

The University of Liverpool

THE REPRESENTATION OF COMMUNISM IN POST-WAR BRITISH FILM, THEATRE
AND ART 1945-63

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By

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Abstract

In contrast to previous cold war studies which have focussed on propaganda and the cultural contest between the USA and USSR, this thesis demonstrates how British film, theatre, and art marginalised communism, and by association political radicalism, through the reinforcement of dominant negative stereotypes. This thesis examines how largely negative portrayals of communism reflected the views of their creators: individuals and groups who were not part of the official state apparatus, but were illustrating their own perception of the communist threat. It is therefore a cultural examination of the visual portrayal of a political ideology within British film, theatre and art.

Through the use of recognisable stereotypes, communism was demonised through a variety of guises: from aggressive and sinister domestic militants through to the portrayal of communism as being ‘un-British’ and a challenge to traditional values and beliefs. Although such anti-communist representations were dominant, more sympathetic portrayals gradually emerged, such as the naive, the gullible or those simply disillusioned and seeking change. Through a determined eclectic analysis of a broad range of sources from film, theatre and art this thesis will show that domestic concerns dominate in all three media. An in-depth look at the CPGB, the Artists Group and Realism, will demonstrate that British communism had no positive cultural influence within the media considered, leaving any sympathetic portrayals down to individuals. The changing fortunes of the Communist Party of Great Britain will also demonstrate how geopolitical events led to a decline in its domestic support and the continual reinforcement of negative communist portrayals.

What emerges is that in the post-war years British film, theatre, and art looked with suspicion at an alien ideology largely associated with a hostile foreign power, and without any real challenge, its continued negative representation helped to establish a dominant anti-communist ideology.

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This work is dedicated to my Dad.

Introduction

This thesis analyses the representation of communism and other forms of political radicalism in British film, theatre and art during the period 1945-1963. It examines how communism was marginalised in these forms of media, reflecting concerns which looked with suspicion at an ideology largely associated within a hostile foreign power, rather than as a result of a deliberate state-led programme of propaganda. Communism was subsequently demonised to represent a variety of characters, from the aggressive portrayal of domestic communists as sinister and immoral figures, through to the more diffuse representation of communist ideology as being in some way un-British and unsympathetic to traditional values and beliefs.

The thesis therefore takes a different position from other recent work on the ‘cultural Cold War’ which generally starts from the premise that culture was used in a deliberate propagandist way to demonstrate the wider struggle between East and West. Instead, this thesis focuses on the way in which cultural life in Britain was influenced by the less conscious sense of the ‘wrongness’ of communism. This does not mean that film, theatre and art were not used to communicate deliberate messages, but that this was often by individuals and groups that were not part of the official state apparatus and thereby using their own position to articulate their own perception of communism in Britain and the potential threat it posed.

One of the first things to establish, however, is the relevant timeline. The time span of the thesis incorporates the immediate post-war years under Labour reform and the following twelve years dominated by the Conservatives, ending in 1963, a year with both political and cultural significance. At a political level this marked the end of the leadership of Harold Macmillan, which effectively lead to the end of Conservative rule as Labour gained control in 1964 under Harold Wilson¹. The year also saw confidence in the British government under considerable pressure domestically following the revelations of the Profumo Affair, and internationally her status was rocked by the French veto by De Gaulle preventing Britain from joining the EEC². At a cultural level 1963 was significant for all there media considered. In film it saw the last of the ‘New Wave’ films of British cinema as their gritty realism was no longer considered commercially successful. The audience wanted James Bond, glamour, and the celebration of affluence and this signalled the end of the representation of working class angst and also the last of the Boulting brothers’ institutional satires, which had become outdated³. In theatre 1963 saw the creation of the National Theatre under the leadership of Laurence Olivier, and also the decline of the commercial success of the kitchen sink dramas previously seen in the work of the Angry Young Men⁴. This trend was again mirrored in art as social realism lost favour to be replaced by the commercial success of op art and pop art, with the austerity of the fifties replaced by the colour and

¹ Following Attlee’s Labour government the Tories had been in power since October 1951 initially under Churchill and then Eden. Harold Macmillan had been in power since 10 January 1957 following Eden’s resignation over the Suez crisis. Macmillan himself retired as a result of ill health on 19 October 1963 (no doubt exacerbated by the scandal of the Profumo Affair) to be replaced by Sir Alec Douglas-Home, who went on to lose the following election to Labour in October 1964 ending 13 years of Conservative government.

²The French leader General de Gaulle blocked the British entry to the European Economic Community stating that Britain had a deep seated hostility towards European construction. His actions cemented France’s position as the head of European politics whilst Britain continued to be seen as subservient to the economic and foreign policy of the USA.

³ Released in 1963 *This Sporting Life* directed by Lindsey Anderson was the last of the New Wave films influenced by the ‘Angry Young Men’ that had earlier emerged in British theatre. The Boulting brother’s final institutional satire was *Heavens Above* released in 1963 which focussed on the church.

⁴ The move away from gritty social realism and politically radical theatre was reflected in the commercial success of traditional productions most notably promoted through the National at the Old Vic.

flamboyance of the commercial sixties⁵. 1963 therefore serves as an ideal point at which to end our examination as there was a definite shift away from realism and the depiction of social and political concerns. The representation of communism within the domestic environment was therefore no longer a popular theme.

Although by 1963 attention had moved away from the domestic threat posed by communism, this brings to the fore one of the ambiguities that in a sense run through this thesis, precisely because any attempt to resolve them un-problematically actually does violence to the material presented. The first is the distinction between the representation of communism and radicalism. ‘Communism’ as associated with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and more generally with the Soviet Union was seldom portrayed with any sympathy whether on the screen, stage, or in the gallery. ‘Good’ communists, like the character of Sarah in Wesker’s *Chicken Soup with Barley*, met with a more sympathetic hearing in the more alternative end of the cultural spectrum, but even then they were more often than not seen as misguided. In contrast initially there was a radicalism that was acceptable and even laudable, as seen in post-war films for example where it was counter-posed to the stuffiness of the British Establishment. This thesis acknowledges the tension relating to the uncertain boundary between radicalism and communism, with often one being associated with the other with no tangible link, and the fact that there was often confusion between the two makes this a complex matter. Unfortunately the label of ‘communist’ was readily applied to manifestations of left-wing radical ideology in the post-war years, making the ambiguity between communism and radicalism unavoidable. This is two-fold as it relates to not only the representations but also the creators of the work themselves.

⁵ This was also the year that David Hockney met Andy Warhol, in New York and another era of British art developed.

Within the media of film, the very deliberate use of clearly identifiable stereotypes ensured that there was little confusion as the dress, language, demeanour and actions of characters clearly identified them as being either communist or not. Although this was challenged with the satirical representations seen in the later work of the Boulting brothers, communists were still recognisable as being different. They represented a different ideology in conflict with British traditions and democracy. In contrast to this clear divide, when one considers theatre the differentiation between communists and radicals weakens. Direct association can be seen in either the openly communist Theatre Workshop or the trilogy of semi-autobiographical plays by Arnold Wesker concerning the communist Kahn family. There were cross overs, however, as ‘radical’ playwrights created characters that were associated with communist ideals by presenting a left-wing radical challenge to traditional beliefs and expectations. A prime example is the work of John Osborne who was considered a radical in both a theatrical and political sense, but was arguably neither in reality. His creation of antagonistic left-wing characters such as Jimmy Porter and his criticism of traditionalism led to him being erroneously classed as a left-wing radical, and by association with communist ideology. It is in the analysis of art that the differentiation between communism and radicalism is at its weakest however as there are actually no overtly communist portrayals in British art, negative or otherwise. One element of this is because the Soviet orthodoxy of Socialist realism had no artistic following in Britain: it was outdated, romantic, monolithic in concept and celebrated the communist state. Social realism was another matter. The gritty depiction of the ordinary, everyday activities of the working class was considered a radical challenge to traditional expectations within the artistic community, at both a political and creative level. This radical status was heightened by the social realists’ support of communist bodies such as the Artists International Association and the Artists Group. Their promotion by a prominent communist critic reinforced the notion that their work was supportive of a communist ideology. Without

openly communist artists, the radicals of the social realists were subsequently classed within the communist camp and their work seen as representative of communist ideals. So whilst this thesis is concerned with the representation of communism, it also accepts that not all representations are overtly communistic, and that the representations of left-wing radicalism often cross the boundaries separating the two due to political association.

This highlights one of the key themes considered in this thesis in that the portrayal of both communism and other forms of political radicalism were not necessarily negative. There were examples of communists who were simply ‘naive’ in their beliefs and guilty of being overly-gullible rather than treacherous. Within the vehicles of what might be called establishment culture such as big-budget films, West end theatre and leading art galleries, there were seldom positive depictions of communists. Nor was there any real sympathy for any form of political radicalism that threatened to undermine the social and political status quo. In contrast there were always venues where political radicalism in all its guises could find an audience. This can be seen in independent theatre and minor galleries, though admittedly their audience was small. Although tempting, it would therefore be wrong to assume that British cultural institutions simply condemned out of hand any ideology or movement that sought fundamental change in British society. That would be too simple. In order to show the dangers in such generalisation, the following pages take a wide ranging view, exploring many examples of films, plays and works of art which analyse the various representations of communism and radicalism.

Another ambiguity to consider is the background to this study. There is clearly a sense in which cultural artefacts were shaped by wider social and political changes, such as the international crisis of the Cold War, the social reforms of the post-war years, the faltering British economy in the forties, and the lingering existence of political radicalism of the trade unions in the fifties. This thesis cannot examine the entirety of these themes in any depth. It instead seeks to sketch in the historical background, which is generally familiar, in order to put into context its analysis of film, theatre and art. A huge amount of work has of course been done by Marxists historians to show how ‘culture’ is simply a product of deeper economic relations (although Gramsci famously argued that culture could itself be used as an arena of class struggle)⁶. This thesis deliberately avoids setting up any elaborate model of how culture is ‘made’ by the wider society. It instead takes a common sense view that artistic productions in all their forms are not autonomous products shaped in some grand isolation from the world. But neither are they simply blind products of wider forces. Film-makers, playwrights and artists all possess the creative autonomy and freedom to develop their own ideas in their own way, even if they are both shaped by, and seek to shape, the world in which they live. Within this concept, there is a strong emphasis within this thesis relating to the domestic perception and therefore representation of communism.

This thesis does not, however, consider the concept of reception or delve too deeply into the reception of the individual films, plays and works of art considered. Reception is a huge subject under constant examination and such theoretical analysis would have detracted from the actual analysis of the works considered. It is therefore the representation of communism,

⁶ Gramsci, A., (ed. Nowell-Smith, G.), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London, 1998): ‘Problems of History and Culture’. See also J. Joll, *Antonio Gramsci* (New York, 1977), K. Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology* (London, 2002).

and associated political radicalism, that is to be the focus. Whilst reviews and popularity are discussed, this is in relation to the characterisations and stereotypical representations placed before the audience. This will show that it is the consideration of the domestic environment which dominates, highlighting the focus on domestic concerns: regardless of the machinations in Europe, it was what was happening at home that was most important. In order to contextualise such concerns it is important to examine the changing fortunes of domestic communists, as it is the representation of their potential threat to British values and traditions that is at the heart of the representation of communism within the creative media. This potential threat highlights the importance and post-war promotion of the concept of ‘Britishness’.

In its broadest sense, whether on film, stage, or in art, the promotion and celebration of ‘Britishness’ relates to the embodiment of British characteristics and traditions which bind and distinguish the British people, forming the basis of their unity and identity. It can therefore be an expression of British culture, seen through dress, habits, behaviour or customs which have a common, familiar or iconic quality that is readily identifiable with being British. These can be represented in the cultural sense by identifiable stereotypes, and they were presented to the British people within the popular media of film, theatre, and art to reinforce notions of identity, belonging and conformity.⁷ Those that represented a challenge to such recognisable characteristics were consequently presented as a threat to ‘Britishness’; they did not identify with the traditional concepts of democracy and freedom, they did not conform, they were associated with an alien ‘other’ who threatened the stability and harmony

⁷ For an examination of the concept of ‘Britishness’ see: D. Arnold (ed), *Cultural Identities and the Aesthetics of ‘Britishness’* (Manchester, 2004); Mike Storey & Peter Childs (eds), *British Cultural Identities* 3rd edition (London, 2003); K. Robbins, *Great Britain: Identities, Institutions and the Idea of Britishness* (London, 1997); P. Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (Abingdon, 2004) and T. L. Akehurst, *The Cultural Politics of Analytical Philosophy: Britishness and the Spectre of Europe* (London, 2010).

of the nation. The concept of ‘Britishness’ therefore established a cultural hegemony as leaders, be they political or cultural, needed to tailor their appeal to the inherited traditions in order to establish sustained support, be that at a commercial or political level⁸. They subsequently appealed to the prevailing attitudes and established values reflecting traditional concepts of belief and behaviour. This in turn helped to create and reinforce the concept of ‘Britishness’ and traditionalism to the detriment of alternative standpoints⁹.

Although in British culture there was a strong concept of national identity, there was not the overt separation between good and bad that could be seen in post-war American culture. Britain was more inclusive and far less overtly anti-communist, hence the representation of the disillusioned idealists or the corrupted and naïve. Whilst in American culture the stereotypes were far more robust in their political stance, in Britain a far more tolerant attitude was expressed: characters could be seen as misguided rather than revolutionary. Therefore whilst ‘Britishness’ was presented as being symbolic of national expectations and standards, communism (and by association radicalism) was seen as at best a challenge and at worst a threat to such standards and beliefs.

Having considered the key themes, the thesis will be broken down as follows and its aims established:

⁸ Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony examines capturing control of cultural output. By allowing the cultural leaders to have a dominant voice in mass media this enables them to utilise cultural norms and expectations (institutions, practices and beliefs) to instigate and support a greater social mission. Although expressed within the communist context, his theory of cultural hegemony translates within the framework of anti-communist ideology developing in Britain in the post-war era. A. Gramsci, & G. Nowell-Smith(ed), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London, 1998), J. Joll, *Antonio Gramsci* (New York, 1977), K. Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology* (London, 2002).

⁹ As argued in D. Arnold, *Cultural Identities and the Aesthetics of Britishness* (Manchester, 2004).

Chapter one: '*Flexible Scaffolding and Stepping away from Propaganda Studies*' is in two parts. Firstly it will briefly outline the methodology and cultural framework utilised throughout the thesis, and then discusses the historiography surrounding Cold War cultural research presenting a select thematic literature review. The complexities of the appropriate theoretical approaches within such a broad ranging analysis are considerable, and this chapter will outline the need to approach this multi-disciplinary study with a degree of flexibility whilst maintaining a focus on the overall goal. At its core this is an analysis of the representation of communism. Although this incorporates an analysis of theatre for example, it is not a theatre study, therefore the criteria and methodological approach should be relevant to the overall goals, and not determined by the analysis of its individual components. An awareness of the need for methodological flexibility within a constructive theoretical scaffolding allows the theoretical strategy to illuminate the connections between fields. This therefore supports the multi-disciplinary approach to the research. In this case, the analysis will demonstrate the cultural connections between the creative fields and the communication of political ideology, which in turn effects the socially constructed beliefs of the public.

An examination of the historiography surrounding Cold War cultural research will show that the creative productions of Britain in the post-war years have had very little consideration. Whilst there has been much written about post-war British film, theatre and art, there has been little consideration of the impact of Cold War framing within these creative fields. There has also been no examination of the representation of communism to the viewing public outside studies specifically relating to propaganda. All of these oversights will be addressed in this thesis. A thematic literature review will then detail and critically analyse selected works and this will be broken down into the following post-war themes: The CPGB,

Cold War cultural research, reforming Britain, British film, British theatre, and British art. The concept for the study will therefore be placed within the context of a cultural historical analysis incorporating the representation of a political ideology.

Chapter two: '*The Realities of the Domestic Communist Threat*' will consider the context of the Cold War and the role played in the post-war years by the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). For Britain, the post-war years represented political, social, and economic reform, all within the context of rebuilding, not just materially, after the war. The CPGB therefore had a unique opportunity in the post-war years to establish a strong support base but actually failed to rise to the challenge. Rather than exploiting the swing to the political left, they continually lost ground and their effectiveness and organisation was severely hindered due to in-fighting, contradictory policies and poor leadership. This chapter will therefore establish that rather than posing a realistic threat to political stability, the official representatives of communism in Britain were effectively impotent and their contribution to the creative output of the era was minimal.

Chapter three: *Stereotypes and Negative Reinforcement: Portrayals of Communism in British Cinema* will consider the post-war British film industry and its contribution to the stereotypical presentation of communism. As Britain struggled economically and saw the East of Europe fall under communist control, the rise of concerns relating to nuclear weapons, espionage, defection and the communist threat in the work place were presented to the British public through the media of film. British cinema allowed for the visual communication of social and political anxieties, but this was alongside the celebration of

traditional British values. This saw nostalgia and escapism initially dominating post-war film production. In reality all was not rosy in the post-war years and international anxieties were soon being placed within the domestic context. Bernard Miles' *Chance of a Lifetime* (1950) considered industrial unrest and communist influence in the workplace, and the struggles involved in the production and screening of the film will demonstrate how concerns regarding the perceived pro-communist ideology of the film very nearly resulted in its demise. Special consideration is then given to four films from the independent producer/directors John and Roy Boulting. All four films demonstrate how negative, aggressive and naive portrayals dominated: *Seven Days to Noon* and its depiction of nuclear paranoia and fear; *High Treason* and the fear of a domestic fifth column of revolutionary militants; *I'm All Right Jack* featuring militant shop stewards, communist unions and class divisions; and *Carlton-Browne of the F.O.* highlighting Cold War rivalry, imperialist attitudes and political ineptitude. From the early dramas to the later institutional satires, the work of the brothers will demonstrate how the negative representation of communist characters dominated. Although in film the positive, or at least sympathetic, presentation of communist characters was relatively invisible, within theatre production there was a broader range of characterisations.

Chapter four: *The Duality of Post-war Theatre in Britain* will discuss how theatre managed to cast aside its label as the bastion of traditionalism and provide opportunities for alternative representations of communism to the audience. The post-war fate of Terence Rattigan and Noel Coward will demonstrate the changing attitudes towards entertainment as dominant class divisions and traditional characterisations were challenged. In contrast to film, theatre offered alternative although not necessarily positive depictions of communist characters for

the audience to consider. This is demonstrated by an analysis of the creative output of institutionally backed theatre, such as the West End productions of H.M. Tennant Ltd and theatres supported by the Arts Council, compared to the smaller, independent, and often cash-strapped productions of companies like the Theatre Workshop. In general, institutionally supported theatre presented stereotypically negative communist portrayals, whilst smaller, independent productions would offer alternative communist characters which stressed the political turmoil of the post-war years set within the domestic environment. The considerable influence of the individuals Binkie' Beaumont, Anthony Quayle and Joan Littlewood will be discussed, and the influential work of the writers J.B. Priestley, Ewan MacColl and in particular Arnold Wesker will illustrate the alternative communist characterisations placed before the audience. Although the influence of commercial and institutional obligations did affect what was on offer, alternative depictions of communist characters and the domestic anxieties surrounding communism were there to see. This was in contrast to British post-war art where the portrayal of communism and the *avant garde* had tenuous links, as political concerns were disguised as social commentary often within the domestic environment.

Chapter five: *British Art, Social Realism and the Challenge to Traditionalism* will demonstrate how communism was openly associated with the emergence of social realism and the radical left. In addition, the influence of the CPGB will be examined alongside the creation of the short-lived Artists Group and the equally short-lived communist cultural magazine *Realism*. This will establish that regardless of the ideology behind both, they were ineffectual and lacked support at a financial, logistical and creative level. The influence of the critics on the political perception of social realism will also be discussed, particularly John Berger who championed the movement. The work of the artists John Bratby, Edward

Middleditch, Derrick Greaves, and Jack Smith will demonstrate how working class domestic environments and sparse landscapes were utilised to present oppression and class division. Surprisingly, post-war British art will be shown to be the least overtly political of the creative media, cloaking political intentions in social commentary in order to ensure exhibition space and audience attendance, as the *avant garde* proved itself to be commercially aware. Although the realism and the angst of the post-war years reflected the political concerns of the time, the subsequent explosion of abstraction, pop art, and op art demonstrated the anticipation of great cultural change and adaptation in the face of adversity within the political scheme.

Overall, this thesis will establish that the post-war British creative output in film, theatre, and art considered the ramifications of the changing social and political structure at both a domestic and international level. In doing so they represented the perceived threat of communism to the audience by utilising recognisable environments and familiar characterisations to which the public could relate. Within the three media considered, the representation of communists and communist ideology within film remained the most overtly recognisable and the one to which the public had the most access. Its popularity subsequently ensured that it also had the most influence. In contrast the dual nature of institutional and independent theatre offered alternative communist characters to the audience, but once again it was in the popular institutional theatre of the West End that recognisable negative stereotypes dominated. Art was different. Overt representations of communism disappeared beneath a cloak of social commentary as politics merged with social concerns and commercial considerations affected production. This resulted in the emergence of social realism, with the everyday environment used to represent the anxieties of the working class.

As art was admittedly the least popular form of visual representation, however, it could offer no challenge to the dominant stereotypes presented in film and commercial theatre. The prevailing negative representations of communism were therefore unchallenged and this helped to perpetuate the socially constructed anti-communist ideology within Britain. Although this gradually evolved from the fearful, sinister characterisations of the immediate post-war years to more farcical and empathetic portrayals, communism remained an alien ideology. It was the antithesis of democracy, freedom and the patriotism that was representative of ‘Britishness’ and traditionalism.

Flexible Scaffolding and Stepping Away from Propaganda Studies

This chapter will seek to do two main things. The first section will briefly examine some of the vast literature that has appeared over the past twenty years or so on what is broadly defined as ‘cultural history’. It concludes by arguing that although it is possible to make use of the various insights and arguments within the literature, no single approach can be applied uncritically to the broad subject matter of this thesis, namely examining how communism was represented in the post-war period in film, theatre and art. A determined eclecticism is therefore the best way of illuminating the whole subject. This will be cognizant of these various approaches and methods whilst at the same time rejecting the idea that any one of them alone is sufficient to frame the research questions posed in this thesis. The second part of the chapter will then go on to review a selection of literature that is more immediately addressed to the whole question of film, theatre and art. This will range from works which directly engage with issues of communism and culture through to others that are more loosely related to the subject. Although this whole process of concept clearing and literature review is in a sense designed to prove a negative, in that there is no single theory or approach that will

allow us to engage unproblematically with the material discussed in this thesis, it does have the advantage of identifying ideas and insights that will demonstrate the links between all three fields under consideration.

Flexible Scaffolding

The appropriate theoretical framework and methodology concerning the representation of communism in film, theatre, and art is a complex issue. When considering representation, there are a broad range of theoretical concepts and it is important to first determine the overall objective and establish how this thesis will contribute to the understanding of this area of research. For the representation of communism within the creative media, this relates to how the post-war public perception of communism was influenced by the events and personalities of the era, and most importantly by the representation of communists within the chosen fields of film, theatre and art. In addition, it must also consider how such representation was influenced by the political or social concerns of the creators. This research therefore utilises a broad range of primary source materials ranging from government and Communist Party archives to autobiographies, from films to court cases, from theatre reviews to costumes, and from sculpture to painting.

An overview of the creative media is one thing, but the first dilemma to solve regarding theory and method relates to the main categories of film, theatre and the arts. They are separate fields but are all representations; the visual communication of a series of images conveying messages. To then examine the influences upon the creation and perception of film differently than a play or a piece of art could disassociate one creative form from another

within the same environment. That would diminish the effect and relevance of the social and cultural bonds of the time. Although the different fields should be acknowledged and the approaches adapted for their examination, it should not be detrimental to the study of representation as a whole, which after all is the aim of the research.

This highlights a continual dilemma throughout this thesis as this is a study of representation, incorporating an analysis of film for example, not a film study. The criteria, theoretical guidelines, and methodological approach should therefore be relevant to the overall goals and not determined by the analysis of its individual components. This establishes the need for methodological flexibility within a constructive theoretical scaffolding, as this will allow the approach to illuminate the connections between fields. Such an approach will subsequently demonstrate the cultural connections in this multi-disciplinary analysis, which in turn highlights the socially constructed beliefs of the public.

The reasoning behind the fear of communism will be established by the examination of the a wide range of sources highlighting the political and cultural ramifications of the East/West divide in post-war Britain. This will place anti-communist ideology into context, presenting an analysis of the role of imagery as a communication tool to establish and reinforce socially constructed cultural assumptions and stereotypes. The representation of the traditional, conservative and democratic values of Britain and the perceived threat posed by communism will show how personal and public concerns were visually presented to the public through the creative media. Thus the promotion of ‘Britishness’ highlights British authority and validity, whilst the presentation of the Soviets and communism as being a direct threat to British

safety, freedom, and political and economic stability will demonstrate the reinforcement of domestic concerns. The visual media of film, theatre, and the arts, were therefore utilised to communicate the anxieties of the era at a social, political and cultural level.

It is understandably difficult to establish a workable theoretical framework broad enough to envelop such a range of sources without losing objectivity, and therefore a degree of flexibility is needed. This is a cultural study but within academia the concept of culture is both complex and disputed¹⁰. When you add in the analysis of representation this adds a further dimension as there is no doubt that images can, and indeed have been used to awaken or stifle public debate, encourage a collective emotional response or promote political support or antagonism. As images can be perceived differently by different people, it is the uniformity of response that indicates the establishment of a cultural framework within the social order. It is therefore not possible to divorce the appearance of an image from its significance, as it is the uniformed response of the social order that determines its power. As such, the media of film, theatre, and contemporary art become ingredients within culture, helping to establish a visual message and in turn a cultural response.

In the post-war years the image has become an integral part of popular culture. As visual artefacts, they illustrate the narratives underpinning events and change, and are therefore indicative of the moment in time of their creation and of the influences upon such. Consequently, in order to understand the significance of an image at a cultural level, one

¹⁰ Peter Burke argues that cultural history actually has no essence and to try to write a history of something unidentified is like trying to catch a cloud in a butterfly net: P. Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (New York, 1997), p.1. In contrast Green argues that cultural history can demonstrate how human beings make sense of the world around them: A. Green, *Cultural History* (Basingstoke, 2008), p.3, see also L. Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London, 2000), p.42

must consider the culture which has provided its conditions of existence and its significant meaning. Through analysing the representation of communism for example, we are highlighting the socially created boundaries within which the political ideology and physical representations of communism are displayed. One therefore cannot ignore the importance of imagery in cultural communication, as Alpers argues they are ‘central to the representation (in the sense of the formation of knowledge) of the world’¹¹. To limit the analysis to the image/performance and the accompanying text, as in what the eyes see and the ears hear in support, would divorce the observer from the necessary intellectual interpretation and perception of the images from their contemporary context. One cannot consider fragments and expect to understand the image as a whole.

Propaganda, communication and stereotypes.

When considering the representation of communism, images are utilised as primary or supporting evidence to highlight the differences between cultures, peoples, and political ideologies and serve to promote the perception of threat from the unknown. Within the concept of propaganda, communism was deliberately objectified by a range of imagery into a homogenous identity that was perceived to be a threat to Britain. This can be seen as Stalin became the personification of the ideals of the USSR, and the red flag with the symbol of the hammer and sickle was depicted wrapping itself around over Europe. In the post-war years, these political and cultural assumptions were already established, and the images to reinforce such attitudes would be utilised accordingly. By using familiar images, the purpose was to communicate a thematic tone within a recognisable context, therefore inspiring the viewer to an emotional response which reinforced the linguistic narrative. As its purpose was to both

¹¹ S. Alpers, *The Art of Describing : Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago, 2000), p.26

communicate a message and motivate a response, the creative media subsequently helped to create an iconographic construction of anti-communism within the domestic context.

As domestic concerns regarding the threat posed by communism grew, culturally constructed categories of marginalisation were portrayed which presented communism as being a different way of life, a different set of goals, and a different political ideology. Representation subsequently became politics as it demonstrated the interrelationships and power play between the perceived normality of British traditionalism, and the ‘otherness’ of Soviet inspired communism. As a rule, communism was portrayed not as a domestic creation but an alien import. It was therefore linked to the Soviets, to revolution, to Stalin, to the oppression of Eastern Europe and to the nuclear arms race. British it most certainly was not. Representation of this message may encompass setting, design, style, presentation, dress, make-up or even hairstyle. Broadly, it includes all those aspects that develop a political identity or image, therefore the representation contributes to the effective communication and reinforcement of the message. Within the concept of the portrayal of communists in post-war Britain, the stereotypical representation of a communist was subsequently utilised to present a negative image in a domestic setting. Through repetition, the images created subsequently became culturally accepted.

By portraying differences and potential threat, socially created prejudices were reinforced and representations became familiar stereotypes. Stereotypes are themselves created images as they can be likened to ‘pictures in the head’: mental reproductions of a perceived reality that

become associated with generalisations¹². From the simplest representation of light and dark symbolising safety and danger, to the more complex illustrations of sycophancy and guilt within the marginalised group, the illustrations seek to initiate an emotional response. The communists were subsequently associated with darkness and therefore potential, unseen danger. This can be seen in the Boulting film *High Treason* (1951)¹³ in which the communists are shown in dark clothing with their hats pulled down to place their face in shadow, or as militant workers in dark jackets with the collars pulled up, furtively attending dimly lit meetings. This is representative of the traditional use of the Judaeo-Christian symbolism of light and dark to signify good and evil, and was therefore a familiar strategy recognisable to the audience and immediately established the scenario.

As stereotypes develop, prejudice is a by-product and by exaggerating the differences in dress, speech, attitudes, beliefs, political ideologies etc., a contrast with perceived but culturally established normality is made. When they are then repeatedly presented to a receptive mass audience they reinforce the marginalisation of the group. Stereotypes in the media were certainly not new to the post-war era as class, race, and religious distinctions were a prominent feature of British film, theatre, and art. The post-war anxiety surrounding the domestic threat posed by Soviet influenced militants and potential saboteurs, however, ensured that social perceptions were influenced due to cumulative enforcement: each presentation reinforcing negative feelings and anxieties surrounding the potential threat to traditionalism and perceived normality.

¹² J. Evans & S. Hall (eds), *Visual Culture: The Reader* (London, 1999), p.461

¹³ For fuller analysis see the film chapter: *Stereotypes and negative reinforcement: Portrayals of communism in post-war British cinema*.

Fiske argues that it is possible to reduce the negative stereotypical perception by the portrayal of empathy towards the marginalised group, but this is rarely seen in the post-war era¹⁴. There are instances of ‘victims’ within the communist portrayals who have been corrupted and used by their ‘comrades’¹⁵. In the case of Wesker’s work there a sense of sympathy for a family torn apart¹⁶, but overall there are relatively few portrayals of sympathetic or empathetic communists and virtually none present in film, the most popular form of visual entertainment of the time. To get an overview it is therefore important to look beyond an individual piece of work but consider a series of works, or the creative output of an individual, in order to establish the true language or meaning behind his work. This concept has therefore led to the thematic analysis of the creative output of the Boulting Brothers in film, Arnold Wesker in theatre, and the work of the ‘Kitchen Sink’ painters in art as a series of case studies.

These case studies establish that the dominant factor remained domestic concerns regarding security and stability. As a result, the attitudes projected created the ‘them’ and ‘us’ mentality, with communism and communists separated from perceptions of normality. Through the creation and reinforcement of negative stereotypes which characterised the subversive tendencies of individuals, such attributes and negative associations were then transferred to the group as a whole. This led to the negative social categorisation of communists. This may be a social differentiation, but it highlights the link between cultural history and political history. Traditionally they have been viewed as being alternatives or

¹⁴ See J. Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London, 1989), also Z. Kunda, *Social Cognition, Making Sense of People* (Massachusetts, 1999)

¹⁵ Such as the character of Jimmy Ellis in *High Treason* (1951), a shop keeper and former soldier, portrayed as a naïve young man corrupted by communist promises and eventually murdered by his comrades after betraying his country.

¹⁶ When considering the Khan family as portrayed in the ‘Chicken Soup’ trilogy of plays by Arnold Wesker.

opposites when it comes to methodological approaches or theoretical frameworks, but there must be a consideration of the political motivations and realities behind the cultural promotion of anti-communism in Britain during the post-war years. In this case it is necessary to consider the realities of the communist threat within the domestic context, therefore taking into consideration the official source materials relating to the Communist Party of Great Britain and their influence, or lack of it, within the domestic political scene. It is therefore appropriate to incorporate an empirical analysis of officially compiled and archived materials, in addition to the broad ranging cultural analysis. Consequently one cannot ignore or underestimate the importance of flexibility as invariably there are contributory factors which determine a mode of approach which is contrary to a purely cultural analysis.

Regardless of the origin of the sources, be they official political records or works of art, a practical systematic approach needs to be taken. One thing that is relevant, however, is that the perception of representations can alter as its meaning is renegotiated within the particular contemporary circumstances of the viewer¹⁷. Therefore an individual watching the television at home would interpret the image differently than through the shared experience of watching in the cinema or the theatre. Also the setting of a work in a particular type of gallery would evoke different experiences than a casual communal or private viewing. Group behaviour, dress, proximity, expectations and social conditions can all effect the reception by the audience making the social aspect an important modality. In this sense the imagery of

¹⁷ See J. Fiske, *Reading the Popular* (London, 1989) and its companion *Understanding Popular Culture* (London, 1989). Fiske argues that the re-negotiation of meaning is consequently inescapable as the audience has its own interpretations of the image and that it is looked at differently within different contexts. He states that there is a difference between mass culture and popular culture and that the audience uses, abuses and subverts the products of such to create their own meaning and message, which can consequently effect the social and political dynamics.

cinema, theatre and the arts consequently mirrored the social and political concerns of the era as popular culture (as argued by Fiske) reflected popular anxieties. For the large, often working class audiences of the cinema, overt representations of communism illustrated concerns of militancy in the workplace and fear of nuclear war. In contrast in the quieter more middle class environment of theatre they were faced with disillusioned youth and domestic communists with a crisis of confidence. In an art gallery, although a communal space, the work is not usually viewed as a group activity, and here you had to look to find communism hiding within the context of social commentary, with a relatively exclusive audience raising little attention.

Our use of images and our appreciation of such therefore perform a social function as well as an aesthetic one, as they reflect our beliefs and attitudes towards ourselves and others in our society. Images are in effect visual conversations which communicate emotion, intellect, beliefs and attitudes not just of their creator, but also by their assimilation, of society. This ensures that images should not be considered the province of one discipline, as many contributory factors influence the final product and its perception by the audience. It is therefore vital that we have a pragmatic approach which allows us to adapt to the changing assumptions of the multi-disciplinary approach. One must consider the sources in their original setting, however, as to single out something that was previously part of a collective presentation is to give it false significance. A film or play is a complete visual presentation and to single out a specific ‘still’ out of context of the presentation as a whole is to isolate a tiny portion and ignore the overall visual narrative. In the same sense the collective works of the creator are a more complete presentation of his visual journey, hence the analysis of a

series the works as a reflection of the changing attitudes within post-war British society (as utilised in all three fields).

Whether considering individual pieces or a series of work, historiography has become intimately associated with images of the past as we can associate a historical era with its visual representation within a contemporary context. Outside of academia, public recognition of popular representations of an era, through film and theatre particularly, cause immediate recognition of a historical event or time period. Ask a person to describe an influential Russian today and they may well conjure up an image of a successful, very rich business man associated with a football club, such as the modern stereotypical creation of the character of Yuri in Guy Ritchie's 'RocknRolla' (2008). In the post-war years it would have been very different. Influential Russians did not wear designer pink jumpers stylishly draped over their shoulders; they were dark clad, subversive, threatening characters to be treated with suspicion. You can therefore recognise the time period by the contemporary stereotypical representation of the character, demonstrating their success at communicating a message.

In order to understand the message we first need to distinguish between what we actually see, and what we infer through intellect. It is our mind which creates meaning, as perception is a psychological process of analysis and interpretation with the image acting as stimuli. As a result, it is therefore perfectly understandable that when studying images there is no single approved methodology or one theoretical framework to apply, as all interpretation and analysis will be influenced by the individual and their own perception and meaning. This is where the use of stereotypes again makes sense as they represent a simplistic form of memory aid which supports an intellectual and emotional response. We need such

recognisable memory aids as a point of reference. It allows us to visually describe the world and develop a recognisable visual language through which the masses can communicate, hence the representation of the familiar stereotype. Without such signposting within the creative media there would be visual chaos, and how would you know who the bad guys were?

Having considered relevant theoretical standpoints there is no single theoretical approach that can actually serve to shape the presentation of all the material. The approach therefore has to be an essentially eclectic empirical analysis incorporating cultural artefacts whilst accepting of the need for flexibility. The connections between the fields of film, theatre, and art will be illuminated by maintaining a focus on the overall goals of the research rather than the individual components under examination. This can be seen in their context, their portrayals, their anxieties and their goals. From the overtly communist representations in film, through the more sympathetic offerings available in theatre, to the social commentary in art, communism was portrayed as not only reflecting concerns regarding safety and security, but also domestic anxieties and social change. As such, the thesis highlights the cultural similarities surrounding the representation of an alien political ideology whilst demonstrating the sliding scale of overtly political characterisations of communism from film through to art.

Stepping Away from Propaganda Studies.

Having discussed the considerable dilemmas surrounding theory and methodology, there is also a significant amount of literature on themes ranging from British communists right through to the social realism movement in art. The following pages will review relevant

selections to highlight key developments and their application to this work. To assist this will be broken down thematically, beginning with an examination of the domestic communist threat through the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). This will show that previously there has been virtually no consideration of the policies and influence of the National Cultural Committee (NCC), and that the party cultural magazine *Realism* has been ignored alongside the contribution of the Artists Group. All three are considered within this thesis. In addition, when discussing the historiography surrounding Cold War cultural research, this has been primarily concerned with the contest for cultural dominance between the United States and the USSR. In comparison, the creative productions of Britain in the post-war years have had minimal consideration regarding the depiction and examination of communism in its varied forms. Within the fields of post-war British film, theatre, and art, although there has been considerable academic and critical work produced, any analysis of the impact of the Cold War ideology within these creative fields has been specifically related to propaganda. In addition, film studies have tended to focus on the establishment of ‘British film’ identity, theatre studies have concentrated on the impact of the new, ‘young’ challenging theatre of the fifties and art history on the development of figurative art and abstraction. In contrast, this study will demonstrate how the media of film, theatre and art in post-war Britain visually portrayed communists and communist ideology to the viewing public.

Communism in Britain

As a starting point the foundation theme of the strength of the communist movement in Britain provides a substantial amount of literature. There have been numerous works which have examined the fortunes of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the aftermath of war, all of which consider similar themes. As a typical example, Willie Thompson’s work relates

to the history of communism in Britain and the CPGB, often incorporating a personal account of his experience within the party. His work is primarily concerned with the political ideology of the movement and its effectiveness at both a domestic and international level. In ‘*The Good Old Cause: British Communism 1929-1991*’ Thompson explores the history of the CPGB, and in particular for this study, charts its slide from the heyday of the war , through the crisis of 1956, the loss of its industrial base and the subsequent decline and crisis of identity¹⁸. The cultural influence of the party is virtually ignored and this is a theme which continues throughout the historiography surrounding the CPGB. The changing fortunes of the CPGB is again reflected in both Noreen Branson’s ‘*History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1941-51*’ and John Callaghan’s ‘*Cold War Crisis and Conflict: The CPGB 1951-68*’ to name but two. Considerable attention is paid to all aspects of the political and social machinations surrounding the post-war fortunes of the party, with particular attention paid to the failure to maximize the initial post-war swing to the left within British politics¹⁹. In both works, however, scant attention is paid to the cultural policies of the party and the workings of the Central Cultural Committee (NCC). In addition there is virtually no consideration of the cultural influence within the creative media other than a passing nod to the work of the Theatre Workshop under the direction of Ewan McColl. Even in ‘*Party People, Communist Lives*’, a collection of biographical essays, there is no representation of the cultural contribution of a party member²⁰. Although ‘*Communists and British Society 1920-1991: People of a Special Mould*’ presents personalised accounts of individual members' histories, it again focuses on an intellectual and ideological approach whilst a cultural analysis is again absent.²¹ Previous works that have considered the fortunes of the CPGB have therefore been

¹⁸ W. Thompson, *The Good Old Cause: British Communism 1920-1991* (London, 1992).

¹⁹ N. Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1941-51* (London, 1997) and J. Callaghan, *Cold War Crisis and Conflict: The CPGB 1951-68* (London, 2003)

²⁰ J. McIlroy, K. Morgan & A. Campbell, *Party People, Communist Lives* (London, 2001)

²¹ K. Morgan, G. Cohen, & A. Flinn, *Communists and British Society 1920-1991: People of a Special Mould* (London, 2007)

studies of social and political history. Although this research will examine the realities of the communist threat at a domestic level, and conclude that in the post-war years the CPGB posed no substantial threat to British political stability, it is at heart a cultural analysis. It therefore also examines CPGB archive materials relating to the National Cultural Committee, and in particular the role and influence of the Artists Group and the cultural magazine *Realism*²². This study therefore addresses a gap in the scholarly literature as it is a cultural analysis of the influence of the CPGB in post-war Britain, and examines the cultural representation of communism within the media of film, theatre, and art.

Cultural Cold War

Moving on from the domestic analysis, within an international context research surrounding communism and the conflicting ideologies of the Cold War has produced several works to examine the resulting cultural contest. These are mainly centred on the influences of the media, social practices, and symbolic representations, but all within the concept of propaganda. A consideration of the British contribution to the cultural representation of communism is relatively ignored. The major focus has therefore been on the cultural contest between the USA and the USSR, such as Frances Stonor Saunders' '*Who Paid the Piper? : The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*'²³. This examines the challenges faced by writers and artists within the context of McCarthyism, alongside the suppression of alternative communist voices and the covert influence of the CIA in the promotion of Western principles. This study is useful in that it examines the covert CIA financial backing of *Encounter* magazine, edited by Stephen Spender, and therefore considers US influence within

²² See Chapter 5.

²³ F. Stonor Saunders, '*Who Paid the Piper? : The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*' (London, 1999). This was followed by the American version '*The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*' (New York, 2001).

British intellectual discussion and cultural production. Although the book is written within the context of CIA activities, it offers an analysis of the suppression of an alternative political ideology within a cultural context. In addition, Modovoi's *Rebels: Cold War Culture and the Birth of Identity* examines the influence of the Cold War on the development of pop culture, as the post-war years moved into the rebellion of the late fifties and the perceived freedoms of the sixties²⁴. Although this centres on the development of masculine young rebels in popular American culture, it is useful in that it provides an examination of the creation and promotion of alternative cultural stereotypes.

