

RADICAL BOOKSELLING HISTORY

Newsletter

Issue 5, November 2022

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Editorial | 2 |
| News items, old items, obits and odd bits | 3 |
| Left Cultures | 5 |
| Print, Pixels, Pride | 7 |
| Trigger Warning | 8 |
| Corner Bookshop Leeds | 10 |
| Communist Party Bookshops | 12 |

Editorial

Welcome to issue 5 of the Radical Bookselling History Newsletter. As with Issue 4, we have a long article for you, this time the story of shops run by, or in affiliation with, the Communist Party of Great Britain from its founding in 1920 to its dissolution in 1991. This time, however, the article is written by one of our editors, Dave Cope, an ex-member of the CPGB, who has already published a complete bibliography of materials published by - and about - the CPGB and a history of Central Books. Party-affiliated bookshops seem to us a fertile ground for further research and publication, which we hope to explore in future Newsletters. We'd be pleased to hear your thoughts on this.

There's a second, shorter article in this issue by another of our editors, Maggie Walker, based on an oral history interview she carried out with Erika Dwek of Corner Bookshop, Leeds. We have two other shorter pieces, on the Lavender Menace Queer Books Archive in Edinburgh and the welcome new journal *Left Cultures*, which springs from the radical city of Bristol. In issue 2 we published a poem about Grass Roots. Now a second, *Trigger Warning*, in honour of Susannah Wright, a lace worker who was Nottingham's first known radical bookseller, opening her shop in 1826. And then there are our regular features of short announcements and, inevitably, obituaries.

Significantly, we also have an announcement of the forthcoming conference at the Barbican on radical bookselling. We plan to bring you a report of the event in our next issue.

As always, we welcome any comments on this Newsletter, or previous issues, and suggestions for future articles or features.

Dave Cope, John Goodman, Rick Seccombe and Maggie Walker

Radical Bookselling History Group

RBH project now has its own email address: rbh@phoncoop.coop. Please use this if you want to contact us.

This Newsletter, and previous issues, can be downloaded from: www.leftontheshelfbooks.co.uk (Research Pages tab)

Dave Cope

Progressive Books 1975-85;
Central Books 1986-2004; LOTS
1992 to date

leftontheshelf@phoncoop.coop

John Goodman

Wedge Co-operative 1977-79;
PDC/Southern Distribution 1979-
80

john.goodman@phoncoop.coop

Rick Seccombe

Grass Roots 1974-79; Scottish
& Northern 1979-83; Frontline
Books 1990-95

rick@care4free.net

Maggie Walker

Grass Roots 1976-1982

maggiewalker101@gmail.com

Design and typesetting

[Ben Goodman](#)

News items, old items, obits and odd bits

Quiet Revolutions: A Celebration of Radical Bookshops

A 1-day event at the Barbican, Saturday 26th November

Book fair, discussions and workshops exploring the legacies and futures of radical bookselling. Two panel discussions will include addresses and interventions on activism and books from historians and writers such as Sheila Rowbotham and Farrukh Dhondy along with key figures from the radical book world of the 1970s and 80s such as Ken Worpole of Centerprise and Jane Cholmeley of Silver Moon.

The four of us will be there and hope to see many of you on the day.

Detailed programme and booking [here](#).

History of Feminist Book Fortnight

Eleanor Careless, Northumbria University, gave a talk on 10th May at Five Leaves Bookshop in Nottingham about the history of Feminist Book Fortnight. You can watch the recording [here](#). Eleanor has also written a 24-page booklet *Feminist Book Fortnight: A Short History*, which can be downloaded from the Business of Women's Words website [here](#).

The website also has plenty more useful and fascinating material such as *Feminist & Women's Publishing & Cultural Industries, a guide to archives and resources*, which can be downloaded from [here](#).

Bookshop prints

Gemma Curtis at Wild Water Art Store is producing some great linocuts of radical bookshops (amongst other things). She and her prints (for sale) will be at the Barbican event on 26th November and of course you can buy them online [here](#).



Study of October Books

As part of its study earlier this year on how community businesses are engaging with young people, commissioned by Power to Change, the Common Vision think tank looked at October Books in Southampton as one of the case studies: [click here](#)

More about the wider project [here](#).

Obituaries

We recently came across this 2003 obituary for Araba Mercer, who worked at Grass Roots and Sheba Feminist Publishers: [click here](#)

And of course we will all have read and heard tributes to Carmen Callil, co-founder of Virago, who died on 17th October. Here is the Guardian obituary: [click here](#)

The bookshop listing

A reminder to you, our friends and readers, to look at Dave Cope's listing of all the bookshops he's ever come across, however small the reference. Please help Dave – and the rest of us – to fill in the inevitable gaps and put right the inevitable errors. This is the listing [here](#).

Did you work in any of these shops? Do you know anyone who did? Were you a customer? Send us your stories.

Left Cultures

This new journal, edited by Phil Wrigglesworth and Colum Leith, aims to be ‘a positive space to celebrate all forms of culture on the Left through storytelling and Illustration’. Based in Bristol, it was launched at an event at the Bookhaus on 20th July.

Issue 1 has over 50 stories and 50 pieces of art within, on the theme of Stories Past and Present, created by an incredible array of talent from around the world working on the Left today. They include Nik Gorecki from Housmans, who has written for issue 1, and Darren from the Bookhaus in Bristol, writing for Issue 2. As the editors write, “we have a lot to celebrate on Left and need to make more noise about what we do!” Their introduction to Issue 1 is reproduced on the next page.

www.leftcultures.com



Storytelling is a very powerful tool and throughout history we have used narratives to change people's vision of the world, to create culture. Stories have the unique power to inform the uninformed and allow people to imagine alternative views of what society can be. They can be passed down through the generations in a similar way to a family heirloom. Throughout the history of the Left people have told stories of unrepresented voices and the unheard to help inspire meaningful change.

Never before has there been a greater need for an alternative vision for society, with the mainstream media co-opted by a small group of billionaires to project their ideals of what society should be for their own narrow selfish interests. How many property shows are there? How many shows are there promoting celebrity culture? How many law and order shows are there? Stories that give another account of society's injustices or that celebrate everyday life have over time been squeezed out of the national dialogue. Corporations use advertising to bombard the public through every avenue possible, in every corner of life, spending billions of pounds in the process. The right wing media have in effect created a tight grip on the national narrative.

Left Cultures is a contemporary space to champion all kinds of voices on the Left, whether that be Socialist, Communist, Anarchist or anything in between. The Left has always been fizzing with ideas to change society and Left Cultures 1 will be celebrating the Left's cultural past, discussing gems of storytelling within film, literature, music, art and poetry. It will do this by asking over 50 culture creators practising today who are willing to stand up and fight for their beliefs to tell a personal story of how culture from the past has influenced and inspired them. All the points of reference from both past and present come together to make a wonderfully rich, diverse and beautifully illustrated lexicon of Left Culture.

As Tony Benn said "there is no final victory, as there is no final defeat. There is just the same battle. To be fought, over and over again. So, toughen up, bloody toughen up".

Print, Pixels, Pride

Lavender Menace Queer Books Archive



Bob Orr and Sigrid Nielsen opened Lavender Menace Bookshop on Forth Street in Edinburgh in August 1982. A few years ago they revived it as the Archive, which

‘aims to conserve LGBT books published between 1970 and 2000, celebrate their authors and connect to the LGBT community in Edinburgh and beyond by running online and in-person events at our safe events space’.

On Sunday 21 August, they held a party to celebrate the 40th Anniversary and thank the many people who kept the bookshop going in the 1980s and 90s through good times and difficult times.

The regular Newsletter has plenty of information about progress with the Archive and events that they are running and taking part in.

Subscribe to the LMQBA Newsletter [here](#).



Bob and Sigrid with early donations to the Archive in the basement of Lighthouse Bookshop where they were initially kept.

TRIGGER WARNING

Neil Fulwood

(for, and in memory of, Susannah Wright)

Stand at the bottom end of Goosegate,
your back to the Arena. Let the scene
leech to sepia. Spiral back through the years,
buildings shrinking to an older aspect,
the snarl of traffic giving out to the clamour
of a mob baying with superior-numbers certainty,
sure of morality, God and themselves.

You'd heft your phone, film it for YouTube
or TikTok but you've tuned out
of your own timeline, displaced yourself
centuries distant from hashtag agendas
and the weaponised vacuity of culture wars.
You recognise, though, what's happening here
as cancel culture gone vigilante:

a scene shot through with the stark simplicity
of a western, lone homesteader holding out
against hired guns. Only this is Nottingham
not Kansas or Missouri or Cheyenne.
And not that they'd know, in Hollywood,
what to do with Susannah Wright,
how to apply the standard reductive formula.

They'd make something of the siege
but be baffled by the seditious sentiments
of the tracts and pamphlets provoking it:
Susannah's stock-in-trade, the stuff
of socialism, of Freethought, calls to arms
for a new beginning, a better way.
Still, there's a moment of rising action here,

a point in the narrative that casts her as icon.
Escalation: the shop invaded; the forces
of law and order summoned but inconsequential.
Susannah acquires a firearm, stashes it
under the counter. Pulls it on the next leery youth
who comes looking for trouble; asks if he'd like it
fired at him. Asks him coolly, voice loaded.

Susannah Wright, a lace worker, was Nottingham's first known radical bookseller who opened her shop in 1826. For four weeks the shop was besieged by up to 200 supporters of the Committee for the Suppression of Vice. At one point she was forced to draw a pistol to defend herself. See *A City of Light: Socialism, Chartism and Co-operation - Nottingham, 1844* by Christopher Richardson, Loaf on a Stick Press, Nottingham, 2013, available from Five Leaves Bookshop, which commissioned this poem.

Thanks also to Nottingham Women's History Group

Corner Bookshop Leeds

Maggie Walker

Corner Bookshop in Leeds was the idea of Erika Dwek. She was living in London and involved with the Earham St Women's Liberation Centre. Having enjoyed helping with bookstalls she asked around for suggestions of where to set up an alternative bookshop. Southampton missed out and Leeds was chosen.

In August 1976 Erica came to Leeds to start negotiations to take on a shop and with the help of women carpenters and others opened as a bookshop that October. The shop which was set up as a limited company was primarily run by women but Erika always thought of it as alternative bookshop saying "there weren't enough books to do a feminist bookshop". "We were amateurish but well-meaning we wanted to work our politics in our daily life". Two workers paid themselves the same rate as the dole (around £17 per week) - when they couldn't afford to pay themselves one of them signed on - and volunteers contributed. The shop started with capital of £2,500 and benefitted from 2 further donations of £500.

The shop served the alternative community of Leeds including Women's Liberation, Gay Liberation, Black Liberation and the Labour Movement. It became a hub with posters for events and tickets for feminist singers and organised the feminist bookfair one year. "The shop was like a social media of those days - posters for events and marches and adverts for rooms etc and shows by feminist and Latin-American bands." Erika and colleagues were very involved in European Nuclear Disarmament and held evening meetings and affinity groups at the shop.

Fascist attacks were a problem. The shop team had death threats by telephone, windows were smashed by bricks and once there was a gunshot through the plate glass window. "Our 2 windows cost about £350 each to replace even in the early 80s". Saturday was the worst: "you didn't know whether they were BNP or National Front or both and some were only young teenagers." They had a panic button but the police were unhelpful and Erika remembers them saying "what could you expect being blatantly lefty". The police were probably tapping their phone. It wasn't only the shop, fascists attacked a pacifist meeting with veteran campaigner Fenner Brockway and Erika remembers that when they "went on coaches to a

Troops Out march in Barnsley the coaches had to park away because of the threats” and when they marched there were “NF people threatening from both sides.”

Bookstalls, many at the University, were important income for the shop – ordering books sale or return. Keeping the shop open was challenging. They were verging on insolvency for most of the time. In 1984 the shop was flooded when lead pipes were stolen from the flats above. After the £7,000 insurance claim they couldn’t get insurance. Erika left in 1984 and Robert Warhurst ran the shop with volunteers, reducing its debts until the shop closed in 1987 with debts of about £15k.

This article is based on a January 2022 oral history interview by Maggie Walker with Erika Dwek of Corner Bookshop, who is quoted.

Communist Party Bookshops

Dave Cope

One of the themes of this article that will be of interest to those readers who have worked in the radical book trade is how Communist Party (CP) shops were run and how the management of them differed from those that were co-operatives in the era of the Federation of Radical Booksellers (FRB). It will become clear that most of the problems they faced were very similar. Structures of accountability and staff involvement were different, and they did vary – there was no template. A comparison with shops of other parties would be interesting – there is no space for this here but I will make a few comments, as a pointer for future research.

The Paperback Book Centres of the Trotskyist Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) were heavily centralised (they were a proper ‘chain’ with shops in Liverpool, Norwich, Glasgow and three in London, though there were name changes) and used a model of a local bookshop with window displays that played down the political role of the shops, which only became evident once inside. This is not a ‘bad’ choice, of course, and may have worked. All provincial radical shops would have carried a strong selection of local books because they sell well, and indeed the history of those few which survived the culling of the 1980s and 1990s is partly one of simultaneously becoming more professional and of becoming good general shops.

The International Marxist Group (IMG) had a London shop trading as Red Books, then the Other Bookshop, and a couple of provincial ones. Bookmarks, the London shop of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), was more like Central Books in advising and helping provincial shops, but these (there were 11 at various times) were stand-alone and run by their District, very much like the CP ones. Bookmarks played an outstanding role in organising the Socialist Bookfairs and Fergus Nichol, the founder and manager of Bookmarks, put a lot of his time into these and the magazine *Radical Bookseller*, while Central Books put its energy into strengthening its role as a national distributor of alternative books and magazines. As for the pro-Chinese/Albanian bookshops, there were some small ‘chains’ of bookshops but outside London these were generally very small and I imagine they relied entirely on voluntary labour, two factors which limited their impact. These shops and their organisations prefer to be called ‘Marxist-Leninist’ as opposed to ‘Maoist’ which is the most commonly used term, but I think ‘pro-Chinese/Albanian’ is the clearest way to categorise them. It is rather unfortunate for them that the best-known account of one of their shops is in Alexei Sayle’s *Stalin Ate My Homework*, which may be a bit unfair, but it is very funny.

