and rank-and-file Communist leadership inside the DMA.

Jack Hilton, *Laugh at Polonius* (Jonathan Cape, 1942)
The political education of a young weaver in Rochdale.

Barry Hines, *The Heart of It* (Michael Joseph, 1994)
Successful scriptwriter returns to his native Yorkshire after the 1980s miners' strike to face the memory of his father, a life-long Party member.

William Holt, *Backwaters* (Nicholson and Watson, 1934)
Young Lancashire weaver emigrates to Canada where he works in lumber camps before returning home and joining the CP ; includes a comic account of the Party in Todmorden (where Holt was a CP councillor).

Gwyn Jones, *Times Like These* (Gollancz, 1936)
1926 Lockout in a South Wales pit village.

Jack Jones, *Rhondda Roundabout* (Hamish Hamilton, 1934)
Affectionate satire on life in Merthyr, including a comical account of the Party in the Rhondda.

Lewis Jones, *We Live* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1939)
Sequel to Jones's *Cwmardy* (1937) representing events in the South Wales coalfield from the early 1920s to 1936 and the War in Spain ; set in the 'Little Moscow' of Mardy in the Rhondda.

Mervyn Jones, *Today the Struggle* (Quartet, 1978)
Among the many characters in this cross-section of British society from the 1930s to the 1970s is Alf Saunders, a railway signalman and a life-long Party member.

Dave Lambert, *He Must So Live* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1956)
Young foundry worker joins the Party in Glasgow in the late 1930s.

Dave Lambert, *No Time for Sleeping* (1958)
Sequel to *He Must So Live*, a study in Clydeside politics in the late 1930s, representing the Communist Party as a unifying force against sectarianism and sectional interest in industry and politics. Includes a brief appearance by Willie Gallacher.

John le Carre, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (Gollancz, 1963)
Idealistic young British Communist is used in a cynical Cold War operation in the GDR ; the novel includes a grim portrait of Party life in Bayswater.

Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (Michael Joseph, 1962)
Complex study in fictional autobiography which addresses, in the 'Red Notebook', the intellectual crisis in the British Party in the 1950s.

Jack Lindsay, *We Shall Return* (Dakers, 1942)
The Phoney War, the Fall of France and the evacuation at Dunkirk seen through the eyes of a British Communist in the BEF.

Jack Lindsay, *Hullo Stranger* (Dakers, 1945)
The politicisation of women working in industry during the War.

Jack Lindsay, *Betrayed Spring* (Bodley Head, 1953)
Set in London, Lancashire, Tyneside and the West Riding during the winter of 1946-47, the first of Lindsay's nine linked 'British Way' novels shows the Party valiantly trying to prevent the betrayal of war-time hopes by the Labour Government.

Jack Lindsay, *Rising Tide* (Bodley Head, 1953)
The Party's leadership of the 1949 Dock Strike and Squatters' Movement.

Jack Lindsay, *Moment of Choice* (Bodley Head, 1955)
Communists fighting losing battles in industry, in the Peace Movement and in the campaign against the war in the Korea.

Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs* (Jonathan Cape, 1992)
The high hopes of Communists in 1946 and their defeat in 1989 are linked by the experiences of an ex-Party member.

Ethel Mannin, *Comrade O Comrade* (Jarrolds, 1947)
Satirical portrait of the London literary Left in the late 1930s, particularly scathing about the Party's attitude to events in Spain.

Naomi Mitchison, *We Have Been Warned* (Constable, 1935)
Study in the relationship between the Labour Left and the CP (including a Communist character called Donald McLean who defects to the Soviet Union).

Iris Morley, *Nothing But Propaganda* (Peter Davies, 1946)
Left-wing London during war-time, including a picture of work in a Communist Party bookshop.

Leslie Paul, *Men in May* (Gollancz, 1936)
General Strike in Lewisham, including sympathetic account of the role of Party members.

Jim Phelan, *Ten-a-Penny People* (Gollancz, 1938)
Violent political melodrama set in Manchester.

AP Roley [George Chandler] *Revolt* (Arthur Barker, 1933)
Third Period novel in which a Liverpool Communist (based partly on Jim Phelan) is incriminated in an IRA raid on a post-office.

Herbert Smith, *A Field of Folk* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1957)
Work and politics in a West London engineering factory, including workers who have stayed in the Party after 1956.

Herbert Smith, *A Morning to Remember* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1962)
Work, health and safety, union politics, and a Party branch in an electric power-station.

John Sommerfield, *May Day* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1936)
Experimental, cinematic account of three days in the life of London, culminating in a May Day demonstration led by the London District CP.

John Sommerfield, *Trouble in Porter Street* (Key Books/Fore Publications, 1938)
Novella about a Party-led rent strike in working-class Chelsea (where the author was Branch Secretary).

John Sommerfield, *The Imprinted* (London Magazine Editions, 1977)
Fictional autobiography of ex-Iber, including portraits of John Cornford, Stephen Spender and Jean Ross.

Philip Toynbee, *The Savage Days* (Hamish Hamilton, 1937)
Youthful fantasy about a bloodthirsty and successful Soviet Revolution in Britain.

Geoffrey Trease, *Missing from Home* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1937)
Adventure story for children about two middle-class runaways who are befriended by YCL hikers and help miners win a local strike.

Edward Upward, *Journey to the Border* (Hogarth, 1938)
Kafkaesque satire on 1930s Britain in which the only rational course of action is to join the Party.

Edward Upward, *In the Thirties* (Heinemann, 1962)
Autobiographical novel which ends with the decision to join the Party.

Edward Upward, *The Rotten Elements* (Heinemann, 1969)
The second in Upward's trilogy *The Spiral Ascent*, in which Alan Sebrill leaves the Party in 1949, believing it to be 'Revisionist'; includes portraits of Pollitt, Dutt and Mahon.

Gordon Wardman, *Crispin's Spur* (Secker and Warburg, 1985)

Hard-boiled thriller set in the near future when Britain is on the edge of civil-war and the Party has turned 'left'.

Raymond Williams, *Loyalties* (Hogarth Press, 1989)

The overlapping stories of a group of friends from 1936 to the 1980s, including two characters (one possibly based on Margot Heinemann) who remain Party members.

TC Worsley, *Fellow Travellers* (London Magazine Editions, 1971)

Roman a clef set during the Spanish Civil-War and including portraits of Stephen Spender and Giles Romilly.