One study which looks beyond the USA is *Cultures at War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in South East Asia*, which examines the media of film, theatre, literature, art, and the popular press in the response to the Cold War in South East Asia²⁵. This collection of essays, edited by Tony Day and Maya Liem, relates to the search for national identity and independence from the forties through to the seventies, following the emergence of the People's Republic of China. Whilst the representation of communism within the various media is considered, the focus of the study remains that of the cultural expression of national identity, rather than an examination of the representation of communism. It is also firmly rooted within the ideologies of South East Asia. This study is valuable in considering the cultural messages within domestic sources, whilst it also offers an alternative voice to the cultural studies relating to Cold War 'Orientalism' by writers such as Christina Klein²⁶.

²⁴ Most notably highlighted in L. Modovoi, *Rebels: Cold War Culture and the Birth of Identity* (Durham, 2006)

²⁵ T. Day & M.H.T. Liem, *Cultures at War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in South East Asia* (Cornell, 2010)

²⁶ C. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia and the Middlebrow Imagination* (Berkeley, 2003).

Post-War Britain

Having considered the fluctuating fortunes of the CPGB and the examination of the cultural Cold War in the post-war years, at a domestic level the era was one of considerable challenges. For Britain, the years 1945-63 saw considerable social, political, and economic upheaval and reform, and the era has provided a wealth of studies relating to the post-war changes, though cultural studies tend to focus on specific themes. Works such as Addison's *No Turning Back: The Peacetime Revolutions of Post-war Britain* reflect an analysis of the political and social transformations of the era, from the practical application and ideology of welfare reform, to the perceived sexual liberation of the sixties and the emergence of a multi-racial Britain and educational reform²⁷. Although the study provides both analysis and information at an economic, political and social level, the consideration of cultural developments is minimal and the ideology of the Cold War and domestic communism are ignored. Sandbrook's *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* provides a valuable analysis of the cultural developments of the era within the context of social and political reform. In addition it analyses how critics, the press and even curators had the power to make or break a film, play or exhibition and this will be further expanded within the analysis of the representation of communism²⁸.

In Marwick's *British Society Since 1945*, a further study of post-war Britain, the cultural analysis of film, theatre and art has been used to support arguments concerning changes and challenges to social assumptions, particularly relating to class and sex²⁹. Communism and the

²⁷ P. Addison, *No Turning Back: The Peacetime Revolutions of Post-war Britain* (Oxford, 2010).

²⁸ D. Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London, 2005). This book's relevance is limited in that it relates to 1956 onwards and therefore misses the important years of 1945-55.

²⁹ A. Marwick, *British Society Since 1945* (London, 1982). Also considered works such as P. French & M Sissons (eds), *The Age of Austerity: 1945-51* (London, 1963)

representation of such within the domestic cultural output fails to attract any attention as the focus of analysis is different. This can be seen in his analysis of *I'm All Right Jack* as being purely representative of class divisions. Additionally, Marquand and Sheldon's *Ideas that Shaped Post-war Britain* presents a collection of essays which consider the how the political, economic, and social post-war environment evolved, and in turn how this impacted on the cultural climate. Once again within this study there is no consideration of the cultural impact of communism or British communists, be it directly or otherwise³⁰. This trend in virtually ignoring both the CPGB and the potential influence from domestic communists demonstrates the perceived lack of impact of communism. In reality this thesis will show that the representation of communism and domestic communists within post-war British culture actually helped to reinforce a socially constructed anti-communist ideology and preserve the concept of British traditionalism.

One author who directly addresses the cultural influence within social and political reform is Alan Sinfield, although his approach is that of a literary analysis in which popular visual culture provides a supporting role. In *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-war Britain*, Sinfield presents an analysis of how politics challenged and influenced cultural output in the post-war years, looking at themes ranging from jazz to television³¹. Within his analysis of the politics of the era, communism is considered within the concept of Marxism, but there is no analysis of the CPGB or the cultural influence of the party at a domestic level. The study does however examine the creation of culturally recognised stereotypes as presented through the visual media, and how these help to establish a recognised identity. It is also a useful examination of general cultural output and the influences upon such, but the analysis has a

³⁰ D. Marquand & A. Sheldon (eds), *Ideas that Shaped Post-war Britain* (London, 1996)

³¹ A. Sinfield *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-war Britain* (London, 1997)

literary base. Whilst the work of John Osborne and Arnold Wesker is considered, this is done within the concept of challenging the genres of traditional theatre and the depiction of class divisions, rather than as an examination of the representation of a political ideology. Within this thesis analysing the representation of communism, Sinfield's analysis is expanded further by considering the creation of recognisable domestic communists in British film and theatre, and how the perceived threat they posed to traditional values and expectations was presented to the audience.

British Film

Within the cultural analysis of post-war Britain, the changing fortunes of British film and the establishment of a recognised identity within British cinema production has been the subject of several works. This has included the examination of the influence of Cold War ideology, but has tended to focus on political influence and propaganda, as seen in Shaw's *British Cinema and the Cold War*³². Shaw examines how Cold War issues are refracted through the productions of the British Film Industry and analyses the public reaction to these messages of propaganda. He argues that film should not be seen as merely passive reflectors of public opinion or taste, but as potentially active producers of political and ideological meaning. In doing so, Shaw considers the relationship between film makers, censors, Whitehall, and the government's propaganda strategies whilst also arguing how film can reflect public consciousness. This is a detailed analysis of how the British government deliberately attempted to integrate cinema into their anti-communist campaign, and shows how films contributed to the siege mentality that characterised Britain in the fifties. Shaw's work is a

³² T. Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War: The State, Propaganda and Consensus* (London, 2001). Shaw has also recently published *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds* (Kansas, 2010) with Denise Youngblood, which utilises a comparative analysis of 10 films (5 American and 5 Soviet) to show how the representation of the 'other' has changed over time and under what influences. This study purely relates to the USA/USSR cultural cold war.

study of cultural propaganda within a Cold War context, and his analysis of British films is very useful, though the emphasis is on their journey to production and their propaganda values, rather than the analysis of the representation of communism. Overall the book presents a detailed analysis of the political events and attitudes of the era and how they affected cinematic output. This thesis will further expand this research by considering the visual representation of communist ideology within the domestic context, through the creation and reinforcement of recognisable cultural stereotypes. In films produced with profit and entertainment in mind, it will demonstrate how even in the work of independent producers such as the Boulting brothers, sympathetic communist characterisations were absent from British film, and whether portrayed in drama or comedy, the demonization or lampooning of communist characters persisted.

Aside from the examination of propaganda, there are numerous studies which consider the development of British cinema, in particular detailing its emergence from the shadow of Hollywood and the establishment of a ‘British film’ identity in the post-war years³³. Within the examination of recognisable ‘British films’, the celebration of traditional values and the portrayal of typically British characters is key to understanding the portrayal of the ‘otherness’ of those who pose a threat to such traditionalism. By highlighting the differences, they help to establish the recognisable ‘otherness’ of communist characters. Studies specifically relating to the development of post-war cinema, such as Barr’s *Ealing Studios*; Balcon’s *Michael Balcon Presents: A Lifetime of Films*; Kemps’ *Lethal Innocence: The Cinema of Alexander Mackendrick* and Burton, O’Sullivan, & Wells’ *The Family Way: The*

³³ Such as A. Aldgate & J. Richards, *Best of British: Cinema and Society from 1930 to Present* (London, 2002); R. Armes, *A Critical History of British Cinema* (London, 1978); J. Ashby & A. Higson (eds), *British Cinema Past and Present* (London, 2000), A. Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford, 1995); R. Murphy (ed), *The British Cinema Book* (3rd ed, London, 2009); S. Street, *British National Cinema* (London, 1997) and *British Cinema in Documents* (London, 2000)

Boulting Brothers and British Film Culture examine the concepts and intentions surrounding initial post-war cinema production and the creation of internationally recognised, and domestically popular ‘British cinema’³⁴. This cultural construction of ‘Britishness’ and the celebration of the camaraderie of the war years allowed the demonization of communism to be put into context: it was a threat to a nation re-establishing its own identity in the midst of considerable challenges and reforms.

Film studies have also considered the depiction of social problems as seen in the realism that emerged with the New Wave of British cinema in the sixties. This can be seen in Hill’s *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-63* and Lay’s *British Social Realism from Documentary to Brit Grit*³⁵. Within these studies traditional gender roles, patrician values and concepts of morality are questioned, whilst mainstream cinemas representation of the working class is described as ‘patronising’. Changing concepts of social history are therefore portrayed on film as themes such as sexual freedom, juvenile delinquency and working class discontent are analysed. These studies are useful in examining the changing nature of cinema as a form of social commentary, in particular relating to the changing representation of class divisions, but the consideration of political characterisations is virtually invisible. The historiography surrounding post-war British cinema has therefore focussed on the emergence of a recognisable ‘British’ cinema from under the shadow of Hollywood, be that nostalgic cinema of the immediate post-war years, or the challenging social realism as we moved into the sixties. Any studies which have considered the context of the Cold War have related to

³⁴ C. Barr, *Ealing Studios* (London, 1993); M. Balcon, *Michael Balcon Presents: A Lifetime of Films* (London, 1969); P. Kemp *Lethal Innocence: The Cinema of Alexander Mackendrick* (London, 1991); A. Burton, T. O’Sullivan, & P. Wells (eds) *The Family Way: The Boulting Brothers and British Film Culture* (Trowbridge, 1999)

³⁵ J. Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-63* (London, 1986) and S. Lay *British Social Realism From Documentary to Brit Grit* (London, 2002)

the USA/USSR cultural conflict, or have considered British cinema in the context of a mode of propaganda. This study will further expand the examination of post-war British film by considering the representation of communist characters and communist ideology within a domestic context. Through the analysis of a series of films and producers, this will demonstrate how the creation and reinforcement of recognisable stereotypical communist and British characters contributed to the creation of a culturally constructed anti-communist ideology.

British Theatre

Recently post-war theatre has also received considerable attention from scholars, with a prime example being Billington's *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945*³⁶. Billington's book is both a cultural analysis of the developments in theatre and a social study in which the changes of the era are seen through the lens of the stage. Within this framework he also links changing attitudes with changing concepts of identity. Billington's work is broken down chronologically, grouped into 1945-50 representing the age of austerity; 1950-55 as the era in which the theatre attempted to shake off its post-war sloth; 1955-59 is considered to be the rebellious phase when new styles and attitudes emerged; and finally for this study 1960-63 when traditional theatre was usurped by the popularity of both new writers and new themes. This thesis will expand Billington's work to encompass an analysis of the representation of communism and left-wing radicalism in theatre. This will include the communication of personal politics on stage, and also the development of alternative communist characterisations through examination of not just the work of individual writers,

³⁶ M. Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945* (London, 2007). Also see R. Huggett, *Binkie Beaumont: Eminent Grise of the West End Theatre 1933-73* (London, 1989) which examines the broad ranging influence and promotion of traditionalism by H.M. Tennant Productions, the dominant theatrical producers of the West End under the control of Beaumont.

but also the producers and directors. This allows for a more in-depth analysis of the politics and influence of independent theatre groups such as the Theatre Workshop, highlighting the division in post-war theatre between institutionally supported and independent theatre. This division is further demonstrated when one considers the autobiographies of Anthony Quayle and Joan Littlewood as representative of opposing attitudes regarding the role of theatre³⁷. This offers a valuable insight into the dilemmas faced in the portrayal of communist characters on stage, and the perceived role of theatre as a communicator of political ideology.

The theme of the emergence of ‘new’ theatre is addressed in Shellard’s *The Golden Generation: New Light on Post-War British Theatre* which considers how the emergence of new writers and new themes challenged the traditionalism of the West End³⁸. Using extensive primary sources including oral testimony, Shellard charts the new shifts in domestic theatre, in particular focussing on the influence of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre and its promotion of new writers with new ideas. He therefore highlights not only the shifts in genre, style and performance, but also the changes in perspective and the emergence of principal working class characters. Shellard does consider the influence of the Theatre Workshop under the leadership of Joan Littlewood, however, the focus tends to relate to the company’s different techniques and approach to production, rather than the political ideology behind the pre-dominantly communist company. The representation of communism or communist characters was therefore not a serious consideration. For groups such as the Theatre Workshop and writers like Wesker, however, the representation of communist

³⁷ A. Quayle, *Time to Speak* (London, 1990) and J. Littlewood, ‘Joan’s Book’ (London, 1994).

³⁸ D. Shellard, (ed) *The Golden Generation: New Light on Post-War British Theatre* (London, 2008). Further considerations of the influence of ‘new’ attitudes in theatre can be seen in examples such as T.W. Browne, *Playwrights Theatre: English Stage Company at the Royal Court* (London, 1975); C. Chambers, *The Story of the Unity Theatre* (London, 1989); H. Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story* (London, 1981); P. Roberts, *The Royal Court Theatre and the Modern Stage* (Cambridge, 1999); R Little & E McLaughlin, *The Royal Court Theatre: Inside Out* (Abingdon, 2007).

characters to which the audience could relate was a primary concern. To expand this theme, this thesis will examine the creation of both antagonistic and sympathetic communist characters on the domestic stage, which in turn will demonstrate the contrasting attitudes to communism between the institutionally supported theatre of the West End and independent theatre groups such as Theatre Workshop. In addition, although the work of the writers John Osborne, Arnold Wesker, and J.B. Priestley has been considered before, this analysis will examine how communist and overtly left-wing personalities were presented to the audience, and helped to establish recognisable characters within an environment familiar to the audience. This will demonstrate how utilising familiar stereotypes and setting them within the domestic environment contributed to the creation of an anti-communism post-war ideology.

Although the portrayal of communism in post-war British theatre has not been considered before, Nicholson's *British Theatre and the Red Peril: The Portrayal of Communism 1917-1945* did examine the effect of growing anti-communist anxieties in the inter war years³⁹. Nicholson's study considers the role of theatre in both communicating and manipulating political agenda by examining the promotion of politically motivated play-scripts, and the machinations of the Lord Chamberlain's office to suppress them. This provides a useful analysis of the pre-dominantly right-wing attitude prevalent in mainstream theatre prior to the war. In addition, it demonstrates how the pre-war left-wing theatre group Theatre of Action eventually lead to the creation of the Theatre Workshop. Nicholson's study is primarily concerned with the role of the institutions of government in the pre-war suppression of

³⁹ B. Nicholson, *British Theatre and the Red Peril: The Portrayal of Communism 1917-1945* (Exeter, 1999). Another work which considers the inter war years is B. Barker & M.B. Gale (eds), *British Theatre Between the Wars* (Cambridge, 2000) this collection of essays has very little consideration of the influence of communism in theatre focussing on changing trends and in particular changing attitudes to the portrayal of gender and sexuality.

subversive material, and therefore this post-war analysis will further expand that examination to include the changing role of the Lord Chamberlain's office in the years 1945-63.

British Art

When we move to look at the developments in art there is a considerable amount of material, but once again very little consideration of the influence of communism or even radicalism within British art. It is the contest between figurative art and abstraction which have predominantly concerned scholars. One writer who addresses this contest within a Cold War context is James Hyman in his work *The Battle for Realism: Figurative Art in Britain during the Cold War-1960*⁴⁰. Hyman discusses the battle within modernism between figurative art and abstraction, with the realism of figurative art placed at the radical vanguard position. Here radical art is seen not as a reflection of political ideology but of stylistic and thematic radicalism, however, when one considers the breakdown within the realism movement, political distinctions become clearer. Hyman separates 'modernist' realism from the social realism of the Beaux Arts Group, known as the Kitchen Sink Painters. By highlighting the social realists, this creates a focus on predominantly left-wing artists, promoted by the Marxist critic John Berger and associated with the Artists Group and the CPGB. Hyman's work also provides an examination of the role of the critics in establishing both validity and a commercial market for the work, with his critical gaze falling squarely on the contest between Berger and David Sylvester. He uses this to highlight the conflicting opinions within the artistic mainstream regarding working class depictions and the erosion of traditional

⁴⁰ J. Hyman, *The Battle for Realism: Figurative Art in Britain During the Cold War 1945-1960* (London, 2001). Hyman also wrote an excellent work on Derrick Greaves, one of the Kitchen Sink Painters, charting his entire career and detailing how his work evolved away from social realism towards a more heraldic style inspired by pop art as tastes changed. See J. Hyman, *Derrick Greaves: From Kitchen Sink to Shangri La* (London, 2007). The realism movement was also examined in D. Cherry & J. Steyn, *The Moment of Realism* (Sheffield, 1984) which discusses an exhibition at the Sheffield Gallery in 1984.

expectations within the artistic establishment. Although a Cold War timeframe is used, Hyman's work is not political history supported by a cultural analysis, but art history that discusses the politics of art within a contemporary condition. For Hyman, the Cold War context most specifically related to the perceived dominance of the USA at an artistic level. His work therefore places the politics of British art within the international cultural contest. In contrast, this thesis will examine the political ideology of the individual artists and how their work reflected their personal views at a domestic level. It will also discuss how the political standpoints of the critics and supporting Artists Groups affected the perception of the social realist as left-wing radicals.

When considering such influences, John Berger provides a crucial link between the social realists, the Artists Group, the CPGB and Marxism. As an art critic he championed the work of the social realists, and his *Ways of Seeing* examines the interpretation, social presence and relevance of imagery and art⁴¹. Written from an independent perspective though with undisguised Marxist doctrine, Berger's work examines the political perspectives from which the viewer approaches imagery, and his analysis acts as a counter balance to the establishment criteria surrounding the interpretation of art and imagery. Berger's long standing 'competition' with David Sylvester also provides a clearly drawn separation between institutional and independent approaches to the depiction of the everyday working class environment, as seen in social realism. In contrast to Berger's work, David Sylvester's *About Modern Art: Critical Essays 1948-2000* examines post-war art and in particular the

⁴¹ J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London, 1972). Berger went on to write *About Looking* (London, 1980) which further develops the analysis of perception and visual interpretation, and the role of observation utilising the analysis of works of art. For a collection of his articles from the New Statesman which detail his contest with David Sylvester see J. Berger, *Permanent Red: Essays in Seeing* (London, 1960)

influences on British art from a more traditionalist perspective⁴². His dismissive attitude towards the ‘Kitchen Sink’ painters of social realism is demonstrated as the significance of their work is virtually ignored, with praise heaped on British artists such as Moore, Auerbach and in particular Bacon. An assessment of the concepts of social realism can also be found in Tucker’s *British Social Realism in the Arts Since 1940*, a collection of essays which deals with British culture as a whole, with sources ranging from poetry to popular television⁴³. Such sources are used to examine the social, political and economic context of social realism, and the work of Bratby, Greaves, Smith and Middleditch are examined as representative of the genre⁴⁴. Whilst there is some consideration of the political ideology behind the art, this analysis is limited with no consideration of the Artists Group or the CPGB.

When we consider the individual artists or the ideology of the Beaux Arts Group sources are extremely limited as their contribution to the development of post-war art is generally ignored. A rare example is *The Kitchen Sink Painters* but this is actually an exhibition catalogue with an introduction by Frances Spalding relating to a retrospective held at Mayor Gallery in London in 1991⁴⁵. It contains a brief biography of each artist and although the analysis of the paintings is comprehensive, there is no consideration of the ideology behind the movement. Studies relating to individual artists within the group are equally limited as on the whole they have been neglected within art history. Bratby was the subject of Yacowar’s *The Great Bratby: A Portrait of John Bratby* which considers not only how his work evolved

⁴² D. Sylvester, *About Modern Art: Critical Essays 1948-2000* (rev. 2nd ed, London, 2002). Sylvester was a long standing champion of the work of Bacon and his *Interviews with Francis Bacon: The Brutality of Fact* (London, 1975) is a record of personal and openly honest interviews with the artist over a period of 25 years.

⁴³ D. Tucker (ed), *British Social Realism in the Arts Since 1940* (Basingstoke, 2011)

⁴⁴ G. Whiteley, *Re-presenting Reality, Recovering the Social: The Poetics and Politics of the Social Realism and Visual Art* in D. Tucker (ed), *British Social Realism in the Arts Since 1940* (Basingstoke, 2011)

⁴⁵ F. Spalding, *The Kitchen Sink Painters* (London, 1991)

over his career but also his self-destructive character⁴⁶. In addition to his artistic output, Bratby's writing is also discussed as it reflected his inner turmoil and his desperate desire to understand the challenges and reforms in a post-war Britain he felt no connection to⁴⁷. Yacowar's work is dramatic and illuminative, but it is also quite journalistic in style and there is limited consideration of the political motivation behind his emergence as a social realist (and indeed his move away from that style). The focus remains on Bratby's self-promotion and the need for a form of acceptance. The work is useful in understanding his eccentricities and his contemporary commercial status, and it demonstrates how Bratby was considered to be the artistic equivalent of John Osborne: the angry young man of art.

Overall, within the examination of post-war British art, it is evident that social realism and the representation of communism have been ignored. In contrast this thesis will provide a contextual analysis of the emergence of social realism and discuss how it challenged class driven artistic etiquette, daring to illustrate the lives of the working class. It will also expand the assessment of the ideology of social realism, and will consider the formation and influence of the Artists Group of the CPGB, and its support of the movement thereby openly associating it with communism. This will also demonstrate the links between those representing social realism, artists and critics alike, and the CPGB. This will address a gap in the scholarly literature as they have been totally ignored in the historiography surrounding both British art and the history of the CPGB. The analysis of *Realism*, the cultural magazine of the Artists Group has also been totally ignored within the historiography of the CPGB and

⁴⁶ M. Yacowar, *The Great Bratby: A Portrait of John Bratby* (Middlesex, 2008)

⁴⁷ Bratby published four semi-autobiographical novels which considered the futility, banality and despair of modern life, depicting an artist in crisis: *Breakdown* (London, 1960); *Breakfast of Elevenses* (London, 1961); *Break-Pedal Down* (London, 1962); and *Break 50 Kill* (London, 1963).

British art history, and this thesis will present an examination of its production, its ideology and ultimately its failure.

Having considered the relevant historiography, a cultural analysis of the influence of the CPGB, and an examination of the portrayal of communism and communists outside of studies specifically related to propaganda have been previously ignored. Cold War studies have also focused on the cultural contest between the USA and USSR and omitted British cultural production. As regards the three media studied, in film the representation of communist and radical characters has been ignored outside of propaganda studies and even then their analysis has only played a supporting role. In addition the work of the Boulting Brothers has received no consideration outside of the concept of British film identity. Whilst post-war theatre has lately received considerable attention, the representation of communism has been ignored, alongside an analysis of the cultural significance of the work of pro-communist writers and producers such as those of the Theatre Workshop and Arnold Wesker. There has also been a total lack of any previous consideration regarding the Artists Group of the CPGB or the cultural magazine Realism, nor has there previously been any analysis of social realism and its political context or influence. All of these matters are addressed in this analysis of the representation of communism in post-war British film, theatre and art.

The Realities of the Domestic Communist Threat:

“That lot run a revolution? They couldn’t run a whelk stall”⁴⁸

Having noted in the previous chapter that the visual representations of communists and communism are shaped by the wider historical context, this chapter seeks to expand that analysis and achieve three goals. It will examine the domestic and geopolitical context which shaped the changing (though largely negative) perceptions of communism in British society, and place the support of the Communist Party of Great Britain within a Cold War context. It will also consider the attitudes within the CPGB towards the role of culture, which in turn will highlight the perceived links between communist ideology and radicalism showing how communists and those associated with them were marginalised. Finally it will establish the realities of the threat to British democracy posed by the CPGB, demonstrating that the communist threat was not necessarily through the mainstream political electoral system as

⁴⁸ George Lansbury’s assessment of the CPGB cited in Raymond Postgate, *The Life of George Lansbury* (London, 1951), p.238

they were not a political party of influence⁴⁹. The real communist threat within the British environment was of a more insidious nature, as seen through the cultural influence of the intellectual followers, or through the infiltration and influence within the union movement. In order to understand the relevance of the communist challenges, however, one needs to examine the stance and standing of the CPGB. The unfolding events of the post-war period and the growing influence of the Cold War will subsequently demonstrate how the attitudes towards the perceived communist threat within Britain actually contrasted to the realities of the situation. The CPGB were in effect poorly managed and poorly supported, whilst their cultural influence within the media of film, theatre and art was actually minimal.

Within Britain, the fear of communism and the threat of Soviet expansionism had emerged from the war following Churchill's strong suspicion of Stalin's post-war objectives and his intentions within Europe. During the war the situation had been very different. The communists had been presented as Britain's valiant partner, standing firm against Nazism in the most extreme of circumstances, and showing strength and determination as a nation under terrible hardships. In the aftermath of war, however, a different perception of the communists under Stalin emerged. As the European nations sought collaboration and cooperation to ensure recovery, communism was perceived as an aggressive and expansionist threat. This followed the Soviet push through Eastern Europe in the final stages of the war, when Soviet influence was cemented within the occupied countries as communist control at governmental level was established. Europe was effectively cut in half and the perception and promotion of communism changed. It was seen as an infectious agent that had spread through the countries of Eastern Europe, destroying their vital organs of economy, democracy, tradition and

⁴⁹ During the five general elections of 1945-1963 they succeeded in gaining only the two seats in 1945 and averaging only 55,078 votes. Following the success of 1945 their standing actually plummeted, leaving them a party within virtually no political presence by the 1960's

culture, thereby rendering them subservient to Moscow. The backdrop of unfolding international events such as the Berlin Blockade, the Korean War, the turmoil of 1956, and the Cuban Crisis highlighted the consequences and influence of communism on the world stage. As a result large swathes of British society saw communism as an aggressive and destructive ideology that posed a threat to the British traditional way of life. Through such concerns, communist influence at a national level became an area for examination by the creative media. This led to the representation of the communist threat at a domestic level through the depiction of espionage and defection, subversives and the fear of nuclear war. Such representations therefore helped to marginalise not only those who were active communists, but also by association those radicals seen to be challenging the status quo. In the nervous and defensive Cold War environment, to be openly supportive of anti-establishment radical ideas, whether communist or not, would ensure an association with communist ideology, the ultimate threat to traditionalism. It was therefore very difficult to separate communists and radicals as one was automatically associated with the other and both groups were marginalised accordingly.

The focus on those presenting a challenge to traditionalism was indicative of the fear of the threat of communism, but this perceived domestic threat was an over-reaction. In contrast to Britain, within mainland Europe the concerns relating to the threat of the spread of communism were in fact both valid and tangible. This could be seen with the emergence of the Soviet controlled Eastern Block, nudging the borders of nervous and often vulnerable governments, economically shattered by war and in the throes of rebuilding. Western Europe

was under siege as domestically the post-war hardships had led to social and political unrest, and this fuelled the growth of communist movements, most noticeably in France and Italy⁵⁰.

Communism in Italy and France

In Italy, the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI) re-emerged in the political and economic turmoil following the war and immediately its membership soared, peaking in 1947 with 2,252,446 members⁵¹. The party subsequently played an influential role in the initial post-war Italian governments, gaining electoral success though never gaining power. Their presence in government was soon obstructed, however, as a condition for the implementation of the Marshall Plan Aid. Italy would have remained in economic turmoil and been unable to rebuild without financial aid from the US, and although the Italian people were vociferous in their support for the PCI, the United States considered communist political influence not only unacceptable but a threat to the stability of Western Europe. They therefore made the removal of the communists from government a condition for the implementation of Marshall Plan Aid. As a consequence, from then on the PCI had no formal standing in the Italian government though remained influential due to their popular support. A level of support that the CPGB never achieved.

Communist influence in also considerable in France following the war. After the liberation, the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF) was invited to join the government of De Gaulle due

⁵⁰ See G. Guiat, *The French and Italian Communist Parties: Comrades and Culture* (London, 2002); J.B. Urban, *Moscow and the Italian Communist Party: From Tagliatti to Berlinguer* (London, 1986); F. Fejto, *The French Communist Party and the Crisis of International Communism* (Cambridge, 2003)

⁵¹ The party had formed in 1921 though it had spent years underground having been banned by Mussolini under the fascist regime.

to its successful role within the Resistance⁵². By the November 1946 election it was so popular it received more votes than any other party, raising considerable concerns that a communist takeover of France was a distinct possibility. Once again it was the dangled carrot of Marshall Plan Aid which blocked its progress, as communist removal from government was a condition of its implementation. A condition which France was in no position to refuse. In contrast to the popularity of the PCI and the PCF, in Britain the CPGB remained small and ineffective with a limited following. Within the relatively conservative, democratic, and imperial island of Great Britain, the realities of the communist threat were therefore minimal. In order to ensure that they remained that way and the CPGB developed no influential political stronghold within the democratic system, not only was the threat of communism exaggerated, it was utilised to reinforce the notions of nationalism and patriotism. To stand against communism was to preserve the traditional nature of British politics, economics and culture.

As had been demonstrated during the war years, when faced with a common enemy to freedom and prosperity, British society consolidated its stance in defence of traditional values. Subsequently successive governments reinforced the perceived threat of communism and the Soviets to the British way of life. This promotion of traditionalism versus the radical threat of communism was achieved through the creative media. This was done through overtly propagandist means, and also through the more subtle, subconscious representations of social concerns presented by individuals. Following the war the Foreign Office, and in particular the Information Research Department, was designated as the production

⁵² The party had also formed in 1921 though it had remained a small isolated party without political influence prior to the war.

department for propaganda⁵³, but not all creative productions were as a result of deliberate government influence. Through the creative media the role of Britain as a democratic, free and traditional country could be presented to the British public, highlighting the ‘otherness’ of communism. Domestically this was a minor political consideration as there was no tangible threat from the CPGB within the democratic system. As the international political climate changed, however, the political divisions within Europe became apparent and Britain faced new challenges from her former colonies as the emerging nations gained confidence and independence. This resulted in the positive reinforcement of the projected image of Britain, supported by the negative reinforcement of the dangers of communism and the threat it posed to the stability of the nation. Consequently the celebration of British prestige and the portrayal of ‘Britishness’ were to play vital roles in maintaining the public’s perception of Britain being a major player in world politics and a stronghold of traditional values⁵⁴. Representation was therefore a vital component of the successful communication of such ideals. Through the positive presentation of democracy and traditional British values, the media of film, theatre and the arts reinforced the concepts of traditionalism and helped to ensure the lack of influence of the communist movement in Britain.

When considering the presentation of communism to the British people, in general the images of communism and associated radicalism were not forcibly entrenched in an anti-communist ideology which was deliberately and persistently transmitted to the public through the mass media. This was not McCarthyite America. As stated, Britain was more inclusive and the

⁵³ For an analysis of Cold war propaganda and the role of the Information Research Department see A. Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 1945-1958: The Information Research Department* (Abingdon, 2004), also T. Shaw, *Eden, Suez and the Mass Media: Propaganda and Persuasion During the Suez Crisis* (London, 1996).

⁵⁴ Concept of ‘Britishness’ as already discussed on pages 7-8.

anti-communist and therefore anti-radical attitudes were developed in a more subtle and creative manner. They were enveloped in traditionalism yet presented as morally justified in an ever changing and more tolerant world. In reality, tolerance was only evident if you posed no challenge to traditionalism. This meant that anti-communist strategies were firmly established following the war, ensuring that the CPGB remained a minor party on the fringes of political influence and were presented as an insidious threat to domestic harmony.

The Fortunes of the Communist Party of Great Britain

For the general public, communism and particularly domestic communists became associated with political and industrial unrest, social disorder and a threat to the economic resurgence of Britain. This was because radical influences were considered to be the cause of growing disputes, with communists and ‘fellow travellers’ pinpointed as the harbingers of unrest⁵⁵. This had not always been the case. In the 1945 General Election the CPGB, who had contested twenty two seats, won in West Fife in Scotland and Mile End in London⁵⁶. With the CPGB gaining two seats, this led to conflict within the Labour Party as pressure was placed to allow affiliation with the communists. This can be seen in the proposal by the Howdenshire Labour Party calling for working class unity in the country ‘by allowing the Common Wealth, the ILP and the Communist Parties to affiliate with the National Labour Party’⁵⁷. As concerns within the Labour Party grew of a communist collaboration, a pamphlet was issued through the NEC by Harold Laski, at the time the Chairman of the Labour Party,

⁵⁵ ‘Fellow travellers’ were those considered communist sympathisers although not actual members of the party.

⁵⁶ Willie Gallagher, elected in West Fife, had previously been elected in the general election of 1935 and represented the coal mining region in which the party had considerable support. In Mile End, Phil Piratin, a Jewish communist activist and leader of the opposition to Oswald Mosley’s anti-Semitism movement was elected from a strongly Jewish community. Although both areas were considered strongholds of communist support, this was the first and only time that the CPGB gained two seats in Parliament and out of the twenty candidates contesting seats, twelve actually lost their deposits. Results of General Election of 5th-19th July 1945 available via <http://www.election.demon.co.uk/geresults.html> accessed 27.01.2009

⁵⁷ Labour Party Archives, General Secretaries Papers, Box 4, Communist Party, GS/COM/HR

entitled ‘The Secret Battalion’. Laski launched an attack on the political opportunism of the CPGB and how their policies sought to compromise the political independence of the Labour Party⁵⁸. This position was also supported by Morgan Phillips, the secretary of the Labour Party, who claimed that the CPGB was operated by Moscow and therefore had no independence of action and that should the affiliation take place, ‘every local Labour Party would become a battleground for democratic socialism versus communism’⁵⁹. This demonstrates the opposition to the CPGB within the popular left-wing Labour movement as it was seen as a threat to the established political system. Although strong support had been built up for the CPGB in the specific areas of mining, textiles and heavy engineering, it tended to be concentrated in specific geographical regions, and in reality the party was both poorly supported and far less influential than its European counterparts in Italy and France⁶⁰.

Regardless of regional and specific industry support, the Labour Party did not want to be officially connected with the CPGB or what they stood for. If the party before the war was considered something of a political joke, with George Lansbury famously quoting “That lot run a revolution? They couldn’t run a whelk stall”⁶¹, their standing following the war was seen as something more threatening. With the Labour Party in power, reforms in full swing and industrial tensions running high, concerns regarding radical challenges to the status quo were of paramount importance. The CPGB were considered such a threat. Rather than present a factionalised political front, the desire was to present a new, united, reforming Britain as the post-war years brought great change and reform as well as the loss of imperial identity and

⁵⁸ H. J. Laski, *The Secret Battalion: An Examination of the Communist Attitude to the Labour Party* (London, 1946)

⁵⁹ Labour Party Archives, General Secretaries Papers, Box 4, Communist Party, GS/COM/36ii

⁶⁰ Morgan, Cohen & Flinn, *Communists and British Society 1920-1991* (London, 2007), p.14. For the same period the French Communist party had a membership of 800,000 while in Italy the Communist Party could boast membership in excess of 1.7million.

⁶¹ Raymond Postgate, *The Life of George Lansbury* (London, 1951), p.238

power⁶². The demonization of political radicalism and especially communism was an opportunity to unite the country behind a common cause: the defence of a traditional British way of life, this time against the growing threat of Communism rather than Nazism.

At an international level, the pursuance of anti-Soviet foreign policy served to reinforce the emerging political divisions within Europe. The subsequent military actions to retain colonial territories in the Far East, and the initial decision to provide financial and logistical support for the royal government in Greece (both in an attempt to limit communist influence), further reiterated the British stance against communist expansion⁶³. Following Churchill's 'Iron Curtain' Speech in 1946 and the onset of the Cold War, it was apparent that the world was divided between the armed camps of capitalism and communism, with Britain and her ally America at the forefront of the stance against Soviet influence⁶⁴. Furthering its separation from mainstream politics, the CPGB had always opposed the 'exclusive Anglo-American Alliance with its dangers of new wars'⁶⁵. Its policies subsequently reflected anti-American Imperialism and anti-colonialism thereby alienating the electorate. It set about building a sphere of influence through both the working and intellectual environments.

Throughout the post-war years the make-up of the CPGB was changing. At the 18th Congress of 1945 although a vast majority of the 769 delegates were from industries such as mining, building, engineering and transport, eighty of the delegates were 'professionals' and their

⁶² With independence granted to India in 1947, quickly followed by Burma (Myanmar) and Ceylon (Sri Lanka),

⁶³ Following the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947 Britain had been engaged in independence conflicts in both Burma and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1948. They had also supported (with the USA) the government forces in the civil war in Greece in their conflict with the Greek Communist Party (the KKE) following concerns regarding communist expansion.

⁶⁴ Stated during his 'Sinews of Peace' address 5th March 1946, at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri

⁶⁵ CP/CENT/PC/02/04, minutes 18 June 1946

presence and future influence was recognised⁶⁶. In a debate relating to Marxist education, it was stressed that the CPGB needed professional people to develop a Marxist approach to their own subjects. This was further emphasised when in his closing speech Harry Pollitt⁶⁷ stated ‘They can play a great role in strengthening the alliance between the working class and sections of the middle and professional classes. We have noted their great vigour and critical approach and we welcome it’⁶⁸. Through the change of attitude towards non-working class members which had begun in the mid-thirties, specialist party groups began to emerge in the post-war years including historians, educationalists, scientists, economists, writers and film workers. Through their work and creative output, these groups were to have influence within their own environments and within the British cultural sphere, a prime example of intellectual communism being the Communist Party Historians Group⁶⁹.

As time moved on the Berlin Blockade of 1948 was also to have a negative effect on the CPGB. Whilst the Allies saw their actions as an attempt to limit communist expansionism, the Soviets considered their stance was against perceived capitalist expansionism, and the blockade lead to the reinforcement of Cold War strategies which were to last for the next 40 years⁷⁰. For communists in Britain, the Berlin Blockade highlighted the divisions within Europe and the dominant political strategy of anti-communism, and this consequently had a

⁶⁶ Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, p.113

⁶⁷ General Secretary of the CPGB 1929-39 and 1941-56.

⁶⁸ Report of the 18th Party Congress, p.46

⁶⁹ The group formed a highly influential cluster of British Marxist historians, including Eric Hobsbawm, Raphael Samuel and E.P. Thompson, as well as influential non-academics such as Arthur Leslie Morton and Brian Pearce. Through their writing and positions within academia, they influenced future generations of academics and in 1952 founded the influential social history journal *Past and Present*. This was published four times a year by the Oxford University on behalf of the Past and Present Society. The Historians Group endeavoured to seek out a popular revolutionary tradition that could inspire contemporary activists, whilst applying a Marxist approach placing an emphasis on social conditions, and consequently wrote of history utilising the dictum ‘men make their own history, but they do not do so in conditions of their own choosing’

⁷⁰ Cold War policies realistically ended with the signing of the Belavezha Accords which declared the Soviet Union dissolved in December 1991.

negative effect on communist support domestically⁷¹. By the time of the 1950 general election, support for the CPGB was waning as they failed to win any seats and out of one hundred candidates (their highest total ever), ninety seven lost their deposits. In the following 1951 election they only managed to field ten candidates and all ten lost their deposits. Following these disastrous election results, division within the party was further heightened over the adoption of the strategy of 'The British Road to Socialism' as put forward by Harry Pollitt following a visit to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1950⁷².

In a reflection of bad results, bad publicity and in-house divisions over policy, party membership suffered, falling from 45,535 in 1945 to 38,853 by 1950 and this trend would continue as the events of the 1950's unfolded⁷³. Party membership fell to a low of 24,670 in 1958, with the losses incurred in the wake of the upheavals of 1956 estimated at 11,000, although for most of the years 1951-1964 membership centred round the figure of 30,000⁷⁴. Whereas the massive growth in membership previously seen in 1942 reflected the positive representation of the Soviets in the fight against Nazi Germany, in the post-war years the communists were themselves seen as a threat to Britain. Their subsequent negative portrayal was mirrored in the loss of popular support, however, with four-fifths of the male

⁷¹ With party membership dropping from 43,000 in April 1948 to 40,161 the following year, a drop of over 5% of party membership.

⁷² As contributed to, and authorised by Stalin, the new party programme was not one of establishing a Soviet Socialist Britain but of establishing a People's Democracy in Britain. It did not envisage the immediate establishment of Socialism based on Workers' Councils, or of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the destruction of parliament and the state apparatus, but predicted socialist nationalisation and workers' control of monopoly capital, whilst the British Empire was to be transformed, inspired by the example of the Soviet Union, into 'a strong, free, equal association of peoples by granting national independence to the colonies'. As detailed in 'The British Road to Socialism', pamphlet issued by CPGB (London, 1951)

⁷³ N. Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1941-1951* (London, 1997), p.252: Appendix 1 'Communist Party Membership'

⁷⁴ J. Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict: The CPGB 1951-1968* (London, 2003), p.17

membership belonging to trade unions, the connections of the CPGB to the trade union movement were tangible.⁷⁵

The Trade Union Connection

In reality the political influence of the CPGB within the union movement was restricted as the party was absent from many regions and industries, and support in its areas of strength was inconsistent⁷⁶. As post-war attitudes to production, conditions and pay changed alongside the social and economic reforms already taking place, many industries experienced unrest as workers sought to consolidate their position and rights within the working environment. The CPGB subsequently utilised their union connections in an attempt to strengthen its position.

They were actively involved in the campaigns for a 40 hour week within the engineering and building unions, equal pay for women, and favoured worker representation on the board running the coal industry⁷⁷. Regardless of any progress made, they soon found themselves being isolated from the British Labour movement as the TUC appeared to be working with the Labour Party to root out communist influence⁷⁸. Morgan Phillips continued to criticise the CPGB stating that they had infiltrated the trade unions through ‘back door methods’, although many officials had been elected, and indeed re-elected, in open ballots⁷⁹.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.19

⁷⁶ Support was focussed in certain industrial unions such as mining, engineering and electrical unions and this was reflected geographically in heavily industrialised areas such as the mining areas of Scotland and Wales.

⁷⁷ K. Laybourn & D. Murphy, *Under the Red Flag: A History of Communism in Britain* (Stroud, 1999), p.128

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.127

⁷⁹ An example being the communist Walter Stevens who had been elected General Secretary of the Electrical Trade Union following long time service and numerous positions within the union. Eight Communists were also returned to the General Executive Council of the Transport and General Workers Union

An example of the singling out of communist influence for criticism was the dock workers dispute in 1948. Following the dispute, which saw 31,000 dock workers on strike, the government declared a state of emergency. This resulted in the deployment of troops and the strike was attacked in the press as being part of a communist plot to undermine the British economy. In response to the strike, the Prime Minister Mr Attlee declared that the dockers had been drawn into the strike by a small group of men ‘instructed for political reasons to take advantage of any situation for the disruption of our economy and the undermining of the government’⁸⁰. The report of his broadcast in the Daily Mirror was entitled ‘It’s a Strike Against the People’ and stated that two of the former committee members argued it ‘was now almost entirely dominated by known communists and fellow-travellers’⁸¹. This reporting shared the front page with headlines depicting Tito as ‘Fighting Against Soviet Domination’ and the reporting of ‘57 Communists Held in Burma’, further demonstrating the obsession with an anti-communist stance⁸². The Times also reported that Arthur Deakin, General Secretary of the TGWU, had estimated that ‘the strike committee consisted of 37 communists or fellow-travellers out of 48 members’⁸³. In a further article on 28th June, Mr Attlee was reported as stating that ‘No doubt here, as elsewhere, the communists are making mischief and that this minority were ‘ready to injure Britain as they are more devoted to Communism than to the prosperity and happiness of the people of this country’⁸⁴.