The Labour Party (LP) had a bookshop for many years within its London offices, but there is only a little evidence of any provincial ones. The Independent Labour Party (ILP), created in 1893, was much keener to push its publications than the LP was, and had a formidable publishing apparatus (National Labour Press, International Bookshops Ltd, E Hubert Johnson and a range of periodicals), as did the CP of course. The ILP had a London bookshop and when George Lansbury merged his *Lansbury's Weekly* with the ILP's *New Leader* in 1927, his Ginger Bookshop was also merged with this shop. The ILP did have shops in Glasgow in the early years of the 20th century, and there were also the Reformer's Bookstalls (Glasgow, Swansea, Manchester, Bradford, Birmingham as well as London) which acted as distributors and outlets for ILP publications, and these were definitely not stalls!

I have written about the development of Central Books as a shop and distributor elsewhere (*Central Books: A Brief History 1959-1999*), and the book is easily available, so I won't repeat it all here. Some of the themes I covered are business practices, the politics/business dichotomy, links and comparisons with Collets, management-staff relations, how the distribution side developed and the relationship with the USSR. And it contains plenty of information on the main London shop(s).

Collets will not be discussed here as it was not a CP shop, though it had extremely close links, evidenced through the Managing Director's membership of the CP. Its history remains to be written.

I will use, as a case study, the history of Progressive Books in Liverpool where I worked full-time from June 1975 to December 1986, and for which there is extensive, though incomplete, documentation. I also have access to some material from the Newcastle and Birmingham Bookshops, and to a very limited degree Glasgow. This is a work in progress and I have yet to examine the CP Archives held in Manchester which should reveal some more material, but most shops were small and many probably had very little they could place in any archive, local or national.

CP Shops in 1920s and 1930s

The major difference between CP shops and nearly all the other FRB shops was that of longevity. Communist shops had existed since 1920, the year the CPGB was created. The first of the new wave of radical bookshops dates to the mid-1960s, and it was in the 1970s and 1980s that they flourished.

There was always a main London CP bookshop ('flagship' is a bit grandiose) and there was a rapid growth elsewhere from the second half of 1941.

But some of the shops commonly thought of as 'communist' were set up by individuals and were outside CP control, even when those individuals who set them up may have been CP members.

These early shops, very close to the CP, are in our Listing of Radical Bookshops. The Workers' Bookshop in Tottenham was set up by Clive Branson in 1933, and his wife Noreen worked there too. David Guest personally paid for the lease of the People's Bookshop on Lavender Hill in 1934 and he managed the shop. Both men had fought in Spain, Guest dying there. Linked to the CP in London were Carters (later the Progressive Bookshop), Peter's Bookshop, the Clapton Book Store, the Parton Bookshop (later New Books). Outside London there was The Wooden Horse in Carlisle. Maclaurin's Book Shop in Cambridge is often considered to be a CP shop but in fact was privately owned. Griffin Campbell Maclaurin came to Cambridge from New Zealand and opened his eponymous bookshop in the mid-1930s. He died fighting with the International Brigades in Spain, but the shop remained open until 1950 in the hands of the local CP.

There was one shop set up very informally in May 1933 by R G Hooper, a CP member in Redhill. An incomplete letter from January 1934 to the CP's London office explains that this was done when an enthusiastic group set up a Party branch in Reigate and Redhill, renting a small bookshop, which also served for meetings, for 7s6d a week for one year. The shop was called the Trade Union Bookshop, and J Conway was the proprietor. They got official support from the ILP and Labour Party but not much practical help. They put up shelves and spent £25 on stocking the shop. Regular meetings had been held there by the branch (called 'locals' at the time). They hoped to cover the cost by collections and several regular guaranteed donations. It appears, once the enthusiasm began to wane and a few members left, that the branch faced criticism from London for not fulfilling their quota to the *Daily Worker* fighting fund.

There is a rare account of a 1930s shop in Ernie Benson's autobiography *To Struggle is to Live Volume 2: Starve or Rebel*, People's Publications, 1980. The author was a leading activist in Leeds, and in about 1933 he was looking for suitable premises for a bookshop. He found a lock-up shop on Hunslet Road. 'It was dirty, dilapidated and loaded with rubbish' but it was on a busy road a few minutes from the centre of Hunslet and cost only £8 a month including rates – and they got one month rent free due to the poor

condition. The comrades cleaned and redecorated it and put up shelves. It had a small back room for branch committee meetings. Ernie was manager, later passing it on to Jack Cline who worked full-time there and Ernie believed that it then became the best shop outside London.

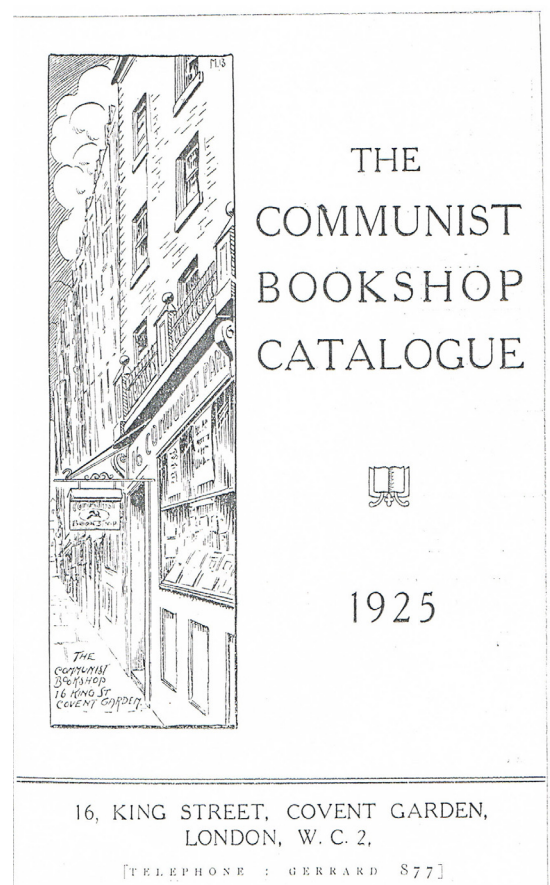
They then needed some stock. They wrote to the CP distributors (Workers Books) in London for some books, but were told orders had to be pre-paid as the branch had a long-standing debt of £5.

Ernie sent £1 10s for a quantity of *How to Claim Unemployment Benefit*, a penny pamphlet that they sold in the hundreds at Labour Exchanges. They religiously put all profits into the shop and after eighteen months had sold £280 of literature. The shop was so successful that they were visited by Henry Parsons, Reg Bishop and Joan Beauchamp (well-known figures in the CP, and probably all directors of the London enterprise).

The windows were smashed three or four times by fascists. The first time this happened, Ernie was woken up at home by a policeman and when he accompanied him to the shop, Ernie quickly hid some raffle tickets that the shop was selling – this was illegal at the time. Following this attack, Ernie did keep a heavy mallet under the counter which he had to produce at least once when fascists came into the shop.

He later served as CP's District Secretary of the West Riding of Yorkshire for a year, and after that he was offered two jobs within a couple of days. One was with Workers' Bookshop in London travelling the country to assist bookshops – and collecting debts, the first one would have been to Birmingham to collect an old debt of £90. The other was with the *Daily Worker* as a canvasser/sales organiser. Most national papers at that time had canvassers who went door-to-door with inducements of gifts or free insurance to win subscribers. He took this job and was very successful in South Wales. In his absence the shop moved to Leeds town centre, in premises separate from the District office (probably about 1938) and was doing well.

It is difficult to find information on CP shops in the 1920s. The main London shop was opened in 1921 on the ground floor of 16 King Street, the CP's head office. Details of its London shops can be followed in the *Brief History*. One shop



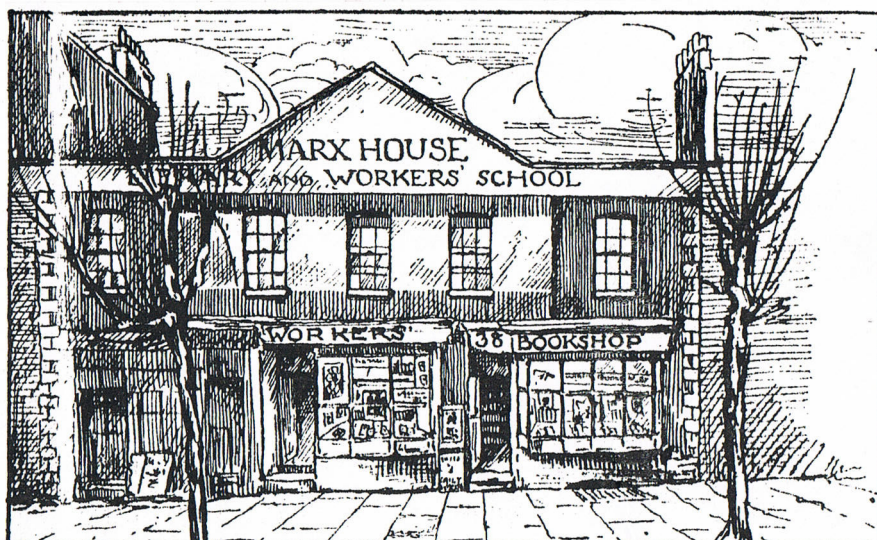
was set up in Birmingham in 1925, and one existed in Falkirk in 1927. These were apparently short-lived. Others may emerge with more research.

A pamphlet published by Modern Books in 1932 lists just two provincial Workers' Bookshops - in Glasgow and Newcastle - which indicates that there were only three CP shops nationally at this time.

Provincial shops set up later in the 1930s include ones in Birmingham, Derby, Leeds, Manchester, Oxford, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Swindon and possibly Birkenhead, Liverpool and Sheffield.

The names of the shops were chosen from a limited vocabulary: The Progressive Bookshop (Leeds), The People's Bookshop (Bradford, Newcastle), Progressive Books (Liverpool), Modern Bookshop (King's Lynn).

Modern Books was also the name of the publisher set up to distribute Comintern books and pamphlets in Britain.



It was not just the CP that had individuals setting them up. Other shops were close to the ILP. Later, this happened with the SWP in Liverpool. The International Socialists, the SWP's predecessor, opened a bookshop in Liverpool the same week and just six doors down in the same street as Progressive Books in 1975, thanks to a member's inheritance. And we must not forget that many FRB-era shops started on the initiative, and investment, of an individual and were not co-ops - quite a few only formally became co-operatives after they had been in existence for some time. News from Nowhere is one: established by Bob Dent and Maggie Wellings in 1974, it became a women's collective in 1981.

Perusal of the Listing reveals one feature of the radical book trade in the nineteenth century that carried over until the 1950s in England. This is the tradition of radical newsagents, which goes back to Chartism. Bookselling at that time required relatively more capital than in the twentieth century, so radicals set up as tobacconists and newsagents to provide an outlet

for radical literature. Tom Mann was installed as a newsagent in Bolton in 1887 to help finance his organising work. Central Books' archives hold a letter from Tom Platt and Son of 34 Queen Street, Morecambe who describe their firm as 'Newsagents, Stationers and Tobacconists – 'Progressive Book Shop''. They also sold 'high-class sweets and chocolates' and 'Books, Toys, Novelties and Games' (this is all on their letterhead). They were placing a small order for various books and at the same time asked about the return of a loan of £25 they made to Central. The business also appears in a list of bookshops stocking Communist literature in a 1944 pamphlet, so while clearly not a CP business, there was definitely a very close link to the

CP. This list also includes the Manchester branch of Collets, but not the other Collets shops, so cannot be treated as definitive.

Another feature of pre-war sales within the CP is the number of 'literature depots' or 'agents' for CP material and books from Martin Lawrence and from 1936, Lawrence & Wishart – these were the official CP publishers. The depots would be rooms, or shelves, within the CP local premises, while the agents would mainly be individuals who may have kept some stock at their house and who could order for individual customers, or perhaps for bookstalls.

Advertising by the shops was poor. The main London shop, The Communist Bookshop, at 16 King Street, the CP headquarters, did use a bit more imagination – and humour. The following three adverts from 1925 and 1926 in *Workers' Weekly* and *Labour Research* do give some idea of its aims:

'We Supply Everything Readable' (i.e. they urged customers to order all their books from the shop, political or otherwise, and they promised a quick service).

On Whitewashing Elephants

IF YOUR LITTLE BOY, anxious to do something big, is told facetiously to go and whitewash an elephant, and, taking you literally, wants to know how to do it, then the WORKERS' BOOKSHOP, Limited, will have (or will quickly get) the best book on the subject.

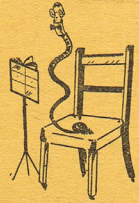
On their shelves dry but indispensable statistics and economic theory rub shoulders with fiction. Blue books own a nodding acquaintance with lowly penny pamphlets, while Karl Marx is separated from Bertrand Russell only by the thickness of a shelf.

The Shop is on the open access plan (familiarised by Mr. Woolworth), and customers can browse, happy and unmolested. Book-lovers have been seen to leave wiping away the furtive tear for the good things they cannot take with them. Subsequent deficiencies in stock have been attributed to kleptomania, and the culprits have been treated with kindness and understanding.

Understanding, it might be said, is our keynote. Our staff, with long experience of bookselling in the Labour Movement, are trained to appreciate your needs and to find the means of satisfying them.

THE WORKERS' BOOKSHOP is the very place for a bookworm.

THE WORKERS'
BOOKSHOP,
LIMITED
16 KING STREET,
COVENT GARDEN,
LONDON,
W.C.1



THE BOOKWORM

SUBJECT CATALOGUE
POST FREE ON
APPLICATION

MAIL ORDERS
CAREFULLY
DEALT WITH

'Where Do You Buy Your Books? Do You Support Capitalist Booksellers? Or Do You Go to The Largest and Best LABOUR Booksellers? The Communist Bookshop' (An appeal to the committed socialist, and note the use of 'Labour' – the CP was seeking affiliation at the time and there were a handful of Labour/Communist MPs, such as Shapurji Saklatvala, an open CP member who was endorsed by his local Labour Party in Battersea North and won the seat in 1922, lost it in 1923 and regained it in 1924, this time without official Labour backing.)

The third advert adopts a light-hearted tone – and works well: 'Say it with a ukulele if you are a lounge-lizard or a jazz-fiend. Say it with flowers if you are young and in love and it takes you that way. Say it with a pamphlet if you want to get the revolutionary message home for "keeps". Try one or all of these on your mate...'