Communists were presented as negative, disruptive, and subversive and the reporting implied that actions were deliberately set in motion to undermine the strength of the British economy. The deployment of troops and the additional rationing of food which resulted from the

⁸⁰ *Daily Mirror*, 26 June 1948

⁸¹ *Ibid*

⁸² *Ibid*

⁸³ *The Times*, 25 June 1948

⁸⁴ *The Times*, 28 June 1948

dispute further undermined communist support, and also brought into question their influence and involvement in the trade union movement. In the TUC conference that year, the CPGB were attacked for undermining the authority of union officials which resulted in a motion (passed) to ‘expose and defeat those elements’. Consequently, on 27 October 1948 the TUC issued the ‘Warning to Trade Unionists’ in which it encouraged members to ‘take energetic steps’ to stop communist activity⁸⁵. Within the unions, many banned communists from holding office and the TGW voted in favour of this motion 2:1 in a ruling that lasted until 1968⁸⁶.

Factions, Colonies and War

The CPGB was becoming increasingly isolated, and although the party believed in three power co-operation between Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union, it could not actually manufacture co-operation within its domestic political sphere and could therefore achieve very little. In an era when Britain was effectively reliant on US aid and support, CPGB attitudes of anti-American Imperialism and anti-colonialism dominated as they saw them as being a major threat to world peace in the Bi-polar order emerging with the Cold War. This stance against what they perceived to be a threat to peace was demonstrated by the launch of the CPGB ‘Stop the Drift to War’ campaign in 1949. This argued that as a result of the Atlantic Pact, the lives and liberty of the British people were in danger⁸⁷.

⁸⁵ TUC, Annual Report, 1948, pp.274-5

⁸⁶ This move was rejected by the Fire Brigades' Union and the Electrical Workers union amongst others but for the majority the move was approved.

⁸⁷ CP/CENT/PC/02/03, press statement for release to newspapers, Saturday 17 December 1949

Not only was this bi-polar Cold War stance an issue, but growing concerns relating to nuclear weaponry, colonial unrest and the outbreak of the Korean War meant that the pursuance of peace became a major priority for all British political parties. Regardless of the CPGB's cries for peace, communist subversive activity within the Commonwealth was a factor which had a negative effect on support at home⁸⁸. The British were in conflict with guerrilla movements in Malaya, and independence movements in Kenya, British Guiana and Cyprus, and communist support for such insurgence was attracting much criticism. The CPGB's support of 'anti-British' actions and its calls for the independence of the colonial states, while at the same time being subject to the authority of the Soviet Union, was both contradictory and ill-timed. Another element had been added to the equation on 29th August 1949 with the successful Soviet testing of an atomic bomb, making the USSR the second nuclear power⁸⁹.

Stalin and the communists now had the greatest weapon the world had ever known at their disposal and their moral authority was being brought into question. This was highlighted when Dr. Garbett, the Archbishop of York, stated in a widely reported address to the Commonwealth Club of California that "Marxian Communism was a militant and aggressive civilisation, obsessed with a hatred of ways of life other than its own". He further stated that "communists knew no loyalty to the country in which they lived" and that their intentions were to instigate "revolution within the country marked down for destruction"⁹⁰. When later

⁸⁸ There were continual negative portrayals of subversive communist activities and communist backed guerrilla actions throughout this time in the British media

⁸⁹ Soviets first nuclear weapons test of RDS-1 on 29th August, 1949 at Semipalatinski, Kazakhstan, USSR.

⁹⁰ Dr. Garbett in an address entitled 'The Dangers of the Cold War' to the Commonwealth Club of California in San Francisco, on 30th September 1949, as reported in *The Times*, 1 October 1949. Dr. Garbett was well respected within the ecclesiastic and political communities having worked with the foreign office during the war, with Churchill referring to him as the Archiepiscopal Ulysses. He had travelled extensively within Europe and the Soviet controlled Eastern Block, including visiting Moscow in 1943, however, his previous positive attitude towards the Soviets was reversed during the Cold War when he denounced Communism as being un-Christian. D. Kirby, 'The Church of England and 'Religious Division' during the Second World War: Church-

the same year Mao Zedong declared the foundation of the People's Republic of China, a quarter of the world's population joined the communist camp and western fears and suspicion intensified⁹¹. Only one week later the Soviets declared their zone of Germany to be the German Democratic Republic with its capital of East Berlin, separating Europe into opposing factions. At both a European and global level there was a serious potential for conflict and in 1950, following the development of the Korean War the European centred anti-communist perspective of Western politics was expanded into a worldwide strategy⁹².

Within Britain like elsewhere, the Korean War represented a stand against communist aggression⁹³. For the communists in Britain, however, the actions of the western powers in Korea were immediately attacked as being naked colonial aggression. The party subsequently gathered 300,000 signatures for the 'Peace Petition Against the Korean War' following the publication of several articles promoting a peaceful solution to the crisis⁹⁴. Although many people had signed the Peace Petition, it is arguable that this was not in support of the Communist Party but in direct opposition to continued fighting in Korea, regardless of the origins of the proposal. As regards the representation of the Korean War itself, the aggressive and expansionist policies of the communists under the direction and support of the Soviets

State Relations and the Anglo-Soviet Alliance', Institute of Historical Research, *E-Journal of International History* (June 2000), accessed 27.01.09 at 15:23

⁹¹ Declaration made 1st October 1949.

⁹² In essence the Korean War was a civil war fought out with foreign participation and influence, including the use of state of the art weaponry, equipment and air power supplied by the opposing world powers. As a result of the counterbalancing actions of the military hardware supplied, by mid-1951 the land battle had effectively reached a stale mate and armistice talks began, however, these were to continue alongside costly battles for the next two years. Fighting eventually ceased in July 1953 and a UN commission was set up to supervise the armistice.

⁹³ Through the invoking of the United Nations Charter, British and Commonwealth troops were deployed. This included elements of the Far East Fleet along the Korean coast, alongside ships of the Commonwealth navies. In addition, two British battalions were despatched from Hong Kong, and a strong brigade group was mobilised in England with the 29th Brigade reaching Korea in November 1950. Several thousand reservists were also recalled to active duty.

⁹⁴ Such as Emile Burns, 'New Stage in the Fight for Peace', *Communist Review* (November, 1950), pp.323-327, and Alan Winnington, *I Saw the Truth in Korea* (London, 1950) a pamphlet published by the CPGB written following his time as a war correspondent travelling with the North Korean Army.

were portrayed as the major contributory factor to conflict. This demonstrated their continued and consistent threat to peaceful, democratic societies. So although the CPGB were promoting themselves as the perpetrators of peace, the general public perception regarding the war was that the communists were the perpetrators of conflict, and this trend was to continue.

If the communists were presented as the aggressors, Stalin had become an international icon symbolising communist values. Through the use of his image communism became associated with inflexibility, oppression, and military backed regimes. Upon his death in 1953 and the eventual take-over of Khrushchev, the West waited for the rejuvenation of the Soviet image from that of Stalinisation, but the changes were slow to materialize regardless of the rhetoric emanating from Moscow⁹⁵. The face representing communism ostensibly remained that of Stalin until visions of the crushing of the Hungarian uprising imprinted themselves on the western psyche⁹⁶. For the communist movements in Britain and elsewhere, 1956 proved to be a pivotal year. International unrest in Soviet controlled Eastern Europe was epitomised by the Hungarian Uprising, and on the domestic front, Britain was faced with the Suez Crisis, facing an Egyptian leader supplied by the Soviets⁹⁷. In addition they were also dealing with the resurgence of the IRA and rebellion movements in Cyprus, Kenya and Malaya⁹⁸. With the

⁹⁵ Stalin died 5 March 1953 and was initially succeeded by Georgy Malenkov until 7 September 1953 when Nikita Khrushchev effectively took control, his leadership lasting until 14 October 1964.

⁹⁶ In Hungary a spontaneous nationwide revolt against the Stalinist government led to widespread unrest and confrontation between 23 October 1956 and 10 November 1956 before the revolt was crushed by the Soviets and all opposition ruthlessly suppressed. The brutality and oppression against an uprising of the people alienated many European Marxists and damaged domestic communist support in many European countries.

⁹⁷ Colonel Nasser had procured an arms deal for Soviet military equipment through Czechoslovakia following a refusal for arms from Britain and the USA. It was also threatening to finance the Aswan Dam project with Soviet money following the withdrawal of funding again by the USA and Britain.

⁹⁸ In Cyprus the EOKA waged a struggle for independence and a union with Greece, with direct attacks on British rule. In Kenya the Mau Mau rebellion against British rule was in full swing, and in Malaya the Federation of Malaya achieved independence on August 1957. In Northern Ireland the IRA had restructured and

conservative Anthony Eden now Prime Minister, anti-communism was maintained as an integral part of foreign policy and with the withdrawal of the colonial powers in the post-war years, the fear of Soviet expansionism was tangible.⁹⁹

The death of Stalin had brought with it a new regime and allowed the Soviet controlled countries in Eastern Europe to take a shallow, cautious breath and evaluate their situation. The two main events of Hungary and Suez in 1956 challenged the balance of power between East and West. In Suez the un-sanctioned military actions of Great Britain and France resulted in political confrontation in the United Nations, where the British public saw the actions of its own government brought into question on the international stage. Whilst the moral authority of Britain was seriously undermined, the actions of the Soviets in Hungary presented a diversion for the outrage domestically and internationally. Regardless of what was happening in Egypt, the public were quick to condemn the actions of the communist oppressors in Hungary and their suppression of the rights of the individual. The communist Soviets were the bad guys, not democratic Britain after all.

The Fallout from 1956 and the ETU Ballot.

For the CPGB, the events of 1956 proved disastrous. Even prior to the Hungarian uprising and Suez conflict, there had been concerns that the CPGB was not being seen as a British party due to its Soviet connections¹⁰⁰. The parties continued isolation within British politics

rebuilt and there was a renewed border campaign against British rule involving direct attacks and disruptive actions.

⁹⁹B. Lightbody, *The Cold War* (London, 1999), p.43

¹⁰⁰Concerns were voiced in a report to the Political Committee from the North East District, CPGB in which it stated “We are still seen as the party of distressed times...and another point raised is that we are not seen as a British party”. CP/CENT/PC/02/32, PC, Minutes, 18 October 1956, North-East District Report

had resulted in renewed calls during the Twenty-Forth Congress for the party to reconnect with the Labour Party. This was not pursued as the Labour Party had made their position clear, and there were further tensions as there had been little change following the denouncement of the policies of Stalin by the new Soviet regime under Khrushchev¹⁰¹. Overall support and influence was waning and the CPGB needed to look for alliances to strengthen its position. In an attempt to raise a more positive profile, it sought to widen its trade union base, however, the party's involvement in the Electrical Trade Union (ETU) brought further controversy.

Following a disputed ballot to the union executive of the ETU, allegations of corruption were raised against the communist dominated executive, and in the full glare of publicity communist officials were found guilty of corruption in the High Court¹⁰². Despite publicly supporting the unionists during the trial, the CPGB immediately distanced themselves following the findings of guilt, but by then their reputation was severely tarnished by association. As expected the TUC upheld its anti-communist stance and demanded a re-election of the officials involved in the orchestration of the ballot, and following a refusal from the ETU, the union was expelled from the TUC¹⁰³. With the union losing credibility and influence, the communist members of the executive committee were consequently on the retreat. The anti-communist representatives eventually ousted them and secured control, thereby ensuring the union's re-admission to the TUC. The saga of the ETU court case was

¹⁰¹ Laybourn & Murphy, *Under the Red Flag*, pp.144-5. An example of the party tensions can be characterised by the conflict over the publication of The Reasoner. It first appeared July 1956 as journal of dissident communism, independent and critical of the CPGB and was created by expelled party members John Saville and E.P. Thompson. It initially lasted 5 months and in 1957 they went on to create the New Reasoner, again a journal of British Marxist and Communist traditions which in 1960 became the New Left Review.

¹⁰² Frank Haxell was deemed to have used 'fraudulent and unlawful means' to win the election as General Secretary of the ETU and was immediately removed from office allowing the anti-communist Jock Bryne to take control. See Laybourn & Murphy, *Under the Red Flag*, p.154

¹⁰³ J. Callaghan, *Cold War Crisis and Conflict: The CPGB 1951-1968* (London, 2003), pp.241-249

damaging to the reputation of the CPGB as it was publically presented as being corrupt. In a report to the CPGB's Congress in 1963, Peter Kerrigan stated that the ETU incident had been 'a complete violation of the principles on which communists have worked for...[it] gravely compromised our party'¹⁰⁴. What the incident proved was that the domestic trade union base on which the CPGB sought to build was in fact precarious, their perceived dominance was selective and transitory, and from then on would be under threat.

Away from the CPGB's policy squabbles and union difficulties, within the international arena there were also challenges to the dominance of the Soviet communist ideology. China's Maoist policies had created two rival centres for international Marxism, therefore dividing communist support worldwide¹⁰⁵. Communists throughout the globe were called on to identify with one side or the other, and the CPGB remained loyal to Moscow. Following the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, however, support for the party was further damaged rendering it virtually impotent at a political level.

The Berlin crisis of 1961¹⁰⁶ had coincided with the negative publicity surrounding the ETU elections trial. Amid an atmosphere of domestic corruption it focussed public attention on the perceived aggressive political ideology of communism, and within the media the communist

¹⁰⁴ W. Thompson, *The Good Old Cause: British Communism 1920-1991* (London, 1972), pp.126-7

¹⁰⁵ Mao had previously supported Stalin both ideologically and politically but following Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's policies, his restored relations with Tito's Yugoslavia and his proposal of 'peaceful coexistence' with the US, the stage was set for a Sino-Soviet split. Through the implementation of the policies of the 'Great Leap Forward' Mao presented an alternative to Khrushchev policies, and after its subsequent failure he used the circumstances of a plot to remove him as a way of denouncing the influence of agents of a foreign power, thereby mobilising the Chinese nationalist sentiment against Soviet influence

¹⁰⁶ For comprehensive study of the Berlin Crisis see C. Cate, *Ides of August: The Berlin Wall Crisis 1961* (New York, 1978); M. Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of European Settlement 1945-1963* (Princeton, 1999); V. Mastny, S.G. Holtsmark & A Wenger(eds), *War Plans and Alliances in the Cold War: Threat perception in the East and West* (London, 2006)

actions were seen as another example of oppression. The newspaper headlines highlighted the plight of those trapped behind the barriers, and the Daily Mirror headlined with ‘Beyond the barbed wire is freedom, behind the tanks’. It concentrated on the families torn apart by the division, and the oppression and lower standards of living for those trapped in the East¹⁰⁷. For the CPGB, this further undermined their position within the political arena as internationally their communist policies were antagonistic and oppressive, whilst domestically they were seen as being corrupt and manipulative for their own gain. The continued negative coverage of the ETU trial, the communist actions in Berlin, and the reporting in the British press that in America active membership of the communist party had become a federal crime, resulted in 1961 being a year that further damaged the reputation and support of the Party¹⁰⁸. The following year was no better. In the Cuban crisis once again communism was portrayed as being openly aggressive, and the fear of nuclear war gripped the world as the US and USSR stood toe to toe over the deployment of missiles¹⁰⁹. With the ending of the conflict and the removal of the missiles, although the threat of war had been averted, fears remained over communist intentions and the potential for nuclear conflict.

Continuing Decline

The early sixties proved to be a very trying time for the CPGB: they struggled to deal with the continual negative portrayals of communism on the international stage and domestic

¹⁰⁷ *Mirror*, 14 August 1961

¹⁰⁸ *Guardian*, 6 June 1961; Washington correspondent article confirming the change outlawing active communist party membership and certifying that the communist party was considered to be a definite arm of Soviet policy. In another article sharing the page entitled ‘State and Trade Unions in Russia’, the role of communist unions was stated as being ‘to take an active part in the work of the State’, with one of its main tasks being ‘the communist education of the workplace’. The page also made reference to the ETU trial and the role of the CPGB, thereby associating the three topics.

¹⁰⁹ Whilst the Soviets had placed nuclear missiles in Cuba off the coast of the USA, the Americans had placed their missiles in Turkey, actually closer to the Soviet border. The crisis was finally averted when the US agreed to remove the missiles from Turkey in exchange for the removal of the Cuban missiles. Kennedy kept this deal out of the public domain and Khrushchev was therefore seen as climbing down to US pressure.

environment. Overall there had been a general failure in the recruitment of new people to the party at all levels, and there was a lack of uniformed approach to the promotion of the party as a viable political party of standing. There had been attempts to encourage new members, such as through recruitment to the Young Communists League (YCL), but membership had actually been in steady decline since the early fifties, falling from a claimed 5000 members in 1951 to just 1734 in 1960¹¹⁰. In a report to the Executive Committee on the decline in membership to the YCL in 1958, Eric Hobsbawm had stated that the problem was that the younger generation were ‘pretty much uninterested in the Party’ as it had ‘never been a force to reckon with in their lifetime’¹¹¹. Although new members had been attracted as part of the peace movement, it was difficult for the party to assert itself as a voice to be heard in the promotion of peace¹¹². In addition, its claim to be representative of the working class was subverted by their consistent support for the Labour party. This reinforced the concept that the Labour Party was seen by the public as the British party representing left-wing views. Whilst the Labour party was British, the CPGB were controlled from Moscow, and consequently through representation and association with Soviet actions, their claim to be a British party was met with scepticism.

For the CPGB, the early sixties did not represent a re-birth of popularity and influence but continued decline. Although they had gained a representative in the House of Lords in 1963¹¹³, they no longer held any seats in parliament nor did they look like a viable electoral

¹¹⁰ J. Callaghan, *Cold War Crisis and Conflict: The CPGB 1951-68* (London, 2003), p.22

¹¹¹ ‘Some notes about the ULR from Comrade Eric Hobsbawm’, 10-11 May 1958, CP/CENT/EC/05/10

¹¹² The Labour Party abandonment of unilateralism had resulted in some new members but the number was actually minimal.

¹¹³ When Wogan Philips, a longstanding CPGB member, inherited the title of Lord Milford following the death of his father.

option¹¹⁴. At a tangible level, the political power of the CPGB by this time was restricted to a handful of seats on local councils scattered around Britain, and the limited influence exerted by CPGB members still operating within the trade union movement. In all, membership was waning, the traditional trade union base was slowly disintegrating under cries of corruption and opposition from the TUC, and all sense of urgency had evaporated from the party¹¹⁵. Whilst politically the CPGB was impudent, at a cultural and social level communist ideology, and the representation and interpretation of such, had a much more significant influence within Britain, with the representation of communism becoming a recognisable theme in film, theatre and art.

¹¹⁴G. Andrews, *End Games and New Times: The Final Years of British Communism* (London, 2004), p.115

¹¹⁵The executive committee had even taken until 1963 to formally ally with the Soviets following the international split between Moscow and Beijing in 1961.

*Stereotypes and Negative Reinforcement:
Portrayals of Communism in British Cinema*



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The previous chapters have considered how we interpret and understand such cultural phenomenon as film, theatre and art and also shown how the changing domestic and international situation helped to frame their significance. In an expansion of this theme, this chapter will now focus on the representation of communism in cinema during the post-war years. It will be seen that although British cinema during this period was not for the most part crudely propagandist, many of the films that appeared dealt overtly with the phenomenon of communism and political radicalism. The overall role of cinema in the post-war years was to provide entertainment and escapism, often in the celebration of British endeavours, but

¹¹⁶ Image of militant union shop steward Fred Kite and his ‘comrades’ from the film *I'm All Right Jack* (Boulting, 1959). Image courtesy of the British Film Institute available via: http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/boulting/all_right_jack.html

cinema also sought to reflect the concerns of the audience and creators. That included anxieties relating to communists at both a domestic and international level. Through the visual representation of concerns such as communist subversives, Soviet expansionism and nuclear war, British cinema helped to establish a culturally created anti-communist ideology in the aftermath of war. This is not, however, an examination of government directed propaganda, although there was a degree of deliberate communication on the part of the creators as a reflection of their personal views. This examination places emphasis on the communist characters placed before the audience and the subsequent creation and re-enforcement of recognised and accepted stereotypes. As a result it analyses the creative output of the producers and directors in bringing their own personal viewpoints and concerns before the audience, as in doing so they highlighted the anxieties of the public.

This chapter will therefore examine the post-war development of British film and the creation of its own identity in celebrating ‘Britishness’¹¹⁷. This will be demonstrated through the promotion of class driven stereotypes, and will consider the influence of individuals such as Michael Balcon at Ealing Studios and the typically British stereotypes seen in the films *Hugh and Cry* (1947), *Whisky Galore* (1947), and *Passport to Pimlico* (1949). All three films also highlight a key post-war theme of a group pulling together against a common enemy and the negative portrayal of the ‘other’. As the forties then gave way to the fifties, the realities of the Cold War were firmly established giving rise to concerns regarding the influence and motives of communists within both the domestic and international arena. One of the first films to

¹¹⁷See D. Arnold (ed), *Cultural Identities and the Aesthetics of Britishness* (Manchester, 2004); Mike Storry & Peter Childs (eds), *British Cultural Identities* 3rd edition (London, 2003); K. Robbins, *Great Britain: Identities, Institutions and the Idea of Britishness* (London, 1997); P. Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (Abingdon, 2004) and T. L. Akehurst, *The Cultural Politics of Analytical Philosophy: Britishness and the Spectre of Europe* (London, 2010).

consider the portrayal of domestic concerns regarding increasing industrial unrest and the communist influence in the workplace was Bernard Miles' *Chance of a Lifetime* (1950). This film was chosen because it was at the time unique in its political portrayal. Alongside an analysis of the themes and characters of the film, the struggle to actually produce and circulate the film also demonstrates the economic and political influences in British cinema at the time concerning perceived pro-communist films. The work of the independent producer/directors John and Roy Boulting is then chosen to demonstrate the dominant negative portrayals of communism within British cinema and the use of recognisable and familiar stereotypes. The fact that they were independent producers who co-wrote, directed and edited their own productions (as did Bernard Miles), ensured that their work was relatively free from the potentially corrupting political or commercial pressures found within the mainly US financially controlled studios. The brothers utilised domestic and international concerns to demonstrate typically British responses. This can be seen regarding the fear of nuclear weapons on British soil in *Seven Days to Noon* (1950); communist revolutionary saboteurs in *High Treason* (1951); communist influence in the trade unions in *I'm All Right Jack* (1959); and Soviet designs to strengthen their nuclear capability in *Carlton-Browne of the F.O.* (1959).

The films of the Boultings therefore demonstrate the changing nature of the portrayal of communists from serious drama to outright farce, and also the influence of the changing nature of the political stance of the brothers themselves. Subsequently, this chapter will establish that within the realm of British cinema in the post-war years, the representation of negative, stereotypical political and cultural assumptions regarding communists were continually re-enforced. This ensured that in contrast to theatre, virtually no sympathetic

communist characters were placed before the audience to offer an alternative stance. By this representation of a single viewpoint, the film industry was instrumental in helping to establish an anti-communist cultural ideology in the post-war years. This stance was no doubt helped by the fact John and Roy Boulting maintained a level of independence which allowed them to produce work which was a reflection of their own political standpoints. As writers, editors, directors and independent producers they could stamp their own authority on a production. This enabled them to avoid the political pressures placed through the corporate production companies often reliant on American financial backing. As will be discussed, in both theatre and art the absorption into the establishment of radical playwrights and artists will be shown to gradually affect the work placed before the audience and the representation of communist characters and environments. In film, however, overt representations dominated as the independent producers presented their own view points and remained outside establishment commercial considerations. The Boultings undoubtedly produced work with an eye on the commercial market but they also deliberately targeted national institutions for criticism. Pro-communist or even sympathetic communist characterisations did not appear because they had anti-communist political beliefs. In fairness it must also be acknowledged that other producers would not have got the commercial backing or distribution contracts to make such work, regardless of their political stance. In that sense film was to a degree self-regulatory and helped to reinforce anti-communist ideology through repeated expose to dominant themes and stereotypes.

As shown in the breakdown, the examination of film is therefore focussed around the films, their creators, and the representations of communists presented to the audience. It is essentially an empirical analysis of a collection of cultural artefacts in order to establish their

message and influence. This will demonstrate how the films reflected traditional concepts of belief, values and behaviour, by creating and then reinforcing the modern (in post-war terms) concept of ‘Britishness’ and traditionalism¹¹⁸. These concepts were evolving in an era of post-war reform. Social rights were seen as representative of social progress, but in order to enjoy the rights and freedoms of British citizenship, one had a duty to ensure its security and protect what it stood for. At the time, the threat to national security and stability was most obviously epitomised by fears of expanding communist influence and the domestic threat from left-wing radicals. The distinction between communists and radicals is most clearly seen in film as the communist representations are robustly created. They were stereotypes to which the audience developed a familiarity. There were depictions of radicalism but they were more often associated with anti-establishment stances for the benefit of the community. Subsequently they were not presented as threatening and often provided the comic relief as the stance against unwelcomed authority or resistance to change. This can most clearly be seen in the films of Ealing studios which will be discussed in the emergence of British film.

For a film to be made it needed to guarantee a distribution licence and this was governed by the British Board of Film Censors (now Classification) which had been founded in 1912 as an independent trade body rather than a form of governmental control. Prior to WWII there had been an unofficial system of political censorship through scrip vetting and this expanded during the war with the film division of the Ministry of Information ensuring no film ‘damaged public moral’. Post-war, the BBFC re-established its position as an independent non-governmental organisation. Its main focus became not political communication but concerns relating to the depiction of violence and sex, be it verbal or visual, although ultimate

¹¹⁸ As argued in D. Arnold, *Cultural Identities and the Aesthetics of Britishness* (Manchester, 2004).

power rested with the local authorities who could decide to ignore the board's decision and impose their own conditions for viewing.

As is later discussed in an examination of the Lord Chamberlains role regarding the censorship of theatre, in the post-war years film censorship centred on protecting public decency. It was the Secretary to the Board who established the policies of the board, and following his appointment as Secretary in 1948 Arthur Watkins, a successful playwright, set out three basic principles for consideration; was the film likely to impair the moral standards of the public, was it likely to give offence to the reasonably minded, and what effect would it have on children? There was no specific consideration of political communication other than to cause offence and there is no evidence of any film banned for political reasons during the time frame of this thesis. It was the depiction of violence, particularly in relation to anti-social behaviour and teenage criminality which became the main concern of the board, alongside sexual language and behaviour. They could portray communists so long as they were not openly violent or sexually suggestive. The gritty social dramas that emerged in the late fifties were also censored in relation to their portrayal of violence and sexual language rather than their challenging political attitudes. So you could show left-wing radicals or even 'commies' who spouted Stalin, so long as you did not portray lust, expose a buttock or call a woman a bitch . Morality, not political conformity remained the post-war concern of the BBFC.

Having got past the censors, in Britain virtually all cinemas at the time followed the same format with programmes filling a three hour slot. There were two features, a seven and a half

minute newsreel, five to ten minutes of advertising and trailers, and a live music slot to fill the remaining time¹¹⁹. The cinema therefore represented an ideal opportunity to communicate traditional British values to a captive audience. Contrary to the overtly anti-Soviet and anti-communist stance taken within the post-war Hollywood film industry, however, British film was typically much more subtle in its representations. This has caused commentators to state that the Cold War, and therefore communism, was virtually overlooked in post-war British film¹²⁰. That is not the case. Tony Shaw has argued how Cold War issues were refracted through British films, arguing how the influence of anti-communist ideology within the creative visual media was filtered through to the public under the watchful eye and steady influence of the government¹²¹. Whilst his work is a political study with a comprehensive propaganda analysis, this examination of the film industry in the post-war years is a cultural study. It demonstrates how stereotypical representations were utilised to reinforce popular anxieties and perceptions. The concerns of the time were therefore reflected in the developing image of the new ‘enemy’: the communist. By highlighting the presence of the threat, representations were utilised not to win votes but promote traditional British values and customs, and therefore reinforce the perception of moral and cultural superiority. This negative perception of communists in film had not been the case during the war years.

Following the emergence of the Soviets as an ally against Hitler, during the Second World War the image of the communist Soviets presented to the public was that of a new found

¹¹⁹ As of 1948, 94% of all cinemas in Britain followed this format: Board of Trade, *Distribution and Exhibition of Cinematograph Films*, 23 November 1949, para. 41, p.19 as detailed in J. Ashby & A. Higson (Eds), *British Cinema Past and Present* (London, 2000), p.208

¹²⁰ Although 3,866 films were made and licensed for public exhibition in Britain from 1948-1985, only 2.4 per cent (which is a grand total of 92) were directly related to the Cold War, and they have generally attracted little interest among historians of British cinema. Nicholas Pronay, ‘British Film Sources for the Cold War: The Disappearance of the Cinema Going Public’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 13, no 1, 1993, pp.7-17

¹²¹ T. Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War: The State, Propaganda and Consensus* (London, 2001)

collaborator in the fight against Nazism. This can be seen in the short film '*Our Russian Allies*' produced in 1941 for the Central Newsreel Studio. This introduced the British public to the culture, training and gathering strength of 'our determined Russian allies' and their preparations for defence. In June 1943 Pathe produced '*Arts Tribute to the Soviets*' with declarations of support and friendship to encourage post-war friendship and co-operation. Also created in 1943 was the feature film '*The Demi-Paradise*' directed by Anthony Asquith, son of the former premier. This film sees the integration of a Soviet engineer into a small English town, signalling Anglo-Soviet unity. Numerous war-time newsreels also showed Russian soldiers with allied soldiers exchanging cigarettes, waving as they passed by in British and American transport, working with British troops to clear mines, or standing together over prisoners and injured comrades. Whilst during the war a positive image of the Soviet communists was promoted, the post-war years saw a different image emerge. As communist control in Eastern Europe was established, communism was represented by depictions of sinister subversives, cultural and religious suppression, economic hardships and the aggression of an expansionist nation. Communism had replaced the scourge of Nazi-ism, with the concept of totalitarianism becoming increasingly associated with the rule of Stalin and the spreading influence of communist ideology throughout Europe. The changes in the domestic representation of communists reflected their changing role on the world stage, with British films presenting this transformation to a public determined to be entertained.

The emergence of 'British' Film

Britain and British film following the war was in a period of great change. Economic hardship, continued rationing, the establishment of the welfare state, the nationalisation of key industries and the dismantling of the Empire created severe challenges to the concept of

the British way of life. Nostalgia for traditionalism saw the post-war years become a renaissance period for British cinema, as romantic values were reinforced and the realism and documentary style of the wartime films was slowly rejected¹²². The influential figures of J Arthur Rank, Michael Balcon, and the Boulting brothers gradually emerged but it was not only the leading figures who changed but also the leading themes. British film subsequently emerged from under the influential shadow of Hollywood and established its own national identity, focussing on domestic themes.

In a contrast to the dreary hardships of the everyday life, after the war British film saw the popularity of escapism films such as *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) and *The Red Shoes* (1948) by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger¹²³. In both films, romance and fantasy are depicted in flamboyant energy and style, and they are indicative of the desire to escape the monotone realities of the era, with the audience transported into the fantasy worlds of heaven and the ballet. These themes of flamboyance and escapism continued as Gainsborough films also produced a series of period costume melodramas such as *The Wicked Lady* (1945)¹²⁴. They were later followed in the fifties with the advent of Hammer films and their series of

¹²² There are many writings which reflect on the changes in post-war British cinema, a selection being A. Aldgate & J. Richards, *Best of British; Cinema and Society from 1930 to the Present* (London, 2002); R. Armes, *A Critical History of British Cinema* (London, 1978), A. Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford, 1995); R. Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain 1939-1949* (London, 1992); S. Street, *British National Cinema* (London, 1997); J.W. Williams, *Features of Post War British Cinema*, available via www.prin.edu/users/els/departments/poli_sci/film_politics/brit1950.htm accessed 17.04.09

¹²³ Both films were written, directed and produced by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger through Eagle-Lion films and are included in the British Film Institutes 'Top 100 British Films of All Time' at number 20 and 9 respectively.

¹²⁴ Gainsborough Films had originally been founded by Michael Balcon in 1927 but after his departure to Ealing Studios in 1938, the Rank organisation took over control and a series of successful costume dramas were produced including *The Wicked Lady*, directed by Leslie Arliss in 1945 and *Caravan*, directed by Arthur Crabtree in 1946. Rank eventually closed Gainsborough Studios in 1951.

gothic horrors¹²⁵. Classic adaptations also became a major part of the film industry with David Lean directing *Great Expectations* (1946) and *Oliver Twist* (1947), whilst Lawrence Olivier followed up his critically acclaimed *Henry V* (1945) with *Hamlet* (1948) and *Richard III* (1955). Anthony Asquith also adapted for the screen several contemporary stage plays such as Terence Rattigan's *The Winslow Boy* (1948) and *The Browning Version* (1951), alongside Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1952). These celebrations of British endeavours and culture all proved very popular, whilst reinforcing stereotypical representations of the British upper and middle classes. Such dramas and literary adaptations brought critical acclaim and commercial success on both sides of the Atlantic, but it was the emergence of the iconic British comedy film which helped to establish the recognisable national identity of the film industry.

One of the main producers at the time was Ealing Studios under the leadership of Michael Balcon. Ealing under Balcon made almost one hundred films between 1938-1959, of which less than thirty were comedies yet it is this genre with which they are most recognised¹²⁶. During the war they had produced nationally successful films depicting popular performers such as George Formby and Will Hay taking on spies, saboteurs and fifth columnists. They sought mass appeal by utilising strong regional accents and presenting recognisable working class characters, be they rogues, or more often, heroes. By targeting a working class audience they provided recognisable characters to which the audience could relate, and the popularity

¹²⁵ The success and popularity of lavish costume dramas increased with the later relaxation of the censorship ruling and the advent of the gothic 'Hammer horror', beginning with *The Curse of Frankenstein*, directed by Terence Fisher in 1957, and followed by films such as *Dracula*, again directed by Terence Fisher in 1958.

¹²⁶ T. Pulline, 'A Song and Dance at the Local: Thoughts on Ealing', in R. Murphy (Ed), *The British Cinema Book* (London, 1997), p.114. In addition, Charles Barr's *Ealing Studios* (London, 1993) presents a comprehensive analysis of the studio, its cultural influence and the influence and input of Michael Balcon both during and after his control of the studio.

of the films was testament to this successful strategy¹²⁷. As stated comedies were only part of their output, and even during the war Ealing had produced propagandist dramas such as ‘Went the Day Well’ highlighting the complex dangers of Nazi invasion, and ‘Nine Men’ depicting the courageous last stand of a stranded group in the desert. Post-war they continued to produce dramas, focussing on the celebration of heroic British achievements with films such as ‘Scott of the Antarctic’, but it was the successful series of classic comedies which cemented their popularity and commercial success¹²⁸.

The intentions behind the Ealing Studio’s projection of everyday British characters was made clear in an interview in 1945, when Michael Balcon stated that there was a desire ‘for a projection of the true Briton to the rest of the world’¹²⁹. It was this ethos which influenced the studio output in the post-war years. Ealing subsequently went on to present a series of comedies depicting communities pulling together in the face of adversity or in the protection of customs, symbolising the desire for the preservation of traditionalism in the face of continual and growing change. There was also a tone of rebellious whimsy evident in the films, and Balcon stated ‘Our first desire was to get rid of as many wartime restrictions as possible and get going...there was a mild anarchy in the air’. They did indeed get going and the first recognised Ealing comedy was *Hugh and Cry*, directed by Michael Crichton in 1947¹³⁰. The film was set against the backdrop of a London showing terrible war damage and filmed almost entirely on location to add authenticity. It depicts a south London community of working class ‘jack the lads’ who live amongst the bombsites, who pull together to defeat

¹²⁷ During the war Ealing Studios utilised the talents of popular working class performers such as Gracie Fields, Stan Holloway, George Formby and Will Hay producing comedies and musical/comedies that proved some of the most popular films of the war years

¹²⁸ ‘Went the Day Well’ directed by Alberto Cavalconti, 1943; ‘Nine Men’ directed by Harry Watt, 1943; ‘Scott of the Antarctic’ directed by Charles Frend, 1948.

¹²⁹ Interview with Michael Balcon, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 11 January 1945, p.163

¹³⁰ Michael Balcon, *Michael Balcon Presents: A Lifetime of Films* (London, 1969), p.159

a gang of criminals who have been using the boys ‘penny dreadfuls’ [comics] to pass information and plan their next jobs. The film’s instant success was attributed to the fact that it provided laughter and relief during a terrible winter and in the midst of rationing that was more severe than at any time during the war¹³¹. Laughter was something that the government could not restrict, and in the same year Ealing also released *Whisky Galore!* directed by Alexander MacKendrick. Here it is a Scottish community who mobilise to ‘rescue’ a cargo of whisky whilst defending their own customs and identity from outside, in this case English, influence. The islanders see the wreckage of a cargo ship carrying whisky, of which there is a ‘famine’, as an opportunity to overcome their privations, and the film is representative of a resistance movie as they battle the oppressive establishment. These are represented as English government officials, always wearing black trench coats so that you can recognise them as baddies, with the islanders constantly seeking to covertly undermine their authority whilst maintaining their own traditions and identity¹³².

Both films are synonymous with the presentation of a community pulling together for a common cause in the defence of customs and tradition, reflecting the common anxieties within society regarding the speed and extent of post-war changes. Concerns regarding the changing politics of the era can specifically be seen in *Passport to Pimlico*, directed by Henry Cornelius in 1949¹³³. This centres round the discovery of an ancient document which determines that the London Borough of Pimlico is in fact part of Gaulle, and it subsequently declares its independence. By abandoning government restrictions and returning to the perceived freedom of the pre-war years, this highlights the concerns over post-war austerity

¹³¹ C. Barr, *Ealing Studios* 2nd Edition (London, 1993), p.94

¹³² P. Kemp, *Lethal Innocence: The Cinema of Alexander Mackendrick* (London, 1991), p.32

¹³³ Image from *Passport to Pimlico* showing people at the barricades which separate the ‘independent’ Pimlico from the rest of London. They are throwing food parcels across the barbed wire, even from the windows of the passing buses. Image courtesy of <http://www.busesonscreen.net/screen/screenfmp.htm>

and continued rationing. Upon claiming independence, the British government announces a total embargo on the new ‘country’, and the national popularity of such a move is reflected in the response of English citizens. Totally unsupportive of the embargo, they send gifts of food and clothing, giving at a time when they were still facing extreme hardships themselves. This imagery echoed contemporary international political issues as food drops were presented in a direct reference to the Berlin Airlift, demonstrating the British stance against oppression by authority (even though this time oppressors were the British government themselves). Tim Pulline argues that *Passport to Pimlico* represents a celebration of the jettisoning of wartime restrictions and becomes a nostalgic evocation of the spirit of solidarity¹³⁴. This is continually represented in the film as social and class barriers are breeched by the desire to return to the perceived freedom and prosperity of the pre-war years. In addition, the country as a whole is seen to not only endorse but also encourage such behaviour, physically and materially supporting the people of Pimlico in their stance against the imposed austerity of the era. Although the actions of Pimlico are radical, the people of London are trying to bridge the barriers, not re-enforce them or condemn the actions of the people behind them. This demonstrates a stance of support for those isolated behind barriers of separation, be they in Pimlico or Berlin.

These films presented in a popular satirical form the awkward post-war social issues whilst showing the importance of the community as a defender of its traditions and culture. They therefore reassured the importance of British values and traditions at both a local and national level. This was reinforced through the portrayal of stereotypical British characters throughout the films. You could see cockney delinquents, isolated islanders and eccentric

¹³⁴ T. Pulline ‘A Song and Dance at the Local: Thoughts on Ealing’, in R. Murphy (Ed), *The British Cinema Book* (London, 1997), p.118

professors, all set within the context of the working class standing firm, if reluctantly beside, the middle class. Regardless of the changes brought about by post-war reforms, Britain was still a society divided by class, but when faced with challenges and potential suppression, as a community and as a nation all are seen to pull together. The presentation of the strength of the British community spirit and the willingness to stand up for what they believed were themes which went on to dominate the films of the immediate post-war years. Traditionally the leading figures in such films had been representative of the ‘stiff upper lip’ and English restraint, but new characters emerged to demonstrate the changing attitudes within society. The working class were presented in leading roles and in a positive light alongside the upper classes, who were often portrayed as the fools of the piece. One film which to a degree contradicts this trend and examines contemporary issues was *Chance of Lifetime* (Bernard Miles, 1950), in which the subject of industrial conflicts was addressed¹³⁵.

Chance of a Lifetime

The film depicts the complex relationships between management and workers within a small machinery factory suffering from industrial disputes. It considers the consequences of compromise and highlights the importance of the contribution of the individual and is significant in that it sympathetically portrays the concerns of both the working and upper class within a troubled industrial environment.

¹³⁵ Bernard Miles started out as a music hall comic but had found fame during the war in films such as Noel Coward’s *In Which we Serve* (1942). After the war he went on literally build a temporary ‘Mermaid Theatre’ in his garden before opening the Mermaid Theatre at Puddle Dock in the City of London in 1959, the first for 300 years. It was in the theatre that he achieved most success as both an actor and as the director of the Mermaid, and in Sheridan Morely’s entry in the ODND there is very little attention paid to his film appearances and no mention at all of ‘Chance of a Lifetime’ which he produced, directed, co-wrote, and starred in and was nominated for Best British Film at the BAFTA’s.

Basil Radford portrayed Mr. Dickinson, the owner and manager of a small engineering firm frustrated with continual disputes and confrontation with his workers who, in a moment of anger, challenges the workers to do a better job of running the factory themselves. When the workers, led by Mr. Stevens (played by writer, director and producer Bernard Miles) decide to accept the challenge, he hands over the management of the firm to their elected representatives and ‘retires’ for some peace. After initially managing well, the financial complexities of managing large orders, ensuring the supply of resources, and growing worker dissatisfaction lead to loss of contracts. To stave off disaster, and at the request of the workers’ leaders, Dickinson returns to lend his expertise and his intervention saves the factory and with it the workers’ jobs. He is consequently invited to form a management board with the worker representatives, and this signals the film’s message; the importance of recognising the expertise of individuals and the need for mutual respect and co-operation within the work environment to ensure success. Although there were concerns that the film was pro-communist, upon its release a contemporary review claimed that ‘There is nothing very revolutionary in all this’ and that the film ends ‘a little tritely... with the conclusion that, if the management needs the men, the men need the management’¹³⁶. What the film actually presented was the workers flirting with the concept of communism but then showing how they would not be seduced by it in the long term. They were good British workers with notions of fair play after all.

Made almost a decade before the Boulting Brothers’ *I’m All Right Jack*, unsurprisingly the film had struggled to be made. Originally it was refused finance by the Film Finance Corporation as it did not have a distribution contract, and the film’s influential producer

¹³⁶ *The Times*, 1 May 1950

Filippo Del Giudice stated ‘This time no-one would grant me such a contract. A.B.C. [Associated British Corporation] the main distributor alongside Rank considered the film ‘communistic’¹³⁷. The film subsequently became the first to be forced onto the cinema circuit under the Cinematograph Films Act, 1948, under the promotion of independent films refused circuit bookings following a formal appeal¹³⁸. As the theme of the film centred round the conflict between capital and labour, however, the Ministry of Labour considered it to be subversive. In a cabinet meeting of 6 April 1950, George Isaacs the Minister for Labour stated that the film ‘Would be regarded as propaganda for communism and for workers control of industry’¹³⁹. This stance was no doubt influenced by the paranoia within the government concerning communist infiltration within the union movement¹⁴⁰. In support of his stance, Isaacs also sent a letter to the President of the Board of Trade, Harold Wilson, calling for his office to contradict the ruling of the Film Selection Committee which had deemed that the film should be granted a circuit booking¹⁴¹. Isaacs stated ‘It is the considered view of my senior officers that it contains dangerous propaganda and will definitely cause harm to the relations between management and labour....and will provide ready-made propaganda for the communists’¹⁴². Wilson was not prepared to contradict the ruling of the Selection Committee, however, as it was an independent, apolitical body and to contradict the ruling on political grounds would be considered oppressive. He reinforced this stance at the

¹³⁷ From *The Last ‘Cri de Coeur’ to my dear old England*, F. Del Giudice, September 1949, a thirty eight page open memoir explaining why he was leaving England and the British film industry. Detailed in Sarah Street, *British Cinema in Documents* (London, 2000), pp.42-44 as original copy missing from the British Film Institute collections.

¹³⁸ It was granted a certificate by reason of its entertainment value after a formal complaint of discrimination by the director Bernard Miles and a review of the case by the Board of Trade Selection Committee on 7th February 1950.

¹³⁹ PRO, CAB 128/17, Cabinet 19 [50], 6 April 1950. George Isaacs was also a lifelong trade unionist, becoming a member of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress.

¹⁴⁰ As typified by the London Dock Strike between May-July 1948 during which communists and ‘fellow travellers’ were considered to have been influential in agitating the dispute.

¹⁴¹ Meeting held Board of Trade, 7 February 1950. Isaacs was a former General Secretary of the printing trades union who had characterised the London dock strike of 1949 as nothing but a communist manoeuvre, and was strongly anti-communist concerning their influence within industry.

¹⁴² George Isaacs (Minister for Labour) to Harold Wilson (president of the Board of Trade), 31 March 1950, PRO, BT 64/4466

cabinet meeting of 6 April 1950, adding that he personally did not consider the film to be subversive¹⁴³.

Regardless of the political machinations surrounding the film, what of the portrayal of the characters themselves? The stereotypical representations of the class system are apparent, particularly in relation to the initial portrayal of the workers and union officials, but the character of Dickinson is neither a bumbling fool nor an oppressive figure. He is a man trying to run a business who becomes frustrated with the barricades placed before him. His portrayal is actually sympathetic. That trend is also reflected in the presentation of the factory workers who come to realise the contribution that the manager makes to the factory. Militant aggression is replaced by an understanding of the need for compromise in order to achieve their aims and secure their jobs, and the film ends with the reluctant acceptance of the need for co-operation on the part of both parties. Overall *Chance of a Lifetime* is an atypical example of British films of the era as it is not a vehicle for the promotion of anti-communist ideology, nor is it an overt example of the reinforcement of stereotypical characterisations. It promotes compromise and understanding. Whilst Miles succeeded in establishing his message without resorting to caricatures and clichés, in later years stereotypes and anti-communist rhetoric became prominent factors in the success of British films. To present this emerging trend in film, this study will now focus on the output and influence of the John and Roy Boulting, who became successful strongly independent writers, producers, editors and directors in the post-war years. Through their work they demonstrate an intense respect for individualism, whilst also celebrating challenges to the entrenched political interests of the

¹⁴³ PRO, CAB128/17, Cabinet 19 [50], 6 April 1950

era, with concerns over the communist threat evident in their work at both a dramatic and comedic level¹⁴⁴.



John and Roy Boulting¹⁴⁵

In order to put into context the creative output and cultural relevance of the twin brothers it is important to understand their motivation¹⁴⁶. John was the first to become professionally involved in the film business, when in 1933 he began working for a small distribution company in London: Ace Films. He quickly moved on to work with a small independent producer, while his brother Roy worked for some months at an independent studio in Canada before joining John in London, eventually working as an assistant editor. Professionally they had both therefore started their careers with independent producers and were determined to maintain that level of control as their career progressed. Personally, although from established middle class backgrounds, both joined the Labour Party in the 1930's strongly fearful of the rise of fascism and the political challenges emerging in Europe. This anti-fascist commitment also resulted in John volunteering as a front line ambulance driver for the International Brigade in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War. With Roy's support this signified their strong commitment against

¹⁴⁴ Born in Buckinghamshire, 21 December 1913, John (originally named Joseph Edward John Boulting) died 17 June 1985 and Roy (originally named Alfred Fitzroy Clarence) died 5 November 2001. Their film collaborations started in the 1940's and continued into the 1960's, with the brothers swopping the roles of director and producer. They remained independent producers, establishing their own production company and Lion films, and their work can be divided into two strains: the successful dramas of the war and immediate post war years, and the very popular series of comedies produced from the mid-fifties onwards.

¹⁴⁵ Image courtesy of the British Film Institute Screenonline stills and poster galleries:

<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/446435>

¹⁴⁶ Born into a middle class family, they were introduced to films at an early age and subsequently developed a keen interest in cinema, establishing one of the first film societies in a public school.

oppression that was a continual theme throughout their work¹⁴⁷. Upon John's return to England the brothers set up Charter Films, an independent company producing 'quota quickies' and their films soon reflected their own political views¹⁴⁸. Their first major success and recognition came with the release in 1940 of the adaptation *Pastor Hall* (directed by Roy and produced by John), a strongly anti-fascist film based on the humanist resistance of Pastor Martin Niemoller¹⁴⁹. Although the film was critically and relatively commercially successful, the advent of war led to a change in professional priorities.

Upon the declaration of war John joined the RAF and Roy the Army, however, they continued to work in film. They produced the propaganda film *The Dawn Guard* (1941) for the Ministry of Information and the feature film *Thunder Rock* (1942). Both films were moralistic and anti-fascist which helped to establish the brothers' reputation and also demonstrated their intention to produce films with a connection to the social and moral dilemmas of the time. Upon transfer to their respective service film units, Roy produced the Academy Award winning documentary *Desert Victory*, and its follow up *Burma Victory*¹⁵⁰, whilst John also produced his first feature length drama-documentary *Journey Together*¹⁵¹. Although such work was propaganda produced for the Ministry of Information, the work highlighted contemporary issues, the plight of the individual, and the need to work together

¹⁴⁷ Although the experience in Spain was relatively short-lived, their strongly anti-fascist views were later to be seen in their war time productions.

¹⁴⁸ These were low budget films such as *Consider Your Verdict* (1938) and *Trunk Crime* (1939), which fulfilled the legal obligation for cinemas to distribute a quota of British films, allowing the brothers to develop their style and cinematic skills at a practical level.

¹⁴⁹ The film is based on the play by Ernst Toller and is the true story of Protestant minister Martin Niemoller, who was interned at Dachau concentration camp for criticising the Nazi party. In Britain it proved to be a minor success though when originally released in an isolationist America the film was heavily criticized and censored.

¹⁵⁰ *Desert Victory* (1943) detailed the Allied campaign to drive Germany and Italy from North Africa, whilst *Burma Victory* (1945) detailed the hardships and eventual victory in Burma over Japanese forces.

¹⁵¹ *Journey Together* (1945) focussed on the journey through pilot training of RAF recruits, emphasising the bonds and mutual respect which developed that helped them to overcome setbacks and losses, and ultimately to survive.

as a team to defeat a common enemy. It was this desire to produce topical, socially relevant cinema which emphasised the stance of the individual that fuelled their post-war productions.

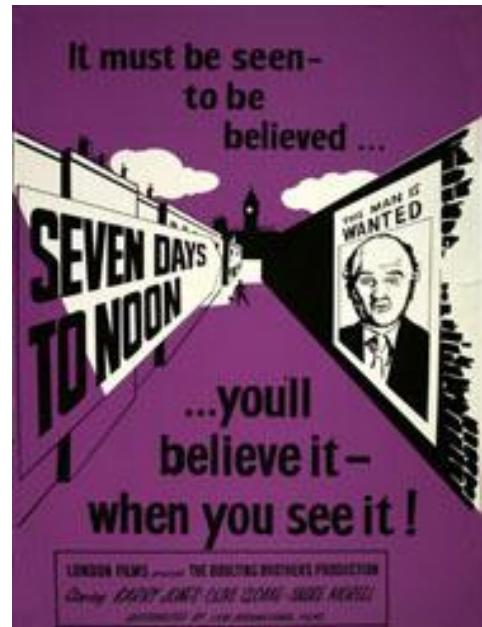
Following the war the brothers were professionally reunited and began with three serious dramas created in quick succession. An adaptation of Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* (1947), which depicted the criminal underbelly of inter-war Brighton was followed by *Fame is the Spur* (1947) detailing the rise of a Labour politician who loses his revolutionary fire as he progresses. They then created *The Guinea Pig* (1948), a story of social experiment and class divisions within a public school¹⁵². The films reflect the brother's preoccupation with political and social issues which are themes which continue throughout their filmography. They also show the reinforcement of British cultural identity within the ever changing environment of the post-war years. This desire to demonstrate the strength of national identity in the face of a growing threat became more apparent in the late forties, as the divisions in Europe were solidified and the communist-democratic divide became more pronounced. This followed the declaration of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, when the perceived worldwide expansion of communism created an atmosphere of suspicion regarding those seeking to challenge authority and traditionalism. This stance had been reinforced with the USSR becoming an atomic power to rival the USA, a development which led to increased concern regarding the potential for nuclear war. With Britain also engaged in its own nuclear programme, this led to the brothers to create the first

¹⁵² *Brighton Rock* was directed by John and produced by Roy and based on the novel by Graham Greene. It is 15th on the British Film Institutes 'Greatest British Films of the 20th Century, and following its commercial success Greene went on to write *The Third Man*. For *Fame is the Spur* the brothers switched roles with Roy directing and the film details how the greed for social status and prosperity led the principle character to sacrifice his socialist ideals (the principle character was very loosely modelled on Ramsey Macdonald). Roy was again director for *The Guinea Pig*, and the screen play was co-written by Bernard Miles who went on to create *Chance of a Lifetime* (he also plays the role of the boy's father). If you compare *The Guinea Pig* with the pre-war public school film *Goodbye Mr Chips*, the message towards creating a more equal and democratic society is evident.

British film to tackle the theme of growing anxiety over the proliferation of nuclear weaponry.

Seven Days to Noon¹⁵³

The academy award winning *Seven Days to Noon* was produced and directed by the Boultlings, whilst writing credit was shared with Frank Harvey (later to collaborate on *High Treason*), Paul Dehn, James Bernard and Roy Boulting¹⁵⁴. The film depicts a disillusioned British nuclear scientist Professor Willington (played by Barry Jones) who is disturbed by the apocalyptic ramifications of his work. In a letter to the Prime Minister, described by the senior investigator as “a polite well written note from one gentleman to another”¹⁵⁵, he threatens to explode a bomb in London within a week unless the government declares it will stop all production of nuclear weaponry. The film then details the search for the scientist and his nuclear bomb whilst London is evacuated and fear grips the nation.



The film reflects the paranoia of the era in that when asked if Willington could be trusted, the senior investigator Superintendent Folland replies “we are so damn scared we can’t trust anybody”. This paranoia is again highlighted when he asks the last person who saw

¹⁵³ Poster image courtesy of the British Film Institute stills and poster galleries: Available via http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/boultling/seven_days.html

¹⁵⁴ *Seven Days to Noon*, directed by John and Roy Boulting, 1950, was awarded the Academy Award for Best Writing Motion Picture Story 1952 (it was released in the USA in 1951)

¹⁵⁵ As described by Superintendent Folland when examining the letter.

Willington “has someone had put him up to this?” The fear is that he had been corrupted by an alien ideology: communism. As posters displaying the professor are put up around London and hotel checks are made, we see youths playing ‘Atomic Racer’ in an arcade, with atomic mushroom clouds serving as the games background¹⁵⁶. The audience is also shown the city secretly gearing up for evacuation, with workers marking up carriages and trucks and the airports coming under the control of the Air Ministry. To reinforce the gravity of the situation, the workers are heard moaning “The last time we did this was for Dunkirk” recalling a fresh memory of potential disaster for the audience¹⁵⁷. In the pub locals are also heard discussing the world situation with one commenting “There won’t be no declaration of war this time. Someone presses a button and its goodbye Sally”. This demonstrates the fear that there would be no gentlemanly negotiations or diplomacy before a strike, implying that advent of nuclear weaponry had changed the rules of combat.

In such an atmosphere of fear and paranoia the situation could not remain secret for long, and people grow suspicious of the increased activity, with newspaper headlines asking “What’s the Mystery. Is it War?” The dangers of paranoia combined with the consequences of Chinese whispers are demonstrated when a conversation is overheard in a gentleman’s club, and ‘Where are they rushing troops to?’ becomes ‘Have you heard, the Russians are moving troops’. The film is therefore demonstrating that the fear of communist expansion is a tangible concern for the British public. As a result of increasing public concern, the Prime Minister makes a radio broadcast to the nation to calling for calm, stating that the country is faced with a grave emergency. Clarifying the situation, the Prime Minister refers to

¹⁵⁶ Although there is now such a game relating to the destruction of the nuclear trucks transporting weaponry, at the time the game was fictitious and created for the film to add dramatic effect and link the threat to the younger generation.

¹⁵⁷ Following what Churchill referred to as a ‘colossal military disaster’ that left the heart of the British army stranded in Dunkirk, Operation Dynamo was launched to rescue the troops and return them home.

Willington as an unhappy, misguided man, and states that to deny Britain such nuclear weaponry would render Britain weak and prove to be “an irresistible invitation to the tyrant” and “a danger to the whole free world”. Although there is no actual reference to the Soviets or Stalin, clearly the threat of communism is the implied danger as there is no appeal to those “shut off by their rulers who control their newspapers, their radio, their every movement”. This is a direct reference to the oppressive control in communist Eastern Europe, and he ends by asking for calm as the eyes of the world were watching, implying that this is not just a domestic matter. The film then shows how his message is greeted with understated concern, as the British public stoically continue about their business, forming orderly queues and awaiting evacuation orders. Iconic British symbols such as the crown jewels, treasures from the National Gallery and British Museum, and even the Chelsea Pensioners are seen being removed to safety, with all forms of transport utilised to evacuate the people. To add an international perspective, an American NBC radio announcer states that the operation is proceeding ahead of schedule, stating how the British people are dealing with the emergency “calmly, resolutely and without panic”.

To offer a rationale for Willington’s actions, he is later seen attempting to justify his threat, stating how he originally saw science as a way of serving God, but now that dream had turned into a nightmare as the people were “moving like sleepwalkers to annihilation”. Whilst this allows the audience to understand his motives, it also reinforces the belief that he would go through with his threat to detonate the bomb as it was a matter of principle for him. This was not a desperate, deluded man¹⁵⁸. As the clock ticks towards the detonation time the search goes on in a deserted London, and Willington is eventually found praying in the ruins

¹⁵⁸ From a discussion with Mrs Phillips, a woman who had given him a bed for the night and whom he holds hostage whilst hiding out in her flat.

of a war damaged church near parliament, fifteen minutes before the bomb is due to go off. This brings the bomb to the very heart of government and threatens to destroy British democracy leaving the nation in turmoil. With the bomb armed, the climax of the film shows Willington being shot trying to leave the church and the bomb is hastily defused as Big Ben, the symbol of Palace of Westminster, strikes noon. The wartime all clear sounds and the final shot is of Parliament undamaged, with London safe and disaster averted.

The film was critically acclaimed as well as being commercially successful, with *The Times* stating that it was ‘aware of the tremendous moral issues involved’ calling it a ‘highly intelligent and seriously minded thriller’¹⁵⁹. The *Daily Mirror* considered it to be ‘a terrifying film’ that brought to life ‘all the nasty fears and terrors of the ordinary citizen’, with the focus entirely relating to the fear of nuclear weaponry¹⁶⁰. The film reflected the anxieties concerning the potential threat of the nuclear programmes, as demonstrated by the emergence of peace movements such as the British Peace Committee, and a stance against nuclear weaponry that would later lead to the foundation of The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament¹⁶¹. The portrayal of Professor Willington as a man fully aware of what he is doing spoke of the desperation of the individual, and highlighted the power one man could have over millions. The fear demonstrated within the community, and the terror that ensues as the desperate search for the scientist approached the deadline, illustrated how the perceived security of the nation could be undermined by those willing to forfeit their lives and freedom for the sake of a cause. Although not overtly anti-communistic, the film reflected the growing

¹⁵⁹ *The Times*, 14 September 1950 and 18 September 1950 respectively.

¹⁶⁰ *Daily Mirror*, 13 September 1950

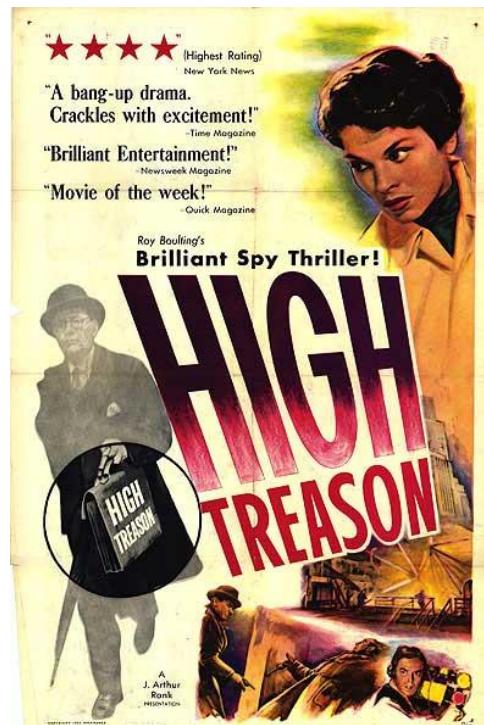
¹⁶¹ Founded in November 1957 with Canon John Collins as its Chairman, Bertrand Russell as its President and Peggy Duff as its organising secretary. The other members of its executive committee were Richie Calder, James Cameron, Howard Davies, Michael Foot, Arthur Goss, Kingsley Martin, J. B. Priestley and Joseph Rotblat. See B. Miles, *Peace: 50 Years of Protest 1958-2008* (London, 2008) and K. Hudson, *CND Now More Than Ever: The Story of a Peace Movement* (London, 2005)

fear of nuclear weaponry and the strengthening and nuclear capable Soviets. It also demonstrated the chaotic ramifications of challenges to the security of the state. In the Boulting's next film this was a theme which was to dominate, highlighting that the threats to British security and democratic freedom could be from within.

High Treason¹⁶²

The Boulting's follow up film was *High Treason*, directed by Roy Boulting and co-written with Frank Harvey, and was a more overt example of the portrayal of popular anxieties surrounding national security¹⁶³. The co-producer Paul Soskin wanted a film that would entertain but that also "dealt with the network of underground subversive activities in this country"¹⁶⁴. Whilst other films of the time centred on the international Cold War threat, such as *The Planters Wife*¹⁶⁵, in which Chinese communists attack

British rubber plantations in Malaya, *High Treason* explored the existence of a *domestic fifth column* and was based on an incident that had recently occurred¹⁶⁶. On 14th July 1950 at the naval dockyards in Portsmouth, seven barges loaded with ammunition and destined for Korea had caught fire and exploded. The Admiralty promptly announced that sabotage could not be ruled out, and after a brief investigation the Prime Minister Mr Attlee announced in



¹⁶² Original poster courtesy of http://uk.movieposter.com/poster/MPW-14785/High_Treason.html

¹⁶³ *High Treason*, directed by Roy Boulting, produced by John Boulting and Paul Soskin, 1951.

¹⁶⁴ *The Cinema Studio*, 29th October 1951

¹⁶⁵ *The Planters Wife*, directed by Ken Annakin, 1952.

¹⁶⁶ S. Guy, 'High Treason (1951): Britain's Cold War Fifth Column', *Historical Journal of Film, Television and Radio*, 13, 1, p.37 pp.35-47

parliament that saboteurs were responsible for the incident¹⁶⁷. This subsequently gave credence to earlier reports in the Sunday Express that information had been passed to 'Reds' regarding the shipment of munitions to Korea¹⁶⁸. In his speech, Mr Attlee called for the public to be vigilant and to "guard against the enemy within", and connected the incident to on-going world events when he stated:

*"Communists, whether they make war in Korea or cause disruption on Malaya, India or Burma, whether they destroy the liberties of the Czechs or Poles, or try to wreck the economic recovery of Britain and France and Australia, are all engaged in an attempt to mould the world to their pattern of tyranny."*¹⁶⁹

The Prime Minister was linking the explosion to the international challenges being faced by Britain, from Cold War conflict in Korea to Soviet backed colonial and domestic insurgents. British authority was now being challenged in the domestic arena, as this deliberate act of destruction on home soil demonstrated that saboteurs were seeking to destroy British stability and recovery, thereby making them susceptible to communism.

The brothers subsequently utilised this incident as the inspiration for a story around domestic saboteurs. The plot for *High Treason* focuses on the premise that Britain is at war with a known enemy abroad and an unknown enemy within, one which is made up of British citizens who work for a foreign state and follow an ideology alien to the traditional British model. In a direct connection to the incident in Portsmouth, the action centres round the deliberate explosion of armaments aboard a British ship in dock (SS Asia) and the subsequent investigation to find the perpetrators of the crime. This in turn reveals a formidable underground network of spies and agents from a broad range of positions in society. They

¹⁶⁷ *The Times*, 25th July 1950

¹⁶⁸ *Sunday Express*, 18th June 1950

¹⁶⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, 31st July 1950

range from an MP to dockworkers and from civil servants to a shop owner. They are intent on destroying the political, industrial and economic institutions of the country, announcing "We intend to destroy the eight great power-producing centres of this country...heavy industry will be crippled, mills stopped, armaments and ship building impossible- the government will be unable to resist our demands for a People's Peace". Although the word communist is never used in the film, and the USSR is not mentioned by name, the political stance of the perpetrators is clearly implied through their dress, language, behaviour and intent. This is illustrated in the film's review in *The Times* when the central protagonist, upper-class MP Grant Mansfield (played by Anthony Nicholls) is described as 'an inoffensive civil servant' who Mr Boulting has 'managed without saying a word to make it unmistakably plain that the man is a communist agent'¹⁷⁰.

The individual portrayals within the film reinforced stereotypical representations of those with communist tendencies who posed a danger to national security. The MP Mansfield is immaculately dressed, articulate and refined, a bachelor who prefers the company of cats to humans but is also secretive and sinister, distancing himself from others. It is he who is the leader, ruthlessly using the people around him. The saboteurs are from different backgrounds. There are 'militant' dockers, corrupted by the promises of true freedom from class driven oppression, and effete middle class 'intellectuals' who smoke pipes, run contemporary art galleries and attend a modern music society. In addition the naïve, disillusioned working class characters have been ensnared and corrupted by ruthless political manipulators, as represented by Mansfield. This fifth column is not that of foreign agents but British citizens, loyal to an alien ideology and with its leaders from the doyen middle class. The middle class

¹⁷⁰ *The Times*, 29 October 1951

characters, however, are representative of reforming idealists, with an elementary association with progressive cultural trends, not with the safe traditional representations of Rattigan or Coward. Their clothing, social habits and interests therefore challenge the perception of the traditionally portrayed British middle class characters, demonstrated by their radical intellectual ideas and tastes for modern European art and music. This illustrates a concern regarding the effect of the rapid social reforms of the post-war era and the influence of imported cultural trends, both resulting in the dilution of traditionalism. Amongst our fifth columnists, it was not just within the middle class characters that such social and cultural separation was evident.

The character of Williams, a working class docker who actually plants the explosive device before later being killed by his comrades, is deliberately set apart from his fellow, patriotic, ‘good’ dock workers. He is presented as a shifty, chain smoking, and argumentative character, isolated and uneasy in his surroundings. He is constantly battling to reinforce his position and is antagonistic not only towards his bosses but also to those around him. In contrast his fellow dockers, even if portrayed as crafty slackers and petty crooks, have an aura of integrity: upon seeing the gravity of the situation they are more than willing to help the authorities. The communist is therefore illustrated as being a disparate hostile individual, isolated within the team and not representative of the ‘honest’, hard-working dockers. Like Williams, the character of Jimmy Ellis, a young shop owner, is also killed by his comrades, but unlike Williams the audience develops sympathy for this character as you see a naïve young man, corrupted into communism whilst serving with the RAF during the war. Ellis had served his country in its hour of need but had then been seduced into betrayal by the likes of Mansfield. Even the Scotland Yard officer investigating his murder concludes that he was

‘trapped into working against his country’. Communism is therefore presented as targeting the naïve and vulnerable for its own ends and is willing to corrupt, use and destroy individuals to achieve its goal.

In contrast to *Seven Days to Noon*, *High Treason* was not a critical or commercial success. Although it was generally favourably received as a thriller, it was dismissed as a contemporary social analysis of the domestic communist threat, with the *Sunday Express* stating ‘It had little impact as, what I imagine it intends to be, a warning of the Communist menace’¹⁷¹. Although the premise of the film had the potential to cause great controversy, the fact that it made little impression implied that the public were neither shocked nor frightened by the portrayals on screen. The Boulting brothers were telling a story that the public had already assumed to be true through newspaper coverage of the actual sabotage. As *The Times* critic stated, the film failed as ‘The argument dies away in the clichés of a collaboration between a literary crime novel and a tired leading article’¹⁷².

Another reason for the film’s failure was the unrealistic expectations raised about its content. The distributor Rank had leaked information implying that the script had been vetted by MI5, and announced that the premiere would be delayed until after the 1951 General Election to avoid possible criticism of political bias¹⁷³. This created the belief that the film would be political dynamite, but the delay was subsequently considered unnecessary and as one critic noted “it would not have swayed a single vote”¹⁷⁴. This opinion may also have been fuelled

¹⁷¹ *Sunday Express*, 28 October 1951

¹⁷² *The Times*, 29 October 1951

¹⁷³ *Daily Express*, 4 October 1951

¹⁷⁴ *News of the World*, 10 November 1951

by the fact that the film did not mention ‘Communist’ or Soviet’ by name, though as stated, British cinema at the time, though obviously not American, was not overtly political¹⁷⁵. The film was actually the first anti-communist domestic thriller in the post-war years, but was not considered to be controversial with the censors giving it an innocuous ‘U’ rating (compared to the ‘A’ given to *Seven Days to Noon*). In contrast to the contemporary critical reception, modern day analysis is somewhat different. Tony Shaw states that the film arguably ranks as the most overtly political film of the whole post-war period¹⁷⁶, whilst Raymond Durgnat argues that *High Treason* was as close to a McCarthyite film that Britain ever got to, with ‘its witch-hunt... weirdly testifying to the hysterical current of its time’¹⁷⁷.

Both *Seven Days to Noon* and *High Treason* managed to draw in fears from the war against fascism and replace them with fears over nuclear weapons and domestic communists, utilising established paranoia over threats to British values. However, they failed in their overall desire to entertain an audience seeking to escape the realities and concerns of their everyday lives. Comedies were the most commercially successful British films of 1951 and the public were keen to be entertained¹⁷⁸. The Boulting brothers made a conscious decision to turn to comedy by the mid-fifties, but following the commercial failure of *High Treason* they initially worked on separate projects in collaboration with American studios, often with American stars in the leading roles¹⁷⁹. Although these films were relatively successful they did not provide the brothers with the commercial success or acclaim reserved for the

¹⁷⁵ In fairness *Seven Days to Noon* had already breached that unwritten rule, even if under the guise of morality.

¹⁷⁶ Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War*, p.41

¹⁷⁷ Raymond Durgnat, *Mirror for England* (London, 1970), p.70

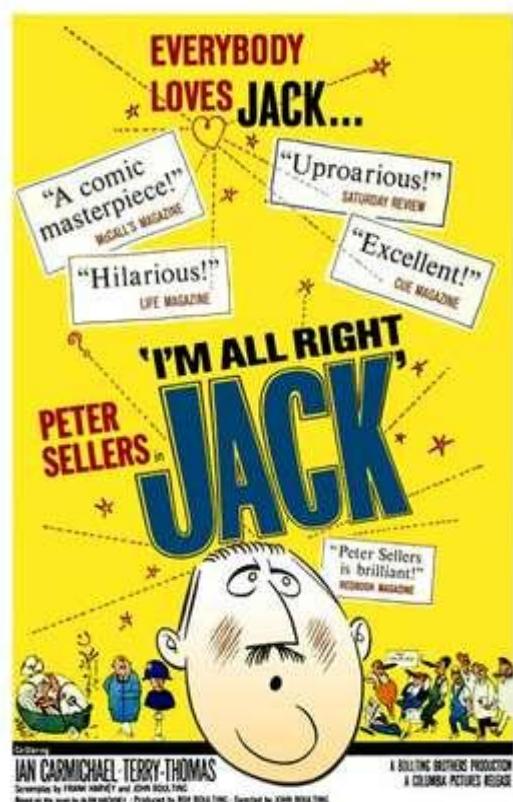
¹⁷⁸ The commercial successes of 1951 were *The Lavender Hill Mob* directed by Michael Crichton, and *Scrooge* directed by Brian Desmond Histed.

¹⁷⁹ Such as Roy’s *Singlehanded* (1953) for 20th Century Fox, a collaboration on *Seagulls over Sorrento* (1954) for MGM-British starring Gene Kelly, and Roy directed *Run for the Sun* (1956) for Russ-Field Productions, starring Richard Widmark, which was the only film the Boulting’s made in Hollywood.

emergence of the second incarnation of the Boulting's career: the institutional satires. In a series of films stretching from *Privates Progress* in 1956 to *Heavens Above* in 1963, the Boulting brothers fixed their sharp eyes on the institutional bastions of British culture and society. They took comedic swipes at the army in *Privates Progress*, the law in *Brothers in Law* (1957), the unions in *I'm All Right Jack* (1959), the Foreign Office and diplomacy in *Carlton-Browne of the F.O.* (1959), and the Church of England in *Heavens Above!* (1963). Although the satires presented a more flexible, less anarchistic view of the challenges faced by the British public, they also demonstrated the brother's continued interest in the defence of the individual against authority and bureaucracy. This transformation was also representative of their changing political attitudes. As the fifties had progressed they had become disillusioned with ineffectual the Labour Party, considering it obsolete and unable to offer a valid alternative to Conservative domination. Moving away from a pro-left-wing stance they had transferred their allegiance to the Liberal Party, seeing liberal reform as the way forward in a changing society. Bearing in mind the change in the political outlook of the brothers, the portrayals of the political protagonists in their films evolved to reflect their changing attitudes. As such, left-wing and communist characters became increasingly robust. In order to analyse the representation of communism in these later films, attention will be paid to two films in particular which bring to the audience strong, satirical communist stereotypes: *I'm All Right Jack* and *Carlton-Browne of the F.O.*

I'm All Right Jack¹⁸⁰

One of the most striking criticisms of *I'm All Right Jack* came from the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians (ACTT), when it severely criticised the film for its negative portrayal of trade unionists and the union movement¹⁸¹. This was ironic as it was the brothers' dispute with the ACTT which would prove to be the breeding ground for ideas for the film. The dispute with the union related to the brothers having combined status as executives and technicians, resulting in what the brothers' considered to be restrictive practices against them by the ACTT. It has also resulted in legal action that was not finally settled until 1964. Set against this backdrop, the brothers created *I'm Aright Jack*, a satirical study of the trade union within a manufacturing company. It was to become one of the most popular British productions of the year, winning BAFTA's for best screenplay, and the best actor award for Peter Sellers for his portrayal of the militant shop steward Fred Kite.



Whilst the film is undoubtedly a depiction of the industrial class struggle prevalent at the time, it also firmly establishes the stereotypical representations of the militant trade union shop stewards and union members. The plot centres round the increase in domestic industrial conflict and highlights the gulf not only between management and the workers, but also

¹⁸⁰ Poster image courtesy of <http://www.moviepostershop.com/im-all-right-jack-movie-poster-1959>

¹⁸¹ Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War*, p.59

between the trade union leaders and the rank and file members. As a way of highlighting the differences rather than the similarities between the two sides, two strong characterisations are made. Stanley Windrush (played by Ian Carmichael) is a university educated gentlemen trying to gain experience of work within industry, whilst Fred Kite (played by Peter Sellers) is the militant shop steward attempting to ensure the job safety of his members. Both characters are comically stereotypical representations of not only their class but also their political standpoints. They are both also shown to be naive and subsequently manipulated by others.

Windrush is introduced as a failure. Although an Oxford graduate he now seeks a career in industry, a move which perplexes his family who cannot understand how anyone ‘brought up a gentleman...would choose to go into industry’. Through his failures to gain employment as a management trainee following ten interviews set up by the Combined Universities appointments Board, Windrush is identified as being not only incompetent but also hopelessly naïve. He is subsequently set up as being the fall guy in a scheme instigated by his devious Uncle, in which he will be integrated into an engineering firm whilst keeping his family connections secret. Windrush therefore becomes the unwitting pawn in a scheme which relies on him creating industrial unrest in one firm, causing an important contract to move to another which will make his uncle a great deal of money in backhanders and raised share prices. The whole premise rests on the disruption Windrush will cause because of his background and naivety within a working class, union dominated industry. Just the mere thought of him working in a factory causes his aristocratic aunt, played by Margaret Rutherford, to fear he would be forced to join ‘one of those horrid unions with all that violence’, and the stage is set.

Upon his arrival at the firm we are introduced to the mad scramble to clock in followed by images of lethargy and general reluctance to get down to any work whatsoever. In the factory strict codes are observed regarding what you can do and when, and woe betide anyone who actually moves more than one thing at a time. Due to his speech, dress and mannerisms, Windrush's presence immediately rouses suspicion that he has been employed by the management as a time and motion assessor. This heralds the introduction of Fred Kite, the shop steward. With a supporting party of union members who are always addressed as 'brother' or 'comrade', Kite informs the personnel manager 'The Major' (Terry-Thomas) that the management is in breach of previous agreements and that the new man should immediately be removed. Although unaware of who Windrush is, the Major immediately backs down to avoid another strike stating that his appointment is a mistake and agrees to sack him. That creates a problem. In a comedic turn, the union cannot stand by and allow a fellow employee to be sacked as that would be victimisation by the management, even though such actions have been instigated at their request. It is eventually agreed that Windrush will be allowed to stay on with the assurance of the Major that he is not in the employment of the management, and the chaos ensues.

In contrast to Windrush who is dressed in an expensive suit complete with overcoat and has the effete mannerisms of a gentleman who has never done any hard work in his life, Kite is the epitome of the working class man. He is in dark working trousers, a collarless shirt with rolled up sleeves, and a pencil behind his ear. To add to his non-nonsense appearance his hair

is closely cropped and he is also sporting a rather curious Hitler like moustache¹⁸². For the workers he is the authority figure in the factory, and he is the man the Major must continually placate in order for any work to get done at all. He is quite simply the archetypal shop steward, practical and rigid and suspicious of all things managerial, considering them a threat to the worker's rights. It is the workers and Kite as their representative who are in control through the continuous threat of industrial action, and into this environment steps the gentlemanly Windrush. Through class and character he is automatically an outsider. His affable manner labels him a 'creep' and his introduction to the union makes his position clear: 'It's not compulsory, only you've got to join see'. The only advantage Windrush sees in his appointment is in the shape of Fred Kite's blond and busty daughter, causing him to accept an offer of lodgings at Kite's house, much to Kite's delight, and it is in the home that we are introduced to the communist backbone of Kite and his naïve beliefs.

Within the domestic environment Kite introduces Windrush to his home library of the works of Lenin and books on communism, and he speaks longingly of visiting the Soviet Union with 'all them cornfields and ballet in the evening'. Kite also talks of the classless society and of how workers need to stand together in Britain, but there is a duality to his stance. Despite talk of equality he speaks of the fear of black workers taking his men's jobs 'just like in Birmingham'. He is highlighting concerns of mass immigration from the former colonies and Kite is therefore portrayed as both a communist and a racist¹⁸³. Although Kite is a dominant character, at home it is his wife who is in charge, emphasising the traditional conservative values of the working class family: good manners and respectability. For her Windrush is a

¹⁸² This was Peter Sellers' idea. He modelled his hair on Stalin and then added the moustache to make him look like 'a right little dictator'.

¹⁸³ There had been serious unrest the previous year due to race riots in London, Nottingham and Birmingham triggered by clashes between black immigrants from former colonies and white youths.

welcome addition to the home with his lovely manners, and she hopes he will be a positive influence on their daughter. Kite sees Windrush's presence as an opportunity for 'intellectual' conversation, relishing the chance to share his communist opinions. Following Windrush's actions at work, however, their relationship becomes very awkward.

With the secret timing of Windrush working faster than the other men and the subsequent introduction of new work schedules, the workers turn against him stating 'he was working like a ruddy black!' Kite has no hesitation in calling a strike and this unrest is exactly what the scheming uncle wanted. When Windrush then naively breaks the picket line to go to work, he is immediately blacklisted and ostracised and the problem escalates. The press coverage of the dispute then makes matters worse. Windrush is portrayed as being victimised by the union for actually working hard, and his refusal to attack his fellow workers for their actions, referring to them as 'awfully nice chaps', brings increasing press and public support for his plight. Soon sympathy strikes begin elsewhere in support of the union, including at the rival factory which is part of the uncle's scheme, and his money making plan subsequently comes under threat. With the strike then becoming national, the TUC sits on the fence and announces that it is 'not prepared to endorse the strike officially, nor condemn it' therefore nothing is resolved.¹⁸⁴. With both factories at a standstill and the money making plans backfiring, the scheming uncle, the Major, and Kite reluctantly work together to get rid of Windrush and end the whole sorry affair. Kite comes up with the idea of how, and Windrush is retired on the grounds of mental instability, his illness brought on due to overwork following the introduction of the new schedules. With their subsequent withdrawal, the strike ends and peace is restored as the factory employees return to the everyday avoidance of work.

¹⁸⁴ This reflects the brothers' attitude to the ineffective stance of the TUC over their conflict with the ACTT.

The film's popularity was largely reliant on the strong character representations of the two main protagonists and became the biggest grossing film of 1959¹⁸⁵. While commercially successful, the critical reviews of the film were varied with the popular press having a more favourable overview. The themes of the film came under fire from certain areas of the press with the *Financial Times* stating that the film 'echoed the popular audience's narrowest and meanest fears and prejudices'¹⁸⁶, whilst the *Times* argued 'for satire worthy of the name ...we shall have to look elsewhere'¹⁸⁷. Whilst many reviews emphasised the film's working class background, with the *Observer* languidly stating that the film was 'bound to be a triumphant popular success...it has the common touch', overall little attention was paid to the anti-communist stance presented. This was not ignored, however, by the left-wing press who were outraged. The *Daily Worker* entitled its review 'All Right Jack and No Left', and launched a scathing attack on its portrayal of union members¹⁸⁸. Although the *Tribune* acknowledged Seller's performance in the role of Fred Kite, they also considered it 'as brilliant as it is contemptible'¹⁸⁹. The film has since continued to cause mild controversy due to the representation of communist union members, resulting on one occasion of it being withdrawn from television viewing prior to an election following the complaint of a Labour MP¹⁹⁰. Ironically the film also became recommended viewing as part of management training courses and was even included on the curriculum of Unilever's management training during the seventies¹⁹¹.