The first mention of advertising as a separate item of expenditure in the accounts of the Newcastle bookshop was in 1978 (in minutes starting in 1970) – there were earlier items of very small amounts, but obviously advertising was not considered of great import. Later in the year the *Workers' Chronicle* offered to insert a leaflet if the shop produced one. The cost would be £10 for 1,500. Days of Hope had done this the previous month. This publicity was obviously considered successful and was repeated in March 1979. In March 1981 it was agreed to spend £45 on 10,000 leaflets advertising the shop, in response to poor shop sales. An effort to distribute within the Labour Movement led to the TGWU and NUPE taking quantities.

Bookshop window displays were traditionally very unimaginative. So much so that a leading member, J R Campbell, complained in the August 1939 edition of the *Party Organiser*: 'They are not as frowsy as they used to be, but the windows are often unattractively set out and do not vary sufficiently from week to week. It is a disgrace to go two weeks in succession with the same display'. This article was headed 'Literature as a Weapon' – a military image much in favour at the time. Arthur Excell remembers selling *Forever Amber* to lure American servicemen into the Oxford shop during WW2, evidence of some creative marketing. It was in 1943 that this shop reported that they sold 300 Stalin calendars – early diversification, and they would have lent themselves to a window display.

There was one shop that had a display unlike any other. Arnold Rattenbury, when he became responsible for literature in the West of England, came across one shop that had a display of the Kama Sutra and other sexually explicit material and immediately closed it down.

WW2 onwards

The upsurge of CP shops was due to the unprecedented public interest in the Soviet Union and its role in the fight against German fascism, once it entered the war in June 1941. The CP changed its line on the nature of the war, putting a lot of energy into promoting industrial production for the war effort. It basked in the reflected glory from the Soviet Union and found itself the subject of much interest, which it immediately took advantage of by producing large numbers of pamphlets and opening shops to sell them in – together with anything else on the Soviet Union.

1942 was the year of peak in CP membership with 56,000. By 1945 there were 45 shops outside London, often still using the names from the pre-war period, or simply the name of the town as in the Weymouth Bookshop. These were often in the most unexpected places. Others were opened in Caerphilly, Cheltenham, King's Lynn, Stroud and Wrexham. All were completely maintained by local enthusiasm, though certainly encouraged by the Party centre and articles in the internal newsletters and journals – though one carried an explicit warning not to set up new shops without extensive preparation. They would mostly have been small and run by volunteers, and with a limited stock.

There was very little competition to the CP bookshops on the Left at this time. In 1946 an advert in a locally published pamphlet described the Norwich shop as 'The Only Shop in Norwich where you can buy the Latest Books on the Trade Union, Co-operative and Socialist Movements'. The same year in Birmingham, the manager could write: 'For over 5 years we have been the only bookshop in Birmingham which has specialised in political literature for the working people. We have distributed in that time over two million pamphlets and periodicals, and a total of well over £50,000 of political literature.....And remember Key Books Ltd are the only booksellers in Birmingham employing 100% Trade Union Labour'. This figure of two million

Linocut of Carlisle, by Ken Sprague. The People's Bookshop can be seen in the bottom right corner. Reproduced from Ken Sprague – People's Artist, John Green, Hawthorn Press, Stroud, 2002, with thanks to the author.



is extraordinary and one wonders if it included leaflets as well as every copy of the *Daily Worker* sold in the District. In 1970, just before the FRB era upsurge, the shop, called Key Books by then, could put an advert in *Labour Research* repeating the claim: 'We specialise in Socialist, Communist, Peace and Progressive Movement literature. Only bookshop of its kind in the Midlands.' But by 1967 there were only 18 shops throughout the country and some of these were literature depots in the CP office. In November 1983 the shop still felt that 'We think we have about the best stock of Socialist and Communist books available outside London'.

The decline of the CP shops was due largely to the isolation that came with the Cold War, and the consequent drop in membership. Those that did survive would have suffered from retrenchment, ever smaller stock and sometimes even putting curtains over the windows to discourage attention and possible attacks when they had perfectly good shop frontages. It would probably have been difficult even to get volunteers and helpers in some cases. Membership did increase and hold steady at over 30,000 for most of the 1960s and over 28,000 in the first half of the 1970s, and CP influence grew during this period in industry, among students, in the women's movement and in the peace movement. But my impression is that the shops were slow to react and only grew in the best cases in the early/mid 1970s, by which time the Party had suffered from the growth of the far left, and Trotskyism in particular. To complete the picture, from 1975, when membership stood at 28,500, there was a roughly continual drop in membership by 2,000 to 3,000 every two years until 1991 when it stood at 4,700. We will see how this affected the shops.

Birmingham

Birmingham had a shop in 1925 (as mentioned above). In 1934 the Workers' Bookshop was at 115 Bradfield Road. In 1937 it was at 115 Holloway Head, and in late 1941 there was a name change to Key Books, which it retained until the end. In 1943 to 1966 it was at 115/116 Dale End. Iris Walker started working there in 1946 and was manager from 1948-1956. Lena Alexander also worked there and became manager in 1958; she was the wife of Bill Alexander, former Commander of the British Battalion of the International Brigade who at this time was the Midlands District Secretary for the CP – there is a tradition of couples working for the CP. Kitty Cornforth worked in the Ipswich shop, while her husband Maurice was the Eastern District Committee – he was also later an author of several

books for Lawrence & Wishart, a company of which he became manager. The premises in Key Books were big: double fronted and with three floors. In 1948 the shop was divided into two and one half was rented to an estate agent, but the shop was still large. The address was changed to number 116 at this point. Upstairs was a meeting hall, offices for the CP Midlands District and Birmingham Area. Offices were let out to the Draughtsmen's Union, the Boilermakers and the National Union of Railwaymen.

Under Iris, who always had a full-time or part-time assistant and volunteers to help, Key Books became the largest and most successful CP shop outside London. There were poetry readings, signing sessions in the shop or hall upstairs if more space was needed. For Rajani Palme Dutt's *Crisis of Empire* in 1949 she had to book a room at the Midland Hotel for an attendance of 300. Dutt, of Swedish and Indian parents, was a long-standing senior figure in the CP, an expert on India, and perhaps best known as editor of *Labour Monthly*, which he founded in 1921 and edited until his death in 1974. The shop's finances were greatly improved when they became one of the official suppliers to Birmingham Public Libraries. She also built up a library in the bookshop – Midland Workers' Library – which had a marvellous bookplate. This was closed when too many books were not returned. She was asked to become a director of Central Books, on the strength of her work in Key Books.

Iris was succeeded by Fred Meers, then ex-nurse Ellen O'Brien took over until 1966 when the lease ran out. Iris had left to live in Italy but she returned regularly, and worked temporarily in Collets. On returning permanently in 1963, although Collets wanted her, she was employed by Central Books but engaged by the CP's Press and Publicity Department to travel the country to increase literature sales. She became Central's MD in 1966.

The shop was reduced to a book room in Well Lane from 1967, run by volunteers Edith Mansell and Lil Atkin. From January 1970 the shop was in the new Party premises at 25 Essex Street and from February to June 1970, June Bennett became manager but when she resigned for domestic reasons she was not replaced and the shop was run by CP full-time office holders and volunteers.

Don Brayford was the manager from 1978 to about 1984.

Esmé Barnsby probably took over from Don. Her husband, George, was a long-standing leading member of the CP in the Midlands, and a local historian. She was the last in the series of forceful and enthusiastic

women who managed the Birmingham bookshop. She was an activist in Wolverhampton, notably in the women's movement. She was the contact for the Feminist Book Fair Group in Wolverhampton during the Feminist Book Fortnight in June 1985.

Her four-page 'Report on Key Books' to the Birmingham City Conference in August 1986 is a very useful document. She summarises the three-fold function of CP Bookshops, and much will apply to the SWP and WRP shops. 'First, and basically, it is a means of distributing our own journals and literature to party members and to a wider public. Secondly, it provides a service to the labour movement as a whole by making available the literature of the movement in all its diversity, both in the shop itself and through bookstalls at events in the colleges, at trade union schools and so on. Thirdly, as a viable commercial enterprise, it generates money for the party which can go a long way towards providing a financial base for our political organisation.' The third function – an aim that was probably never realistic - is discussed elsewhere. But it does reflect the unusual role of Key Books in being the leaseholder of premises that included the CP offices – usually it was the other way round

From this report we learn that the premises were 'pleasant, light and modern', but limited in size and located in an area with little passing trade ('people have to mount an expedition to find us'). Early in 1986 there were plans to enlarge the shop but 'as we have now discovered that the lease has only ten years to run, we may have to move soon' and Esmé hoped it would be to premises that were much larger for the shop.

She describes some of initiatives taken, most of which will be familiar to radical bookshops, though some are specific to the CP shops. She asked for academics to order from the shop if possible and one ordered 100 copies of a text, and she was expecting another library order. She got reading lists from the Communist Society (ComSoc) at the Polytechnic and ordered copies of books for their stall; Warwick University ComSoc organised a bookfair which brought in nearly £350. CP members in AUEW-TASS took books to weekend schools, and others had just started doing the same in NALGO. She used CP contacts to get orders from the Trade Union Resource Centre Library. She points out that sometimes sales from events do not cover the charge that may be paid for attendance, and mentions Birmingham May Day and Leamington Spa Peace Festival as examples. But she still urged the comrades to try and organise as many as possible and let her know of others that she could approach for a stall.

She complained about books returned from stalls that had stains from coffee cups and beer bottles 'and perhaps the thing that annoys me most is people using them as backing to write on. An expensive book can be ruined in seconds with biro impressions on the cover'.

Every radical shop, and mainstream one for that matter, has trouble with shop-soiled stock. Perhaps party bookshops felt this more as they sent books and magazines to branches and individuals for stalls over a wide area. There is a similar plaintive appeal from Ann Macmillan, the Bookshop Organiser for the South Wales Bookshop, that was sent out with parcels of books: 'Please take care of this Literature. All that you do not sell has to come back to us undamaged, as it must go on sale to other comrades. Remember, COFFEE STAINED COVERS, BENT BACK PAGES WILL STAY ON OUR SHELVES FOR AGES AND AGES.' In passing, this is the only case I know where the title was 'Organiser' not 'Manager'.

Accounts sheets I have seen for Key Books provide the following information:

| | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1969 Sales: 1,594 Stock at end of year: 216. Net loss: 790. | No wages (147 for casual assistance). |
| 1970 Sales: 2,483 Stock at end of year: 577. Net loss 266. | No wages (69 for casual assistance). |
| 1971 Sales: 4,145 Stock at end of year: 696. Net profit:427. | No wages (72 for casual assistance). |
| 1972 Sales: 6,020 Stock at end of year: 1172. Net profit:436. | No wages (69 for casual assistance). |

1983-1984 Key Books 'held its own financially', thanks to some large orders from university and community organisations, and a big event to launch Bea Campbell's *Wigan Pier Revisited*.

| Year | Total Sales | Shop | Libraries & Orgs | Lit & Postal Accounts | Bookstalls |
|------|-------------|--------|------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| 1985 | 15,300 | - | - | - | - |
| 1986 | 14,500 | 6,400 | 2,800 | 1,300 | 4,000 |
| 1987 | 21,100 | 14,400 | 3,200 | 900 | 2,700 |
| 1988 | 29,900 | 20,300 | 5,400 | 1,000 | 3,200 |
| 1989 | 26,800 | 18,800 | 2,800 | 500 | 4,700 |
| 1990 | 21,000 | 16,600 | 2,600 | 400 | 1,400 |
| 1991 | 17,200 | 14,300 | 1,100 | 200 | 1,500 |

The Bookstall figure for 1989 includes £2,500 from the Central Library's Women's Book Fair. 1991 includes £550 from a stall at Birmingham Rep's production of the Ragged Trousered Philanthropists.

The higher sales in 1987 to 1989 probably reflect Esmé settling into the job. The Literature and Postal Accounts reflect the CP's decline. In 1979 there were about 60 branch and individual postal accounts; by 1986 this was down to 16. *Marxism Today's* success, and its availability in W S Smith as well as student bookshops, together with an increase in direct subscriptions that the paper encouraged, meant fewer sales in shops. Just in the shop, sales of *Marxism Today* were averaging 100; *7 Days*, the CP weekly, 36; *News and Views*, a more internal magazine, 42.

And finally, when Esmé thanks all the volunteers who helped regularly on Saturdays or when she was on holiday, she picks out for special mention one comrade who looks after the shop on Mondays – Charlie Hall, the old-timer who managed Central before the war and then helped in the Newcastle shop. He had obviously moved to the Birmingham area – he must have been 72, and had been in the Young Communist League and CP for over 55 years.

In February 1990, Esmé makes the only comment I have found about any competition to Key Books. She notes that 'there is a new co-operative, Positive Image, covering our previously exclusive area of non-sexist and multicultural children's books'.