¹⁸⁵ *The Big Country*, directed by William Wyler and starring Gregory Peck was the second grossing film followed by *Carry on Nurse*, directed by Gerald Thomas, and way ahead of *Room at the Top* directed by Jack Clayton and starring Lawrence Harvey. From A. Aldgate & J Richards, *Best of British: Cinema and Society from 1930 to Present* (London, 2002), p.180

¹⁸⁶ *Financial Times*, 17 August 1959

¹⁸⁷ *The Times*, 17 August 1959

¹⁸⁸ *Daily Worker*, 15 August 1959

¹⁸⁹ *Tribune*, 21 August 1959

¹⁹⁰ The film was pulled from the schedule of 15th April 1979 by London Weekend Television after a complaint was made to Transport House, which in turn complained to the Independent Broadcasting Authority and the complaint was upheld. A. Aldgate & J Richards, *Best of British: Cinema and Society from 1930 to Present* (London, 2002), p.180

¹⁹¹ *Daily Mirror*, 6 January 1970

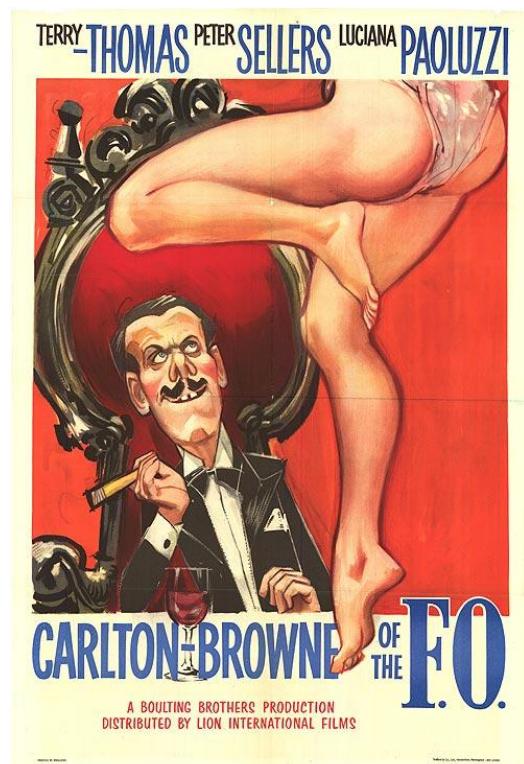
Although comedies had emerged as box office gold in Britain at the time, further propelled by the ‘Carry On’ franchise, ‘St. Trinian’ films and the ‘Doctor’ series, none had the striking individuality of Boulting’s *I’m All Right Jack* nor were they as overtly political in their message¹⁹². Although the other films were filled with double entendres, risqué situations or farcical slapstick, they did not characterise the contemporary political and social dilemmas within a satirical format, and this separates the Boulting’s film from the genre. The film actually reflected popular concerns as the growing Cold War tensions mirrored growing industrial tensions regarding the power of the unions. The two central characters were key to presenting the opposing ideologies, neither of which came out well. Windrush represented Britain, out of depth, naïve as to the intentions of others and with an outdated imperialistic attitude in a changing world. Kite in contrast was determined to follow a modern ideology which would break the old imperialistic and capitalistic barriers, resulting in working class control. Windrush, like Britain, was ideologically unprepared for the collapse of traditional imperialistic attitudes, and this renders him susceptible to the radical challenges of the left-wing militants such as Kite. Through the portrayal of Kite as an inflexible, Lenin reading communist who effectively controls the factory, communism is demonised to represent a threat to the perceived harmony of British industry and its production. Although this was a biting domestic satire, it did have international connotations. Kite’s factory made missiles for the Ministry of Defence, so by striking they were affecting our national security and rendering Britain vulnerable during the height of the Cold War. This highlighted another theme to be examined by the Boultings; the defence of British territory and foreign policy. In

¹⁹² The Carry On franchise of Gerald Thomas led to 29 original films from 1958-1978, with only one film concerning industrial relations in a factory entitled ‘Carry On At Your Convenience’ (1971). This film proved to be the first box office failure for the series as it was deemed to have alienated its working class audience with its attack on the trade union movement and the lampooning of the Bolshie union representative Vic Spanner. The four St. Trinian’s films (1954-1978) all centred around the unorthodox girls boarding school and the havoc created by its often violent, criminally inclined and overtly sexual pupils, whilst the Doctor series of films (1954-1970) depicted in seven films the middle class shenanigans of junior doctors within the National health service and later led to several successful television series.

Carlton-Browne of the F.O. attention is drawn away from everyday industrial concerns as a far flung corner of the Empire comes under threat from Soviet interest. Whilst *I'm All Right Jack* offered a domestic analysis, *Carlton-Browne* portrayed the international anxieties of the Cold War in true Boulting fashion.

*Carlton-Browne of the F.O*¹⁹³.

In an attempt to focus their satirical eyes on foreign policy, both British and Soviet, in this film the brothers have highlighted the anxieties surrounding the changing position of Britain on the international stage, and her colonial collapse. In addition, they have incorporated the fears regarding Soviet expansionism, Cold War partition and the manufacture of nuclear weapons. What they have actually created in modern day analysis is a satirical lampoon of diplomatic ineptitude and nostalgic imperialist attitudes within the framework of Cold War anxieties.



As in *I'm All Right Jack*, the scene is set in the opening sequence when we learn that Britain only gained the colony of Gaillardia by accident when a British vessel carrying oranges crashed into it, resulting in the residents 'living on marmalade for months'. The farcical situation is reinforced when we learn that the British representative on the island has

¹⁹³ Original poster for Carlton-Browne of the F.O., image courtesy of <https://www.movieposters.com/posters/archive/main/84/MPW-42143>

remained in post 40 years after the island's independence, purely because nobody actually told him to leave. The foreign office is therefore immediately represented as a place of incompetence and complacency, filled with imperialistic old boys with outdated views and indifferent attitudes. Chaos ensues when valuable mineral deposits which can be used in the manufacture of atomic bombs are then discovered on the island. The island suddenly has value and the Soviets are also interested in this new discovery, but there are long standing political factions on the island and no-one knows which side the deposits are on. Something must be done and enter Terry-Thomas playing Carlton-Browne, head of Miscellaneous Territories in the Foreign Office. He reacts to the news that he is off to Gaillardia to secure British control (once they have found it on a map) by complaining that he will miss Ascot.

As with the other Boulting films, stereotypical representations abound of bureaucratic buffoons, eccentrics, and sinister plotters. It is the Soviets who pose the greatest threat to British interests as they are after the mineral deposits to manufacture nuclear bombs. Carlton-Browne's must therefore ensure that the islanders stay within British control, even if this is hindered by the fact that they are actually independent. This demonstrates the post-colonial anxieties prevalent in the fifties over the loss of control and political influence, and the fear of Soviet expansionism into the vacuums created. By seeking to ensure British influence, the film is therefore reinforcing the Cold War policies though within a non-violent, satirical framework. As such, the film highlights the outdated methodologies within British foreign policy and its subsequent lack of understanding of contemporary attitudes.

Back in Gaillardia, the King is assassinated exacerbating the potential for conflict and Carlton-Browne is duly dispatched in a cloak of imperialist superiority and ignorance. Upon his arrival, we are introduced the heir of Gaillardia. He has been educated in England but he immediately rouses suspicion when the government learn he was formerly a member of the Labour Party. His left-wing tendencies subsequently raise concerns regarding his loyalty and of a potential deal with the Soviets. In contrast, the Gaillardia Prime Minister Amphibulos (played by Peter Sellers) sees a chance for personal gain and suggests to Carlton-Browne that they should work together ‘with all our cards under the table’ to secure a deal. In another side deal, however, the Grand Duke of Gaillardia (John Le Mesurier), a long time claimant to the throne, is secretly negotiating with the Soviets for his own ends. The Boultings have therefore presented political corruption at all levels of the negotiation; locally with Amphibulos, nationally with the Grand Duke, and colonially with Britain. This air of corruption is maintained as eventually British, Soviet and also now American representative are on the island digging to stake a claim for the right to the deposits. The main concern is where on the island the deposits will be found. Due to on-going feuding between the north and south factions, Amphibious suggests peace through partition and so enters the might of the United Nations. A partition along the 33rd parallel is decreed and a workman enters with a bucket of paint. A white line is then literally painted across the land, with the British and Americans supporting the South and the Soviets the North, thereby echoing the partition in Korea and the Cold War stance. But who is on the side with the deposits? Manic negotiations ensue as fears rise that Britain may control the wrong half and will have given the Soviets the resources for nuclear weapons. As the British Foreign Secretary attempts to reverse the decision in the UN, the Soviets block the move and the danger of armed conflict over Gaillardia escalates. In a flash the matter is resolved in a suitably traditional fashion. The two feuding factions of north and south are united through marriage and the engineers of the

solution, Amphibulous and the Grand Duke, are rewarded with a hotel in Portugal. In an echo of the First World War, a goodwill football match is then arranged, and in a reflection of the bi-polar order it is the USA and the USSR who will compete. When they turn up in kit for different codes of football chaos ensues, and the images of cultural differences are reinforced.

The actual representation of the protagonists in *Carlton-Browne* reinforces the audience's perception of communists as being threatening and subversive. Our first introduction to the Soviet delegation on the island is at a ceremony set up to parody the Soviet Mayday Parade. Whilst the other official attendees are in full ceremonial dress, suspicion is drawn to three figures in sombre dark suits and dark hats, totally out of place in the barmy climate and surrounded by white dress uniforms complete with feathered hats. As they closely watch Carlton-Browne and the other delegates, and they are in turn watched by them, the military parade begins. Men march past with shovels and axes, girls ride by on bicycles with old, inoperable rifles, a plane with no engine is pulled along by donkeys and then the finale of the civil defence: dustcarts. Mayday in Moscow this most definitely is not. The Soviet's presence on the island is as a result of the dealings of the Grand Duke. He is introduced striding into a meeting uninvited, his manner aggressive and confrontational as he pushes the Prime Minister into a chair, thereby casting aside democracy. His appearance at this initial introduction is undoubtedly based on Stalin, with his harsh, cropped Stalin like hair and moustache, his working clothes, sheepskin collared pheasants overcoat and belt strung across his chest in a military manner. He is gruff, domineering and forceful, brandishing a crop and the audience immediately realises he is the one in league with the communists. Although from then on he is seen in formal dress, the visual connection has been made. The communists are always seen in the sombre dark suits and hats, even when supposedly digging

for the deposits, and this is their uniform throughout the film, regardless of the circumstances. They are therefore inflexible and predictable, unlike the flamboyant Carlton-Browne, who careers through the film with an air of incompetence and pomposity.

"They're all a bloody shower!"¹⁹⁴

Overall there are similarities between these two comedies in that they both demonstrate the changing nature of industrial and political relations and the ambivalence of political attitudes both domestically and internationally. You basically have an external situation reflecting domestic concerns. In *Carlton-Browne* the Foreign office officials are the senior managers, the feuding factions of north and south of Gaillardia are the factionalised workers, and the rising Cold War tensions are representative of those seen in the workplace. Although the settings for the film are distinctly separate, the themes cross over and reflect the concerns of the era. The similarities also relate to the depictions of the protagonists, with left and right-wing ideologies stereotypically presented to the audience. Carlton-Browne is Windrush with standing in the foreign office, representative of the conservative English gentleman, full of naïve expectations and outdated imperialistic attitudes. The Soviets have replaced the communist shop steward Kite, intent on gaining control and representing a direct threat to traditional practices and values. Just as the factory returned to normality with the removal of Windrush and the reinstatement of the working status quo, with the dispute over the deposits settled Gaillardia disappears once again into obscurity. One contrast, however, is the fortunes of the main characters themselves. Windrush is left disillusioned with the deceit and corruption he has faced and retires to a nudist colony, shutting himself off from an outside world he cannot understand. In contrast, Carlton-Browne is knighted for his services to world

¹⁹⁴ Spoken by Terry-Thomas as both The Major in *I'm All Right Jack*, and as Carlton-Browne in *Carlton-Browne of the FO* when speaking of the workers and the islanders respectively.

peace and his actions are celebrated as a triumph of British diplomacy. This contrast demonstrates the brothers' cynical attitude towards the achievements of the Conservative political hierarchy, with John Boulting listing his recreations as 'irritating the conservative minds',¹⁹⁵.

The films of the Boulting brothers presented the concerns of ordinary people in a unifying framework, by utilising recognisable and tangible threats to their traditional way of life. By placing relevant anxieties into a satirical setting, they popularised the absurd. They also highlighted the inadequacies and infallibilities of the imperialistic attitude entrenched within British culture. Within this concept, conservative forms of patriotism were encouraged whilst communism was demonised, portrayed as an insidious threat lurking at the very heart of British society. Whilst other popular British films of the time undoubtedly entertained the audience, the films produced and directed by the Boultings sought to portray contemporary anxieties within an entertaining format. That allowed them to encourage and reinforce a negative public perception of communism in both its domestic and international guises. Although their socially aware comedies anticipated the satire boom of the 1960s, the brothers were not part of the New Wave British cinema of the same era, and their success faded as more biting political satire emerged, particularly through television. In addition, the emergence of the 'Angry Young Men' and kitchen sink dramas, which championed the working class and their reactions against class distinctions and the establishment centred attention on more domestic issues within British culture. Communism took a back seat as traditional conservative family values, domestic stability and social norms came under threat from a more broadly based culture of radicalism that was divorced from communist

¹⁹⁵ John Boulting's Who's Who entry as referenced in his Obituary 'John Boulting; A Distinctive Contribution to British Cinema', *Times*, 19 June 1985.

ideology¹⁹⁶. The late fifties and early sixties therefore saw British cinema focussing on domestic social and cultural issues, with nationalism becoming more inward looking as different notions of ‘Britishness’ were presented¹⁹⁷. Contrary to the desperation for traditional stability seen in the forties and fifties, there developed a youthful embrace for change, and British cinema mirrored this change in direction. Along with the development of science fiction films, the lapsing of censorship restrictions also saw the emergence of horror films, which although often set in the past had contemporary issues. Whilst American produced films often centred around the monster of ‘the alien other’, in direct relation to the red menace and communism,¹⁹⁸ in Britain the power struggle was not so clearly defined for the audience, such as in the Quatermass films¹⁹⁹.

Although there are other films that could quite rightly be considered independently in a study of the representation of communism in British cinema, by focussing on the Boulting’s series of successful films which incorporate popular British character actors, a trend is established. The public became familiar with the portrayals before them, and through reinforcement they come to recognise them as having a degree of truth. Militant dockers were suspect, shop stewards became associated with the character of Kite, high ranking civil servants were out of

¹⁹⁶ As examples of the cinema production of the work of the writers labelled as part of the ‘Angry Young Men’, John Braine’s ‘Room At The Top’ was filmed in 1958, John Osborne’s ‘Look Back in Anger’ filmed in 1959, Allan Sillitoe’s ‘Saturday Night, Sunday Morning’ filmed in 1960, Shelagh Delaney’s ‘A Taste of Honey’ filmed in 1961 and Sillitoe’s ‘The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner’ filmed in 1963.

¹⁹⁷ As argued in Sarah Street’s *British National Cinema* (London, 1997) particularly Chapter 3 ‘Genres from Austerity to Affluence.

¹⁹⁸ US science fiction and horror films such as ‘The Thing’ (1951), ‘Them’ (1954) and ‘Invasion of the Body Snatchers’ (1956) centred on the threat of the invading alien forces, obliterating individuality and serving as a metaphor for the anti-communist stance of the MacCarthyite era.

¹⁹⁹ *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1955), directed by Val Guest was a Hammer Production focusing on returning astronauts being infected with a fungus-like alien life-form which would destroy humanity if allowed to spore, and the subsequent race to find and destroy it. It was re-titled ‘The Creeping Unknown’ for American audiences and became a cult film on both sides of the Atlantic. Its success led to *Quatermass II* (1957), directed by Val Guest, a plot with similar fungus like aliens invading Britain as a result of meteor showers. Finally for Hammer Production there was ‘*Quatermass and the Pit*’ (1967), directed by Roy Ward Baker, in which an ancient alien ship is discovered buried in London which has the power to control the mind and instigate anarchy and violence.

touch and incompetent as the Empire collapsed around them, and the Russians were an all corrupting, sinister presence who were nuclear capable and dangerous. This reflected the brothers own views but although they were considered radicals within their industry this was in a professional context. They did things differently; they remained independent and took on multiple roles in the creation of their films which brought them into conflict with the major studios and also the unions at times. They were not, however, considered political radicals. They were members of the Labour Party who later became disillusioned with the lack of progress and changed allegiance to the Liberal Party. They had no association with the communists, be that in an official capacity with the CPGB, or unofficially with communist sympathisers and their stance remained anti-communist though reformist throughout this period. Their independence was therefore professional rather than political and this stance was typical in film as production costs and commercial considerations effectively determined what was produced.

British post-war films therefore managed to present and reinforce the attitudes of society whilst reflecting its concerns and anxieties in a changing environment. Throughout the post-war years and into the sixties, social changes were generally accepted with the emergence of the welfare state, the nationalisation of several industries, the National Health Service etc. Internationally, however, developments concerning the spread of communism caused the public to question national stability and the security of the state. One constant concern was the expanding influence of communism at a domestic level. As cinema makers produced films which reflected not only the public's concerns but also their own political standpoints, a stereotypical representation of the contemporary Soviet and domestic communist was established and indeed reinforced. They were the personification of the threat to traditional,

democratic life and values, and communist sympathisers within a domestic context were either naïve, corrupted or revolutionary saboteurs. As such, an anti-communist cultural ideology was established and reinforced through the creative media of British films with the representation of stereotypical characters as its backbone.

The Duality of Post-War Theatre in Britain.

"At this juncture in the world's history the theatre has an enormous role to play. It can make an immense contribution towards the unity and faith we have got to achieve if we are to have some hope of combating the faith of communism which is burning up the whole world."

Anthony Quayle, July 1950²⁰⁰

Although film in a sense offered a one dimensional negative representation of communist characters which echoed the viewpoint of the creators, within theatre there is much more variety and complexity in communist characters placed before the audience. Theatre was therefore a media which allowed for a more subtle examination of the challenges of the era, be they political or social. It also had more opportunities for alternative portrayals to be seen. This chapter will therefore establish how post-war British theatre presented a more nuanced illustration of communism, and how this was pre-dominantly staged within the domestic environment. Concerns relating to international communism were largely absent and this reflected the more intimate relationship theatre has with the audience. Like film, the creation of characters, stereotypical representations, and settings were used to reinforce the message

²⁰⁰ Anthony Quayle speaking to a meeting of the Board of Governors at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, of which he was the Director, following his return from a successful Australian tour: *The Stage*, 3rd August 1950.

of the play and develop the connection to the audience. As a result characters were presented which demonstrated the changing perception of threat from communism. This can be seen as the austerity of the immediate post-war years gradually gave way to the idealist hopes of the fifties, and the cultural freedoms of the early sixties. From social dramas to satirical revues, the ideologies and concerns of the playwrights and producers were presented to the public, and offered an insight into the cultural depictions of the perceived heroes and villains within the domestic context. Although more openly left-wing, non-conformist depictions of working class people were emerging through the work of radical playwrights, theatre on the whole maintained its traditionalist stance.

The rise of modern theatre which consciously challenged the artistically and socially refrained melodramas and upper middle-class comedies had deep and uncertain roots. The war and the subsequent programme of massive social and economic reform had created an amorphous but definite mood for change. This was seen as the gradual decline of social deference was mirrored by a parallel decline of aesthetic deference. Subsequently a number of new playwrights articulated this growing sense of impatience with the old social and artistic forms, as they were searching for more realistic themes and language that would appeal to new audiences. Drama slowly moved from drawing rooms to working class kitchens, and theatre developed a sense of post-war reality as class barriers were eroded. The normality of everyday existence became a source of examination as family conflict, economic struggles and changing expectations related to all. Theatre therefore became a mirror of the concerns of domestic society, regardless of the class of the audience or the creators. It offered an alternative voice missing in the examination of film, as independent companies and amateur groups could present work that would have not been considered

suitable for the commercially led West End. In contrast, film was reliant on an established distribution circuit controlled by commercially led cinema chains. The costs of production and distribution for film determined that there was no alternative commercial audience and also no alternative communist characters.

The opportunity to present contrasting communist representations in theatre can be seen when one examines the two opposing factions. That is the traditionalism of the ‘institutional’ theatre of the West End, the Old Vic and the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre²⁰¹, compared to the ‘independent’ productions of the Unity Theatre, the Theatre Workshop and the emergence of the Royal Court²⁰². This conflict between ‘institutional’ and ‘independent’ theatre will demonstrate the alternative communist portrayals being placed before the audience. It will also show how the political stance of the individual can influence theatrical production, with Binkie Beaumont, Anthony Quayle and Joan Littlewood representing their respective fields²⁰³. Their influence will be seen to directly influence the productions on offer. In addition, the concepts and representations of communist characters in plays by the writers

²⁰¹ The West End was considered the commercial centre of British theatre and was dominated by ‘Binkie’ Beaumont’s H.M.Tenant Ltd which controlled at least 25% of all West End theatres in the post-war years. In addition, the Old Vic was a permanent classical British theatre company that was considered a highly respected and exportable national asset and was under the leadership of Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson and John Burrell. Although the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre maintained its financial independence from government institutions, Binkie Beaumont became an influential member of the Board of Governors and utilised his influence and his business acumen to ensure starname players and commercial success. In addition, under the leadership of Anthony Quayle the stance of the theatre was very traditional in its concept. The SMT was to become the The Royal Shakespeare Company in 1961 under the leadership of Peter Hall.

²⁰² The Unity Theatre was formed in 1936 and grew from the Worker’s Theatre Movement using agitprop theatre techniques to highlight the plight and struggles of the working class and unemployed and presented theatre which reflected contemporary life. Although it originally began with no formal base or capital it developed small theatre groups in major cities presenting left-wing plays. Theatre Workshop was founded in 1945 by Joan Littlewood, Ewan MacColl and Gerry Rafferty and will be discussed in detail from page 135. The Royal Court re-opened in 1952 but in January 1956 George Devine established the English Stage Company at the theatre with the intention of creating a writers theatre that would produce serious contemporary works. The importance of its productions of the works of Arnold Wesker and John Osborne will be considered from page 141.

²⁰³ Anthony Quayle was the influential Artistic Director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre from 1948-56 and laid the foundations for the Royal Shakespeare Company. Joan Littlewood, a lifelong communist, was a founder member alongside fellow communist Ewan McColl of the Theatre Workshop in 1945, becoming its artistic director.

J.B. Priestley, Ewan MacColl and in particular Arnold Wesker will demonstrate how non-stereotypical communist characters were portrayed. This will also highlight that there were plays which presented radical left-wing characters which were associated with communist ideology due to their anti-establishment stance. This can be seen in the early work of John Osborne who originally emerged as the ‘angry young man’ and represents a radical who was gradually absorbed by the establishment due to his commercial and critical success.

Regardless of the intentions of the writers, they had to be granted a licence to perform to a paying audience, and in contrast to film there was significant censorship in theatre. It was the role of the Lord Chamberlain’s office to determine which material was fit to be presented to the public, but this study will show how little influence such censorship had with only two plays refused license from 1945-1963 on political grounds. In a further example of government influence which again is not mirrored in film, the role of subsidy and the grants of the Arts Council will demonstrate how non-challenging, traditional forms of theatre benefitted from government controlled financial support. In comparison, more politically active theatre companies were marginalised, remaining mainly self-funded and continually on the brink of financial collapse. This chapter will therefore establish the contrasting representation of communism within British theatre: from traditional theatre with its dominant stereotypical negative representations such as the subversive, the revolutionary and the sinister other, standing in direct contrast to the progressive, the idealist, and the freedom seeking oppressed seen in independent theatre. Throughout this chapter once again it is the intentions of the creators, producers and the actual representations put before the audience which are focus for consideration. It is therefore a cultural analysis of a collection of

empirically collected artefacts which is the basis for the examination, with the choice of plays determined by their significance at the time and their communist characterisations.

When considering theatre's role in representing the concerns of society, Michael Billington argues that one can trace the fluctuations of post-war British society through the drama of the era. He also raises the complex question of whether theatre simply reflects society or helps to create and modify it²⁰⁴. One therefore needs to re-consider the role of theatre as a representation of general public attitudes, as in the post-war era the perception of theatre as being the bastion of the middle class was confronted with the emergence of new, challenging, and indeed young, working class playwrights. This challenge to the traditionalism and its celebration of nostalgic, imperialistic representations of Britain brought with it new concepts of normality: the portrayal of class divisions and social expectations evolved to reflect a modern, reforming society attempting to establish itself within a post-war Europe. Within this sphere, the emergence of post-war *avant garde* theatre companies contributed to the presentation of new dimensions of theatrical production. The trappings of flamboyance were stripped away and the audience was presented with a more realistic depiction of contemporary Britain. They therefore offered a view of the anxieties and concerns of the nation at a domestic level, focussing on the plight of the individual and the family. Overall they offered a mirror on society rather than a created illusion, and the public chose to watch.

So where did the change in attitudes and perceptions of theatre emerge from? Britain prior to the war had been represented on stage within the context of a stratified class system and a

²⁰⁴ M. Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945* (London, 2007), p.3

nation in the economic doldrums. It was the stalwarts of Ivor Novello, Noel Coward and Terrence Rattigan who provided the escapism and entertainment at a critically and commercial successful level within the theatres of the West End²⁰⁵. Neither fairness nor reform was evident in the traditionalism of the have and have-nots, whether presented as musical, comedy or drama. More challenging productions simply had limited prospects. The Royal Court, which had earlier in the century helped to promote the work of emerging British talent, had ceased to be a theatre in 1932 and small regional theatre companies offered limited opportunity for more challenging and political productions. There had been politically active theatre groups before the war such as The Manchester Theatre Union, the socialist Theatre Union, and the communist Red Megaphones, but their audience and therefore their influence and impact was admittedly small²⁰⁶. Even in the immediate post-war era, nostalgic drawing room dramas and musicals initially still dominated, although the promotion of the poetic dramas of Christopher Fry and T.S. Eliot provided the initial cultural shift²⁰⁷. It is not until the mid-1950's and the emergence of the *avant garde* status of the re-opened Royal Court that British theatre truly embraced its role as a contemporary social and political commentator and cast aside its apathy. This change was not merely a product of the fifties,

²⁰⁵ Ivor Novello's post-war major successes were *Perchance to Dream* (Hippodrome, 1945), *King's Rhapsody* (Palace Theatre, 1949), and finally *Gay's the Word* (Saville Theatre, 1951) the last play before his death in March 1951. Noel Coward's productions included *Peace in our Time* (Lyric Theatre, 1946), *Sign No More* (Piccadilly Theatre, 1946), *Pacific 1860* (Theatre Royal, 1946), *Ace of Clubs* (Cambridge Theatre, 1950), and *Relative Values* (Savoy Theatre, 1951). Rattigan presented *The Winslow Boy* (Lyric Theatre, 1946), *The Browning Version* (Phoenix Theatre, 1948), *Adventure Story* (St. James Theatre, 1949), *Deep Blue Sea* (Duchess Theatre, 1952), and his last major success *Separate Tables* (St. James Theatre, 1954).

²⁰⁶ Manchester Theatre Union was dominated by Joan Littlewood and Ewan McColl and set up in 1936 following on from McColl's' Theatre of Action and Red Megaphones, both of which were considered as left-wing vehicles for social commentary and caused controversy due to Littlewood and McColl's connections with the Communist Party of Great Britain. For a comprehensive study of inter war British theatre from a political perspective see Steve Nicholson, *British Theatre and the Red Peril: The Portrayal of Communism 1917-1945* (Exeter, 1999) and Clive Barker & Maggie B. Gale, (eds), *British Theatre Between the Wars* (Cambridge, 2000).

²⁰⁷ Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not for Burning* premiered at the Arts Theatre Private Club in 1949 before running at the Globe Theatre [now the Gielgud Theatre] and was followed by *Ring Around the Moon* (Globe Theatre, 1950), an adaptation of Jean Anouilh's *Invitation to the Castle*. T.S. Elliot's *The Cocktail Party* also debuted at the Edinburgh Festival, 1949.

however, as its origins were in the desire for a modern theatre which reflected the concerns and expectations of a modern Britain in the aftermath of war.

As a result of post-war reforms, in theatre the class ridden representations of family and social dilemmas seemed both anachronistic and blinkered. In general, however, commercially successful theatre did not reflect domestic anxieties. What of immigration, subversives, alien political ideologies, economic reliance on the USA and the decline of Britain on the international stage? The political and social considerations of the age were simply not primary subject matters for traditional theatre. In addition, Britain was also under bombardment from cultural imports from America and Europe. The popularity of flamboyant American musicals such as *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific* and *Guys and Dolls* ensured a continuous stream of American imports, whilst the European writers Anouilh and Ionesco had works successfully translated alongside American imports from Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams²⁰⁸. This perceived dilution of British culture created a renewed sense of purpose for the depiction of ‘Britishness’. Whilst this inevitably led to an increase in traditionalism and the celebration of nostalgic, romanticised presentations, it also paved the way for more realistic portrayals of domestic life and anxieties. Millington argues that social purpose helped to galvanise and liberate culture at large²⁰⁹, and alongside opportunities for funding, this is certainly applicable to the changes soon to be witnessed within theatre.

²⁰⁸ Oklahoma! (Drury Lane Theatre, 1947), South Pacific (Drury Lane Theatre, 1950), Guys and Dolls (Coliseum Theatre, 1953), Anouilh’s *Le Misanthrope* (Old Vic, 1948) and Christopher Fry’s adaptation of Anouilh’s *Ring Round the Moon* (Aldwych, 1950), Ionesco’s *The Lesson* (Arts Theatre Club, 1955), Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* (Old Vic, 1950), Miller’s *The Crucible* (Royal Court, 1956), Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Aldwych Theatre, 1949)

²⁰⁹ Billington, *State of the Nation*, p.7

Funding

The question of funding helped to shape post-war theatre. Following on from the wartime Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), in 1945 this became the Arts Council of Great Britain with the directive to promote and maintain British culture. This government funded programme was to report directly to the Treasury and was initially under the chairmanship of economist and arts lover John Maynard Keynes²¹⁰. In addition to his standing as the foremost economist of the era, Keynes had been a member of CEMA during the war and was a strong supporter of both the Royal Opera House and the Sadler's Wells Ballet Company. Consequently under his direction funding was largely focussed in central London with the Royal Opera House receiving the largest grant. With Keynes' guidance, by reporting direct to the Treasury the Arts Council also established the principle of an 'arms-length' relationship between UK Arts policy and the government. In addition it confirmed the principle to financially support the Arts and positively promote British culture, safeguarding of home-grown theatrical production. It was, however, a double edged sword. By providing financial support for theatre it designated certain kinds of theatre as being worthy of state subsidy, and therefore by exclusion, certain kinds of theatre not. The imprimatur of the Arts Council subsequently came to be seen as a sign of quality. 'High theatre', although a traditional concept, now had state validation. Nevertheless as the fifties progressed cultural changes influenced institutional theatre. With the advent of successful and critically acclaimed *avant garde* theatre at the English Stage Company (ESC) based at the Royal Court for example, thought-provoking subsidized theatre gradually emerged to challenge the traditional dominance. This is not to say that plays and productions considered worthy by the critics found favour with those in charge of the purse strings. The gradual build-up of support for the Theatre Workshop, under the direction of Joan Littlewood did result, after much

²¹⁰ CEMA had previously reported to the Arts Minister and the Education Minister, the new directive to report direct to the Treasury effectively curtailed the influence of departmental policy regarding the arts and education, thereby theoretically allowing for more flexibility of funding.

pleading, in a small grant from the Arts Council, but it was minimal in comparison to the funding given to the ESC. As a further indicator of institutional support for traditional theatre, in 1961 the newly established Royal Shakespeare Company (which evolved from the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre) received an initial grant of £5,000 from the Arts Council rising to £57,000 just two years later. In contrast, by 1963 the Theatre Workshop's grant had reached the heights of £3,000. In addition to Arts Council grants, local councils could also provide grants in support of community based theatre, and this provided a stimulus for the emergence of repertory theatres in Guilford (1946), Ipswich (1947), Leatherhead (1951), Canterbury (1951) and Derby (1951)²¹¹. Theatre Workshop received no such funding²¹². The evident establishment disapproval of its left-wing stance and the Art Council's subsequent reluctance to support it can be seen in the grants given by the Arts Council to both the English Stage Company and the Theatre Workshop:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Theatre Workshop</u>	<u>E.S.C.</u>
1954-55	£ 150	
1955-56	£ 500	
1956-57	£ 500	
1957-58	£ 1000	
1958-59	£ 1000	£ 5500
1959-60	£ 1000	£ 5000
1960-61	£ 2000	£ 8000
1961-62	£ 2000	£ 8000
1962-63	£ 3000	£ 20000

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²¹¹ A. Jackson & G Rowell, *The Repertory Movement: A History of Regional Theatre in Britain* (Cambridge, 1984), p.81

²¹² The company was associated with communist policies due to its evident political activism and the communist political connections of its members, such as co-founders Ewan MacColl who was a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (along with several company members) and Joan Littlewood who resigned her party membership but remained a committed communist.

²¹³ Funding statistics cited in H. Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story* (London, 1981), p. 214

The Lord Chamberlain's Office

In addition to the influence of the Arts Council and the potential funding that they could offer, theatre was also subject to the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain. As the government's representative of authority within the realm of theatre, The Lord Chamberlain's Office censored theatrical performances in order to protect the 'vulnerable' British audience. Even in the changing times of the post-war years the office were still using the guidelines issued by the Parliamentary Select Committee in 1909, which set out the conditions for the refusal of a license, and it was not until the Theatres Act of 1968 that this duty was officially abolished²¹⁴. As a result, the actions of the Office reflect the anxieties of the establishment over political and moral concerns but they were actually using guidelines which were Edwardian in stance. By dictating what was considered suitable for public performance, censorship reflected the dual offerings in British theatre. Mainstream theatre offered a more traditional, conservative stance which was in contrast to the more liberal, challenging theatre of the independent and fringe groups who could present their more challenging work as a 'club performance', thereby negating the need for a license from the Lord Chamberlain's office²¹⁵.

Censorship works on the premise of discriminating between what is acceptable and what is not, utilising ideological concepts to determine if the material posed a threat to the perceived standards of society. At its core were concerns over religion, decency, morality and political stability and theatre scripts were vetted by the 'readers' of the Lord Chamberlain's office.

²¹⁴ One of the catalysts for this change in the law was the prosecution in 1965 of Edward Bond's play *Saved*, staged at the Royal Court Theatre under "club" auspices. During the period under consideration, the appointment of Lord Chamberlain was undertaken by Rowland Baring, 2nd Earl of Baring (1938-1952) , succeeded by Lawrence Lumley, 11th Earl of Clarendon (1952-1963).

²¹⁵ A 'club' performance was one whereby registered members of the 'private' audience could purchase tickets in advance for a production, therefore ensuring that it was not a performance open to the general public.

These were almost exclusively ex-military men representing traditional establishment views²¹⁶. Theatre which provided no concerns was therefore in general representative of white, heterosexual, conservative, middle-class, married, church-goers. That would be safe, sensible theatre but not actually representative of the anxieties of the cold war era. In contrast, a play with challenging social or political themes would risk being declined a license, and the material could then only be performed in a private club environment with no public access. It was therefore necessary for work to be presented for licence with due concern given to the criteria of the readers and their perceived need to protect the public. This resulted in contentious themes being camouflaged. Political activism was disguised as working class idealism, sexual ‘deviances’ were hidden under the cloak of infidelities or mental breakdown, and homosexuality camouflaged as marital strife or the bachelor life. One could not expect a play which questioned God, the Monarchy, the sanctity of marriage and heterosexuality, let alone threaten democracy or British relations with other powers to find favour in the Lord Chamberlain’s office. In reality political objections were extremely rare and utilised the exemption ‘to be calculated to cause a breach of the peace’. During the period of this examination (1945-1963), out of the 76 plays refused a public license, only two were subject to political objections, however, both were submitted by left-wing Unity Theatres and contained communist themes: *Strangers in the Land* and *The Rosenbergs*²¹⁷.

Mona Brand’s ‘*Strangers in the Land*’, is a rare example of a play featuring the examination of the international communist movement as it considers the treatment and persecution of the Soviet backed communist insurgents by British soldiers in Malaya. It was submitted to the

²¹⁶ An example being Lieutenant-Colonel Sir St. Vincent Troubridge (retired).

²¹⁷ Of the 19,838 plays submitted for licence between 1945-1963 only 76 plays were refused a licence, and by far most rejections were on the grounds of the sexual content or implied sexual behaviour portrayed within the plays. Concerns relating to homosexuality, lesbianism, salacity, prostitution and the vice trade dominated.

Lord Chamberlain's Office in 1952 for performance by the Unity Theatre based in Cardiff²¹⁸. A license was refused on the grounds that it was likely to cause a breach of the peace, as the ex-servicemen of Cardiff could take 'violent action against such defamation' due to the 'direct libel against the British army and the British community in Malaya'²¹⁹. In his note of rejection the reader from the Lord Chamberlain's office, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir St. Vincent Troubridge explained his concerns: "The Unity Theatre organisation is the theatrical organ of the communists and fellow travellers...It is not to my mind tolerable that these should receive a license for further dissemination from so high an official as the Lord Chamberlain"²²⁰. It was therefore not only the play which was deemed unsuitable for license, but the Unity Theatre was itself criticised for its political stance. The play could subsequently only be presented as a club performance and therefore its audience, and influence, was severely limited.

The following year Eric Paice's '*The Rosenbergs*' was submitted for license by the Unity Theatre in Holborn in conjunction with the Manchester Committee for Clemency for the Rosenbergs²²¹. The play was overtly political and concerned the American trial for espionage of the communists Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in 1951, and was strongly critical of the political witch-hunt's being conducted in the US²²². Following rejection of the play for license, the Lord Chamberlain expressed his concern over the political message of the play in

²¹⁸ Mona Brand was an Australian playwright and had been a member of the Communist Party since the 1940's. She was under the surveillance of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation for her political beliefs and her writing was relatively unknown in Australia at that time due to the domestic attitudes to pro-communist works. Interview with Mona Brand 'Unknown at home, but a hero abroad', Sidney Morning Herald, 21st October 2005

²¹⁹ Readers Report: *Strangers in the Land*, 1952, British Library

²²⁰ Note attached to Readers Report; *Strangers in the Land*, 1952, British Library

²²¹ Eric Paice was writer for the Unity Theatre and went on to be an early TV writer, helping to establish the realist tradition, for series such as Dixon of Dock Green, The Brothers and Secret Army.

²²² They were eventually executed in America on 9 June 1953 after three stays of execution and appeals for clemency from Western European countries were ignored.

a note attached to the Readers Report: ‘Unity theatres are v. left-wing....One wonders if it is right to use the theatre for this sort of personal propaganda especially in a case which is still, really sub-judice’.²²³ Once again the refusal of licence was also connected to criticism of the political standpoint of the theatre group. Although the play had to be presented as a private club performance it was a sell out and broke the theatres record for block bookings for a straight play²²⁴.

Club performances therefore allowed more controversial themes to be presented before an audience and one such play was *The Valley of the Shadows* by Kenneth Galloway, presented by the New Gateway Theatre Club in Edinburgh²²⁵. The play dealt with disillusioned youth who, embittered with the system that offered them no future, turned to communism only to find they were worshipping at a false alter. The central character is a communist party member, Marion, who learns that a former love to whom she provided secret plans from her father’s files has been ‘liquidated’ by his communist comrades²²⁶. His death forces her to question both her actions and her communist beliefs, as she feels he was a victim of the corruption and paranoia of his comrades. She subsequently resigns from the communist party and the plot revolves around her struggles to normalise her life and distance herself from her communist connections and her potentially treasonous actions. It is the intervention of a local

²²³ Note attached to Readers Report: *The Rosenberg Story*, 1953 British Library.

²²⁴ See C. Chambers, *The Story of the Unity Theatre* (London, 1989), p.197

²²⁵ Not submitted for licence to the Lord Chamberlain’s office, *The Valley of the Shadow* by Kenneth Galloway and directed by William Forbes was presented by the Committee of the New Gateway Theatre Club, New Gateway, Edinburgh on 25 January 1955. The New Gateway also went on to produce ‘Stratonica’ by Laurence Clark, directed by William Forbes and presented 6 October 1955. The play concerned the relationship between an ailing American senator and his new wife, a communist and the daughter of a Russian philosopher whilst on a Pacific island near an atomic proving ground. It proved rather complex and was reviewed as ‘psychological gymnastics’: *The Stage*, 13 October 1955

²²⁶ Her father is Lt.-General Sir Brian Thornwood, therefore military secrets have been passed to the communists and this highlights their revolutionary intentions.

parson, Rev. Landsbury, who offers her support and stability which allows her to find the strength to walk away, leading her out of the ‘Valley of the Shadow’.

Marion is portrayed as an intelligent, middle class character who is disillusioned with her traditional role and also with the choices she has made. Choices which she no longer understands. She is a young idealist shown to have been corrupted and used by her communist comrades, only to find herself destroyed and abandoned upon a crisis of faith. It is the influence and support of a traditional British figure, in this case the parson representing the western convention of faith and traditionalism, that offers her escape from the shadow and allows her to move towards the light. The symbolism of light and dark to illustrate right and wrong is used not in the sense of lighting, clothing or setting, but in the more deliberate sense of moral enlightenment, as it is only through abandonment of the shadow of communism that Marion is redeemed. As an examination of the political dilemmas facing the disillusioned youth of the fifties, the play was described as ‘significant’ and ‘deserving of a wider audience than that of a theatre club’,²²⁷ though unfortunately there is no evidence of further productions, and it was only the club audience of Edinburgh which had the opportunity to see it.

Regardless of the option of a restricted club performance, even if a license was granted one still had to find the financial backing and a theatre in which to stage the play. Self-censorship within theatre was evident as theatre companies had commercial as well as political considerations. Plays had to make money and in order to give their productions the best

²²⁷‘The Problem of Politics’, review of ‘The Valley of the Shadow’, *The Stage*, 27th January 1955.

chance of profit, on the whole producers ensured the public were given what they wanted to see. This subsequently widened the gap between the financially supported institutional theatre and the often cash-strapped and homeless independent theatre. In order to establish the influence of such divisions the ideology and roles of both institutional and independent theatre will now be examined.