The only reference I've seen to refusing to stock an item in Key Books was a decision in the May 1984 DC Minutes that the *Leninist* should not be

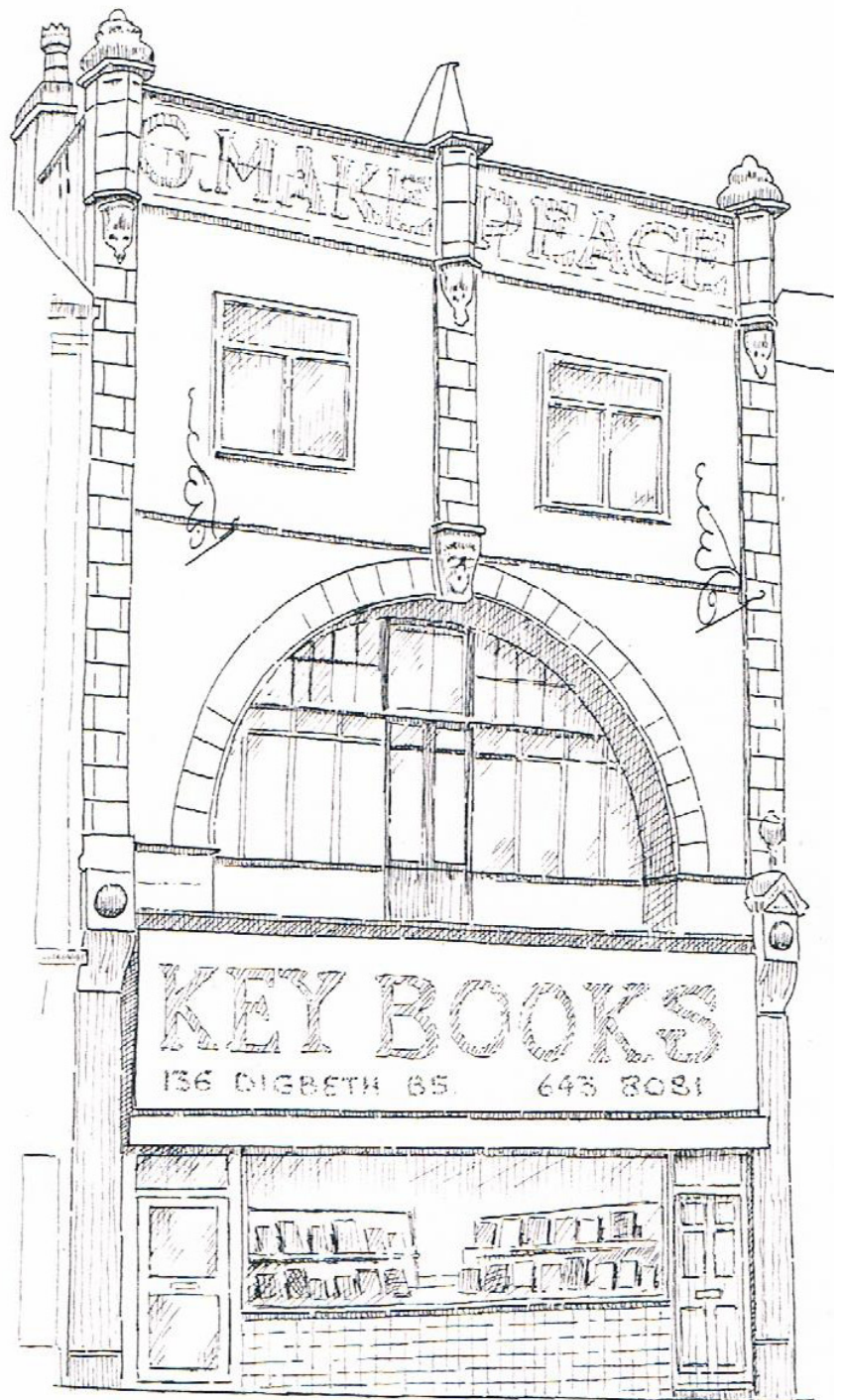
advertised, displayed or stocked in the bookshop as its objective 'was to conduct factional activity within the CP against Congress policy'.

Birmingham – the end

There are not many cases where the decline and end of shops are well documented. There is none for the final years of Progressive Books. Central Books retail shop is documented (*A Brief History*). And for the sad case of Birmingham there is also documentation.

Key Books, the Star Club and the CP Midland offices moved into 136 Digbeth, in the centre of the city in 1987. The attractive Edwardian building was large, but in 'a neglected' state of repair. 'We hope to make it our home for many years to come'. An undated (April?) circular to CP members in the Midlands launched an appeal for £6,000 for renovation, and asked for volunteers to help, though contractors would be handling the major tasks. There would be a big office to rent out, and the shop was three to four times the size of the previous one, with a room at the back for Progressive Tours, who thought that 'With the recent upsurge in interest in the Soviet Union there is enormous scope here'. The shop planned a second-hand section and appealed for books. The shop should be ready to move into in July, the circular stated, though the official opening had been put back to September.

It once housed the business of G Makepeace, whose name was emblazoned in huge letters across the top. It naturally became known as Makepeace



House. In March, Bill Norris of Central Books had met Esmé and Tony McNally, the District Secretary, to discuss the plans for the new shop and a week later he wrote offering a stock package with extended discount and payment terms and other assistance.

In June 1987 Tony McNally wrote, on behalf of the DC, to three key people at Party centre – Ian McKay, National Organiser, Elspeth Munroe, representing Roddell Properties (the holding company for CP businesses) and Judith Gradwell, the National Treasurer. He summarised the critical situation the Party found itself in. The lease on premises in Essex Street was being sold, and new premises at 136 Digbeth had been purchased for £47,500 after much delay. The problem was that the new premises needed an estimated £30,000 worth of repairs but as work progressed and discussions held with regulatory bodies, it was discovered that an additional £12,000 would be needed and this was money the District did not have. The options were:

1. To halt work until that money could be raised, but that would mean a greatly reduced income from the new premises.
2. To raise a mortgage of £15,000 and try and find the £40+ per week that would be needed to pay it.
3. To approach Party centre for £15,000 through Rodell Properties, which would then own the property.
4. To do as much work as possible with the capital available and then sell the property, and buy smaller premises in a suburb, with room for an office over a bookshop.

Tony preferred the third option. Selling Digbeth would have involved a massive loss given the work done already. Retaining the lease on Essex Street would have involved spending some £15,000 renovating a depreciating asset and there were only nine years left on the lease. What exactly happened remains to be fully researched, but in February 1990, Esmé reported she was retiring in May 1990 (having given a year's notice), and that nobody had been appointed to replace her, and she feared this might not prove possible on the party wage – especially since she was receiving 'considerably less than this'. She believed the shop needed at least one full-time worker and one on half-time. There was no income from the Star Club, and there was no income from a meeting room. There were five tenants (including the Midlands District, though they were irregular payers as was one other tenant). Eva Skelley, Collet's MD, was visiting the

following week and 'if we can persuade them to take over Key Books all our problems would be solved'. Nothing came of this and three years later Collets itself had collapsed.

In 1991 the CP transformed itself into Democratic Left (DL) and CP properties were included in this process.

Makepeace House (Digbeth) was sold over this period and the CP/DL and Key Books moved into 14 St Martins House, The Bull Ring, for two years. Esmé and Edie Bodsworth were running it - so the former had not 'retired'. From the small number of documents from DL I have seen it appears that Progressive Tours lent £30,000 for the purchase of Makepeace House.

What is clear from the Key Books saga is that there was an underestimation of the political crisis facing the Communist movement and of the financial impact this would have on the bookshop and premises.

There was also a lack of full knowledge of planning regulations and their financial implications.

The first years of the 1990s saw the end of all the CP shops discussed, and this was not just because the CP dissolved itself. In theory some could have continued as DL shops.

Clyde Books

It is worth mentioning Clyde Books here. This was the CP's only bookshop in Scotland after 1948 when the one in Edinburgh closed. This is astonishing given the strength of the CP in Scotland, and the number that were set up in the 1920s and 1930s. A few were also set up during WW2 but I believe the only one that survived after the end of the war was the Edinburgh one.

Clyde Books opened in Spring 1943 and lasted until 1993. After the demise of the CPGB, under the management of the energetic Seb Fischer, who had moved from the CP to Democratic Left (DL), it adopted, in 1991, an ambitious new ownership model. Recognising that DL alone could not sustain a bookshop, it approached a broad range of radical movements which included the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly, Scottish CND, Scottish Green Party, Friends of the Earth (Scotland), Scottish CP, Scottish Council for Civil Liberties, Scottish Friends of Palestine, trade unions, gay and lesbian groups. These obviously covered the whole of Scotland, not just Glasgow.

An article in the Scotsman on 11 November 1991 was written after the shop had been renovated, reshelved and partially restocked. It described Clyde Books as 'Scotland's sole surviving alternative bookshop' – the journalist may not have been aware of West and Wilde in Edinburgh, though that was a Gay and Lesbian shop and not a comprehensive radical shop. The journalist was not very well up on radical bookshops. To her credit she had contacted Mike Weaver, coordinator of the FRB, before writing, but readers might smile at her reference to Freewheel in Norwich as 'Freewill', and Grapevine in Cambridge had metamorphosed into 'Lifeline in Sheffield'.

'Until this year' continues the article 'Clyde Books was a dingy outfit in Glasgow's Parnie Street. It was run by what might be called the cobweb wing of the CPGB. You could always be sure of finding that copy of Lenin's *Against Revisionism* on the third shelf. It had been gathering dust there since the shop opened in 1943.' An easy quip that dismisses the dedicated volunteers who had kept it going through some difficult years, but there was an element of truth in it. The new management had deliberately kept a wide range of political stock, but also built up specialist sections on Scottish history and politics, Irish politics and culture, environment and global politics, women's studies, gay and lesbian, and children's books. A four-page A4 newsletter (No.1, June 1991) carried a list of almost 100 magazines stocked, of which 20% were specifically Scottish. It carried every political orientation from anarchism to Trotskyism via the Scottish Liberal Democrats, but not automatically every paper they were asked to. Seb was quite firm in his view that 'Shops in the past were full of publications selling at 30 and 40 pence' and that this was unsustainable, for those shops or his.

Seb was in effect the manager. There was no question of forming a co-op. 'We have a very clear hierarchical set up. That's a necessity. Our experience talking to people in co-operatives showed us that the discussions which took place to solve day-to-day problems were far too long' he told the journalist from the *Scotsman*.

In a document dated 16 June 1992 sent to directors, staff, volunteers and supporters he describes the current position and some ideas for the future. During the first six months in 1991 the directors (Des Craig, Barbara Catt, Doug Chalmers) played a crucial role, but then their respective priorities - and place of work in one case - changed. In Chalmers' case 'he was too involved fighting the real cobweb wing's rearguard action to kill off Democratic Left before it saw the light of day'. During this period more helpers and supporters came forward and there were discussions about

setting up a management committee. He proposed broadening out the organisations who hold shares (shares were in the hands of organisations and their representatives) and he was opposed to extending this to individuals. He suggested approaching Friends of the Earth, Women's Aid, Oxfam, Labour Party, SNP. And there was a very supportive member of the Green Party who had business experience who could be added to the one existing Green Party director. However, he had moved away from the idea of a management committee: they had managed well without one so far; it would need people who know the staff and business well and could commit time to it; it could need 'servicing' and take up admin time; the shop needs a flexible support network rather than 'another layer of 'delayed timing management''; the staff have developed their management skills and 'work in a very co-operative spirit'. Three had attended book-sellers' courses. Seb then produced a long list of different ways individuals could help the shop.

The one set of figures I have is of sales and expenses for year 1991-1992 accompanying this document. Sales were £50,000 (£18,000 in the previous year). A third of the income was from bookstalls. Expenses were £71,200: Other income (capital, Development Fund and VAT rebates) meant there was an overspend of £1,100.

The capital investment raised by Seb was £14,000, which included £5,000 of his own money (plus another £500 to cover a cash flow problem in February 1991), £3,000 from three other individuals (of which £1,000 was a bridging loan that had been repaid), £500 from the Scottish Green Party and £5,000 from DL. Interest, basically 10%, was payable on these loans. The Green Party loan was a 'loose long-term investment in book stock chosen by a Green party member – 10% of stock sales to the Green Party'. This 'had not worked out' (no details) and would be rethought for the future. A Development Fund consisted of £4,420 from DL rent payments and supporters' standing orders.

Wages were only £5,700. Seb had received only £4,000, and he was also receiving a £40 Enterprise Allowance which was about to end. He had to take a part-time job with DL, in March 1992, to survive. There was not much to pay the necessary part-timer and volunteers. He also praises the 'old-guard' for their assistance from the beginning.

The documents end there, apart from an account, with newspaper cuttings, of a BNP attack on the shop in January 1992 which caused damage to books and displays but no physical injuries. However, the psychological impact on the young man and woman working in the shop at the time, and

Seb who came out from the back to help, appears to have been considerable and may have played a role in the shop's decline.

It appears to have closed in 1993.

'Literature'

To return briefly to London, Thames Books was a 'chain' set up by the London District of the CP. There were eight shops by 1946, though most had been opened in 1941. There were further shops in a second phase in 1949 and 1950 though these were very short lived. There was some friction between Central Books and Thames Books over terms and slow payment, especially supplies of literature to branches in London.

Supplying Party journals and pamphlets to Districts and bookshops was the primary function of the distribution side of Central Books for many years. Districts would then send on supplies to branches where 'literature secretaries' (lit secs) would distribute regular orders to members, though sometimes the lit sec would collect his or her orders from the bookshop. Lit secs can be traced back to the 19th century and the ILP also kept up this tradition. Magazines were packed on Mondays, posted on Tuesdays and usually arrived on Thursdays. Some of the bookshops would stay open a little later on Thursdays so lit secs could come in after work, though many would visit the shops on Saturdays. In London, in the early 1970s, the literature secretary was Jack Eighteen, a retired dock worker and a director of Central, and he went to the warehouse most days to collect material. Pamphlets were printed in quantities ranging from 1,000 for a more specialised title to 10,000, 50,000 and even 100,000 for an important campaign when the Party's membership was at its peak during WW2.

The literature was of two categories: magazines imported from the socialist countries and home-grown British. The former consisted of mainly glossy, heavily subsidised glorifications of socialist achievements and while sales declined from the mid-1950s they were still considerable in 1975. The latter consisted of weekly or fortnightly



mainly internal news and discussion journals (not that they were confidential, just that the content would not interest many outsiders, and all were available to anybody from the bookshops), a monthly theoretical journal and various specialised journals which reached a peak in the 1970s with the rise of cultural politics and Eurocommunism. There were always some non-Party magazines, like *Labour Research* which Central distributed from 1939 and still does today.

A sample of the magazine orders from Central Books for Progressive Books, unfortunately not dated but between Spring 1973 and Spring 1975, shows the type of magazine and comparative quantities:

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| CP serials | 9 (total of 135 copies) |
| Socialist countries | 19 (274) |
| Other | 8 (93) |

The CP serials: *Country Standard* (not strictly CP), *Education Today*, *Link* (CP women's journal), *Marxism Today*, *Music & Life*, *Our History*, *Comment*, *Labour Monthly*, *World Marxist Review* (not strictly CP).

These figures exclude branch sales of *Comment* and *Marxism Today*, and the YCL's paper *Challenge* which was distributed separately.

Socialist Countries: *Anglo-Soviet Journal*, *China Pictorial*, *China Reconstructs*, *Chinese Literature*, *GDR Review*, *International Affairs*, *New Hungarian Quarterly*, *New Times*, *Peking Review*, *Social Sciences*, *Socialism Theory and Practice*, *Soviet Film*, *Soviet Literature*, *Soviet Union*, *Soviet Woman*, *Sport in the USSR*, *Sputnik*, *Travel to the USSR*, and *British-Soviet Friendship* (the only one from this list that was published in the UK).

The list excludes the best-known paper, *Soviet Weekly*, printed in London and with its own distribution network and full-time reps, who also handled the hundreds of English language propaganda pamphlets from the Novosti Press Agency.

Other: *African Communist*, *Anti-Apartheid News*, *Forum*, *Irish Democrat* (Connolly Association), *Irish Socialist* (CP of Ireland), *Labour Research*, *World Trade Union Movement*, *Young Socialist*.

There are some anomalies in orders of individual titles: the 40 copies of the *New Hungarian Quarterly*, a substantial journal, must have been for one special order, probably an academic. Similarly, *Social Sciences*, a very academic journal from the USSR, had an order of 50 – neither of these had

more than a couple of shop sales. *Forum*, a progressive educational journal, had a high order of 35, which may be due to the very active group of CP and left-wing teachers in Liverpool: again, one individual may have taken most, or all, of these to sell at meetings.

This is the complete list of magazines distributed by Central at this time, and was to change dramatically over the next few years.

The literature sales were an important source of income for the bookshops (with the exception of London where the District handled sales).

The figures for Newcastle over the ten years 1972 to 1981 reveal that for the first six years, sales of lit to the branches ranged from 51% of total sales to 59%. Shop sales, including stalls, predominated in the final four years, reaching between 55% and 77%.

Every CP organisation, from branch to City, Area and District issued urgent appeals for members to buy, sell and read more literature. Bookshops would organise meetings of lit secs, but a small group of regulars was usually the response. A typical comment is this from the District Committee Report to the Midlands District Congress in 1974: 'Consolidation and stock expansion in the Bookshop has resulted in increased literature sales, though many branches do not avail themselves of the opportunity'.

In November 1970 in the Midlands District the orders of 'main periodicals' were: *Comment* 170; *Labour Monthly* 114; *Marxism Today* 80; *World Marxist Review* 12. Membership was 1,909.

A hand-written note by Woods indicates that in Newcastle there were 12 branches in 1980 and 6 in 1982. This would have hugely hit sales. In August 1982 Belle reported that 'most of the periodicals which had been sold through the branches had recently gone out of publication'. In the same year she told a Bookshop Committee that she believed that the significant drop in lit sales to branches and individuals was due to unemployment, high postal charges and increased prices.

Apart from literature sales, stalls were crucial for the CP shops, like all radical shops perhaps with only the exception of Collets. And it applied to Central Books retail shop as much as all the provincial ones.

From the figures for the Newcastle shop, there is only one year when figures are given separately for outside sales (stalls and individual accounts). In 1977 these were £422 (11%), while shop sales were £1,446 (38%) and

branch sales £1,932 (51%). In March 1982, this breakdown is also given, with respective percentages of 32%, 53% and 14%. This is a remarkable swing, though it may have been an untypical month with a big stall or stalls; the branch sales look correct for the period. For the whole year of 1982 'outside sales' totalled £797 (of which £227 came from three events in Carlisle, which was in the Northern District).



*Central Books stall
November 1987.*

Bill Moore who managed the Sheffield Bookshop, as well as being the District Organiser, estimated that only 15% of takings came through the shop. Charlie Eason had run the shop from WW2 to 1971 and had won a share of the contract to supply Sheffield Library with books, and this kept the shop afloat.

*Left to right: Dave Cope,
Peter Logan, Bill Norris*

In 1977 there was more effort put into trying to get permission for stalls. Some requests were turned down – Bedlington Miners' Picnic ('various reasons'), NUM Annual Conference at Tynemouth (Lawrence Daly replied stating it was not possible, though no reason was given in the minutes). They did have a stall at the Durham Miners' Gala but the position was not good. By the 1980s unions were approaching the shop, asking it to provide stalls at meetings.

The People's Bookshop did look upon other radical bookshops with some concern. In January 1976 (?) 'it was noted that Cradlewell Books was now open; as they were selling Marxist classics, some competition was expected, but the committee was confident that we could continue to increase sales, while not allowing complacency to creep in'. For the Communist University in Newcastle in March 1978 a rota of helpers was worked out for the four days. Sales were £54 'which was very pleasing', but 'We were not happy with the presence of Cradlewell Books stall at what was a CP event. We were quite sure that we would not have got equal facilities at one of their events'. In February 1980 Belle and others expressed disapproval that Days of Hope had a stall at the Women's Day event organised by the CP's Women's Advisory, even though the shop had sold tickets for the event. It was agreed to express the BC's strong views. A more positive decision was

to set up a 'telephone tree' with Days of Hope, to warn of fascist activity, following a request from the latter in August 1981.

There is only one set of figures providing information on purchases. For the first six months of 1978 purchases totalled £1,273. The following are those purchases over £10:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Central Books | £ 1,067 |
| Iranian books | £ 82 |
| Labour Monthly | £ 76 |
| Frank Graham | £ 16 (this was a major local publisher, with a radical background) |

Why *Labour Monthly* was not supplied from Central Books is a mystery.

These figures do indicate that the shop carried a very limited range of stock – nothing from PDC and nothing from mainstream wholesalers.

The shop carried very few debts, paying very promptly. Belle got annoyed when 'invoices', but she probably meant statements or maybe credit notes (or even parcels, which would contain the invoice, that might have arrived after the month end), arrived late from Central and she could not pay on time. She could almost certainly have paid a month later even without negotiating, as she was such a regular payer. It appears she paid all outstanding invoices from one month within the first week of the following month. Similarly, there was a cautious use of money in the bank – in October there was almost £1,000 in the Co-op Bank and the BC opened a deposit account. From extant papers, there is not a single reference to a budget.

Second-hand books were stocked from about 1980: in January 1981 sales were about £60 in the previous month, and the following month were up to £112. Stock figures: Jan 1978: £422 and the following year the stock rose by 80%. Yet there was no insurance of the stock.

A sign of the low footfall can be evidenced by the response to a request by the DC for the shop to take an extra copy of the *Morning Star* in 1981. It was turned down as the shop was already taking six copies but only selling three, and there was no discount and they were not sale or return so unsold copies had to be paid for.

The shop did try diversifying: there was a discussion about producing a diary, Christmas cards by a local artist were produced in 1982, but one member thought they were 'crude and objectionable' and too many had been ordered without BC discussion. It is not known how well they sold.

BC Minutes reveal only a couple of disagreements over stock. In September 1981 it was agreed not to stock *Pulse* 'due to lack of information about it'. The following meeting reflected some disagreement, and it was left to Belle to get more information and decide. The decision was not to stock it, but no reason was given. In October of the same year, the Committee rejected a request to stock *Tribune* on a sale or return basis. 'The committee felt that they would not sell and the request was rejected' (though it turns out in later minutes that it had been tried in the past). In May 1982, the BC decided not to order Pluto's *Big Red Diary* ('decided sales did not merit order'). This is an unusual decision and may be a sectarian one, the Straight Left faction having gained control of the District.

The appearance of CP shops, internally and externally, was often not welcoming. They were still dowdy, and imaginative displays were rare. An Auditors' Report for the Newcastle shop in 1978 went far beyond its financial remit by criticising the frontage and window display 'which falls below the standard of a 'normal' bookshop. The interior could be improved by a standardisation of the shelving, all second-hand books of shoddy appearance should be removed, and more colourful posters would brighten up the room. When possible, meals should not be eaten in the actual shop, but this can only be achieved if the kitchen area is drastically improved. This area, including the toilet facilities, does not provide even a tolerable standard of hygiene, and we urge that attention be given to this problem, perhaps through the medium of a working party.' Structural changes were made, also due to a series of break-ins via the rear of the premises, and the premises were more or less closed from June to September 1981 – not a week as originally suggested – and a year later the Bookshop Committee (BC) notes that customers had been lost and the shop had not recovered from the closure. Another BC meeting in 1982 noted that the window and internal display of books was poor and a repaint of the shop was organised. The same year the condition of the roof was a matter of concern.

Newcastle opening hours in October 1980 were:

Monday, Tuesday, Friday, Saturday: 10am to 5pm;

Wednesday: 10.00am to 1pm; Thursday: 10.00am to 7pm. There had been a proposal to open for longer hours in 1978, but this was very difficult given the shortage of volunteers.

Belle Killen was the manager, and bookkeeper, in the 1970s and her expenses were £3 a day in 1972 and she worked four or five days a week.

In 1976 there was a vote to increase her wages but Belle voted against on the grounds that the shop could not afford it; expenses had risen to £10 by 1979.

The Bookshop Committee met monthly. The BC members at this time were elderly, there were lots of apologies for non-attendance, and at least three members of the BC died in the 1980s.

There is a cryptic note in BC Minutes of February 1982 'it was agreed that the ordering of books should only be done by the manageress'. This could refer to volunteers but it is quite possible it refers to the District Secretary, given the low-level antagonism between shop and Party.

Two long-standing members of the BC were Charlie Hall (the first MD of Central Books in 1939) and Charlie Woods, who achieved national attention as the named author of the pamphlet *The Crisis in Our Communist Party: Cause, Effect and Cure* published in 1983 as a rallying call for the opposition to the CP leadership in the bitter internal debates that preceded its dissolution in 1991. He had joined the CP in 1922, worked as a miner, and been District Secretary for a number of years. He was expelled for his involvement in this factional Straight Left publication, which he did not write, but willingly accepted responsibility for. Perhaps the authors thought it would reflect badly on the CPGB if such a long-standing member was expelled. Honesty might have been a better policy for the authors.

Relationship between the CP and its shops.

There were occasional bursts of centralising activity, usually limited to injunctions to push sales of particular pamphlets or books. There were irregular meetings of bookshop managers. Most of this would originate either from an enthusiastic new national organiser or from Central Books, which was simultaneously the name of the main London bookshop, from January 1940, and the distributor of 'literature' to Party Districts and bookshops and the book trade in general. The Districts and bookshops were independent (sometimes fiercely so) from the Party head office and there could sometimes be some friction between bookshops and their controlling District office. This worked two ways: there was little assistance from the centre to the shops – any that came was from Central Books. But there was never any political interference with the bookshops from the leading national bodies (Political Committee or Executive Committee). Reuben Falber, who had been an Assistant General Secretary of the CP

and a director of Central Books from 1955 to the end of 1991, could only remember one instance of the Political Committee discussing the company over the whole of this period and that was when he presented an item for discussion.

The relationship between the Newcastle shop, The People's Bookshop, and the local CP is not clear from the limited minutes I have seen. In 1970 there was a sudden change in this relationship. My reading is that the Newcastle City Committee had given up responsibility for the shop and passed it to the Northern District Committee (the next level up) or to a new Bookshop Committee. The shop was on the ground floor of the offices but no regular rent was being paid to the DC which desperately needed it. So did the bookshop of course, so there had to be some give and take. Agreement was reached but the bookshop was tenacious in insisting on deciding the amount and timing of any payments. This was an old bugbear in the CP – in times of financial difficulty, the shops could be seen as source of immediate income. And sometimes the shops were obliged to pay more than they wanted – or could afford - for rent and their share of expenses – rates, heating, phones etc. In this case it looks as if the appointment of the manager was the prerogative of the BC. The Manager was not on the DC, though was invited to DC meetings when literature sales or the bookshop were on the agenda. The DC did have a rep on the BC. There was also a Premises Committee with members of the BC and DC. From 1975, takings were higher and so the shop did make more substantial contributions to the District finances. In 1975 the shop paid £240 to the District; in 1976 the figure was £180. Following years of petty skirmishing, at a special joint meeting of the BC and the District Secretariat in January 1982 the latter asked for an increase from the £27 monthly payments to £40, and for it to be paid in advance from the reserves in the bank: this was because there was a danger the District would lose its full-time worker. There was some opposition to the amount, especially given the low profitability of the shop but it was eventually agreed unanimously in the expectation of higher sales later in the year – but payment in advance was not agreed.

There was obviously political dissension from the Student Branch to the new hardline leadership in the District, and criticism of the limited stock of the bookshop. In October 1979 the branch wrote to the BC with seven suggestions, most of which were intended to increase takings. They included widening the range of publications and suppliers, stocking fewer Soviet titles and stocking more from students' reading lists (Woods called this 'more esoteric publications'); they suggested co-operation with Days

of Hope (where the wider stock was probably more to their taste, though they did not expand on this suggestion). And the final request was for the monthly payments to the DC to stop. Charlie Woods' minutes stated 'all were controversial and presented problems, but we were anxious not to discourage the interest shown' and they invited the students to send two representatives to a special meeting in November, which was conciliatory given the political climate of the time. Relations do not appear to have become normalised, as in March 1981 the BC expressed concern over the lack of contact between the students and the DC in relation to the Newcastle Communist University – 'We were unsure even whether the bookshop would be invited to have a stall during this event'. It is not clear why the students did not contact the bookshop directly – this should not have been an issue for the DC, despite the political differences.

In a circular from Key Books, dated 30 November 1983, Don Brayford, one of the directors, explains the relationship between the District Committee and the shop. Key Books holds the lease, the assets are firmly in the hands of the Midlands District Committee, and the Committee will always ask the shop for money when it faced financial difficulties. For instance, the shop had to lend it over £500. This inevitably led to difficulties for the shop as it could not order in the run up to Christmas. That is why the shop always supports the Party's appeals – for the current Christmas and New Year appeal for £200, the shop was putting appeal letters in mail order copies of *Marxism Today*, *Focus*, *Soviet Weekly* and *New Times*.

The shops could be supportive within the same District. For instance, there was a period in the late 1970s when the Manchester shop faced severe financial difficulties and was on stop from Central. The Liverpool shop ordered extra bundles of CP magazines and sent them over to Manchester – on the strict understanding of prompt payment. This may have been with the knowledge of the Manchester office, but probably not with the knowledge of Central.

The three shops in Yorkshire (Bradford, Leeds and Sheffield) got together to organise the production of a joint catalogue in 1944 which included L&W's catalogue bound in with a general catalogue of CP and general left-wing books and pamphlets, almost certainly produced by Central Books.

In most Districts at any one time some branches would be on stop due to unpaid bills, and they would be named and shamed. In 1981, the Newcastle Bookshop Letter announced that it would no longer be delivered to branches and had to be collected as it was too expensive to post out.