Institutional Theatre

The productions of British popular theatre were dominated by commercial requirements and therefore reflected the dilemma faced by Attlee's reforming government: it had to prove itself to be economically viable. Within the West End one main business dominated popular theatre: Binkie Beaumont's HM Tennant Limited. Based at the Globe Theatre (now the Gielgud Theatre), Beaumont was a highly influential producer with long standing support for traditional theatre. He also later became one of the Board of Governors of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre and one of the founder members of the board of the National Theatre in 1963²²⁸. Under Beaumont's guidance the West End saw the successful post-war staging of many lavish productions, ranging from Rattigan's '*The Winslow Boy*' (1947) to *Oklahoma!* (1947), and from Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1949) to Christopher Fry's (adapted from Anouil) '*Ring Round the Moon*' (1950). In general, Beaumont presented entertainment with star names in star costumes. He also championed traditional playwrights such as his long-time friend Terence Rattigan, ensuring the continual representation of middle-class drawing rooms. Beaumont's support of traditional productions, especially those

²²⁸Born Hughes Griffiths Morgan (his mother remarried and his surname became Beaumont), as a child in Cardiff he became a friend of Ivor Novello, the son of a neighbour. He gradually developed his interest in theatre beginning his career as a stage hand at the Cardiff Playhouse Theatre and his friendship with Ivor Novello continued. He later became lifelong friends with John Gielgud, Noel Coward and Terence Rattigan whose work he continually supported. See Richard Huggett, *Binkie Beaumont: Eminence Grise of the West End Theatre 1933-73* (London, 1989)

of costume dramas and farce, safeguarded the continued dominance of the genre within the popular theatre of the West End. This was typical of the pragmatic attitude to theatre which saw it as a customer driven service which tapped into the middle class nostalgia for pre-war values. Beaumont had a reputation for guaranteed quality and he therefore sought to protect his product and his reputation, embodying a conservative aesthetic. His evident distain for progressive and indeed aggressive modern theatre was later epitomised by his refusal to sit through the premier of *Look Back in Anger* at the Royal Court, walking out in disgust during the interval. This stance was recognised by Joan Littlewood who described him ‘a minotaur who lurked in a labyrinth’²²⁹. Although Beaumont maintained a pragmatic approach, he did have some sympathy for the idealists who sought to bring about an evolution in British theatre, but his interests remained commercial as he controlled at least 25% of West End theatres. Beaumont’s influence and interests not only affected what was on offer, but also what was considered by others to be economically viable²³⁰. This influence led John Osborne to later describe him as ‘The most powerful of the unacceptable faeces of theatrical capitalism’.²³¹

As well as Beaumont, one cannot ignore the dominant playwrights of the immediate post-war era as they were effectively the voice of establishment theatre and the popularity of their work marginalised any positive representations of political radicalism. Noel Coward and Terence Rattigan were both deeply uneasy about the changes taking place in Britain, and

²²⁹ J. Littlewood, *Joan's Book* (London, 1994), p.192

²³⁰ He managed to secure Arts Council funding for productions promoting domestic writers, thereby fulfilling the criteria of the council although the writers were already under his management rather than new talents. He had always known how to manipulate the system and during the war Entertainment Tax had ensured that 33% of all box office income went to the Treasury. In order to avoid this, Beaumont had set up Tennant Plays Ltd presenting non-profit 'educational' plays. At the end of war he also set up The Company of Four at the Lyric Theatre presenting educational or experimental plays which provided jobs for actors returning from the forces, again to his financial gain. His stable of contracted actors also ensured that he could always ensure a big name for a big production. See Billington, *State of the Nation*, p. 32

²³¹ J. Osborne, *Almost A Gentleman* (London, 1991), p.20

responded in their work by a mixture of backward looking nostalgia and censure of the changes taking place around them. Coward had been at his heyday during the war and held deeply conservative, imperialist views which were at odds with the reformist policies of the new Labour government. His bitterness towards the changes in his beloved England were reflected in his post-war writing, such as in his 1945 production *Sigh No More*, in which he patronised the intelligence of the working classes. In 1946 he presented *Peace In Our Time*, set in an alternative England in which Germany had actually won the Battle of Britain and successfully invaded²³². The play centres around a group of people in a pub, collaborators and resisters alike, and is in direct contrast to his perceived apolitical reputation²³³. Coward is questioning whether a brief period under Nazi rule with its resulting patriotism and resistance would have been better than the defeat of Conservatism and the acceptance of post-war Socialism. This seemed quite a change in direction from the man who stated in his acidic assessment of agit-prop theatre: 'The theatre is a wonderful place, a house of strange enchantment, a temple of illusion. What it most emphatically is not and never will be is a scruffy, ill-lit, fumed-oak drill hall serving as a temporary soap box for political propaganda'²³⁴. He may not have considered *Peace In Our Time* to have been propaganda but it was certainly overtly political in its message, highlighting his frustration at the changes in post-war Britain.

Peace In Our Time was not a commercial or critical success and demonstrated Coward's lack of connection with the changing character of the British people. While he wanted a return to

²³² *Sigh No More* premiered at the Manchester Opera House in 1945 before being presented at the Piccadilly Theatre in 1946, and *Peace in our Time* was premiered in London at the Lyric Theatre in 1946.

²³³ The play was premiered in Brighton before transferring to the Lyric Theatre, London, however, it was not a success. It was a pleasant, alternative reality melodrama set in a pub and did not in any way convey the horrors of occupation or touch upon the fate of the Jewish population or 'other deviants' such as homosexuals. The play was therefore out of touch with the reality of its proposal and had misjudged the relief and optimism present in post-war Britain.

²³⁴ Kenrick, John. "[Noel Coward 101: Cowardy Quotations](#)", The Cyber Encyclopaedia of Musical Theatre, TV and Film, available <http://www.musicals101.com/noelquot.htm> accessed 21.07.10

the traditionalism and social structure of the pre-war years, the public had embraced the post-war concepts of change and reform. Coward could not. In the fifties, however, he returned with a blatantly right-wing play following the Conservative election victory in 1951. *Relative Values* celebrates the restoration of traditionalism and lampoons dreams of social equality with everyone happy with their true station in life²³⁵. Although a relative triumph, it did not match up to the critical or commercial success of his earlier productions. Coward never could embrace the social, political and cultural changes in Britain, and although he now has iconic status, his post-war theatrical reputation was in decline.

Terence Rattigan was his greatest domestic rival. He was once again a stalwart of institutional theatre, who sought to appease his loyal conservative audience whilst covertly defying society's repressive attitudes²³⁶. A major post-war success was *The Winslow Boy* in 1946, which followed the wrongful expulsion of a cadet from the Royal Naval College for theft and the fight to clear his name²³⁷. Although the play shows an individual standing against the establishment and triumphing over Whitehall bureaucracy, we also see the cadet's militant sister working with her political opponent for justice. He is demonstrating an alliance between the radical left and establishment right to achieve an end goal. Unlike Coward, Rattigan understood the political dilemmas of the post-war era. He was able to channel this into work that was recognisable to his audience whilst representative of the moral and political anxieties of the time. A less successful, though an equally relevant drama, was *Adventure Story* (1949), which showed the decline of Alexander the Great from a military

²³⁵ *Relative Values* opened in November 1951 at the Savoy Theatre, London and went on a successful tour with several revivals throughout the fifties. It details the scheming of both the servants and the aristocracy surrounding the removal of a Hollywood upstart hoping to infiltrate the upper classes.

²³⁶ Like Coward, Rattigan was also gay and often presented disguised homosexual characters within his work.

²³⁷ *The Winslow Boy* premiered at the Lyric Theatre, 1946

adventurist to an uncompromising despot²³⁸. Rattigan is highlighting how the belief of universal peace is used to justify the actions of a tyrant as his quest transforms into a tragic dream of world conquest, with Alexander effectively asking on his death bed ‘Where did it all go wrong?’²³⁹ In a time when Stalin was the autocratic face of aggressive communism and the East of Europe was falling under the oppressive control of Soviet dominated communist governments, it was a highly relevant examination of the contemporary political anxieties. It was also a definite change of direction for Rattigan which the public did not appreciate. The play was actually a financial disaster costing his backer, Binkie Beaumont as always, his capital investment. Although Rattigan’s career initially remained successful on both sides of the Atlantic with popular plays such as ‘*Separate Tables*’ (1954)²⁴⁰, his work soon seemed dated following the advent of more realistic, working class theatre in the later fifties, and his dominance in the West End declined.

Another important ingredient in the promotion of traditional values and ‘Britishness’ was that of classical productions, the bastion of which in the immediate post-war years was the Old Vic²⁴¹. The management of the Old Vic recognised that British theatre was stagnating and needed a new approach. They subsequently pioneered a system of revolving repertory with discounted tickets in an attempt to make the theatre more accessible to the general public, rather than the domain of the middle class and elite²⁴². The company’s role as an ambassador to celebrate “Britishness” was also highly prized. They were seen as an internationally

²³⁸ *Adventure Story* premiered at the St. James Theatre, 1949

²³⁹ Himself gay, Rattigan avoided any indications of homosexuality towards Alexander lest he incur the wrath of the Lord Chamberlain’s Office. This was not a melodrama of sexual infidelities but a political and moral commentary.

²⁴⁰ *Separate Tables* premiered at The St. James Theatre, 1954

²⁴¹ It represented a permanent classical British theatre company that would also serve as a training ground for future generations of classical actors.

²⁴² Under the directorship of Lawrence Olivier, Ralph Richardson and John Burrell, during the later war years half the tickets were discounted in prices equivalent to 1-2 packets of cigarettes as an invitation to the general public to sample theatre.

respected exportable national asset, engaging in 1948 on successful tours of Australia and New Zealand, further enhancing the reputation of both British theatre and its director Lawrence Olivier²⁴³. In the initial post-war years the Old Vic stood for the hope of creating a future audience for classical theatre with the traditions of a stable, permanent company. The safety net of financial support had also been established with the principle of public subsidy set up under the direction of the Arts Council and its future was secure.

Promoting classical theatre whilst eroding the traditional barriers for the audience was also the aim of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre (SMT) in Stratford under the guidance of Anthony Quayle from 1948-56. Under Quayle's leadership the theatre was transformed into a world famous centre for classical drama and encouraged the emergence of such talents as Richard Burton and Peter Hall. One difference between the Old Vic and the Memorial Theatre was that the latter was not subsidised by the Arts Council. This allowed for a level of autonomy and artistic freedom that a reliance on government approved financial support would have stifled²⁴⁴. Instead, Quayle utilised his contacts at an artistic and business level to ensure that they had 'big names' to bring in big crowds with major West End stars appearing in productions²⁴⁵. He also invited 'Binkie' Beaumont to join the Board of Governors and he immediately became a member of the Executive Committee, bringing his actors under contract and his business acumen. Quayle's personal impact on the artistic output of the company was also considerable. This reflected his own views not only regarding the

²⁴³ Its success also led to its downfall as the major stars of Olivier and Richardson became distracted by touring productions and film work, drawing away key actors. Eventually full time administrators and board appointed artistic directors took over the running of the company.

²⁴⁴ Quayle recounts how the Arts Council had occasionally offered some financial support but that they thought it 'wiser to decline their offer courteously' for fear of depending on it which would lead to the potential erosion of their independence. A. Quayle, *A Time to Speak* (London, 1990), p.458

²⁴⁵ This resulted in John Gielgud, Peggy Ashcroft, Michael Redgrave, Ralph Richardson and Margaret Leighton among many others appearing at the SMT.

importance of classical theatre, but also on the role theatre had to play in society as a media for the defence of traditional values and customs. This was clear on his address to the Governors of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre on 21st July 1950, following his return from a successful Australian tour:

*"At this juncture in the world's history the theatre has an enormous role to play. It can make an immense contribution towards the unity and faith we have got to achieve if we are to have some hope of combating the faith of communism which is burning up the whole world."*²⁴⁶

Quayle felt it was an immense duty to present high standard theatre to British people overseas, thereby reinforcing notions of 'Britishness' and traditionalism, concepts which he believed were under threat from the growing influence of communism. His stance was no doubt influenced by a combination of his traditional RADA training and his very successful war service. This had seen him in various positions with the Royal Artillery and he ended the war as a Major having served with the Albanian partisans behind enemy lines. Quayle saw the pre-war concerns regarding the spread of Nazism transferred to the growing post-war threat of communism. He felt it was his duty to present theatre to the British people which upheld traditional values and expectations and celebrated individuality through the classics²⁴⁷.

Whilst the Old Vic and the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre embodied the post-war ideal of a permanent classical theatre company, there was also a desire to reach a new audience and engage in a critical manner with many of the moral pitfalls of traditional British society. Not all institutional and commercially successful theatre was dominated by the likes of Rattigan

²⁴⁶ 'Shakespeare for Export', *The Stage*, 3rd August 1950.

²⁴⁷ See his autobiography *A Time to Speak* (London, 1990). Although the latter stages of his life are somewhat condensed due to his diagnosis of terminal cancer whilst writing, his lifelong attitudes to oppression and tyranny are established alongside his utter belief in the traditionalism of classical theatre as a representation of British values, customs and beliefs.

and Coward, as writers such as J.B. Priestley emerged in the post-war years to challenge their supremacy. He had been a successful novelist and playwright during the pre-war era and had cemented his success and popularity during the war with his celebration of all things English and his confidence in final victory²⁴⁸. Following the war, however, he became ‘a passionate advocate of the new post-war idealism’²⁴⁹. This can be seen in *An Inspector Calls*, first performed in 1945 in the Soviet Union and then in 1946 staged by the Old Vic. The play utilised an Edwardian setting to convey a modern message concerning England’s class ridden, chauvinistic and commercially exploitative society. It is a damning social critique in the manner of the social realist dramas of Shaw and Ibsen, but was successfully camouflaged as a domestic Edwardian melodrama to suit the contemporary audience (and the Readers of the Lord Chamberlain’s Office).

An Inspector Calls

The play takes place on a single night of 1912 and concerns a prosperous middle class family and their role in the death of a young girl. Priestley presents a moral condemnation of class ridden discrimination resulting in the exploitation, abandonment and social ruin of a vulnerable girl. Whilst she has been rendered powerless by her gender, class and poverty the middle class characters are primarily concerned with retaining their social standing, demonstrating their moral hypocrisy and prejudices. The play shows them reminded of their role in and their responsibility for the young girl’s suicide by the eponymous investigating Inspector. The conflict between the family and the inspector represents the contest between

²⁴⁸ Following his military service during WWI which resulted in him being highly critical of the British Army and the officer class in particular, Priestley became a successful novelist by the 1930’s. During WWII he was a regular broadcaster for the BBC presenting *The Postscript* on Sunday evenings from June to October 1940 which became hugely popular. Despite its popularity the programme was dropped by the BBC after concerns were raised by the cabinet regarding the left-wing political content of the broadcasts.

²⁴⁹ Billington, *State of the Nation*, p.16

capitalism and socialism and mirrors Priestley's personal radical views. In this sense, the character of Inspector Goole represents the writer's alter ego through which he could express his socialist principles and also question the attitudes of middle class philanthropy towards the poor. Priestley demonstrates how this is based on the principles of social and moral superiority, thereby highlighting the contemporary concerns regarding the development of the welfare state and the vulnerability of the working class. In the inspector's exit speech, the philosophy of the play (and Priestley) is presented directly to the audience:

"One Eva Smith has gone- but there are millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering, and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, with what we think and say and do. We don't love alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, when they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish. Goodnight".

Priestley is warning of the return to pre-war social and economic stratification, and highlighting the potential consequences of such to an audience in the midst of social and economic reforms. Due to its overtly socialist message, the play was considered controversial as the country sought to balance reform and traditionalism in the post-war years. Although Michael Billington now considers it not only a warning against a return to old ways but also 'a plea for a new communitarian society', the readers of the Lord Chamberlain's office did not agree. Had they been aware of the depth of the political undercurrent, a performance license may have been withheld²⁵⁰. Due to his patriotic reputation and popularity, Priestley's standing would certainly have aided his positive reception with the censors.

Through this work, and also his criticism of the management of British theatre and the government influence in such, Priestley was attacking traditional conservatism and was

²⁵⁰ Billington, *State of the Nation*, p.17

therefore representative of the left-wing attitude emerging within challenging theatre²⁵¹. *An Inspector Calls* symbolised how the stage could be utilised to analyse the state of the nation and the deeply rooted social anxieties of the time, but Priestley was actually presenting the voice of a social reformer. He was a radical rather than a communist, but that did not stop the establishment from implying he had communist sympathies. The Theatre Managers Association reviewed Priestley's book 'Theatre Outlook' in their in-house magazine and found it critical of their role alongside that of the Arts Council²⁵². They subsequently dismissed his socialist idealism and stated "Mr. Priestley's book costs 7s 6d (about nine roubles)", purporting a Soviet and therefore communist connection with his suggestions for the way forward. Published in 1947, his book appeared the same year as his play '*The Linden Tree*', utilising a family gathering to again analyse the state of the nation.

The play considers post-war society and the challenges it faces through the representation of a series of stereotypical characters within a family environment: the opportunist spiv, the ex-patriot, the faux aristocrat, the dedicated (but communist) doctor, the public servant, the idealistic youngster and the disillusioned senior. The play centres round the sixty-fifth birthday of Professor Linden at which his disillusioned family gather and attempt to convince him to retire. The only reflection of his waning idealism is seen in the youthful innocence of his daughter, whilst the rest of his family have effectively turned their backs on life. Although the play 'finds Mr. Priestley still thumping the topical', there was also praise for the 'very

²⁵¹ See J.B. Priestley, *Theatre Outlook* (London, 1947)

²⁵² Dissatisfied with theatre management, his book was critical of the Theatre Managers Association, political interference, the Treasury, and the monopoly of control exercised by Binkie Beaumont, calling for a publicly controlled Theatre Authority and the creation of touring National theatre companies. He also put forward plans for civic theatre which would reflect local character and outlook, offering a radical revision of national theatre and its role within the community. The book was published by Nicholson and Watson, majority shareholder in The Spectator, right of centre politically though traditionally a voice for analysis of the arts and theatre. The same year he also gave a lecture to the Fabian Society entitled 'The Arts under Socialism' in which he outlined the same plans.

real and human people' who represented 'a microcosm of our post-war country', and it was well received²⁵³. The play also has elements of patriotism as Priestley endorses good intentions and traditional values, and this theme was continued with '*Home is Tomorrow*' in 1948 which considered how idealism and capitalism were natural enemies. This was followed in 1949 by '*Summer Day's Dream*', which whilst demonstrating a love for idyllic England, also highlights the fear of the consequences of the nuclear programme and the arrogance of the superpowers. Although this is a comedy, serious social anxieties are presented to the audience with three sinister strangers arriving to challenge the tranquillity of a family of survivors from World War III: an American industrialist, a Russian bureaucrat and an Indian research chemist. All are eventually spiritually enhanced by their stay, but they have highlighted the social concerns of the era within a futuristic setting: the fear of nuclear war, fear of Soviet (communist) intentions, anxieties over American dominance and influence, and the intentions towards Britain of the developing former colonies.

Priestley was a recognised writer and playwright working within the 'establishment' of traditional theatre whilst at the same time questioning its values and intentions²⁵⁴. As a reformer rather than a revolutionary, he was also presenting an alternative ideology which encompassed a celebration of traditional values within socialist reform. He can therefore be seen to represent a bridge between institutional traditionalism and the independent, political theatre re-emerging following the war. The barrier between institutional and independent theatre was therefore not entirely rigid. It allowed for a degree of flexibility, enabling

²⁵³ *Guardian*, 18 August 1947. The play was premiered at the Duchess Theatre in August 1947.

²⁵⁴ Always distrustful of state dogma, Priestley had been a member of the think tank '1941 Committee' with fellow writer Tom Wintringham, and had been a founder member of the relatively short-lived liberal socialist Common Wealth (Party) in 1942. He also found himself included on George Orwell's list written for the Information Research Department of those whose political leanings (in this case considered pro-communist) rendered them as being unsuitable to write for the IRD. Priestley later went on to be one of the founder members of CND in the late fifties and maintained his political left-wing stance.

established writers such as Priestley to present more politically challenging work. This demonstrates the complexity of post-war theatre as not only traditional formats but also traditional themes could be challenged even within the realm of institutional theatre, but only when presented by a respected and established writer.

Another play which later endeavoured to build a bridge between the institutional and the independent by presenting a challenging political work was part of the Paul Schofield-Peter Brook season at the Phoenix theatre: *The Power and the Glory*²⁵⁵. Adapted from Graham Greene's novel, the central character is that of a priest, the only survivor of the priesthood in a Mexican state where a revolution and the suppression of the Catholic Church has turned his world upside-down²⁵⁶. This is not the recognisable portrayal of priesthood familiar to West End audiences, but rather a man destroyed and left a shabby, crumpled wretch. He is drinking heavily, living immorally, and has a bastard child to boot. With Catholicism outlawed he is persecuted by the police and the state, and haunted by his own demons whilst those who shield him are placed in great danger. Despite his many faults and the humiliation he faces, there is a sense of strength as he holds on to the deep tenets of his religion. The play therefore portrays a sense of honour within the desperation, although heavily disguised, with the *Manchester Guardian* stating "for all peoples celebrating comforting but proscribed rites the heart is momentarily quickened"²⁵⁷.

²⁵⁵ *The Power and the Glory*, based on Graham Greene's novel was adapted for the theatre by Denis Cannan and Pierre Bost and directed by Peter Brook at the Phoenix on 5 April 1956.

²⁵⁶ G. Greene, *The Power and the Glory* (London, 1969) new ed. Also see M. Bosco, *Graham Greene's Catholic Imagination* (Oxford, 2005) and M. Couto, *Graham Greene on the Frontier: Politics and Religion in the Novels* (Basingstoke, 1990).

²⁵⁷ Philip Hope-Wallace in *Manchester Guardian*, 6th April 1956

This is oppression and persecution seen targeting the very core of western Christian society, and the resulting destruction of the priesthood leaves the audience witnessing the consequences of revolution: a poverty ridden state living on the edge of fear and under state control with traditional faith condemned. Opposite the priest, the Lieutenant is the central character of authority pursuing him, and he is a personification of the state and the oppression it stands for. The Lieutenant sees the church as fundamentally evil, controlling the people through the delusional representation of right and wrong, and uses this to justify his personal persecution, and in turn that of the state. Those representing authority are therefore seen as corrupt and corrupting, cold and ruthless whether in the name of communism or for their own endeavours, and there is no redemption under the umbrella of the church as it will be destroyed. Although the play was not an overt condemnation of communism, it demonstrated the consequences of revolution and oppression as traditional values are condemned, and was therefore a negative portrayal of radicalism. The anti-clerical movement in Mexico was indeed classed alongside socialists and communist movements due its oppression of traditional faith. As an adaptation of a successful novel the play was well received with Paul Schofield in the main role, adding to the box office draw after his successful and critically acclaimed turn as Hamlet only two weeks before (again at the Phoenix). Such challenging works were rare successes, reliant on the reputation of established writers or performers, and in general traditional theatre stayed with tried and trusted productions. Overall commercial theatre was slow to change in the post-war years.

Established writers and traditional productions had even dominated the Festival of Britain, which was designed to be a celebration of British artistic, scientific and technical

achievement, and innovation²⁵⁸. Ridiculed by the conservatives and Churchill as an expensive folly, the festival went on to expose the deep cultural divide in British life. Michael Frayn argues that the Festival represented the cultural expression of the radical middle classes, the herbivore do-gooders and *Guardian* readers who were soon to be usurped by the Daily Express reading carnivores of the upper and middle classes, ready to regain their place at the forefront of society in the impending conservative reclamation of power²⁵⁹. The festival actually represented a glorious if costly swansong for Labour, and out of the £400,000 grant presented by the Arts Council, only £55,000 went to theatre²⁶⁰. The celebration of ‘Britishness’ in theatre at the time meant one thing: Shakespeare. So to celebrate the 1951 Festival of Britain, a playwright who died over 300 years earlier dominated at the Old Vic, Stratford, the West End, and regional rep. Where was the celebration of post-war British theatre, of contemporary writers and contemporary themes, the celebration of a reforming Britain emerging into a post-colonial age? Certainly not within mainstream, institutional theatre evidently dominated by traditionalism. In the quietly growing realm of independent theatre, however, alternative voices were being heard.

Independent Theatre

In the post-war years left-wing theatre sought to establish itself as an independent voice, offering an alternative to the traditionalism of the West End. From the onset, drama, singing and music had played an integral part in the cultural life of the socialist movement, resulting

²⁵⁸ The 1951 Festival of Britain was based in London but with festivals throughout the British Isles. It began May 1951 celebrating the centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851. It was described as ‘a tonic for the nation’ by Labour Deputy Leader Herbert Morrison. See B.E. Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation: The 1951 Festival of Britain* (Manchester, 2003)

²⁵⁹ See ‘Festival’ by Michael Frayn in P. French & M. Sissons (eds.), *The Age of Austerity: 1945-51* (London, 1963), pp.317-340. In October 1951 the Conservatives won the general election under the leadership of Winston Churchill and this heralded 13 years of Conservative rule until Labour regained power in Oct 1964 with Harold Wilson.

²⁶⁰ Billington, *State of the Nation*, p.49

in the formation of theatrical groups under the banner of the Worker's Theatre Movement in the twenties²⁶¹. They were concerned with presenting the class struggle to the people and were considered openly revolutionary and agitational, forming the classification of 'Agit-Prop': agitational and propagandist. Consequently they were identified with the Communist Party and they remained small, independent theatre groups with pockets of support and little if any influence²⁶². Following the war and the popularity of a left-wing swing in British politics there would never be a better time for a left-wing theatre movement to establish itself as a part of main stream British culture. This desire to present theatre which reflected the political, social, and economic concerns of the time was personified by the exploits of two of the stalwarts of the pre-war movement: Ewan MacColl (born James Henry Miller)²⁶³ and Joan Littlewood.

Although Joan Littlewood had been trained at RADA, she was a left-wing, working class student on a scholarship²⁶⁴. She had originally met up with MacColl, then still known as Jimmie Miller, in the early 1930's when he was running an Agit-Prop theatre group 'Red Megaphones'. Together they went on to form the Theatre of Action and then the Theatre Union, in which Littlewood played an increasing influential role as both player and director, whilst MacColl provided original material and adaptations of the classics²⁶⁵. Littlewood

²⁶¹ The Worker's Theatre Movement initially formed in 1926 but quickly faded before being reformed in 1928 in the East End of London. Designed for a working class audience it focussed on relevant social and political themes such as unemployment, the Depression, and the rise of extreme right-wing movements such as the British Union of Fascists.

²⁶² Often groups of workers presenting plays, documentary pieces and improvisation sketches to fellow workers about contemporary themes, therefore the audience was both small and partisan.

²⁶³ Following his desertion from the army Jimmy Miller had changed his name to Ewan MacColl by the time he re-joined Littlewood to form the Theatre Workshop in 1945. He was eventually arrested (1946) and spent time in detention before being dismissed on medical grounds from the army without court martial, however, he maintained the name MacColl.

²⁶⁴ Within RADA the very apparent class division, snobbery and stifled training designed exclusively for the traditionalism of the West End only heightened her left-wing political stance and nearly put her off theatre completely. Barely a page and a half of her biography are dedicated to the years at RADA, see Joan Littlewood, '*Joan's Book*' (London, 1994), p.68-9

²⁶⁵ An early example of MacColl's original work was '*John Bullion*' (1934) and his adaptations of European classics included *Fenteovejuna* which he renamed *The Sheepwell* (1936) and *The Good Soldier Schweik* (1938).

became the company director and her style was challenging for the performers and audience alike, raising political questions and challenging cultural expectations regarding theatre production²⁶⁶. When the advent of war resulted in the continuing call up of male actors, the Theatre Union was forced to disband, but in 1945 the mainstream of actors regrouped once again under their leadership to form, this time as a professional company, the Theatre Workshop²⁶⁷.

The Challenges of the Theatre Workshop

As the new Theatre Workshop Littlewood was the artistic director, and her new partner Gerry Raffles was the manager. The new company maintained their left-wing political stance and their intention was to portray the dreams and struggles of the people. This was stated in their manifesto written by Howard Goorney, one of the founder members²⁶⁸:

*“We want a theatre with a living language, a theatre which is not afraid of the sound of its own voice and which will comment on Society as did Ben Jonson and Aristophanes”.*²⁶⁹

In a hand out to all company members he further stated that the company wanted “to portray ordinary human beings in theatrical terms, on stage, doing exactly what ordinary people were doing, but also what they could aspire to – both artistically and politically”²⁷⁰. The openly left-wing politics of the company ensured that they were associated with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), as Ewan MacColl was a recognised member, and many company members including Gerry Raffles openly supported the party. Joan Littlewood had

²⁶⁶ Heavily influenced by Brecht, they tended to produce work within spaces rather within the confines of traditional theatre, sticking to the simplicity of outdoors and utilising music, dance, movement, lighting and the surrounding environment to enhance the production whilst working with virtually no financial support or material resources.

²⁶⁷ Re-formed by the core of Littlewood, MacColl, Gerry Raffles, Howard Goorney and Rosalie Williams.

²⁶⁸ Goorney had been a member of the Young Communist League and maintained connections with the CPGB and a pro-communist stance.

²⁶⁹ See H. Goorney, *Theatre Workshop Story* (London, 1981), p.41-42

²⁷⁰Ibid

also briefly flirted with the CPGB before becoming disillusioned with its attitudes towards the Arts and community communication, but, she maintained her communist ideology defiantly stating in later life ‘I’ve always been a communist’²⁷¹. Even before the war their left-wing political tendencies and association with the CPGB had been recognised. In 1938 both MacColl and Littlewood, along with several members of Theatre of Action, had been investigated by the police due to their productions and association with the CPGB²⁷². They had also been prosecuted following the police closure of their ‘club’ production of *Last Edition* in the summer of 1940, when they were fined and bound over to keep the peace for twelve months²⁷³. This ensured that they had a conviction which resulted in them being blacklisted by the BBC for whom they worked to support their theatre activities. When they queried why they had been blacklisted, a CPGB party member informed them quite simply “You have access to microphones”. The assumption that they were political activists and potential troublemakers subsequently stayed with them into the years of the Theatre Workshop²⁷⁴.

The members of the Theatre Workshop were politically and demographically removed from those of the West End theatre, in part due to the influence of the personalities involved. Under Littlewood and MacColl’s guidance, socially relevant topics were presented to the

²⁷¹ Niall Mulholland, ‘Joan Littlewood’, *Socialist World*, 26 September 2002, available online at www.socialistworld.net/eng/2002/09/26obit.html accessed 01.10.10

²⁷² In 1938 Joan’s former friend from RADA Alison Bayley informed her “I’ve denounced you to the police...About you being a communist” to which Joan replied “Oh that’s all right, they already knew”. The police had at the time visited both her and MacColl, and also the families of Rosalie Williams, Graham Banks and Gerry Raffles from Theatre of Action. See Littlewood, *Joan’s Book*, p.110-111

²⁷³ Although the play was considered inflammatory and its political content and intent was brought into question, the prosecution was brought under the premise that impersonating living people on the stage was against the law and was likely to cause a breach of the peace as they played Mussolini and Hitler.

²⁷⁴ They were stopped from entering Broadcasting House in 1940 following the court case and informed that they were barred, even though they were contracted to complete a Children’s Hour play under the director Olive Shapley, who knew nothing of the situation. They subsequently offered their story to the newspapers but none, including the Daily Worker, were prepared to publish it.

audience with the aim being that theatre should aid political education²⁷⁵. As an indicator of the intentions and political standpoint of the group, a major original post-war production was MacColl's *Uranium 235*. MacColl had stated to the company "We've got to put on an anti-bomb show", and he subsequently considered the epilogue of *Uranium 235* to be a powerful impeachment of the forces of evil²⁷⁶. The play was a direct response to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and represents a moral interrogation of the rational and political dilemmas involved. It incorporates a series of sketches including an atomic ballet, energy characterised as a gang land boss, and the quantum theory explained by a couple of slapstick comics with dubious German accents. This allowed the company to portray the process of the creation of atomic weaponry alongside questions concerning the morality of its use direct to the audience, within an entertaining, if unconventional format. In February 1946 it premiered in Newcastle and subsequently went on tour, even spending five days playing at the Billy Butlin's Holiday Camp at Filey, North Yorkshire²⁷⁷. The play went on after the wrestlers, with whistles, shouts and claps greeting the end of each scene 'as if it had been a music-hall turn'²⁷⁸. *Uranium 235* proved to be a successful production for the Theatre Workshop and was often presented over the next five years on tours both in Britain and abroad, where it was equally relevant as nuclear power became a major ingredient in the Cold War²⁷⁹. Its success was two-fold. Audiences loved the eccentricity of its performance, and it also allowed Littlewood and MacColl to present a political play carrying an anti-nuclear message to a receptive audience. Such criticism of the nuclear programme was of course criticism of the

²⁷⁵This was demonstrated by MacColl's argument that the heroes of theatre needed to change and that the conflict needed to be brought back, see H. Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story* (London, 1981), p.2

²⁷⁶Littlewood, p.178

²⁷⁷At the same time E=MC2 was produced in America by Living Newspaper which K. Shepherd-Barr argues demonstrates how theatre played a vital role in the post-war discourse regarding nuclear energy on both sides of the Atlantic, not only reflecting concerns but actively shaping public discourse. See K. Shepherd-Barr, *Science on Stage* (Princeton, 2006).

²⁷⁸The stay at Filey was successful and enjoyable with Joan Littlewood adding "We were well paid, fed and housed and the all-in wrestlers showed us some of the tricks of the trade". Littlewood, *Joan's Book*, p.200-202

²⁷⁹The US demonstrated their nuclear capability with the bombings in 1945 followed by the USSR's successful testing in 1949, the UK in 1952, France in 1960 and China in 1964.

political establishment, but fear of nuclear weapons and the possibility of nuclear war was not the only anxiety being faced by the public.

The rising concerns regarding communist infiltration in the workplace was a theme already seen in film. In theatre Ronald Watson, a first time playwright and himself a shipyard worker, created *Seeing Red!* a drama set against the background of a union dispute within a shipyard²⁸⁰. It was presented by the Renaissance Theatre Company in Barrow-in-Furness which had opened in January 1958 as an independent permanent company without any Arts Council funding and was keen to present work relevant to the local audience²⁸¹. The play concerns three workers: a plater, a boiler maker, and his young son-in-law who is an idealistic young communist and bone idle to boot. In this play, although the communist character is an agitator within the workplace, he is also presented as being determined not to do any work at all, much to the complaint of his colleagues and family, whose strong work ethic is in direct contrast to the lethargic communist. Revolution is not on the cards as it would be too much bother. It is the communist infiltration of the shipyard unions which is the concern. The background to the play is an evening in the kitchen of the boiler maker's home, as the three men discuss the potential for strike and complain of their lot. The play was well received with the director Donald Sartain (who also played the major role of the boiler maker Sidney Wilson) stating "It was an absolute wow"²⁸². It appealed to its local audience by

²⁸⁰ *Seeing Red!* By Ronald Watson, was presented by the Renaissance Theatre Company directed by Ronald Sartain at Her Majesty's, Barrow 18th May 1959. Donald Watson was admired for his realistic depictions of the working class and went on to write some of the earlier episodes of Coronation Street. He went on to have two more plays presented in Barrow with working class themes set within a domestic context: *Sounding Brass* and *Paddy's Pig*.

²⁸¹ It did not receive any funding until a grant from the Arts Council in 1961 plus support from the Labour Council in Barrow and sponsorship from Vickers Armstrong shipyard.

²⁸² Interview with Donald Sartain for the Theatre Archive Project, British Library with University of Sheffield and the AHRB, 26th April, 2006 available online and accessed 22.09.2010
<http://www.bl.uk/egi-bin.taprint.cgi?url=projects/theatrarchive/sartain.html>

portraying themes and anxieties relevant to their lives, and was written by one of their own, further connecting the theatre to the community.

This dilemma of trade union infiltration by communists was not only a concern in Britain, for the theme was soon transferred farther afield, utilising world events to portray the consequences of the collapse of faith in communist ideology. At the Royal, Stratford East '*The Secret of the World*' by Ted Allen was presented, directed by John Berry²⁸³. This play considered the disillusionment of faithful communists following Khrushchev's denunciation of the Stalinist regime and the aftermath of the communist suppression of the Hungarian uprising of 1956. Set in the home of a Canadian trade union leader, therefore yet again utilising a domestic setting, we see the downfall of a man who feels compelled to resign his party membership and denounce his former political beliefs, causing him to lose both his position within the union and his position of respect within the workplace. At a domestic level, his family are tired of the constant labour disputes that have affected their stability, and his adult children are distant from their father, dreaming of broader horizons. The subsequent loss of faith, position and family support leads the central character, Sam Alexander, to doubt his political ideology. His life's work is brought into question and he collapses into a cynical world as he loses his mental stability. His downfall is complete when he rejects a financial settlement following an accident, and bases his hopes on a useless invention, much to the chagrin of his family. The play highlights the confusion and anxieties faced by communists following Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and the turmoil of the suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, leading to a re-appraisal of their beliefs²⁸⁴. In addition, the

²⁸³ *The Secret of the World* by Ted Allen, directed by John Berry at the Royal, Stratford Easton 7th March 1962

²⁸⁴ On 25th February 1956 Nikita Khrushchev made a 'secret' speech to the Twentieth Party Congress in which he denounced Stalin's rule and his tyrannical policies. Months later and following rising political and social unrest in other areas of eastern Europe, the Soviet Union utilised a large invasion force to crush the

portrayal of his children as second generation communists weary of the domestic consequences of communist affiliation illustrates the how in a prosperous and stable society, the lure of communism was not always seen in a positive light by the young.

These factors were becoming increasing relevant in the changing attitudes towards the anxieties and ‘villains’ of the era. As Billington argues there was a growing tension between entrenched cultural conservatism and a burgeoning youth movement that was both impatient and disillusioned with the established institutions²⁸⁵. Traditionalism, particularly in the sense of social expectations and class divisions, was becoming perceived as a villain in the race for reform. This change in attitudes saw the emergence of new playwrights and therefore new theatre, not just in the Theatre Workshop but also through the English Stage Company (ESC) based at the Royal Court. Theatre could be a weapon of antagonism which targeted not only the middle-class traditional audience, but also dared the younger generation to go to the theatre and watch something relevant to them. The ESC sought to present plays with a contemporary relevance for an audience willing to be challenged and not merely seeking escapism. As a consequence, playwrights such as John Osborne, Arnold Wesker, and Ann Jellicoe emerged to present socially and politically challenging works²⁸⁶. Whilst many works have been written about the significance of the Royal Court and John Osborne in particular, when considering the representation of communism, Arnold Wesker’s trilogy of plays based on the trials and tribulations of the communist Kahn family stands out. These plays show how

revolutionary forces which had effectively taken control in Hungary, leading to many deaths, mass arrests and subsequent executions. Widely reported in the west, the actions were condemned at a political and social level and caused many domestic communists to question their continued support of the Soviet regime and the communist ideology.

²⁸⁵ Billington, *State of the Nation*, p.84

²⁸⁶ Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* premiered in 1956 followed by *The Entertainer* in 1957 and cemented the reputation of the Royal Court as the producers of challenging new drama. Wesker’s trilogy of *Chicken Soup with Barley*, *Roots* and *I’m Talking About Jerusalem* were all presented at the Royal Court 1958-9 and Jellicoe’s *The Sport of my Mad Mother* was premiered in 1956.

independent theatre presented alternative, sympathetic communist characters before the audience²⁸⁷.

The Arnold Wesker Trilogy

Chicken Soup with Barley premiered in 1958 at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, before being staged at the Royal Court. It follows a West End Jewish communist family, the Kahn's, from the pre-war optimism and idealism of 1936 through to the emergence of aggressive Stalinism and the Hungarian Uprising of 1956. The play demonstrates the challenges to the family's deeply held communist beliefs through the political events of the era, a struggle which is embodied in the changing personal relationships between family members. Politics therefore becomes intertwined with family dynamics as the play challenges and explores the family's communist ideologies as it grows apart. It once again places political theatre into a domestic setting.

Political events actually remain off stage. Initially the play revisits the communist commitment of the 1930's as the family are presented having stood against the British Union of Fascists in the East End clashes of 1936. The father Harry is shown defiantly draped in the communist flag, though he has not been involved at the clashes and is actually sheltering from the conflict at his mother's house²⁸⁸. Harry is the weaker character of the parents and it is his wife Sarah who is the matriarch, demonstrating her strength and maintaining her political

²⁸⁷ When considering the Royal Court and the English Stage Company see T.W. Browne, *Playwrights Theatre: English Stage Company at the Royal Court* (London, 1975); G.A. Doty & B. Harbin (eds) *Inside the Royal Court Theatre 1956-81* (Baton Rouge, 1990); R. Little & E. McLaughlin, *The Royal Court Theatre: Inside Out* (Abingdon, 2007); P. Roberts, *The Royal Court Theatre and the Modern Stage* (Cambridge, 1999).

²⁸⁸ There is direct referral to the 'Battle of Cable Street' of 4th October 1936 where Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists clashed with anti-fascist protestors, including many communists and Jews, and thousands of police officers at Cable Street, in the East End of London. The clashes united the Jewish and communist communities and damaged the reputation of the BUF. It also resulted in the Public Order Act of 1936 which banned the wearing of political uniforms in public and required organisers to obtain police consent for political marches.

standpoint throughout the play. She is also the domestic warmth, but as the family grows up and fragments so do their political allegiances, and it is left to Sarah to champion her ideals, regardless of the evidence of tyranny before her. As she later states to her son Ronnie when he challenges how she can remain true to the cause following the revelations of 1956: “Socialism is my light...A way of life...I’m a simple person, Ronnie, and I’ve got to have light and love”²⁸⁹. Whilst the son has lost the political faith of his youth, the mother clings to her beliefs defiantly stating that she is still a communist. For Sarah, post-war reform, wealth, and success have resulted in a loss of understanding for the struggle for a fair and just society. The relative affluence and political apathy of the fifties has therefore left her isolated, even within her own home. She is therefore representative of the disillusioned left-wing political activists who felt betrayed by the realities of the political events of the era. But how could she morally justify Stalin’s oppressive rule and the Soviet actions in the suppression of the Hungarian uprising? Both the son, Ronnie, and the daughter, Ada, lose their political fire and subsequently the family is torn apart, isolating Sarah. She maintains that although communist ideologies have failed under Stalin, that does not mean they are invalid or untrue, and her family is left embittered and fragmented.

The Kahn family represents a microcosm of the larger world and their disillusionment stands as a metaphor for the left-wing disappointments of post-war Britain. Here communism is not portrayed as the sinister ‘other’, it is an ideology that Sarah clings to which gives her strength and her life meaning. She is a wife, a mother, a normal human being protecting her family and living a normal working class life. The audience can therefore relate to a real person, not

²⁸⁹ A. Wesker, *Chicken Soup with Barley* in ‘The Wesker Trilogy’ (Harmondsworth, 1971), p.74

a caricature or embellished stereotype, and it is Sarah who is the backbone of the play as well as the family.

Wesker stated that the play was written following the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 and that the Kahn family “was my family...Ronnie was me”. The disillusionment portrayed reflected his own views as a young communist who had grown up in a politically active family²⁹⁰. This autobiographical element added authenticity. It helped to chart the changing political fortunes of British communists as thirties idealism was eventually replaced with disillusionment and political fatigue. This is shown at the end of the play when Ronnie can no longer understand his mother’s communist views. She in turn does not understand his apathy, asking him “Is that what you want? A world where people don’t think anymore?” Wesker is demonstrating how the gradual post-war emergence of affluence and opportunity had resulted in jobs, money and prospects, creating a generation that no longer felt the need to challenge the status quo. But for Sarah the fight, dreams, and belief in a better future remain. Wesker was placing before the audience his mother’s argument that it was the perpetrators at fault not the ideology itself, therefore the Soviet communists, not communism, were to blame for the demonization of the communist ideology²⁹¹.