Finances

All CP bookshops were under-financed. There was never any capital available to invest in shops – buildings, staff or stock. Each shop was left to sink or swim, though Central under Bill Norris would be as helpful as possible in advising and in giving a larger discount for initial stock and longer credit. Some of the larger Districts might make an effort to plan for a bookshop when they acquired new premises – this happened in Birmingham and to some extent in Newcastle.

There was a lot in common between the CP bookshops - similar stock, lack of finance, lack of training of staff and often a lack of business experience.

And often a history of long-serving managers, workers and volunteers: Charlie Eason (related to the Dublin booksellers) ran the Sheffield shop from some time in WW2 until his death in 1971; Charlie Hall was MD of Central Books from 1930 to 1940 when called up for military service; Kath Hitchings who retired after many years from the Cardiff shop in 1980.

The structure of shops was basically similar for all the provincial shops. There would be a manager, paid full-time but more commonly part-time or possibly not at all. So some shops relied on dedicated and inevitably elderly members who had the time. He or she would be responsible to the local CP body – Area or District Committee, and might have a committee, usually informal, to help.

Most of the larger shops were set up as limited companies, limiting the Party's risk, and the Party's head office would have advised local District Committees to follow this procedure. They were legally owned and run by their directors, but the Party would obviously make sure they kept control – the careful precautions taken for Central Books are described in *A Brief History*. They were a sort of pre-nuptial agreement with a pre-signed admission of infidelity in case of a future divorce, and the book is worth reading for this alone. Directors were not always CP members, at Central or even smaller shops like Brighton, which included a former Labour Mayor, Louis Cohen. Vida Henning, a CP activist, described the shop around 1945: 'a left-wing bookshop run by a committee, most of whom were members of the CP complemented by representatives from other left wing organisations plus some individual radically minded people' but this 'committee' was probably the Board.

The Brighton shop was one of the few that sent a manager on a training course – Betty Whittenbury got a diploma in 'Bookshop Management

and Practice'. She was full-time Assistant Manager for two years, on 'a very low wage'. She left in the early 1960s when the future looked bleak for the shop. The lease was about to end and they could not afford the offered new lease. It was the former Mayor who advised the CP to accept it and then immediately sell it. This worked and they had enough money to clear all their debts, and left them with a stock of books. They moved to temporary premises in Trafalgar Street then into the front room of the District Secretary's home in Gloucester Road to sell off the final books and gramophone records. The shop ceased to exist in about 1965. CP shops did not like to close owing money to suppliers, though this did happen when the Workers' Bookshop in London was wound up in 1939.

In the mid 1980s, Central Books' retail shop in London had monthly staff meetings of the four to six staff who worked there (which included one person looking after the Mail Order Department which was quite significant financially), otherwise the shop and wholesale business were managed by the directors. There was no intermediary Bookshop Committee, or supporters' committee. The staff meetings were very practical and non-controversial. The shop was represented on the Board of Directors by the manager, Jane Bell at this time, and myself who had previously been a sort of token provincial Director. And Bill Norris, the MD, had spent many years working in the shop. Stock control and ordering was divided up among the full-timers: Jane did Pan, Picador and Pluto; Bryony did Women's Press and Lawrence and Wishart; I did the rest. It was harder for part-timers to be included in this as they tended not stay for too long, and reps' visits did not always fit in with their working days.

On the following page are some sales figures that were not included in *A Brief History*. They will be of interest in comparison with the other shops discussed here, and in building up a better overall picture of the retail impact of radical bookshops. And hopefully they may give a nudge to other radical shops to compile similar figures.

| Year end March | Total | Shop | Mail Order | 2nd Hand |
|-----------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1977 | 41,000 | 25,000 | 16,000 | - |
| 1978 | 63,000 | 39,000 | 24,000 | - |
| 1979 | 72,000 | 44,000 | 28,000 | - |
| 1980 | 71,000 | 40,000 | 31,000 | - |
| 1981 | 105,000 | 55,000 | 37,000 | 13,000 |
| 1982 missing | | | | |
| 1983 | 125,000 | 66,000 | 51,000 | 14,000 |
| 1984 | 158,000 | 79,000 | 66,000 | 13,000 |
| 1985 | 135,000 | 79,000 | 46,000 | 10,000 |
| 1986 | 144,000 | 80,000 | 51,000 | 13,000 |
| 1987 | 159,000 | 85,000 | 63,000 | 11,000 |
| 1988 | 169,000 | 82,000 | 74,000 | 13,000 |
| 1989 | 183,000 | 99,000 | 73,000 | 11,000 |
| 1990 | 202,000 | 112,000 | 76,000 | 14,000 |
| 1991 (estimates) | 225,000 | 127,000 | 82,000 | 15,000 |

Notes: 2nd hand refers to sales through the shop and shop catalogues of material from the James Klugmann collection, after the most important sections had been passed to libraries. 'Mail Order' is not literature accounts but supplies to institutions and individuals, all over the world.

Progressive Books, Liverpool

The Progressive Bookshop opened at 18 Norton Street off London Road in 1941, almost certainly soon after the German attack on the USSR in June. In April 1945, facing financial difficulties, control passed from the Lancashire District Committee to Central Books and it was renamed Central Books until May 1950 when the stock was taken over by the Merseyside Area Committee which was granted a £50 loan interest free for two years to finance this purchase.

There are no figures extant about the shop in this early period apart from some for a 9 monthly period from July 1951 to March 1952:

Sales: £1,449 (equivalent of £52,000 in 2022)
(Branches: £1,192, Shop: £256)

Expenses: £1,405 (Purchases: £1,205; Overheads: £200 – Wages £143, Rent £39, Post £13, Other £5)

Stock at 30 June 1951: £87. Stock at 31 March 1952: £108 (1922 equivalent £3,900)

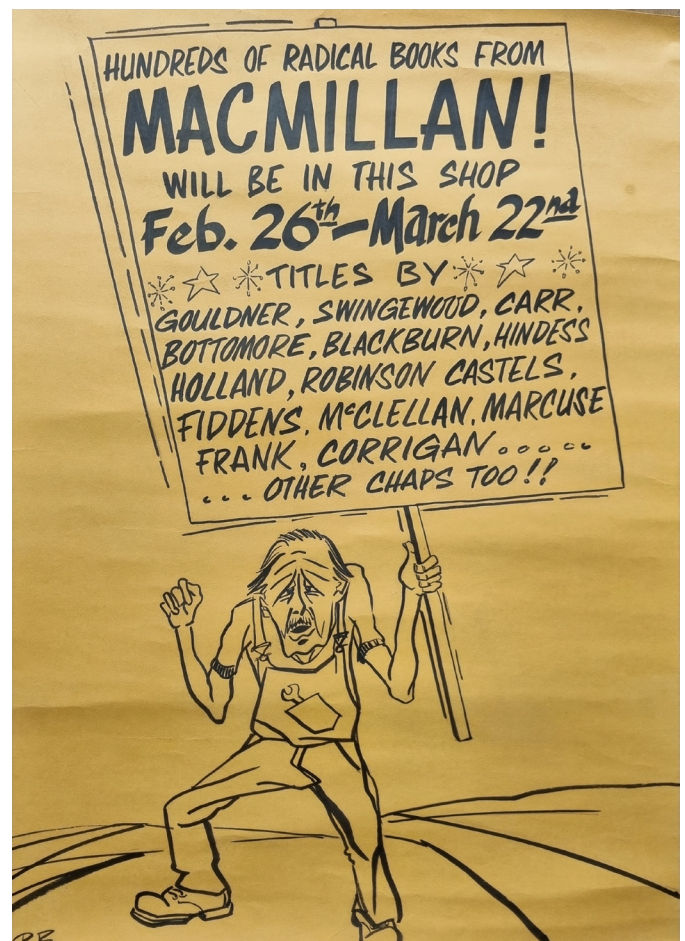
From this there are some figures we can use for future comparisons: Wages 71% of expenses, and 10% of sales. Rent 20% of expenses.

The other figure of note is the ratio of shop sales to CP Branch sales. This is typical of CP shops: the branch lit orders were the foundation of the business, and a long list of weekly, monthly and irregular periodicals could generate a considerable turnover.

In 1956 the shop, now Progressive Books, moved to 113 Mount Pleasant, with the CP office upstairs. The official opening with William Gallacher, the former Communist MP, was postponed due to the Hungarian uprising of October and November. Les Parrington was part-time manager there in 1958, probably until the mid-1960s. Les had been involved in politics in South Africa.

From January 1969 to May 1975 the shop was at 12 Upper Duke Street and Eric Caddick was the manager there most of the time – part-time and minimal expenses. Eric was a former professional boxer, a seaman and an active member of Liverpool's black community, and he too, played a role in South African politics, being one of those who volunteered to work with the ANC alongside several other Liverpool Communist seamen. He also claimed to have sold a copy of the Communist Manifesto to Paul McCartney, whose school was only a couple of minutes walk distant. For a short period, Geoff Thomas (who later became a teacher) was manager after Eric, and worked there unpaid with help from his wife, but I do not recollect any hand-over or training from him.

When the Party on Merseyside had to move from cramped rented premises in Upper Duke Street and took the bold decision in 1975 to buy much



larger premises and incorporate a club, there was no room for the shop. Premises for a new shop were rented from the council and I was asked to manage it. I was 23 at the time and had joined the CP as a student in 1971. The rent was initially £543 p.a., increased to £1,260 from January 1981 (the council were reasonable landlords and lenient when we got behind with payments, which happened very quickly). Finances were so tight we did not have a phone for a couple of months. And instead of volunteers and a shop that was only open from 18.30 to 20.30 on Thursdays and 10.30 to 17.30 on Saturday, it moved to six days opening. The business was owned by the Merseyside Area Committee, part of the North West District. In fact, we learnt later that the accountant had not followed our instructions and had just registered the ownership under the names of two directors, so it was not strictly owned by the CP. In 1982 we sold shares to raise money, a useful capitalist practice, and the CP retained 51% of the shares. Three directors were elected by the shareholders and four nominated by the Area Committee (AC).

CP Membership on Merseyside in 1976 was over 1,280 from 35 area branches and 14 workplace branches, so a reasonable base to support a shop. The area covered the Wirral, Southport, Skelmersdale and St Helens.

Staff & Decision making

The shop was run by a Bookshop Committee (BC) which was largely left to get on with running the shop. Unfortunately, no BC Minutes survive prior to 1980 apart from one set in 1978.

There were usually several members of the Area Committee on our BC (I was elected to the AC once appointed manager) and I gave regular reports

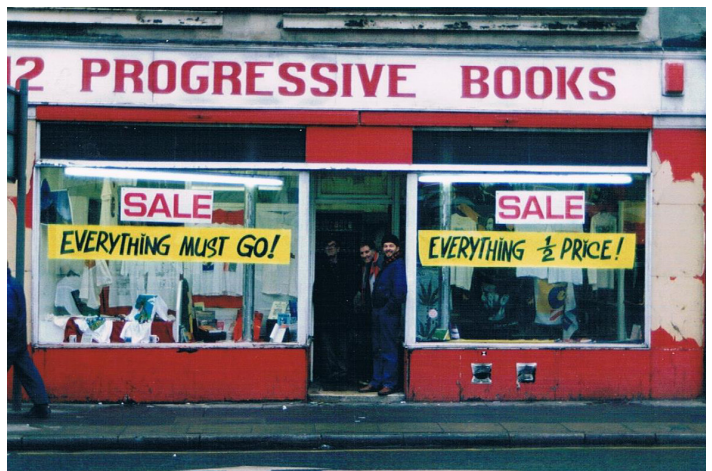


to the AC and our budgets and strategies were approved, sometimes after some searching and occasionally critical discussions. There were enthusiastic members on the BC from a variety of backgrounds: the longer-term members included a docker, local government worker, hairdresser, probation officer, teacher, museum worker and artist, under-employed musician, and two building workers. There was no business expertise apart from the Area Treasurer, a small businessman, who was very supportive, particularly in the early days when he had more time. There was no expertise in the book trade (I had worked in a library for a year and another member was an avid collector and seller of second-hand books). The Area Secretary, Roger O'Hara, was also supportive in many ways, especially in trouble shooting and in pushing for more business-like methods, and introducing computerised accounting. He certainly saw the importance of the bookshop politically for the CP on Merseyside and prevented the shop from being exploited financially by the Area or District.

BC meetings were at least monthly, held in the shop after it was closed at 5.30 or 7.30 and could last three hours. After one crisis, we meet fortnightly and even weekly.

A lot of time was spent discussing potential new members, not all of whom were in the CP. We never had many women members (the first was in 1984), though this did change when Linda Croker worked there, and we also elected a female member of the AC as Company Secretary.

For most of the time I was the sole full-time paid worker. My wage was to be the same as that of a paid CP full time worker, which was not terrible. Some years later this was raised by 20%, but the shop's finances meant we could not implement it and wages also got into arrears for a while.

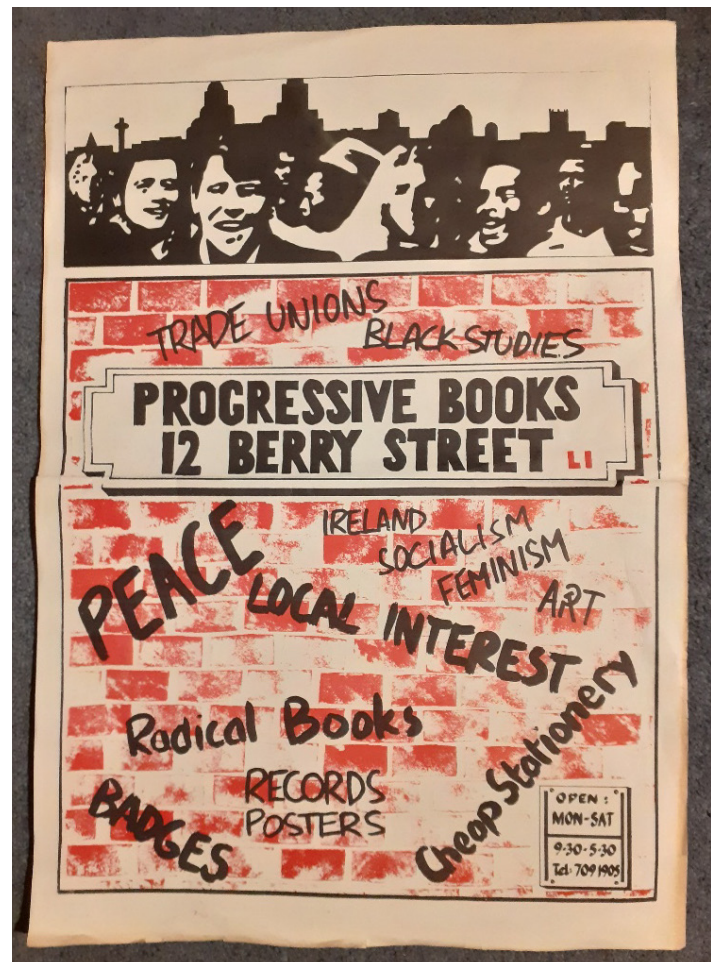


From January 1981 there was usually one part time paid worker and between June 1981 and December 1982 there were two full-time workers.

The periods when I was the only paid worker were difficult. For instance, in April 1984, a couple of weeks before a holiday, I had to give training to a couple of members of the BC in the procedure for cashing up at the end of the day – nobody else knew what to do.

On Mondays, for almost the whole period of its existence, John and Veronica Gibson looked after the shop. The benefit for John, who was the local *Soviet Weekly* rep, was that he could use the shop to push his paper and the publications of the Novosti Press Agency which he also handled. Most of the Committee were inclined towards Eurocommunism and reset the window displays accordingly on Tuesdays.

Despite political differences relations were always cordial and mutually beneficial. We soon paid other volunteers £8 a day cash in hand when needed. We had a badge-making machine early in the badge boom, which was self-financing. Later on we had a Saturday worker, a sixth-former, not in the CP who was paid £250 p.a. We did use the Youth Opportunities Scheme in 1980, taking on a member of the YCL, but we supplemented the wages and benefits. There was a very heated debate when we discussed taking someone else on when this period of six months was over: there was strong opposition to the scheme but we eventually agreed to go ahead and to improve training, holidays and expenses. Not all volunteers, or YOPS workers, were necessarily in the CP, nor were members of the BC, and certainly when we sold shares we appealed to supporters outside the CP. The young woman, Linda Croker, who had volunteered in the shop and who took over from me in December 1986 when I moved to London to work in Central Books, was not in the CP at the time.



Finances

Not all audited accounts survive from my period

Finances were in a terrible state in 1975. There were debts going back to 1972. The accountant, we found out later, had not been presenting accounts to Inland Revenue – we ended up paying taxes on profits we had not made. After my first year sales had trebled, as would be expected given the previous opening hours and low sales, but we were running at a loss. Central Books had stopped supplies of books (though not CP literature) for three months; we were on stop with Bookwise, the mainstream wholesaler and we were unable to keep to our repayment agreement. We launched an appeal for £700, which we did not reach but the money we raised averted a crisis which might have closed the shop. Throughout my time there we issued various appeals, and were given some substantial loans, some of which were written off by the lenders.

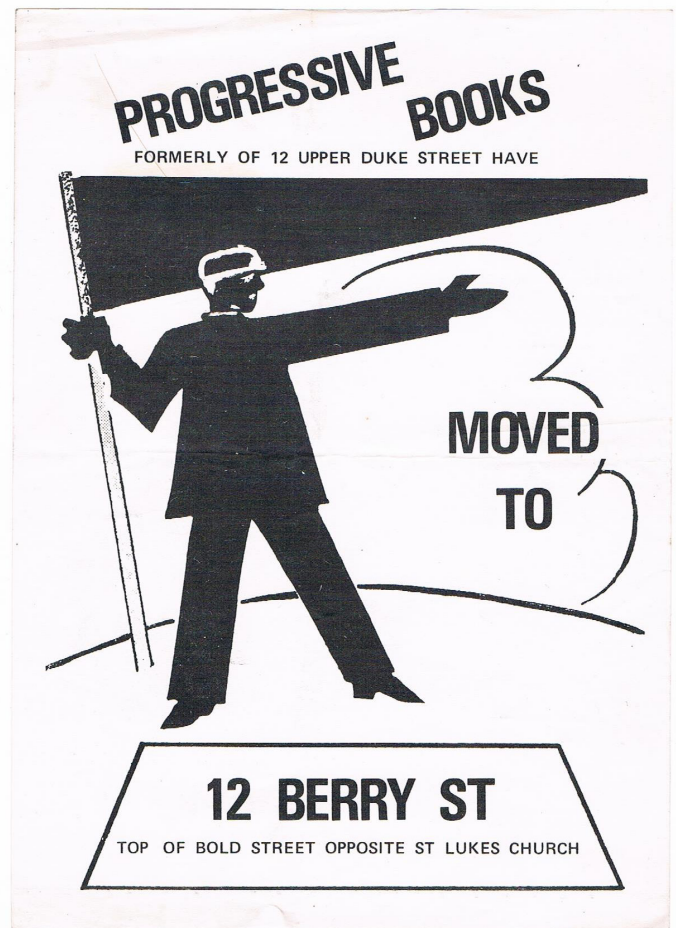
In 1983, we were technically insolvent. I was the only paid worker, but a year later there had been a big improvement and Linda had started part-time.

To give an indication of the shop's progression, here are some rounded up sales figures from the audited accounts.

From Bookshop Accounts (calendar year): 1976: £7,300; 1977: £11,600; 1978: £23,100; 1979: £30,500; 1980: £35,900 Sales per day: 1985: £78

From audited accounts to y/e April (with net profit/-loss in brackets): 1981: £36,500 (-£1,376); 1982: £34,200 (-£4,453); 1983: £30,900 (-£1,070); 1984: £41,300 (£782); 1985: £50,387 (£6,674); 1986: £55,700 (-£2,961); 1987 (first 6 months): £21,400. The shop closed in February 1992.

It was only re-reading old minutes of the Bookshop Committee after a gap of many years that I remembered, with some shock, how difficult my job had been and even unpleasant at times. One of the reasons was the continuous financial pressure we were under. On occasions it led to conflict between



the Bookshop Committee and myself. I had quickly learnt about the book trade, doing all the ordering and paying, and I had to resort to delaying payments, finding alternative sources, making use of sale or return, getting help from reps, arranging payments over a period – the usual practices. The Committee wanted very strict restrictions on ordering which allowed little leeway for me, together with approval for every item I bought. I was not blameless, as our stock control was based on keeping a record of all sales and a list of basic titles we should stock, The rest was in my head and I could go overboard when ordering. It is always necessary in a bookshop, as with most businesses, to be able to respond quickly to new demands – and with radical shops there was the continual need to supply bookstalls at short notice. Overall, I think I managed this fairly well. But some on the BC had little conception of the juggling that was necessary. However, there were occasions when I obstinately resisted instructions to reduce orders and stock. The time involved in this would have been unbearable and wasteful.

Another source of tension for me was my co-worker – a manipulative person whom I found it very difficult to deal with. He was removed as BC minutes-taker after one episode. He was eventually sacked. The lessons I learnt from working with him helped me a decade later when I took charge of personnel at Central, but at the time it was very unpleasant. Towards the end of my period there, my marriage was breaking down and after we separated she committed suicide. So at times the combination of problems could be a bit overwhelming.

To overcome our financial problems, we looked at diversifying to find any goods we could sell at a higher margin than books and some were successful, others not. Among the successes, we started selling stationery and photocopier paper for which we had found a very cheap supplier. The BC instructed me to spend a certain amount of time going round city centre shops to sell this. I agreed fully with the decision to stock this stationery, but it was handled in a very mechanical way, including in changing the ratio of stationery stock to book stock. There was little understanding of the book trade, even of the radical book trade. When the Federation of Radical Booksellers allowed party shops to join (previously the Federation of Alternative Booksellers only allowed ‘non-aligned/collective, non-hierarchical, non-profit shops/projects’) I was keen for Progressive Books to get involved but I had a tough time convincing members that it was good for us and there were arguments that we couldn’t afford it at a time of financial crisis. But I did convince the BC that it was in our interest. The

same arguments came up when I wanted to go to Socialist and Feminist bookfairs.

The Bookshop Committee meetings were often long and a bit repetitive and could be quite negative at times and it was noted that in February 1983 two consecutive meetings were cancelled when I was the only one who turned up. Others were poorly attended. This was in contrast with the first year when there was considerable enthusiasm about the new shop with a good group of younger members helping out. Different circumstances led to a couple of these dropping out – one died, one moved, for example.

Stock

For the record, successful diversifications included posters, local framed prints and photographs and peace mugs that we commissioned. Badges have been mentioned. We made our own 'Don't Blame Me I Voted Labour' in 1979, and we sold 21,000. We printed 5,000 'People's March for Jobs' in 1981 and we commissioned an enamel red star badge that was very successful. We did get some printed T-shirts made with the slogan 'Frankie Backs the Miners' in 1984 after the Liverpool group Frankie Goes to Hollywood suddenly became hugely popular – the father of one of the group was a building worker in the CP. Second-hand books were very successful, and many supporters passed on their books to us so no cost was involved.

Alternative cards were big sellers (cue a trip down memory lane for FRB members next). Leeds Postcards led the market. Liverpool had its own producer of alternative cards, Rick Walker trading as South Atlantic Souvenirs ('Trees of the Falklands' was one – just a blank card – and another was '10 million penguins can't be wrong'). Another Liverpool wit produced a 'Popopoly' card to coincide with the Pope's visit – this caused an outrage among right-thinking citizens, Waddingtons' directors and the local mainstream press. And finally, in 1981, 'Greetings from Toxteth – All Riot Now' with photos of burnt-out buildings in sepia. As for alternative Christmas Cards, 'It's a Girl!' caused another scandal, but was a money spinner for us.

We had plenty of room above the shelves for posters, and they sold well. How does my list of bestsellers compare with other shops?

'Gone with the Wind' and 'The World According to Reagan' (both SWP);

Cath Tate's 'Prevent Street Crime'; Brecht's poem 'In Praise of Communism' from the incomparable Poster-Film Collective, plus their superb coloured 'educational' posters on imperialism and history; 'Giz a Job' (*Boys from the Blackstuff*). Organisations: Anti-Apartheid, Chile Solidarity Campaign; CND (especially their one with the quote from Pastor Niemöller. Individuals: Che (especially), Marx, Engels, Lenin (and maybe a few of Mao and Trotsky though not to the same customers), Malcolm X. Industrial disputes headed by the 1984-5 Miners Strike, but also Grunwick. I think the two bestsellers were 'Gone With the Wind' and 'Prevent Street Crime' (respectively a mock film poster with Reagan carrying Thatcher – 'she promised to follow him to the end of the earth and he promised to arrange it' - and Thatcher photomontaged into pickpocketing an unsuspecting shopper, for those too young to know or too old to remember). We must have sold hundreds of each.

Unsuccessful ventures included small items of furniture and leatherwork from a local artisan. Political records and tapes were surprisingly poor sellers. And we discussed reprinting a couple of books, but this was not followed up.

Like all radical shops, we relied a lot on stalls. I spent many hours at stalls, helped by others certainly but the burden fell on me but I did not mind, I loved doing stalls. For many years I took a stall to the Trades Council monthly meetings. I spoke to Blackburn TC, numerous local union committees. I sold books on trains – going to a lobby of Parliament in 1975 and to the huge CND demo in October 1983. We organised a stall every night for three weeks at the Everyman Theatre when Belt & Braces were performing a dramatization of the *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* in 1978.

There was one weekend at the end of November 1980 – the national Labour Party demo against unemployment attracted 150,000 demonstrators from all over the country and many more people came into the shop that day; there were good sales of literature on the march and rally; it coincided with stalls at the annual Morning Star Bazaar in the AUEW Hall, and a very successful stall in Manchester at a District event on the Sunday. In total the shop took over £1,000 that weekend. In an earlier week that month we had taken £260 from stalls at a Trades Council conference on women at work, at the District Congress, and at a students' meeting and at the Methodist Book Fayre

In June 1985 we had a stall at NALGO's national conference in Blackpool where we took £1,400 in four days.

Perhaps the most important sales were the regular occasions I was invited by WEA tutors to take a case of books to each of their new classes for shop stewards or safety reps, fortunately usually just round the corner from the shop. For several years I did this – giving an introductory talk about the shop and then selling some samples. This could lead to further invitations from the shop stewards themselves on the courses

I never worked out how many hours I spent on stalls, or in the shop on Sundays catching up on admin. I could only rarely take time in lieu.

We also had very big sales of some sociology and history titles thanks to two academics at Liverpool University, who let me take copies into their introductory lectures for several years, giving the students a discount.

From the beginning I argued for a broad and inclusive range of stock to be carried like most radical bookshops, and the AC agreed. Being a shop linked to a political party there were differences: we naturally wanted to give prominence to our publications and those books that reflected our general outlook. But we never saw the shop as a recruiting agency, and never pestered customers to join. We wanted to provide a service to the left, and beyond, and we believed we would ultimately win more respect for showing we were putting our resources into the broadest possible range of political material including from those organisations we could have major differences with – and that was a more viable financial model as well. Being a party shop meant that customers would inevitably have opinions and prejudices about us and we would have to work to dispel some of the latter, and no doubt some would just not want to use our shop. Merseysiders were lucky to have a wide choice of radical bookshops to choose from: News from Nowhere was the largest, always with a huge feminist selection, and they carried the whole range of left and anarchist publications; a small room at the end of a steep staircase was briefly the home of the IMG, then the Revolutionary Marxist Current, and later possibly the Revolutionary Red Current (though this might be my imagination); the IS shop mentioned above; a WRP shop, a CPB(M-L) one and Atticus, a small literary/political shop. There were also several second-hand bookshops whose owners has strong political identities – Big Flame, anarchist, Labour Party. Nearly all these shops, new and old, were situated in the same area slightly on the edge of the town centre and not far from the two universities (Hardman Street/Renshaw Street/Berry Street/Seel Street).

One decision on stock I took was to stop selling *Paedophilia: Some Questions and Answers* published by the Paedophile Information Exchange. Paedophilia

was not a media issue in those days, and I had innocently placed an order in 1978 or 1979 from PDC for a copy, as I did with nearly all new titles from them. It was only when I looked through it that I realised it was using the concept of child sexuality to justify under-age sex in relationships that could not be equal given the age differentials. PDC themselves soon stopped handling their titles.