Although the play now seems to be presenting a distinct message, when interviewed in 2006 Wesker stated he was neither providing answers or asking questions, as he was not writing political plays but plays animated by ideas. He added that the naturalism of his characterisations and staging were a result of the influence of the cinema in his life, not

²⁹⁰ A. Wesker interviewed by Harriet Gilbert at the Edinburgh International Book Festival for the BBC World Book Club and broadcast on the BBC World Service September 2006, available on www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/specials/133_wbc_archive_new/page6.shtml accessed 21.07.2010

²⁹¹ Ibid

theatre, and that the material dictated the ‘shape’ of the play²⁹². This acknowledgement of the influence of cinema in the more naturalistic depiction of both people and situations demonstrates the distance between the class driven stereotypical representations within traditional theatre and the realities of post-war life. Cinema therefore influenced the emergence of realism in theatre as it represented contemporary depictions, albeit idealised. In comparison theatre was out of touch and reliant on outdated stereotypes. The younger, politically aware playwrights emerging throughout the fifties such as Wesker and Osborne subsequently utilised this lack of contemporary representation to highlight the *avant garde* status of their work. This led to realistic, contemporary working class characters within a more naturalistic setting, challenging authority or their perceived status, and questioning not only their role in society but also society’s role in their lives. Whilst Wesker described *Chicken Soup with Barley* as a play about the ‘disintegration of a family set against the disintegration of a political ideology’, the second play of the trilogy, *Roots* (1958), was ‘a lyrical journey of self-discovery’²⁹³

In *Roots* the central character is Beattie Bryant, the rural girlfriend of Ronnie Kahn. It follows her journey from uneducated and dominated working class woman to someone who can express herself and her disenchantment of the struggles of her time²⁹⁴. Through her relationship with Ronnie she has become politically aware, but following Ronnie’s decision to end their relationship and her family’s subsequent attack on her, she finds her own voice of defiance. She is no longer spouting Ronnie’s words and beliefs but her own, and is therefore

²⁹² Ibid

²⁹³ Arnold Wesker, ‘Living Room Revolt’: *Guardian*, 26 January 2006. Wesker wrote this article prior to the revival of ‘Roots’ at the Royal Exchange in Manchester 30 January 2006.

²⁹⁴ Beattie meets and falls in love with Ronnie whilst on a holiday in London. The play is subsequently set in her own farming community as her family gather to meet her love, only for Ronnie to send a letter ending their relationship and leaving her to face the anger and disappointment of her family.

liberated by abandonment and victimisation. Although Hincliffe argues that Beattie is disillusioned by the ‘brutalisation of man by mass culture’, it is actually her own journey and the realisation of her own brutalisation at the hands of society which is the dominant ideology of the play²⁹⁵. This allows the audience to see the development of a sympathetic character with ardent left-wing beliefs who finds the strength through her political awareness to find her own voice.

The final of the trilogy is *I'm Talking about Jerusalem* (1960), which focuses on the other Kahn sibling: the daughter Ada and her married life with Dave Simmonds. Here the timeline is from 1946-1959 and therefore runs concurrently with the latter half of *Chicken Soup* and the whole of *Roots*. Whilst the first play was set in the city, the second in Beattie’s farming community, and this play deals with the conflict between the two with Ada and her husband leaving London to build a ‘new Jerusalem’ in Norfolk. They have severed themselves from industrialised and commercial society for a purer, back-to-the-land existence. Jerusalem serves as a synonym for socialism, an experiment in the application of socialist principles, and although after twelve years of struggle the experiment fails, there is an element of honour and courage for Ada and Dave in the fact that they tried. As in the first play the strongest character is the woman of the household, Ada, and it is her strength and determination that keeps Dave from abandoning his dreams following early setbacks. Once again a strong, sympathetic female character with communist principles is presented to the audience and her story is central to the play.

²⁹⁵ A. Hincliffe, *British Theatre 1950-1970* (Oxford, 1974), p.91

One striking element in Wesker's trilogy is the positive depictions of strong female characters: staunchly communist in the case of Sarah and Beattie, though arguably Ada is more of a radical. They are not shady revolutionaries but idealists. They are not lurking in the shadows or providing a sinister presence, they are the backbone of the story with good intentions and dreams to aim for. For the theatre of the fifties, the plays written by Wesker were representative of the playwrights who did not conform to the restraints of commercial theatre but instead sought to portray the realities of their own experiences. As Wesker argued 'the spirit, language and substance of the plays were fresh. We were a new generation' and this helped to galvanize a new attitude to theatre²⁹⁶. In view of the political content of the plays and the positive communist characterisations, one could question how they actually got past the Readers of the Lord Chamberlain's office. But refusal for licence was based on stated criteria and the play was non-revolutionary, in a domestic setting, and the themes of family disintegration, political disillusionment, self-discovery and courage were not grounds for refusal. Although the plays presented non-stereotypical positive representations of communist characters, they did not meet any of the criteria for refusal²⁹⁷. The Kahn's were a family, a British Jewish family trying to deal with the trials of post-war life, and consequently the Lord Chamberlain's office had no grounds on which to refuse a licence. Wesker had a pragmatic approach to the workings of the Lord Chamberlain's office when he stated:

'The Lord Chamberlain didn't inhibit substance. No-one in those Cold War days censored Chicken Soup with Barley because it contained a sympathetic portrait of a communist mother. The Lord Chamberlain....was merely an irritant who forbade swearwords and blasphemous expletives'.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Wesker, 'Living Room Revolt' *Guardian*, 26 January 2006.

²⁹⁷ They were not antagonistic, revolutionary or combative and were unlikely to cause a breach of the peace. Nor were they indecent, offensive, attacking religion, inciting crime or likely to impair relations with a foreign power.

²⁹⁸ Ibid

The Wesker trilogy of plays therefore provided one of the very rare representations of positive and hopeful communist characters in theatre during the post-war years. It managed to do so by presenting a crisis of political faith within a domestic drama based around the family dynamic. That in itself serves as an analogy of the dilemmas of post-war Britain.

John Osborne

Wesker was not the only new writer emerging to challenge the traditional conservatism of successful theatre, but it is fair to say that his characters were recognisably communist to the audience. In contrast, other dramatists created characters who represented those disillusioned and at odds with society, thereby expressing their anger with traditionalism and calling for a rebellion against the constraints of conformity. Although not overtly communist in principle, they certainly presented a left-wing challenge within a right-wing cultural bastion of traditionalism. As previously mentioned, a primary example are the plays and characters created by John Osborne which are representative of the frustration and conflict felt within both British society and theatre as the fifties developed. They challenged class-driven stereotypes and expectations, and voiced discontent at the apathy and stagnation of British politics under conservative rule. Osborne presented a forceful vision of himself and his own views to an audience willing to be shocked, but he was no communist and neither were his characters. This is an example of how radical writing and radical attitudes were associated with the left-wing and therefore communism. Osborne presented antagonistic anti-establishment views. He was labelled an ‘angry young man’ and his work was considered left-wing and radical, and his characters subversive. He was therefore pigeon-holed as being supportive of such views.

Unlike Wesker, he did not create homely, quietly recognisable family portraits using a domestic setting to reflect the struggles of the reforming times. Osborne instead created seedy, antagonistic characters that shouted their indifference and scorned the audience's sympathy as seen in both *Look Back in Anger* (1956) and *The Entertainer* (1957)²⁹⁹. He mirrored the social and cultural conflicts of fifties Britain, presenting working class characters at odds with traditional conservatism and class-driven expectations, loudly proclaiming the Empire and its aspirations to be a fallacy³⁰⁰.

When *Look Back in Anger* debuted in 1956, the originality was in the presentation of the main character. Jimmy Porter was a young, working class man who was intelligent and politically aware. The difference was he was deliberately confrontational at all levels. He voiced his contempt in colloquial speech, did not seek to engage the sympathy of the audience and was determined to portray his feelings of anger and contempt for those around him. The whole character concept was a challenge to contemporary mainstream theatrical assumptions. The significance of *Look Back in Anger* as a watershed moment in British theatre has been debated by revisionist writers such as Michael Billington, Dan Rebellato, Dominic Shellard and Luc Gilleman, but it stands as a recognisable example of the change in direction of British theatre. Here the voice of disillusioned youth was attempting to throw off

²⁹⁹ *Look Back in Anger* premiered at the Royal Court under the direction of Tony Richardson on 8th May 1956 to an initial shaky start and critical mauling. With the support of major critics such as Kenneth Tynan of the Observer who described the play as 'a minor miracle' and 'the best young play of its decade', and Harold Hobson of the Sunday Times who stated Osborne 'was a writer of outstanding promise', the plays reputation grew. With the help of television excerpts broadcast by the BBC on 18th October 1956 and seen by an estimated 5 million, it cemented itself as the play to see. *The Entertainer* premiered 10th April 1957 and was again directed by Tony Richardson with Laurence Olivier playing the lead role of Archie Rice to critical acclaim.

³⁰⁰ Osborne went on to write the less successful '*The World of Paul Slickey*'(1959) a musical satirising the tabloid press, however '*Luther*'(1961) based on Martin Luther the archetypal rebel of an earlier era was a return to form and won him a Tony Award after its transfer to Broadway. This was followed by the less successful double bill of *Plays For England* (1962): '*The Blood of the Bambergs*' an attempt at satire surrounding a royal wedding and '*Under Plain Cover*' a drama concerning the incestuous relationship of a brother and sister and sexual fetishes.

the confines of traditional class-driven conservatism in the wake of reform and a (slowly) changing Britain³⁰¹. Now Osborne was no youth but the concept of the voice of youth in theatre was becoming a dividing factor as culture was becoming a weapon of social antagonism³⁰². Although the politics was unashamedly left-wing as a counteraction to the steadfastly entrenched conservatism of the era, but this did not mean that positive communist depictions were evident. Far from it. Left-wing was one thing, socialist another, but this was 1950's Britain and communism was stereotypically associated with the Soviets, fear of communist expansion and the nuclear threat. British it most certainly was not. Osborne was a radical representing the social and political angst of youth, not proclaiming the need for a communist revolution. It was therefore a rarity for the positive communist depictions as presented by Wesker and far more common to see the antagonists, the rebels and the subversives as in the works of Osborne and Whiting (which will be discussed later).³⁰³

Osborne represented the disillusioned 'ordinary' man who he saw as rebellious and left-wing, and through his initial success he was seen as the mouth piece for the cynical and disappointed post-war generation. Alan Sinfield argues that his character Jimmy Porter was too busy displacing his frustration onto his life to develop a socialist analysis, and that this in turn limits the play's political message³⁰⁴. However, Osborne's portrayal of Porter as

³⁰¹ See Billington, *State of the Nation* in which he argues that there was no real revolution in British theatre but actually a shift in the balance of power and a growing influence from a burgeoning and impatient youth culture. Dan Rebellato, *1956 And All That* (London, 1999) argues against the seminal influence of *Look Back in Anger* inferring the changes in British theatre were a culmination of gradual developments at a political, cultural and economic level. Also Dominic Shellard, *The Golden Generation: New Light on Post-War British Theatre* (London, 2008) which utilises first-hand accounts to argue that *Look Back in Anger* was not a revolution in British theatre, as it was actually thriving and transforming during the fifties and sixties under its own creative steam. In contrast Luc Gilleman, 'From Coward and Rattigan to Osborne: Or the Enduring Importance of *Look Back in Anger*', *Modern Drama*, Vol. 51, no. 1 (Spring, 2008), pp.104-14 argues for the plays enduring importance and favourably compares it with Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea* and Coward's *The Vortex*.

³⁰² Osborne was 27 years old when writing the play and hardly a disillusioned teenager.

³⁰³ See page 166.

³⁰⁴ Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-War Britain* (London, 1997), p.296

symbolising the political angst and dissatisfaction of a generation was absorbed by the public as being representative of the radical left-wing discontent with the dilemmas of the era. This ensured that *Look Back*, the Royal Court, and Osborne himself became focal points round which new radical perceptions in theatre were organised. His next offering augmented the political import of the Royal Court. *The Entertainer* served as a metaphor for the collapsing Empire and the social changes apparent in Britain, whilst also reflecting the political catastrophe of the Suez Crisis.

The star of *The Entertainer* was Laurence Olivier, a stalwart of traditional classical theatre³⁰⁵. He saw Osborne as a writer who could reconnect him to contemporary theatre and cautiously asked him ‘Can you write something for me?’³⁰⁶ Set against the backdrop of the Suez Crisis, Osborne created *The Entertainer*, a play representing of the decline of Empire set within a domestic drama, and concerns the family of a fading music hall performer, out of date and unable to cope with the changing world around him. The play links Britain’s transient role on the world stage and its declining influence at an economic and political level, but presents this within the context of a family in crisis. The main character Archie Rice perceives himself to be a strong and popular performer, but he is participating in a doomed art form and is out of touch with the cultural changes of the fifties. He is clinging to the past and while he struggles to accept his reduced role and status, the fortunes of his family reflect the turmoil of the time. His wife is a forlorn character, humiliated by his philandering and the reduction of their life to living in sordid lodgings and playing in dilapidated variety theatres. For her all illusions of glamour and success have dissolved into the reality of fifties Britain. Their

³⁰⁵ He had initially described *Look Back* upon first viewing as being ‘a travesty on England’, but his opinion of the play and the playwright changed after being convinced to see the play again in company with Arthur Miller who was greatly impressed. See Donald Spoto, *Laurence Olivier* (London, 1991), pp.226-227

³⁰⁶ Ibid

daughter is also a character at odds. Although she has participated in the protest in Trafalgar Square against nuclear weapons, she cannot wholeheartedly embrace the political activism burgeoning in the youth movement. She is disconnected from both her parents and her peers and in conflict with the world around her, reflecting the frustration of her age. In addition, their son has been captured whilst fighting abroad in Suez, and after false hope has been reported killed³⁰⁷. The Prime Minister Harold Macmillan may have been telling the public they had never had it so good, but the Rice family would not have agreed with him³⁰⁸.

While Archie shows cynical contempt for all, including himself, it is the role of Archie's father which best personifies the lost age of success. He is a nostalgic, sympathetic character who represents the decent values of Britain's glorious past. Unfortunately he is reduced to financially supporting his tax dodging son, who is on the brink of moral and financial ruin. Archie Rice's crumbling theatrical dream is symbolic of Britain's fading imperial empire, and whilst the protests of youth are in the background, such as the Trafalgar Square anti-nuclear protest, this is not a youthful call for rebellion against conformity. It is a melancholic analysis of the inter-relationship between national politics and private emotion. Dysfunction, dispossession, and the cost of war reflect the changing social landscape at a national level as the challenge to British values both home and abroad come under scrutiny. While the main protagonist of Archie is falsely ebullient and egotistical, there is a seedy, more sinister trait to his character that makes him somewhat pathetic and separate from the rest of the performers. Like Porter before him, he is not likable, and he is in effect alone. Unlike Porter, however, he is not shouting his contempt for the world around him, but is protesting at what he himself has become and the circumstances of his downfall. The play is therefore not a left-wing call

³⁰⁷ This allows Osborne to attack the Tory government's invasion as an imperialistic action.

³⁰⁸ Macmillan made his 'Never had it so good' speech at a Tory Rally in Bedford on 20th July 1957.

for rebellion or a covert signposting of the perils of capitalism (thereby proclaiming the benefits of communism). It is instead merely a mirror to the plight of those unable to change and adapt to the reality of the new, fifties Britain. Through his work in *Look Back* and the *Entertainer*, Osborne was not the first writer to suggest that anger (and its associated violence) was the defining emotion of post-war society: John Whiting had already considered these themes when he emerged in 1951 with *A Penny for a Song* and *Saints Day*³⁰⁹.

John Whiting

Whiting's *A Penny for a Song*, was a romantic farce with serious undertones set in 1804. It examines a community awaiting a Napoleonic invasion and the chaos caused in it by the arrival of a young radical on a mission to stop the war. Stereotypical representations dominate with the English upper class portrayed as lovable eccentrics, whilst their lower class counterparts are crafty servants and straw-chomping peasants, happily watching their 'leader' Sir Timothy Bellboys defiantly setting out to single-handedly defeat Napoleon. The arrival of Edward Stern, a returning ex-soldier fired with revolutionary ideas from the continent brings chaos. With farcical results the English distaste for foreigners and foreign ideas is played to the full but there is a serious core. The character of Stern highlights the pain and absurdity of war, with Whiting hinting at the darker themes that would emerge in his next work performed the same year.

In *Saints Day* the themes are much more dramatic. David Rudkin considers Whiting 'the first to go over the top' in the post-war years and present to the audience an unflinching portrayal

³⁰⁹ *Saint's Day* was winner of the Arts Theatre Club Playwriting Competition to celebrate the Festival of Britain in 1951 and premiered at the Arts Theatre in October 1951 having triumphed over 1000 other entries. For an analysis of Whiting's plays see S. Trussler, 'The Plays of John Whiting', *The Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 11, no. 2 (winter, 1966), pp.141-151 and E. Salmon, *John Whiting as Dramatist* (London, 1979).

of violence, anarchy and chaos, making *Saint's Day* the first modern post-war play³¹⁰. Whiting presents to the audience the possibility of social disintegration as the life of an isolated and emotionally desolate poet spirals out of control. This is triggered by the arrival and influence of outsiders, represented by a young, radical poet and escaped soldiers. Through their impact and influence, the play descends into nightmare and madness ending in execution, the destruction of a community and the condemnation of faith. The themes of self-destruction and persecution are reinforced by the implication that the brutality sanctioned by war will persist into peacetime, lending a sinister anticipation as events unfold. It is the disturbing and growing influence of the radical young poet, however, which insinuates that the old days are gone and the anger and rebellion of youth is a growing force. For Whiting, the introduction of politically radical characters was a precursor to the disintegration of normality, and the emergence of challenges to authority and traditionalism. Although not original themes, it was the brutality of their presentation which baffled the critics. The *Times* reviewed it as being "of a badness that must be called indescribable.... He ends the play by getting all the principle characters hanged. The play is perhaps an indictment of society, or it may be of life itself"³¹¹. The confusion surrounding the message of the play and the scathing attack on Whiting's abilities as a playwright resulted in letters being sent to the paper in his defence³¹². The lack of critical success of the play may well be attributed to timing: Britain was in the midst of the Festival of Britain, a celebration of success, and it was not the time for such a violent condemnation of modernity. Billington argues that the random violence in *Saint's Day* prefigures much modern drama and that Whiting was the first dramatist to

³¹⁰ Dramatist (and John Whiting Award winner) David Rudkin's essay on Whiting's *Saint's Day*, was written for David Ian Rabey's 2003 production of the play at Theatre Castell, Aberystwyth, Wales. Reproduced at: <http://www.superfluitiesredux.com/2010/08/11/david-rudkin-on-john-whiting-on-saints-day/> accessed 03.09.2010

³¹¹ *Times*, 6th September, 1951

³¹² By Tyrone Guthrie and Peter Brook on 12th September, and Peggy Ashcroft and John Gielgud two weeks later, all proclaiming the importance of the work. See Letters to the Editor in *The Times*, 12th September 1951, and 26th September 1951 respectively.

suggest that violence was the defining quality of modern civilisation. As previously discussed, however, musicals, classical productions and flamboyantly produced nostalgic melodramas dominated commercial theatre. If Whiting's play had emerged later in the fifties, when political apathy under Conservative rule had set in and Cold War ideology was established, then its critical and public reception may well have been different. As it was, British theatre critics and the public were not yet ready for such a challenge to their preconceived ideas of commercial theatre. John Osborne may well have received the same critical reception if he had presented *Look Back in Anger* in 1951.

Although the focus has been that of the presentation of left-wing characters in the newly emerging contemporary theatres such as the Royal Court and Theatre Workshop, it is also important to recognise the contribution of regional repertory theatre³¹³. Local 'rep' in the post-war years presented a different play each week, often following a play's successful run in the West End, and the classics and the most popular playwrights were the basis of their repertoire. This meant that more traditional plays containing the portrayal of stereotypically negative depictions of communist and left-wing characters dominated, however, there were occasions when the reception of new material was tested in 'rep' and alternative characters emerged. Whilst rep allowed for a degree of experimentation, the West End stayed with tried and tested portrayals.

³¹³ Repertory theatre consisted of a resident company of a 'leading' man and woman, a 'juvenile' man and woman, a 'character' man and woman and resident director with occasional guest actors to fill roles.

'Rep' versus the West End.

In 1954, Edwin Lewis's *It Could Happen Here* was premiered in Harrogate by the White Rose Players, and is a portrayal of a family torn apart by political agitation³¹⁴. The principal character is that Brian Buller, a young soldier returning from the Korean War. Whilst abroad he has been indoctrinated by communist propaganda, and the plot centres around the effect of his return on his family. Buller is troubled by the everyday domestic normality of his family with its ordinary outlook and fears, and his presence causes tension as his civil servant father cannot understand how he could abandon his democratic, conservative beliefs. The negative influence in the play is that of his communist mentor, Jim Luckit. He is a crafty 'red', an outwardly pleasant working class character who has disguised sinister intentions. Buller eventually shoots him at the climax of the play, thereby demonstrating his true loyalties and return to the fold. The critics felt that the final act of shooting the agitator ruined the play as it was deemed to be 'out of place in this everyday home' as the author had 'taken his subject too seriously'³¹⁵.

The presentation of a solider corrupted by communism was a typical example of the portrayal of communist targeting those weakened by circumstance. In contrast to the sympathetic portrayal of Buller, the agitator Luckit was a cockney communist, with likable traits but a sinister ulterior motive for his friendship. This was not a new theme. In theatrical reviews the Stage had earlier highlighted how communists were often given 'effective cockney presumptions' and therefore presented to the audience a stereotypical ideal of the working class agitator. In contrast middle class depictions of communist converts tended to be that of

³¹⁴ *It Could Happen Here* by Edwin Lewis and directed by Hilary Fisher-White premiered at the Grand Opera House, Harrogate on 27th September 1954

³¹⁵ 'Communism in the home', *The Stage*, 7th October 1954

intellectuals, disillusioned and seeking an alternative ideology³¹⁶. But not all depictions of conversion were towards communism. In July 1954 a play depicting the struggle between the two opposing ideologies of the East-West divide and a conversion away from communism appeared at Windsor³¹⁷.

Tug of War by Roderick Lovell centred on the characters involved in an escape route which assisted aristocrats fleeing to the West from communist oppression in ‘modern Ruritania’³¹⁸. The setting is a newly converted communist country falling under the control of a totalitarian regime, and clearly echoes the fears surrounding increasing Soviet control within Eastern Europe. The main characters are the surviving members of an aristocratic family, the Contomichalovs, who run a network from their home to assist their peers in escaping persecution. They are presented as intelligent, compassionate and full of good intentions, and the aristocracy are therefore portrayed as being the victims of circumstances who are at the mercy of those in control: working class characters representing the brutality of the state. All is subsequently thrown into turmoil by the arrival of Nikolas Andreyev, a young man supposedly seeking refuge from the state police. Although accepted by the gullible family, his presence introduces a sinister fear that he is actually a spy for the state out to infiltrate their network and endanger all of their lives.

³¹⁶ *The Stage*, 11th March 1954

³¹⁷ *Tug of War* by Roderick Lovell and directed by John Cunsell was presented by the Windsor Repertory Company, The Royal, Windsor on 12 July 1954.

³¹⁸ The setting of the fictional country of Ruritania has on this occasion been used to represent the communist conversion of a country bordering the Soviet Union, with the Royal family and traditional regime overthrown in a working class revolution resulting in state control and oppression.

The concern over a communist spy in their midst is enhanced when Andreyev calls into question the way in which the family treated their peasants, thereby revealing his political stance. In response, the family present a united front. They are noble landlords protecting those under their authority, reinforcing the notions of family and loyalty. This causes Andreyev to question his beliefs, and although he had successfully infiltrated the family, he is eventually won over by his hosts and his allegiance changes. By winning Andreyev's support, this ensures the safety and continued operation of the escape route. The play therefore demonstrates how the ideology and freedoms of the West thwart the oppressive ideology of the East and communism.

The character of Andreyev is presented as a determined young man, but he is in emotional turmoil over his allegiance to the communist state, and through appealing to his compassion and his humanity he is converted. This implies that young communists are merely misguided, in that they are dictated to by communism and are blindly following an ideology that offers no alternatives to subservience. Once freed from this restraint and shown the alternative freedoms in the West, they would of course change their allegiance. Naive wishful thinking perhaps, but it was a portrayal that was acceptable to both the public and the censor, and reinforced the stereotypical representation of the confused young communist duped into following a corrupted ideology.

In contrast to trying out new themes in rep the West End stayed with tried and tested offerings that ensured economic viability and the return of production costs. So instead of *Tug of War*, as a typical example H.M. Tennant productions offered the farce *Mrs Willie* by

Alan Melville at the Globe³¹⁹. Set within an aristocratic country house the play offers a tale of the ‘high jinks’ surrounding a diplomatic dinner thrown by Ilena, the former queen of a Balkan country. She is living in exile in Britain after her husband was killed and her family were overthrown during a communist revolution years earlier. The play details her scheming to manoeuvre her son back to the throne. Ilena has remarried, hence the title Mrs. Willie, and the dinner party throws up several characters with connections to her past, plus poisoned caviar, a possible bastard son as a waiter, and the general chaos of farcical entrances and exits, misunderstandings and double-entendres. Hardly thought provoking stuff but guaranteed to gain a West End audience with the star Yvonne Arnaud in the lead. Although pleased with her presence, Kenneth Tynan of the *Observer* was suitably unimpressed, describing the production as ‘a shrill, snobbish farce, mainly dependant on bathroom humour’,³²⁰.

Within the play the portrayal of the characters followed West End conventions, and although her husband was killed in the revolution and her family destroyed, Ilena is scheming with the sinister and untrustworthy communist Ambassador to return her family to power. He in turn sees her patronage and the restoration of the monarchy as an opportunity to line his pockets and further his own prospects. He is therefore not only disloyal to his cause and unscrupulous; he is entirely out for himself and seeking financial gain. Not just a cad but an immoral and corrupt communist. The politics of the play, however, is lost with the inclusion of stereotypical ‘toffs’, crafty servants, flirty mishaps and shady dealings. The play is far

³¹⁹ *Mrs. Willie* by Alan Melville and directed by Wallace Douglas, presented at The Globe, 17th August 1955. This was a Binkie Beaumont production with suitably lavish costumes and a typical country house set by Michael Weight. It had previously premiered at The Opera House, Manchester to unremarkable reviews and was described as ‘a conventional set-up’ with no acknowledgement of the political theme: *Manchester Guardian*, 9 August 1955

³²⁰ *Observer*, 21 August 1955

from a political message, it is a lavishly produced piece of entertainment with sumptuous costumes, and illustrates how a West End farce was far removed from the political idealism of Ewan MacColl et al.

It was not only in the theatre that plays featuring the portrayal of communists and radicals was presented to the public. In June 1957 the BBC presented as a Sunday evening play *The Quiet Ones* by Ian MacCormick, a domestic drama concerning the infiltration of communism into a family in a small provincial town³²¹. Once again the ‘target’ of communist agents is a vulnerable young man. From a devout catholic home, he is disabled from polio and though ambitious is aware that his disability will hinder his career opportunities. He is therefore disheartened not only by the system, but also feels let down by God. He is consequently susceptible to the offer of an alternative future and is then befriended by two shop floor colleagues. They are communists who have infiltrated the union at the factory and who eventually share their intentions with him: they want to use the unions to gain absolute control of the country. Within the factory environment the communists are portrayed as young idealists, looking like ‘Teddy Boys without frills’ and they have a quietly growing influence³²². At a contemporary level, the Teddy Boy image was associated with social revolt and rebellion in male youth culture. This was perpetuated through the newspaper coverage of violent gang clashes, promoting the imagery of the Teddy Boy as an ‘anti-social no good with

³²¹ *The Quiet Ones* by Ian MacCormick premiered on BBC 16th June 1957. Ironically, its broadcast was initially postponed due to an industrial strike at the BBC. MacCormick had produced several original plays for the BBC (he had also worked for ITV), including *One Morning Near Troodos* which premiered in 1956, and concerned the story of British Troops stationed in Cyprus who were hunting a resistance leader. Also in 1956 was *Act of Violence*, set in an un-named central European state where a legendary revolutionary leader has returned to seize power. The play deals with the violent aftermath of an apparently bloodless takeover.

³²² ‘Conscience Versus Communism’ in *The Stage*, 20th June 1957. The imagery of Teddy Boys implied a connection to the young working class and symbolised an element of social revolt in the visual defiance of traditionalism (see Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock* (London, 1983), p.184)

a bicycle chain up his sleeve³²³. This representation of young communists dressed as Teddy Boys therefore implied an element of menace. In contrast, the domestic heart of the play is provided in the role of the mother who despairs at the loss of her son to communism, even more so when his brothers seem to be following his lead. She cannot understand how they can abandon their faith and their country to an ideology which is contrary to all they have been taught. For her, communism was a corrupting evil. Her concerns are eventually appeased when her son resigns his party membership in a fit of conscience. He distances himself from the communist agitators within the factory, and although this leaves him alienated at work he is back in the fold at home. By contrasting the increasingly politicised factory environment with the domestic traditionalism of the home, the play highlights the dilemma of peer pressure and conformity.

The portrayal of workplace confrontations, family conflicts, and the concerns of the nuclear age were to continue in theatre into the sixties. At the same time traditional, institutional theatre established solid foundations reinforcing its dominance. In 1961 the creation of the Royal Shakespeare Company (formerly the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre) under Peter Hall was followed in 1963 by Olivier's National Theatre, initially based at the Old Vic, and the building of new theatres in Chichester, Nottingham, Bolton, and Stoke-on-Trent³²⁴. Although the sixties saw traditionalism in the guise of permanent established companies consolidate its hold on commercial theatre, new writers emerged through independent theatre which strengthened its position as an alternative force. Alan Ayckbourn found success in 1965 with

³²³ *Daily Mirror*, 6th October 1956

³²⁴ The Royal Shakespeare Company, based at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre formally came into being on 21st March 1961 under the leadership of Peter Hall. The National Theatre opened 22nd October 1963 with Laurence Olivier as Artistic Director from 1963-73. Chichester Festival Theatre opened 1962 with Laurence Olivier as first Artistic Director and productions would eventually transfer to the National Theatre. Nottingham Playhouse opened in 1963, Bolton Octagon Theatre opened 1967, and the Stoke-on-Trent Victoria Theatre (now the New Vic) opened 1962.

Relatively Speaking (originally called *Meet my Father*), which after premiering at the Library Theatre Scarborough transferred to the West End, acting as the catapult for his career. Tom Stoppard also found success when *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* premiered at the Edinburgh Festival 1966. It was then produced by the National Theatre at the Old Vic. Joe Orton also had his initial success with *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* at the New Arts Theatre before its transfer to Wyndham's Theatre in the West End. This highlights how small, independent theatre offered opportunities for new, home grown writers to premiere their work.

When one considers the productions from the forties to the sixties, the emergence of new, working class writers gradually influenced the representation of characters. In main stream institutional theatre, although traditional stereotypical representations dominated, they gradually evolved in the post-war years to reflect the changing social and cultural make up of Britain, be it in a non-radical context. This of course suited its target audience. The theatre-going public of institutional theatre were the upper-middle class, the debes, and according to Sandy Craig, 'the demimonde of fashion and assorted hangers on'³²⁵. Therefore by presenting suitably appropriate and palatable fare the theatre ensured their continued patronage. In contrast, independent theatre sought a new audience: that of the professional middle class, the teachers and the managers with experience of life and the workplace. Although independent theatre presented work that was new and challenging, it had deeply familiar foundations to which the audience could relate: it was domestically based with contemporary themes. Theatre was no longer the exclusive domain of classical plays or upper class characters in

³²⁵ Sandy Craig in *Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain* (Oxford, 1980), p.13

their country houses³²⁶. Depictions of the working class and the anxieties they faced in everyday life had gradually become part of mainstream theatre. However, it was in the realm of financially and institutionally independent theatre that this broadening of horizons brought with it another dimension, that of the political dilemmas facing Britain in an era of reform. The home and the traditional family unit was under scrutiny as were the social and political influences upon it, and as such, the emergence of left-wing and communist insurgents into both the domestic and industrial setting became themes for consideration.

Of course politics in theatre was nothing new, in the sense that all theatre is political as it is not autonomous and is therefore forced to decide in whose service it acts³²⁷. The political influence in commercial and independent theatre, however, demonstrated the contest between conservative values and left-wing ideology. Within the concept of addressing contemporary anxieties, institutional theatre in general mirrored the anti-communist ideology of the post-war era. It reinforced the culturally constructed stereotypes of the subversive, the revolutionary, the militant or the sinister other, and within the West End, such characterisations dominated in both drama and farce. It was in the emerging independent theatres such as the Theatre Workshop, the Royal Court and minor reps that alternative representations were made. This is not to say that communism was celebrated, but that communist characterisations were not necessarily negative. Representations of idealists, disillusioned youth seeking a sense of purpose and belonging, and those seeking freedom from perceived oppression and victimisation appeared. The setting, however, was not the revolutionary battlefields, the dockyards or political rallies. In the cash strapped environment of independent theatre, large flamboyant productions requiring big sets and large casts were

³²⁶ Reflecting the popular desire for nostalgic, conservative representations of imperial Britain

³²⁷ Ibid, ‘Unmasking the Lie - Political Theatre’ pp.30-48

not a possibility. This limitation of resources helped to direct the consideration of communism into the domestic environment, with the portrayal of family division and disillusionment used to examine not only the communist ideology but also society's reaction to it. *Avant garde* theatre in the post-war years subsequently became associated with the cultural left as it championed the voice of youth, challenged class divisions and social expectations and portrayed sympathetic communist characters within a recognisable domestic setting.

The level of predictability that the representation of communism had within mainstream, institutional theatre was therefore challenged through the emergence of independent theatre with a left-wing bias. This was further enhanced through the element of reality depicted. Gritty domestic settings which the audience could relate to emerged, rather than the stately drawing rooms of unfamiliar manor houses, therefore both the setting and the people had a sense of the familiar. The portrayal of characters who were disillusioned, confused, desperate, or at odds with those around them reflected the transformation and reforms in post-war Britain. You could therefore see anything from overtly revolutionary communist characters to left-wing radicals at war with entrenched conservatism. Communist writers such as Wesker also had radical contemporaries such as Osborne, the communist theatre group Theatre Workshop had a radical rival in the English Stage Company at the Royal Court, and overtly communist characters such as Sarah Khan had radical contemporaries such as Jimmy Porter.

Theatre therefore offered audiences the opportunity to see the portrayal of communists from the sinister other to the innocent idealists and this was something relatively unavailable in the

cinema, which did not have the stratified system apparent in theatre. Theatre effectively had alternative voices although some were admittedly a lot louder than others. Aside from the mainstream theatre with its financial support and huge production costs, independent and amateur theatres and theatre groups offered opportunities for work to be presented that would have been considered commercially unsuitable for the West End. In contrast, at the time the film industry was reliant on the established distribution circuit of cinema chains. In addition, for a film to be made the costs were such that the producers needed to anticipate a distribution deal and regardless of the post-war requirement to show British made films, due to cost, logistics, and business considerations, it was very difficult for films to be made offering a truly alternative ideology. The duality of institutional and independent theatre therefore offered the public a choice. Through the growing commercial success of challenging new productions, the public subsequently endorsed thought provoking and more realistic theatre as shown by the success of the Royal Court and to a lesser extent Theatre Workshop. Within this commercial context, the representation of communist characters was a minor consideration. Independent productions were often small featuring new writers and a limited cast, however, opportunities were there. Plays were presented to the public which portrayed communist characters ranging from sympathetic to antagonistic, idealists to militants. In contrast to *Mrs Willie* playing to packed houses in the West End, they may have played Arnold Wesker to the Belgrade in Coventry, or Ronald Watson's work to a small audience in Barrow-in-Furness, but there was a diversity of communist portrayals and therefore audience choice.

British Art, Social Realism and the Challenge to Traditionalism

'Artistic consciousness is by no means a thing in itself, it must also partake of the general consciousness of society... Art of a given period [therefore] reflects their inner most feelings, aspirations and frame of mind.' Alan Woods³²⁸

'The medium of art is not in any sense reducible to a social content' Jack Lindsey³²⁹

Having examined the portrayal of communist characters in both dramatic and comedic scenarios in film and theatre, this chapter will demonstrate how art production was far less overt in its representation. The representation of communist ideology was actually cloaked in social commentary mirroring the challenges and anxieties of working class life. For communists within the artistic community, post-war confidence failed to materialise into any level of commercial or political success. This chapter will examine the failure of the CPGB, its National Cultural Committee (NCC) and the Artists Group to provide any tangible assistance to communist artists. This resulted in a failure to establish any strength of support within the artistic community, and even cancelled exhibitions at the CPGB's own annual conference due to lack of support. In addition, the failure of the communist art magazine

³²⁸ A. Woods, 'An Introduction to Trotsky's Writings on Art' dated 20th December 2000, available www.marxist.com/ArtAndLiterature-old/marxism_and_art.html accessed 17.12.2010

³²⁹ CP/CENT/CULT/04/File09/Betty Reid's Papers: Jack Lindsey, 'Marxist Theory of Culture'

‘Realism’ will be shown to be a direct result of dwindling support, lack of funding and poor management, regardless of the good intentions of a few individuals. Within art, artistic radicalism and political radicalism were openly associated, and through the promotion of radical artists by the CPGB and openly Marxist critics, the link with communism was established. Within that sense, when talking of communist art or radical art very often the establishment failed to separate the two, seeing radical change within the artistic sense as being indicative of a communist political ideology.

One radical to be considered is Henry Moore who will demonstrate how a radical assimilated by the artistic establishment still managed to produce challenging and provocative, socially relevant works³³⁰. The role and influence of the critics will also be discussed, particularly John Berger and Davis Sylvester, demonstrating how commercial and critical support was vital for artistic success and acceptance. In addition, it will show how the pro-communist political standpoint of the critic became associated with the work of the radical artists. This stance was further supported as the art in question, social realism as represented by the Beaux Arts Quartet of ‘Kitchen Sink’ painters³³¹, challenged class driven artistic etiquette and dared to illustrate the lives of the working class. The short-lived success of the movement further illustrates how conformist attitudes were needed in order to maintain commercial viability, as

³³⁰ ‘Artistic establishment’ in this sense means the recognised institutions of authority and influence, and those in financial control, such as the Arts Council, the Royal Academy and the established Schools of Art. The schools of art continued to promote pre- 20th century art as being true ‘art’, maintaining training programmes that focussed on the grand masters and classical form and representation. This attitude continued within the Royal Academy and its programmes and shows, whilst the financial support provided by the Arts Council continued to focus on traditional forms of conformist art promoted by the Royal Academy, with minor consideration initially given to amateur artists

³³¹ Social realism is a broad term that relates to the representation of contemporary social, economic or political conditions in a realistic manner from a left-wing viewpoint, often associated with the suggestion of protest or social reform. This became associated with The Beaux Arts Quartet, or ‘Kitchen Sink’ painters, here represented by John Bratby, Derrick Greaves, Edward Middleditch and Jack Smith as the four most prominent artists of the social realists. The Quartet were nicknamed the ‘Kitchen Sink’ artists following an article by the critic David Sylvester in Encounter magazine in December 1954 in which he introduced the term ‘kitchen sink art’ to describe the work of the social realists.

the artist's styles evolved to meet changing consumer demand. It was not only social realism that had a limited life-span. The Artists Group and *Realism* were also short lived and ineffectual enterprises, and this is reflected in the lack of consideration in the historiography concerning the CPGB. Previously, radical and communist influenced post-war art has been considered immaterial, yet when examined within the context of the post-war representation of communism in British culture, it actually stands alone from film and theatre. Contrary to film and theatre, left-wing artistic production was not ridiculed or filled with stereotypical representations. Communists were not painted as either left-wing idealists or working class militants, in fact they were not overtly there at all. They were hidden under the cloak of social realism in order to ensure gallery space and a chance of commercial success.

Through an examination of a series of CPGB archives, artists, art, reviews and analysis, this chapter will demonstrate that regardless of commercial considerations, there were British artists who refused to allow middle-class, traditionalist artistic expectations to moderate their work. Through lack of opportunities and support overtly communist art was invisible in the post-war years, however, the communist supported social realism was not and that could get gallery space. As a result it portrayed the realities of everyday working class life, reflecting the pessimism and the anxieties of the contemporary political climate, and although it had a short life span it also wielded considerable influence. They may have gradually dissolved into the artistic establishment that they had originally stood against, but the 'Kitchen Sink' artists can stand alongside the 'Angry Young Men' as banner waving ground breakers of the post-war era.

Prior to war, the irrational and fantastical effects of surrealism had revitalised British art, but following the harrowing depictions of the war artists, post-war British art is traditionally seen to have retreated into the countryside and returned to traditional subjects. Consequently the family, the British countryside, honour, and morality became favoured artistic themes in a celebration of victory and of British values. Nevertheless, as social and political reform took hold in the late forties, it was not long before art reflected the concerns of the era. Britain was crawling away from war and throwing aside the cloak of empire, and although the concept of empirical importance and superiority was one which was part of the British consciousness, there is no doubt that post-war Britain was no longer a dominant world power³³². Domestically great changes could be seen. Through reform and rebuilding Britain was attempting to move forward whilst maintaining a foundation in traditionalism, and any threat to the stability of this precarious balance was viewed with suspicion. Communism was undoubtedly considered such a threat. Through the actions of the Soviets and the Cold War anxieties of expansionism and nuclear capability, to stand in support of communism was to stand against traditional British values of freedom, fair play and democracy.

Challenges to traditionalism were therefore seen as radical behaviour that was to be treated with suspicion. An initial reinforcement of traditional themes within art was therefore established, but new artists slowly began to challenge conventional forms, themes and representations. One such group was the social realists who depicted the everyday working class environment as it was relevant to them, without any romantic or heroic overtones. Their

³³² For examples of the changes in post-war Britain see D. Marquand & A Seldon, *The Ideas that Shaped Post-war Britain* (London, 1966); A. Sked & C. Cook, *Post-war Britain: A Political History 1945-92* (London, 1993); J. Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: Retreat from Empire in the Post-war World* (London, 1988); B. Appleyard, *The Pleasures of Peace: Art & Imagination in Post-war Britain* (London, 1989); D. Arnold, *Cultural Identity and the Aesthetics of Britishness* (Manchester, 2004); P. Levine & S.R. Greylzel (eds), *Gender, Labour, War and Empire: Essays on Modern Britain* (Basingstoke, 2009); B. Williams, *Life in Post-war Britain* (London, 2010); P. Addison, *No Turning Back: The Peacetime Revolutions of Post-War Britain* (Oxford, 2010)

work was seen as not only artistic radicalism but also political radicalism and the social commentary seen in the work was treated with suspicion³³³. It was not only the new artists who portrayed their concerns and anxieties. Established artists sought inspiration for their work in the post-war environment and found that political and social anxieties regarding the reforms and challenges affecting Britain provided a wealth of material. Whether creating art to highlight the dangers of the era or the opportunities it presented, the political motivations of the artists were subsequently reflected in the work produced. The visual portrayal of political concerns therefore encompassed the work of both the new and the established.