There were some discussions over magazines. Occasionally a query or complaint might be made by a CP member, or a member of the AC or BC. The procedure was that most decisions were left to the manager, then the BC if there was something controversial, and if the issue remained unresolved the Secretariat of the AC (the small committee that ran the day to day affairs on behalf of the AC) would be involved and then the AC itself would decide. I can only remember two instances of a discussion at the AC. The first was over *An Poblacht/Republican News*, the Sinn Fein paper, which the BC were happy to stock, and the AC backed us up. The second was at the height of the divisions in the CP, probably in 1984, when the AC discussed not stocking the monthly *Straight Left*, on the grounds that its authors were anonymous and its organisation not transparent. There were some who wanted to stop selling the *Morning Star* itself given its role in attacking the leadership of the CP, but we argued against this as a measure that would not be understood in the wider movement, however strongly we felt about the paper's negative role. Again, the AC agreed with this approach. There was a general dislike of anything that smacked of censorship.

However, there was one Trotskyist paper, the *Spartacist*, that I think we did stop selling. I cannot remember the specific reason, but this group spent most of its time intervening and disrupting the meetings of every other left group and was extremely sectarian. It may have been a particularly egregious article, but the group was simply obnoxious and nobody disagreed with the decision.

I am aware of one final political spat after I had left. In April 1987, the Area Secretary complained to the Bookshop Committee that the shop had displayed material from the Communist Campaign Group (which was to become the Communist Party of Britain) after instructing it not to do this until there had been a discussion on the AC. One of the members of the BC had rather dishonestly replied that it was 'purely a business decision' to which the Area Secretary replied bluntly 'it was a political decision'.

Enough documents remain for me to be able to give a summary from stock takes at Progressive Books.

The figures are retail for books and magazines and then the total figure is reduced by 35%, to produce a rough cost price. Different discounts were applied to non-book items and badge parts were entered at the cost price.

| | Jul-78 | Jan-81 | Nov-84 |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Magazines | 246 | 287 | 204 |
| Trade Unions | 513 | 1,540 | 725 |
| Labour Movement History International (Socialist Countries) | 137 | 242 | 302 |
| International (ROW) | 191 | 76 | 252 |
| International Ireland | 231 | 185 | 535 |
| Politics, Philosophy, Economics | 63 | 219 | 347 |
| Marxism | 404 | 1,022 | 1,206 |
| CP Pamphlets | 297 | 517 | 534 |
| Labour Party | 121 | 119 | 45 |
| Sociology & Education | 0 | 0 | 103 |
| History | 111 | 178 | 585 |
| Feminism | 127 | 167 | 450 |
| Children | 277 | 504 | 2,240 |
| Peace | 79 | 53 | 171 |
| Black Studies | 21 | 150 | 356 |
| Fiction | 146 | 656 | 1,201 |
| Poetry, Drama, Lit Crit, Media, Arts | 305 | 975 | 1,032 |
| Local | 277 | 458 | 1,027 |
| Health, Housing, Social Services | 52 | 547 | 961 |
| Environment | 308 | 424 | 612 |
| Gay & Lesbian | 0 | 37 | 89 |
| General/Other | 0 | 25 | 45 |
| | 739 | 1,249 | 1,914 |
| | 4,645 | 9,630 | 14,936 |
| Less 35% | 1,626 | 3,370 | 5,228 |
| | 3,019 | 6,260 | 9,708 |
| Non books: | | | |
| Badges | 550 | 412 | 327 |
| Posters | 120 | 185 | 163 |
| Stationery | 308 | 574 | 797 |
| Other | 120 | 315 | 1,121 |
| Non-books | 1,098 | 1,486 | 2,408 |
| Books | 3,019 | 6,260 | 9,708 |
| Totals | 4,117 | 7,748 | 12,116 |

A couple of comments: quite large figures including 'New In' display and Window display are not allocated to topics but included in General; this category also includes orders awaiting collection (surprisingly large for forgotten reasons), a Pluto Press display stand one year (though I cannot claim it always just had Pluto books), stock about to be returned, reduced shop-soiled books, small subjects (Humour, Psychology, etc.). Fascinating as it is now to look back and compare changes in stock, the main purpose of the stock take was to produce a total figure quickly, so there some anomalies and inconsistencies: Politics and Economics would have contained books on Marxism for example. Other points: Third World books became predominant in the International category by 1984. Black Studies assimilated books from USA, the West Indies and some on the Arts over the years. Philosophy was by far the smallest part of PPE. Humour became an increasingly larger part of General. In the first years we had a disproportionate number of books and pamphlets on Iran in International as different émigré groups brought in their respective publications for us to sell SOR – the figure in 1978 was twice as high as that for both China and USA. It was difficult to refuse stock brought in under these terms

The 1978 figures were for the first twelve months after we moved to Berry Street. We had very little stock at the time of the move and building it up – by any means necessary – was crucial to our survival

In only one year did the stocktake include a figure for 'Small Presses' (e.g. worker-writers) as we tried to promote this interesting side line in radical publishing, that proved impossible to sell in mainstream shops and really only took off in the radical shops in the area where they were produced.

Absence of a figure in the first year might just indicate a low figure that was merged into General (e.g. Environment).

I have included areas with some small stock values – Children, Gay (Lesbian was included in Feminism), Environment, Labour Party (though this was almost certainly more than any other radical bookshop in the country apart from the Labour Party's own shop, of course) for their reflection not so much on CP policy as on our customer base. And the first three categories featured extremely prominently in News from Nowhere.

Despite my comments about the difficulty involving women in the BC, and the presence of News from Nowhere with their huge stock, feminism was always one of the larger sections in our shop, a reflection of feminism's impact on the CP at the time.

To deal with our underfinancing we did not make the move towards becoming more of a 'community bookshop' as some shops did – this was always harder in cities where there was a wider choice of independent shops and chains, and one of the consequences of such an approach could be the diminution in the political stock. We always tried to provide a service for the different communities on Merseyside – black, feminist, anti-fascist, international solidarity activists and organisations, and community groups in the fields of health, housing, welfare rights. We went out to many of these and asked for suggestions on what we should stock. I was a member of the Welfare Rights Resource Centre Library Support Group, and later worked with the Merseyside Trade Union and Unemployed Resource Centre Library. We extended these approaches, but perhaps most effort went into extending our contacts with the trade union movement in the North West and even nationally through the use of our lists of books and pamphlets for trade unionists.

In normal and in difficult times (perhaps the same thing for us) we put a lot of effort into the Labour Movement. The very high stock figure in January 1981 (which included £600 just on Health & Safety at work) must relate to orders for WEA classes in the couple of preceding months or in preparation for the forthcoming ones – we certainly did not order them especially for Christmas. The stock figure for February 1986 for Trade Unions went up to £1,130, after the drop in 1984.

An inevitable question about the stock is to what extent did the fact that it was a party bookshop affect decisions? Although I did practically all the ordering over ten years I do not believe that my interests and biases affected it to any great degree. I have said that we wanted to promote the CP's publications, so we stocked these, together with any books and pamphlets about the CP, however critical, and Maoist and Trotskyist groups were not shy with their critiques. We undoubtedly stocked material that was very slow selling, but then which radical bookshop did not? Each one would have its 'must stock' list, even non-party ones. The CP nationally never made any comments on these issues of stock. The only pressure came with campaigns to push particular pamphlets, especially industrial, and the occasional book from Lawrence and Wishart such as Sam Aaronovitch's *The Road from Thatcherism: The Alternative Economic Strategy* in 1981. I've mentioned some political debates

We really did try to find books from a wide range of political traditions, sometimes offending some CP members. We had little luck with anarchism

– I’m sure local anarchists felt much more at home at News from Nowhere - but we did much better with the Labour Party and the TUC. I went to London to discuss with the publications department of both organisations, but the Labour Party were not geared up to distributing outside their normal networks. Eventually we did get regular material, including the weekly *Labour News*. When the General Election arrived in 1979, we stocked manifestos of all the parties and sold a lot – including Liberals and Tories: there was nowhere else that sold them. I wish I had kept some – they now sell for reasonable prices second-hand. I do remember that all the parties were slow in asking for payment – none sent a statement - and I would not be surprised if the two last-named did not get paid, though I ensured the Labour Party did. This did not stop them all sending more when the next election came round in 1983 and we placed more orders.

We found that books on what we called the ‘socialist countries’ did not sell well. Even Lawrence and Wishart’s 1982 *Poland: A Crisis for Socialism* sold very poorly, and this was from the CP’s publishing house. The stock on the USSR and other countries, including China, was surprisingly small – precisely because it did not sell quickly. Books by the Medvedev brothers, Roy and Zhores, did sell while they were in the news.

We also tried hard for a while with children’s books, but the only real success were the beautifully illustrated Russian fairy tales by Ivan Bilibin, which kept going out of print, and to a limited extent, the interesting, but expensive, series of non-sexist picture books from the Writers’ and Readers’ Publishing Co-op in 1976. I was keen to develop the range of ‘political’ fiction (the *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists (RTP)*, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Howard Fast, Alan Sillitoe, Victor Serge, Robert Blatchford etc) and this was successful. My impression is that interest in these diminished from the 1980s, with the exception of the *RTP*, ‘the building workers’ bible’, which was in a class of its own. CP building workers on the Teaching Hospital site and in the Direct Works Department sold huge quantities of these. In my time at Progressive, I worked out we must have sold over 3,000 paperbacks and 500 hardbacks. There is a Liverpool connection to the book. Robert Noonan (‘Robert Tressell’) died there in 1911, and in 1977 he was reburied from his recently discovered pauper’s grave. To celebrate this event two of us spent an evening flyposting the city centre with adverts for the book, paid for by Granada Publications, who published the paperback edition.

Among other promotions, we produced our own book tokens, which we promoted in CP branches and some trade unions.

Book lists became a regular, and time-consuming, feature – Local, Feminism, Fiction, Ireland, Labour Movement History, Health, Black Studies/Anti-Racism, Trade Unions. The last one was the most important for our sales – there were fourteen editions, most duplicated but some printed, one in 1,500 copies.

And just a brief word about Publisher Reps. These could be very important for arranging SOR deals, special promotions and higher discounts, as well as suggesting potential forthcoming books and checking up on backstock. Their visits were very time consuming for booksellers as well as publishers, and that is main factor in their decline this century, together with computerisation and the ease of communicating trade news through emails or websites. S&N and PDC were especially important for their wide and constantly changing range of small publishers. There were radical reps from mainstream publishers: Prudence de Villiers at Quartet (who went on to co-found In Other Words shop in Plymouth), Barrie Hodgson who was a freelance north west rep for several publishers and a member of the Labour Party (and he would visit at lunchtime with a couple of cans of beer and sandwiches which we shared sitting behind the till – we could not close for lunch if I was working on my own). And I remember the Cambridge University Press rep who was extremely helpful, though not on the left. These would all have had some influence on what we stocked.

Attacks

We suffered various attacks from the far right. Once a group came in and threw book stands around: we then took some protective measures – a panic alarm, but mainly getting some large CP members to stand around or sit in the back of the shop on Saturdays. And we had our large double fronted windows smashed on successive Friday nights by crossbow bolts. The next Friday, a freezing winter night, two carloads of us waited in the small road opposite the shop but they did not turn up. Two weeks later the windows went again, so we got some wooden shutters made and painted by a talented art teacher to represent the Liverpool skyline. Then there was the case when two self-proclaimed fascists tried to break in the through the back. Thanks to an off-duty policeman going to a nearby club who heard the noise they made, they were arrested and somehow were acquitted on the grounds that they were only trying to have a piss. One was a well-known Liverpool gangster who wrote up the incident in his autobiography.

We had no problems from the police – we didn't go in for drugs and porn. There was one incident when I had to call them for assistance when two Trotskyists were fighting in the shop. They were representatives of the two factions of the WRP after the split of 1985, arguing over ownership of keys to a scooter. Customers were shocked and one woman a little frightened though it was not terribly violent as they were rolling about on the floor without inflicting much damage on each other. Despite the threats of a Stalinist (me) to call the forces of the bourgeois state to interfere in revolutionary justice they would not stop. When the police arrived the two tamely allowed themselves to be taken away to the police van to be questioned. After half an hour a policeman came back in, took off his helmet, scratched his head and asked me if I could explain what they were arguing about.

News from Nowhere had more trouble than us with the fascists, partly due to their initial location and the fact that being an all-women shop they were an easier target.

In Newcastle, the June 1978 BC meeting expressed concern that when the shop only had one person present they were vulnerable to attack, especially on Saturdays. An appeal was issued for comrades to help out. Staff security was discussed again in August 1981. In January 1983 it was finally agreed to go ahead with an alarm system.

Nationally the CP had faced police raids shortly after it was formed, and members had been imprisoned for various reasons. In preparation for the General Strike of 1926, twelve leading members were imprisoned: during the Strike many were fined or jailed for carrying strike bulletins.

Police raided the Oxford bookshop in June 1940. This was a time when the CP faced serious state harassment due its position on the war which at the time it classified as imperialist. The *Daily Worker* was banned on 21 January 1941 and the Party faced the possibility of itself being banned. It had made secret preparations to produce material illegally should this be the case. It wasn't, and the political situation changed completely once Germany attacked the USSR. The ban on the paper was lifted after 19 months.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would repeat that the CP shops were grappling with the same problems as all radical bookshops. They were helped by some factors: the Party provided a source for volunteers, it encouraged a reading

culture, and the range of publications it produced was a considerable contribution to debate for many outside its circle (for a fuller discussion of these publications see my *Bibliography of the CPGB*, Lawrence & Wishart, 2016). The CP's steady decline coincided with a decline in the rest of the Left in general, but the collapse of Communism was more dramatic. The shops worked best when there was a collective behind them but the role of individuals identified with individual shops was not inconsiderable, even if this appears to be in contradiction with a collectivism one might have expected. The Communist Party had always been highly supportive of the role of Co-operatives and the Co-operative Movement, but it did not apply co-operative structures to its own organisations, primarily to retain control of them, and perhaps because it was orientated towards action rather than debate. It did have its own structures of democratic accountability and also of collective work, though with weaknesses I have mentioned above. The one major exception to this was the *Daily Worker*, which was owned by a co-operative society, the People's Press Printing Society, from 1945.

To the question of how to spread radical ideas as part of a broader movement to change an unequal world for the better, and what are the best forms of organisation, its bookshops, and publishing for that matter, exemplified one approach (or rather several as we've seen) and were neither better nor worse than others – just a bit different.