Whilst in popular cinema, and to a large extent theatre, the representation of pro-communist ideals was rare, the very nature of the *avant garde* of art would suggest that challenging and antagonistic material was a virtual pre-requisite, and that the work of left-wing and communist artists was there for all to see. That is not the case. Art, like film and theatre was a business after all, and its production and presentation had to be a commercially viable exercise. Admittedly the production costs in art were nothing in comparison to a staging a play or producing and distributing a film. It could be a charcoal sketch after all. But regardless of how much the piece cost to create, the public still had to see it and that was the problem. As the CPGB found out to its cost, if you could find a venue willing to house it you could put up a display of communist art, but in the Cold War era no-one would go to see it. To present openly communist art ensured commercial failure for a British artist³³⁴. There were plenty of small, privately owned galleries who were interested in new work by new artists, but it had to be different to be noticed from the hundreds of other art college

³³³ Often this was further complicated due to the support given to the respective artist by a political association such as the CPGB, or the political stance of a supporting critic, such as the openly Marxist critic John Berger and his support of the social realists which will be discussed later.

³³⁴ As will be discussed the Italian artist Guttuso was openly communist and had a successful exhibition in London in the fifties but he had an international reputation and was considered the leading social realist.

productions. Radical art was therefore commercially viable if you found the right gallery. For the artists who wanted to realistically present the everyday lives and anxieties of the working class that became the Beaux Arts Gallery in London under the directorship of Helen Lessore. The four most successful social realists who exhibited there subsequently became known as the Beaux Arts Quartet of John Bratby, Derrick Greaves, Edward Middleditch and Jack Smith. Although the social realists were openly supported by the CPGB and hailed by the Marxist critic John Berger their work was politically and artistically radical rather than overtly communist which was influenced by commercial considerations.

The anti-communist environment of the Cold War years in Britain therefore ensured that the public viewed openly radical and communist art (or anything else for that matter) as suspicious. This was not a recipe for commercial success. Through support and association, communism and artistic radicalism were perceived as being linked, and consequently the opportunities for the promotion of communist or even challenging left-wing art were very rare. Although there was a gradual shift in attitudes towards contemporary art in Britain and a move away from traditionalism, elsewhere things were moving quickly. France had Picasso, Matisse, Giacometti and Existentialism, whilst the USA had become the refuge for the *avant garde* of Europe and New York eventually emerged as the centre of ‘new art’³³⁵. In contrast, in Britain there was a very slow acceptance of modernism as the ghosts of pre-war surrealism lingered and the disputes between realism and abstraction mirrored the dispute between left and right³³⁶. From the sombre tones of forties art through to the flamboyant colour of the

³³⁵ Many European artists had fled to America and particularly New York to escape the persecution of the Nazi’s. This led to New York replacing Paris as the centre of the *avant garde* of contemporary art and the centre of the abstract expressionist movement, with artists such as the Dutch born Willem de Kooning, Russian born Mark Rothko, and American born Jackson Pollock.

³³⁶ Within Britain, ‘realism’ was associated with dour working class interiors of the social realists and left-wing ideology, as characterised by its support from the Marxist critic John Berger and the CPGB. Abstraction was

early sixties, the changing fortunes and anxieties of Britain were reflected in the art that was created. Contrary to film and theatre, however, art presented a more subtle commentary and continued to celebrate traditional themes although in non-traditional styles³³⁷. Critics and historians subsequently identified that in the battle for realism there were specific ideological positions which rendered this conflict as being representative of the microcosm of the political battles of the era. John Berger, openly Marxist and champion of social realism stated ‘All works of art, within their own immediate context, are bound directly or indirectly to be weapons’³³⁸, and similarly the illustrator Paul Hogarth stated that ‘it should also be known how rearmament and Cold War thinking affected the nature of art itself’³³⁹. The ramifications of the post-war era and the emergence of the Cold War subsequently affected British artistic production.

Art was attempting to redefine British identity following the changes brought about by war, and visual culture played an important role in establishing recognisable structures and debates. The battle for realism came to dominate debates on the future direction of British (and European) art, but this was also the battle between ‘modern realism’ and ‘social realism’. Modern realism within British art related to the work of what is now considered to be the ‘School of London’ painters such as Frank Auerbach, Francis Bacon, Leon Kossoff

considered by the right to have a moral and political dimension that was representative of western freedom of thought and was favoured by the more traditionalist followers such as David Sylvester (though he was not right-wing politically).

³³⁷ Hyman argues that it was ‘only by understanding the implications of the Cold War polarisation between Washington and Moscow for post-war artistic practice, and its critical presentation, patronage and reception, that it is possible to re-appraise properly this period, reassess its artists and evaluate its formative influence on subsequent generations’. James Hyman, *The Battle for Realism: Figurative Art in Britain During the Cold War 1945-1960* (London, 2001), p.1

³³⁸ John Berger ‘The Unknown Political Prisoner’, *New Statesman*, 21 March 1953, vol. 45, no.1150, pp.337-8

³³⁹ Paul Hogarth, ‘Humanism versus Despair in British Art Today’, *Marxist Quarterly*, January 1955, vol. 2, no. 1, pp.37-47

and Lucien Freud³⁴⁰. They placed emphasis on abstraction and engaged with modernist concerns such as existentialism with a focus on the treatment of the body. Their work was recognised by a majority of critics and the Royal Academy as being at the forefront of the modern art movement in Britain. Social realism in contrast placed emphasis on the everyday working class environment and the anxieties faced within it, as seen through the work of the Beaux Arts Quartet of John Bratby, Derrick Greaves, Edward Middleditch, and Jack Smith. In Britain the battle for realism was therefore centre stage, though this theme has been ignored in Cold War studies³⁴¹. As we have already discussed the depiction of working class realism was quite literally centre stage in theatre, but within art it became the focus of division³⁴².

Social realism emerged to capture the public's attention following the endorsement of critics such as Berger, but it was not wholeheartedly embraced by the 'establishment'. They preferred the less left-wing concept of modern realism. This led to a lack of opportunities for the promotion of left-wing artists, a theme which repeats itself throughout this thesis. In a report in *Our Time*, the communist cultural paper produced by the CPGB, its author concluded that alongside the political pressures of the era, there was a social pressure upon intellectuals to attack communism. He argued that workers in the cultural fields in particular were subject to continuous pressure and corruption, all to ensure that the 'end product is a renunciation of all progressive ideals, all notions of the artists social responsibility and all

³⁴⁰ Authorship of title was claimed by Lawrence Gowing writing for the Sunday Times, and the label has now commonly used both institutionally and commercially

³⁴¹ In Cold War studies the examination of culture has often has been seen within the context of propaganda. For examples of Cold War studies which consider the cultural contributions and ramifications from a propagandist stance see F. Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London, 2000); H. Krabbendam & G. Scott-Smith, *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe* (London, 2003); P. Major & R. Mitter (eds), *Across the Blocks: Exploring Comparative Cold War Cultural and Social History* (London, 2004); T. Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War: The State, Propaganda and Consensus* (London, 2006); J. Jenkins, *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War* (Edinburgh, 2006)

³⁴² Following the post-war fall of neo-Romanticism and prior to the rise of Abstract Expressionism in the sixties.

belief in humanity³⁴³. Admittedly such criticism was not unusual coming from the CPGB. They considered that the mass media of entertainment and the Arts were owned, controlled and staffed by the class responsible for such pressure and corruption, and that consequently the media reflected a ‘sick, dreary decadence’³⁴⁴. This in turn led to the creation within the CPGB of the National Cultural Committee (NCC) which contrary to its intentions, stands as an example of the lack of effectiveness of the communist stance within the realm of the artistic community.

The NCC and the Artists Group

Set up in 1947, the intention of the NCC was to both police and nurture the flow of Marxist ideals within British culture. This was needed as under the Arts Council ‘a more authorative, even dictatorial attitude’ had been observed which had tended ‘to interest itself in the larger and more permanent institutions’, ignoring the politically independent artists.³⁴⁵ In order to try to influence and counter the perceived negligence of the Arts Council concerning the patronage of independent art, the NCC eventually developed the Artists Group, although in a typical example of their effectiveness, this was not until 1955³⁴⁶. By that time artists and critics alike had voiced grievances to the NCC concerning the declining condition of the Arts in Britain. These related to the lack of patronage in the art field, the scarcity of direct commissions and the declining market for work. In addition, the general lack of exhibition facilities and studio space for artists, the exploitation by dealers, and concerns about adult education (such as declining facilities and the need for a clearer art education policy within

³⁴³ CP/CENT/CULT/01/01/‘Our Time’, 7 Nov 47

³⁴⁴ Ibid

³⁴⁵ Minutes of NCC 15th May 1947, CP/CENT/CULT/01/01[Minutes and Papers 1946-50]

³⁴⁶ There was a core of members: Jim Lucas (chair), Pat Carpenter (sec), Reg Turner, John Berger, Helen Fairfield, Aileen Bestman, Godfrey Rubene, Gari Morgan, Ray Watkinson, Barbara Morris and Bob Dawson. All were working as artists, teachers of art, producing amateur art, or acting as art critics.

art schools) were also raised³⁴⁷. The Artists Group was subsequently set up in 1955 to counter-act such negligence and support left-wing artists at a practical level.

In its role to promote and support communist art and artists, in February 1955 the newly created Artists Group proposed a series of lectures and discussions on themes such as social realism and the current state of Soviet art. Forty five artists were also invited to submit their work for an exhibition suggested for the Theatre Workshop and the Unity Theatre³⁴⁸. The mood was very optimistic but whilst the exhibition was to celebrate the individual work of communist artists and social realism, it not materialise. The lectures were also a failure³⁴⁹. By April, the Theatre Royal, Stratford did agree to have a very small foyer exhibition from May 17th for a limited period, but it was not a success and no commissions or sales were forthcoming. The Artists Group did not even have any commissions for promotional art from their ‘comrades’. Although various unions were considering art illustrations for the cover of their journals, nothing was actually formalised and no commissions were placed³⁵⁰. With good intentions but virtually no support the Artists Group carried on and maintained focus.

The theme which dominated the choices of work for proposed exhibitions and the topics for lectures related to the emergence of realism in art, and the dilemma of how communist art could fit into the modern artistic environment without being devoured by it³⁵¹. It was a

³⁴⁷ CP/CENT/CULT/01/01/ Grievances of Painters and Sculptors

³⁴⁸ CP/CENT/CULT/05/Artists Group/12 Feb 55

³⁴⁹ Due to very poor attendance for the lectures they could not cover the organisational costs even though the speakers were unpaid.

³⁵⁰ CP/CENT/CULT/05/Artists Group/16 Apr 55

³⁵¹ For the CPGB social realism was considered the depiction of social and racial injustice and the portrayal of economic hardship, thereby rendering the representation of working class activities as heroic (Rivera was used as a prime example). In contrast Modern Realism as favoured by the Royal Academy was seen as the depiction of the everyday, unadorned with sentiment or imagination and without political or emotional attachment.

question that they never seemed to answer. They instead focussed on the role and influence of non-British communist artists, appreciating the contributions of Renato Guttuso and Diego Rivera in particular. This led to the realisation that they needed to establish contact with more foreign communist artists, as “only having Guttuso at present” limited their exposure to “true communist art”³⁵². In a continuation of their concerns regarding the commercialisation and corruption of social realism in Western art, the Artists Group also agreed to create its own magazine ‘*Realism*’, however, they initially had other considerations³⁵³.

The lecture series was running at a loss due to poor attendance and incurred costs, and the small foyer exhibition was also not going well due to limited pieces for display and poor attendance³⁵⁴. This was partly blamed on the impact and limited popularity of Guttuso’s London exhibition and the touring Hiroshima exhibition, but in reality the exhibition staged by the Artists Group was a small, rather obscure display that had not been promoted³⁵⁵. Because of the anti-communist public stance in the Cold War era, passing curiosity could not guarantee enough support to make that, or any future ventures viable. A Financial Committee was subsequently set up to evaluate future proposals and try to reverse the trend. Unfortunately, this was by now working alongside the Journal Committee, the Exhibition Committee, and the Artists for Peace Committee. So within the Artists Group of at the most twelve attendees (it was usually five or six), all now had numerous additional committee responsibilities with the development of a further four sub-committees, with all proposals

³⁵² CP/CENT/CULT/05/Artists Group/16 Apr 55

³⁵³ *Realism* will be discussed in detail later in the chapter, see p.175

³⁵⁴ CP/CENT/CULT/05/Artists Group/14 May 55

³⁵⁵ Renato Guttuso was successfully exhibiting at the Leicester Galleries, London, whilst the touring exhibition of Iri Maruki and Toshiko Akamatsu’s Hiroshima Panels was also achieving acclaim.

going through two committee stages before any action was taken.³⁵⁶ Hardly a recipe for active change.

By August no further progress had been made regarding potential exhibitions, nor in the work of the ‘Artists for Peace’, who were as yet undecided on their specific role³⁵⁷. It was not until January 1956 that positive steps were taken and it was decided that there would be an art exhibition at the Party Congress. It was a perfect opportunity to promote communist artists at a communist party annual meeting and yet another sub-committee was proposed to organise this³⁵⁸. Unfortunately by March it transpired that the intended exhibition for the Party Congress was under threat as there were not enough banners or available artists to decorate the hall, let alone pieces to exhibit³⁵⁹. By April the exhibition was cancelled, and a proposed exhibition of Soviet art was also on hold³⁶⁰. Yet again, good intentions dissipated due to lack of resources and support, not just at a financial level but also within the artistic community. They simply did not have enough pieces submitted to mount an exhibition, or even materials to create the banners or decorate the venue.

It was not just in relation to the mounting of exhibitions that there were problems. By May’s meeting it was clear that the production of the magazine ‘Realism’ was in difficulties, and a new editor and an accountant were needed to ‘sort it out’³⁶¹. To try to counter balance this

³⁵⁶ By the Artist’s Group meeting of 11 June 55 all matters arising concerned the logistical concerns of the various sub-committees whilst no real progress was reported: CP/CENT/CULT/05/11June 55

³⁵⁷ CP/CENT/CULT/05/10 Aug 55

³⁵⁸ CP/CENT/CULT/05/Jan 56 This meeting was also attended by Barbara Niven, Ewan Phillips, George Fullard and Cliff Rowe.

³⁵⁹ CP/CENT/CULT/05/Mar 56

³⁶⁰ They did not have enough art to exhibit, had little interest from prospective artists, and there was difficulty in organising a suitable venue as they had no financial plan in place. CP/CENT/CULT/05/Apr 56

³⁶¹ CP/CENT/CULT/05/May 56.

negative news it was proposed that there should be an autumn art exhibition sponsored by ‘Realism’, and at the next meeting a further sub-committee was set up to organise this. It was intended to include modern Italian and French Painting and to find a suitable location: a tall order given the recent failures. Unsurprisingly, due to lack of finances, lack of art work to exhibit and lack of organisational skills, the autumn art exhibition failed to materialise. The final meeting of the Artists Group was in September 1956, and their failure left only the art of the social realists to present the everyday lives of the working class and the anxieties they faced. Social Realism was not overtly communist art. It was radical left-wing art representing a critical social commentary, and was associated with communist ideology through the support of the CPGB and Marxist critics. In order to understand this covert representation political radicalism, and the problems being faced at an ideological and practical level for the communists of the Artists Group, we will now consider the cultural magazine *Realism*, the ideology behind its creation and also the reasons for its failure.

Realism

Whereas *Realism* was presented as the cultural and intellectual magazine of the CPGB, there were other political publications of the era that offered alternative voices and with which it was in competition. *Encounter* was a literary and intellectual review journal founded in 1953 by the poet Stephen Spender and early neoconservative author Irving Kristol. Although Spender had been very left-wing in his younger years, he had become disillusioned with communism and voiced his loss of political faith in essay form in *The God that Failed*³⁶². He had subsequently distanced himself from any form of communist support which he now saw as a corrupting and perverse representation of its original intentions. Under his direction,

³⁶² R.H. Crossman (ed), *The God that Failed* (London, 1950). This was a collection of six essays by former communists; A. Koestler, I. Silone, A. Gide, R. Wright, L. Fischer, and S. Spender detailing the reasons behind their initial support of, and loss of faith in communism.

Encounter therefore promoted an Anglo-American pro-democracy stance, and was actually covertly funded by the Central Intelligence Agency through the Congress for Cultural Freedom³⁶³. In contrast, *Realism* represented a strongly left-wing counter balance. It promoted the representation of working class struggles within the post-war environment and the anxieties faced, challenging the traditional orthodoxy in art. However, it was not the only left-wing publication.

Although the *Daily Worker* was technically independent, it was a small, socialist daily newspaper that at the time remained true to the Stalinist policies of the CPGB³⁶⁴. Its size meant that it had very little cultural commentary and was therefore no alternative to the cultural analysis within *Realism*. Another publication was the *Tribune*, which had a strongly anti-fascist and pro-Labour stance and was involved in promoting the policies of the Labour Government in the post-war years³⁶⁵. Although left-wing, it went on to develop a strongly anti-communist stance following the communist takeover of Eastern Europe and the Berlin Blockade, remaining critical of the USSR and denouncing Stalin and his policies. It was not a cultural publication and therefore offered no real competition for *Realism*. In contrast, the *New Statesman* was a left-wing publication which was both a political and cultural magazine³⁶⁶. From 1930-1960 the editor was Kingsley Martin, who in the pre-war years had directed the magazine towards a strongly anti-fascist and left-wing stance. Following the

³⁶³ For a comprehensive analysis of the CIA's involvement and influence see Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London, 1999). The American version published the following year is essentially the same book : *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (London, 2001)

³⁶⁴ It had been founded in 1930 by the CPGB, but since 1945 it had been owned and published by a reader's co-operative: The Peoples Press Printing Society

³⁶⁵ Presented weekly, The *Tribune* had originally been founded in 1937 by two left-wing Labour MP's, Stafford Cripps and George Strauss. It had been set up to back the Unity Campaign, an attempt to secure an anti-fascist and anti-appeasement united front between the Labour Party and socialist parties to its left, such as the Socialist League, the Independent Labour Party and the CPGB.

³⁶⁶ The *New Statesman* was founded in 1913 with connections to the Fabian Society

defeat of fascism, the magazine remained strongly left-wing in the post-war years and was critical of British foreign policy and also its subservience to the USA. In addition to its political stance, it also devoted several pages to book reviews and contemporary cultural criticism. Thus the *New Statesman* was an alternative left-wing cultural and political publication to *Realism* that was already well established with a considerable reputation and following. This placed the cultural magazine of the CPGB immediately at a commercial disadvantage upon its creation in 1955.

There had actually been suggestions for a Communist Party cultural journal three years earlier. At the time it was proposed to create a journal which ‘would fight to develop a Marxist attitude in relation to literature and art’ with the intention to ‘capture the initiative from the Catholics, the Trotskyists and other bourgeois idealists who have a clear field to themselves at the moment’³⁶⁷. According to the CPGB, Britain was particularly backward in its patronage of the arts, stating that apart from the 1951 Festival of Britain there had been ‘practically no official patronage’³⁶⁸. A cultural magazine was subsequently proposed to promote, educate and highlight the work of the working class artists and the struggle they faced. Although this was proposed in 1952 it was not until 1955 that the first issue of *Realism* appeared, and this lack of a pro-active approach served as a precursor to the trials and tribulations of the magazine. It was created to present and promote British left-wing art, but the first issue focused on an exhibition of the work of Renato Guttuso at the Leicester Galleries in London. It presented an in-depth interview with the artist and an assessment of

³⁶⁷ CP/CNT/CULT/03/File 06/M is.Papers 1950-55/Jan 1952

³⁶⁸ In a report to the CCC, they acknowledged there were long established artistic organisations such as the Royal Academy (est. 1768), and the Imperial Arts League (est. 1909), which promoted traditional forms of ‘bourgeois art’, plus the newly established Institute of Contemporary Art, which was the centre of ‘reactionary, decadent art’. In addition they saw the Arts Council as a puppet of the government highlighting that art received less than 10% of the funding given to Opera and ballet, and less than 7% of the funding given to music. See CP/CENT/CULT/01/03: Reports to the Commission on the Middle Classes

his work³⁶⁹. The CPGB saw Guttuso as a champion of social realism, whilst he saw his work as being reflective of true democratic art, and he entered into the debate surrounding social realism by stating that ‘the realist artists are today the only true artist of the *avant garde*³⁷⁰. *Realism* considered that his exhibition in London had created ‘violent divisions in opinion’ as ‘drab lefts’ had misunderstood his work and defended academic social realism [modern realism], whilst it was cheered by those sick of art being ‘smeared in a naturalistic sentimental manner’³⁷¹. His work was seen as having a directness and violence of attack, showing the heroism of the modern working class whilst displaying how they had been devoured by the circumstances of the twentieth century. His personal philosophy was evident in his work as he stated ‘It is not important to show that one is a revolutionary – it is important to be a revolutionary’³⁷². Guttuso was a ‘son of the Italian toiling masses’ (though in fact his background was not working class), and social and political commentary was an intrinsic ingredient of his work³⁷³. His work echoed the changes evident in Britain as class and social barriers were eroded and it appealed to the Artists Group, who considered it very relative to both British art and British society in the post-war years³⁷⁴.

Although Guttuso’s exhibition (which was not sponsored by the CPGB) and the first issue of *Realism* were relatively successful, the Artists Group were aware of the paradox surrounding

³⁶⁹ Renato Guttuso (1912-87) was an Italian painter considered to be Italy’s leading exponent of Social realism. He had been a member of the Italian Resistance during the war and had criticized both the church and the Mafia through his work which was often the direct expression of his hatred of injustice and the abuse of power. He was also openly anti-fascist. His post-war works were often inspired by the struggles of the peasants of his native Sicily, and working class struggles in the changing European post-war environment.

³⁷⁰ *Realism*, Issue 1, June 1955. Quote taken from the open letter from Guttuso to the Artists Quartet committee, which he ended with the proclamation ‘Long live democratic art!’

³⁷¹ Gerald Marks writing in *Realism*, Issue 1, June 1955

³⁷² Ibid

³⁷³ This reflected his belief that art developed when human society made new steps forward.

³⁷⁴ Works influenced by war such as ‘Killed Worker’, ‘Death of a Hero’ and ‘Shooting of the Patriots’ represented the sacrifice of the working class, and their drama and commentary was considered particularly relevant.

‘revolutionary art’: artists were dependent on the bourgeoisie to actually buy their work, making them reliant on the capitalist, class driven system which their work criticised. As a result, many artists found themselves reliant on teaching positions rather than being professional artists, and this theme of artists being reliant on the system, and in particular on teaching, continued in the following issue of *Realism*. In ‘The place of painting, sculpture and decorative arts in architecture’, Hugh Cameron argued that artists should be employed on public buildings, as in reality art was a luxury for the powers that be to the exclusion of the masses³⁷⁵. Although he argued that capitalism had frustrated the development of social art forms, there were exceptions. Following the war a vast school building programme had been instigated which had resulted in several county councils, such as Herefordshire, incorporating art within the designs. That said, only half of one per cent of the building costs were set aside for painting, sculpture, or decorative art, and the artists were not consulted until after completion of the buildings³⁷⁶. Art in architecture was an afterthought. Art in education, not just in relation to the buildings but also the curriculum, was a continual debate within *Realism*. The lack of facilities for artists and the loss of funding within adult education endangered the livelihood of many, whilst the direction of art schools and the influence of American art was also a matter for concern³⁷⁷.

Concerns relating to foreign influences in British art were nothing new, and not all were considered to have a negative effect. One such example is the emergence of the popularity of foreign examples of public art: work produced for a large selection of the people rather than

³⁷⁵ *Realism*, Issue 2, Aug-Sept 55

³⁷⁶ Ibid

³⁷⁷ See ‘Art Schools’ by Charles Morris, *Realism*, Issue 3, April 1956, in which the role of art and art history in education was debated.

the elite, as exemplified by the murals and frescoes of Diego Rivera³⁷⁸. In his works reflecting Mexican revolutionary politics, Rivera saw art as a social instrument which illustrated the life and struggles of the worker and his desire for revolution. His work was applauded within *Realism* which called for the creation of popular ideas within a popular form, such as the love of liberty, and the celebration of values and family. The success of the foreign exhibitions of the work of Rivera and Guttuso subsequently lead to an examination of the state of British art, and it was found lacking in the promotion of new artists outside of the Academy tradition. When John Berger (a member of the Artists Group) organised an exhibition at the South London Art Gallery, William Graham stated that Berger should be supported in his endeavours in discovering and exhibiting new artists, as there was little evidence of this in the artistic environment³⁷⁹. Unfortunately the NCC, the Artists Group nor *Realism* provided any logistical or financial support for new artists or the exhibition of their work, regardless of their intentions. The small number of artists who were involved with the CPGB and the Artists Group, which was essentially the committee members, were still mainly producing work on an amateur basis and teaching. They therefore had limited opportunities to exhibit their own work and their reliance on teaching ensured this remained a theme for the magazine.

The fear was that art education, far from expanding, was being ‘viciously attacked by the Ministry of Education at the behest of the Treasury’, with one seventh of the total number art

³⁷⁸ Diego Rivera (1886-1957) was a Mexican painter and the most celebrated figure in the revival of monumental fresco painting, though his style was firmly rooted in the Mexican tradition. He created murals during the revolution to glorify the history of the working class and many examples of his work are in the public buildings in Mexico City. His works were intended to inspire a sense of nationalist and socialist identity in a still largely illiterate population, with the glorification of labour and the strength of unity. He also worked outside of Mexico, producing works in the Soviet Union (1927) and the USA (1932-33) though his work at the Rockefeller Centre, New York, was destroyed before completion as he had included a portrait of Lenin.

³⁷⁹ *Realism*, Issue 4, June 56

schools closing between 1953 and 1956³⁸⁰. This was considered a direct attack on British art and design, with *Realism* asking ‘What can be done to defend British art and indeed the cultural life of the whole community?’³⁸¹ This negative political influence was further reinforced by the voicing of concerns relating to American attitudes and censorship. In ‘Art for Politics Sake’, the witch hunts in America against pro-communist artists received much criticism³⁸². The article was concerned with the cancellation of an exhibition featuring one hundred of America’s leading artists following concerns of ‘pro-communist leanings’ of some contributing artists³⁸³. The USIA (United States Information Agency) who had organised the exhibition had been criticised by Republican George A. Dondero for their ‘hesitancy and cowardice’ in dealing with this ‘social hazard’ which weakened the government’s anti-Soviet stance. The *New York Times* hit back stating that the USIA should not be politically bullied and rejected the idea that ‘art must undergo a test of the political legitimacy of the artist’, arguing that it considered this censorship to be a ‘Nazi and communist concept’³⁸⁴. This strong stance was taken as the USIA had also previously objected to a touring national exhibition of masterpieces as it had contained a work by Picasso. Unsurprisingly in Cold War America the anti-communist stance won through.

Whilst *Realism* presented the *New York Times* article as a scathing attack on the US and the ‘Red Art Brigade’, it was intended as warning of the political influence of censorship within

³⁸⁰ *Realism*, Issue 5, Aug-Sept 56. Thirty arts schools and art departments had closed within the previous three years which was considered by the Artists Group to be an attack on British art and design instigated by the Treasury.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² *Realism*, Issue 5, Aug-Sept 56.

³⁸³ The article quoted from the *New York Times*, 16th June 1956, in which the American Federation of Arts had rejected the call for a political ‘means’ tests for artists.

³⁸⁴ *New York Times* 16th June 1956

the arts which it saw developing in Britain³⁸⁵. It condemned the government's attitude towards art and praised the attitudes seen in communist countries such as East Germany, where in art schools they were 'better equipped, more spacious and were training less students'. They may have singled this out for praise but they also concluded by saying that the work produced under such a system was 'sentimental naturalism' and therefore lacking inspiration or realism³⁸⁶.

The final issue of the magazine in October 1956 was a smaller affair which began with an editorial announcing the board had been forced to produce a new and better magazine and that further details would follow in the *Daily Worker*, the *New Statesman* and the *Tribune*. They never did. Once again financial restraints and lack of support had come to bear and in the last *Realism* they reverted to the theme of the first, once again looking at the work of Guttuso. The concept of realism was once again at the heart of the ideology of the magazine of the Artists Group, and the reality of their own situation was that they could no longer produce the magazine and that the Artists Group itself was also doomed³⁸⁷. Not enough of the magazines were sold and not enough members of the public attended any of the talks or exhibitions organised. They could not even supply enough art or artists, let alone enough banners, for their own Party Congress. They had also created a magazine for the celebration and promotion of British art, yet out of six issues, three were devoted to Guttuso or Rivera, from Italy and Mexico respectively. On the whole regardless of the good intentions behind

³⁸⁵ Though in reality they could only evidence the closure of art schools and lack of funding from the Arts Council as being representative of such political bullying.

³⁸⁶ Such socialist realism as produced in the USSR and its satellites never gained any following within Britain as it's monolithic, propagandist style was seen as out of date, sentimental and disconnected to British values and traditions. *Realism*, Issue 5, Aug-Sept 56

³⁸⁷ The highest subs to *Realism* were noted in a report to the financial committee of the Artists Quartet August 10th 1955, when they stated they had '70 full subs and 13 concession subs' to the magazine. This would not have covered printing costs. CP/CENT/CULT/05 Aug 1955.

the Artists Group and the ideology behind it, there was very little public interest or support for outwardly communist art, or indeed artists, and both the Group and the magazine suffered as a result.

The emergence and decline of The Artists Group and *Realism* in the post-war years reflects the general rise and fall of support for the communist ideology. Initial optimism was soon lost and the anticipated growth in support failed to materialise. Alan Sinfield argues that the end of war presented a rare opportunity to recast society, but the complexities of the politics of the era also caused the populous to cast a weary glance towards the international situation and fear for their own identity and traditional values³⁸⁸. Though the Labour victory in 1945 indicated that support for quite radical social change was evident, this was still within the concept of British ‘fair play’ with health, education, transport, and work, seen as areas for improvement for all. Also within that concept, ‘good culture’ was seen as a reflection of traditional values and representations of British valour and spirit. It was therefore a barrier to dissidence rather than a promoter of it. Through the precedent set by CEMA during the war, the concept of culture was seen as being the responsibility of the state, and it therefore became an element of welfare capitalism, hence the emergence of the Arts Council in 1945³⁸⁹.

Although it was the Arts Council’s intention to create a greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the fine arts, their initial policies actually resulted in an emphasis on raising the bar rather than spreading accessibility. This stance was duly officially acknowledged and

³⁸⁸ Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-War Britain* (London, 2004), p.1

³⁸⁹ Ibid, p.51-9

there was a formal change of policy in support of raising standards in 1951, after the Conservatives had regained power³⁹⁰. For art, this resulted in the loss of financial support for exhibitions aimed at the lower classes, such as the exhibitions held at Butlin's Holiday Camps, in schools and in factories. In addition, financial support for local arts clubs and regional initiatives was lost. It was 'fine art' that was to be supported and a dual level system gradually developed in which work supported by the Arts Council had a sense of legitimacy. This division was further widened due to the expansion of commercial capitalism in art: if it was popular it was merely commercial, if it was subsidised by the Arts Council, it was art³⁹¹.

The assumption that 'good' culture was likely to be funded in the public sector had actually distorted the attempts to produce radical work, be that at a political or methodological level within art³⁹². An example of this can be seen in the support and championing of previously radical artists by the Arts Council in the post-war years, the most obvious example being Henry Moore. Although Moore never joined the communist community, since he was unwilling to make such a direct political gesture, in the pre-war years he was firmly within the radical orbit of British art. Following the war Moore was part of the artistic establishment seeming to confirm Trotsky's statement that under capitalism, by 'combining repression and encouragement, boycott and flattery, it was able to control and assimilate every 'rebel' movement in art and raise to the level of official 'recognition'³⁹³. When considering the fortunes of radical art in the post-war years this seems valid. The lack of funding and

³⁹⁰ See R. Hutchinson, *The Politics of the Arts Council* (London, 1982)

³⁹¹ This concept of good culture as opposed to commercial culture was utilised by the CPGB who saw this commercialism of British art as being the corruptive influence of debased US commercial culture. Sinfield considers this stance to be 'left culturalism', but Wesker saw it as an essential part of socialism, in that it gave people the feeling that they were part of the general group, they were not isolated by part of humanity. See Sinfield p.59 and C. Marowitz & S. Trussler (eds), *Theatre at Work* (London, 1967), p.88

³⁹² Sinfield, p.283

³⁹³ L. Trotsky, 'Art and the Politics of our Epoch' Essay published in the Partisan Review, June 1938, see 'Fourth International, March –April 1950, Vol. 11, No.2, pp.61-64, available via Leon Trotsky Internet Archive at www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/06/artpol.htm accessed 27.07.2011

opportunities, lack of exhibition space, the closing of the arts schools and the promotion of traditionalism, all sought to isolate communist and radical art at both a financial and practical level. In contrast, art which celebrated traditional values and ‘Britishness’ was both supported and encouraged through the Arts Council. Moore had managed to come through the period of pre-war radicalism and isolation by emerging post-war as an artist celebrating one of the core concepts of traditional British values: the family. He was, however, a radical at heart and continued to produce works which challenged traditional concepts, but the heart of his post-war commercial and critical success was the portrayal of the family and relationships. This public acceptance and celebration of his work had not always been the case.

Henry Moore

Born in Castleford, Yorkshire, Moore was from a working class background with his socialist father working at the local mine³⁹⁴. Following his service in WWI which saw him wounded in action, he would later become a committed pacifist and determined to avoid any active participation in politics in which he saw no answers³⁹⁵. By the late thirties, however, he was deeply concerned with the rise of both Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy. As the steady stream of refugees arrived in London, these concerns were compounded following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936. Within Britain as elsewhere in Europe, those with left of centre, socialist or communist sympathies supported the Republican government under attack from Franco, and Moore was unequivocally on the Republican side³⁹⁶. He had previously given his support to the Marxist orientated Artist International Association (AIA) in 1934, providing work for an exhibition. The AIA’s aim was to mobilize ‘the international

³⁹⁴ His self-educated father was an under-manager at Wheldale Colliery in Castleford. For comprehensive details of Moore’s early life see R. Berthoud, *The Life of Henry Moore*, (London, 1987)

³⁹⁵ Ibid, p.40

³⁹⁶ Berthoud, *The Life of Henry Moore*, p.144

unity of artists against Imperialist war on the Soviet Union, Fascism and Colonial oppression', and Moore saw his actions as a stance against the spread of Fascism and oppression which was growing in Europe³⁹⁷. He was therefore associated with a Marxist organisation but he did go so far as to join the CPGB stating 'I was approached by the Communists in the 1930's, when a lot of people did join them. But I didn't go that far. To be a member of the Communist Party was an active role that I didn't want to have'³⁹⁸. Throughout the Spanish Civil War, Moore continued to support the fund raising efforts of the AIA³⁹⁹. In 1938 a small delegation including Moore, Jacob Epstein and Stephen Spender were invited to Spain by the Republicans, however, the Foreign Office refused them permits to travel. The group felt this was based on the government's non-intervention policy and their left-wing political stance, with Epstein stating 'If the invitation had come from Franco we would probably have got our visas'⁴⁰⁰. His association with left-wing policies, support of the communists, and his stance against fascism was therefore openly acknowledged.

³⁹⁷ L. Morris & R. Radford (eds), *AIA, The Story of the Artists International Association 1933-53* (Oxford, 1983), p.2 Moore presented work at the AIA's first exhibition 'Social Scene' in 1934 in which many works were overtly propagandist

³⁹⁸ Henry Moore to R. Berthoud, April 1984 as cited in Berthoud, *Life of Henry Moore*, p. 144

³⁹⁹ In 1937 he was one of fifteen signatories of a broadsheet attack on the Government's policy of non-intervention in Spain, even designing the front page. He also went on to co-sign letters to provincial newspapers, in an attempt to drum up support for the British Section of the International Peace Campaign. See Morris & Radford, *AIA*, p. 41

⁴⁰⁰ *Daily Worker*, 31 January 1938

During the war, the immense popularity of his sketches of East Enders sheltering from the blitz in the Underground, meant that his artistic reputation soon over-shadowed his political one⁴⁰¹. The drawings had been commissioned by the War Artists' Advisory Committee, under the direction of Kenneth Clark, and the impact of the drawings was such that they were hung in the National Gallery during the war and through their popularity became symbols of the spirit of the resistance against the Blitz⁴⁰². His drawings were powerful depictions of the hardships faced by the population, with people packed into a confined space which Moore likened to the images of slaves in the holds of ships, as can be seen in *Tube Shelter Perspectives* (1941)⁴⁰³.



The images depict a mass of almost skeletal figures huddled together in a nocturnal underworld. They highlight not only their immediate plight in seeking refuge from the bombs above, but also that the group is undistinguishable of class: the portrayal is that of non-descript people showing the despair within the heart of London, the heart of the Empire.

⁴⁰¹ He was appointed as a war artist by Kenneth Clark who later championed his work and orchestrated his post-war success. The use of underground stations as bomb shelters was un-official at the time and following their continued use and the commercial success of the drawings, the government sanctioned them as official air-raid shelters.

⁴⁰² They were exhibited in the National Gallery in 1941, 1942 and 1944 under the title 'War Pictures'.

⁴⁰³ P. James, *Henry Moore on Sculpture* (London, 1966), p. 218. Image: 'Tube Shelter Perspective' (1941), pencil, ink, wax and watercolour on paper

The theme of his work moved to focus on family groupings following the birth of his daughter in 1946, and the reclining figure transported itself from his war time sketches to become the dominant imagery of his art. The post-war years therefore saw a more mellow Henry Moore, who through his very successful and popular wartime commissions had lost his political radical status and by the end of 1945 he was a Trustee of the Tate Gallery and a member of the Art Council's Art Panel⁴⁰⁴. In addition to later becoming a trustee of the National Gallery, he was also awarded Companion of Honour in 1955 and The Order of Merit 1963⁴⁰⁵.

His post-war works combined traditionalism with hope, conservatism with radical representation, and they were readily embraced by a war-weary British public and the international artistic community⁴⁰⁶. This experience allowed Moore to mix with the *avant garde* of European art and during the XXIV Venice Biennale of 1948 Moore had dinner with the openly communist Renato Guttuso. It also produced the first foreign monograph of his work presented by the communist art historian Giulio Carlo Argan which was very well received⁴⁰⁷. Just like British classical theatre, Moore had become a major cultural export

⁴⁰⁴ He felt he had a duty as a public figure and as well as his roles over many years as a Trustee at the Tate Gallery and at the Arts Council, he was also a Trustee of the National Gallery 1955-63 then 1964-74, and a member of the Royal Fine Art Commission from 1947-71. He was even a member of the National Theatre Board from 1962.

⁴⁰⁵ He had previously declined a knighthood by letter on 5th December 1950 fearing it might change his conception of himself and his work.

⁴⁰⁶ One of the most celebrated pieces was 'The King and Queen' (1952-3), a large bronze of two regal seated figures which was actually triggered by the stories he was reading to his daughter at the time, but which also captured the royalist feelings of the nation following the death of King George VI and the succession of Elizabeth II in February 1952. He also had a successful exhibition in New York, and this exhibition went on to tour the major American cities with a smaller version touring Australia. He also won the international prize for sculpture at the XXIV Venice Biennale of 1948

⁴⁰⁷ Argan had met Moore in 1946 while working in London resulting in an enduring friendship, and during the Biennale he published in book form an essay he had written for an Italian art magazine: it sold out in weeks. Internationally his recognition among modern artists was such that the leading Belgian sculptor Philip van der Saylens stated after seeing Moore's work 'Henry Moore has accomplished for the prestige of British art what Nelson did for the British navy' See *Yorkshire Post*, 10 October 1949

although domestically his work was not embraced by all, leaving critics such as Patrick Heron in the *New Statesman* and M.H. Middleton of the *Spectator* to sing his praises; calling him ‘the Michelangelo of our times’⁴⁰⁸.

Although he was no longer perceived as a political rebel and was not politically active, some works did reflect the changing atmosphere of the post-war era and the emergence of the Cold War anxieties. As an example he began a series of works focussing on the concept of the helmet, a prime example being *Helmet Head No 2* (1950), a work permeated by the Cold War concerns facing Western Europe⁴⁰⁹. For Moore the helmet bridged two themes, maternal care and protection from the outside. The ‘outer protection to an inner form’ is seen in the solidity and protection offered by the outer helmet set against the vulnerability of the infant seen inside, as represented by the open, fearful eyes⁴¹⁰. Although a solid bronze piece, there is a vulnerability to the work that is in contrast to its outward appearance. This is a strong analogy for the role Britain found itself in during the post-war years in the shadow of the Cold War, with the protective shield of NATO held over a vulnerable Europe as she carefully monitored the strengthening USSR.

Another piece which ventured into darker thematic territory was *Warrior with Shield* (1953-54) in which the emaciated body of the warrior, with his amputated limbs and gashed face, are perched precariously on the plinth⁴¹¹. This is a representation not of defeat but of defiance, as the wounded warrior holds his shield, protecting himself from above. Moore

⁴⁰⁸ *New Statesman*, 29 May 1948 and *Spectator*, 21 May 1948

⁴⁰⁹ For image see p.200

⁴¹⁰ Henry Moore, ‘Moore on his Methods’, *Christian Science Monitor*, Boston 24 March 1967

⁴¹¹ For image see p.200



Henry Moore

'Helmet Head No 2'⁴¹²

(1950)



Henry Moore

'Warrior with Shield'⁴¹³

(1953-4)

⁴¹² Art Gallery of New South Wales: Image available via
<http://www.henry-moore.org/works-in-public/world/australia/sydney/art-gallery-of-new-south-wales/helmet-head-no2-1950-lh-281>

⁴¹³ Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery: Image available via
<http://www.henry-moore.org/works-in-public/world/uk/birmingham/birmingham-museum-and-art-gallery/warrior-with-shield-1953-54-lh-360>

stated this is ‘a figure which, though wounded, is still defiant... The head has a blunted and bull-like power but also a sort of dumb animal acceptance and forbearance of pain...’⁴¹⁴. The statue was created at a time when the Korean War was still at the forefront of people’s consciousness and Stalinism still held control in the USSR. Moore’s warrior is not only injured he is mutilated, yet his defiance and desire to survive ensures that he holds his shield, and his head, high. This is symbolic of Moore’s attitude to the arts, and in particular to the political influence within the arts. He was subject to much criticism and attack from those traditionalists (particularly within the Royal Academy) who neither understood nor attempted to understand his work, but he still held his shield, and his head high and continued to stand for what he thought was important in modern sculpture and the communication of ideals⁴¹⁵.

Moore’s work served as an example of something in which Britain still excelled, yet on the whole art, and in particular radical art be that in a thematic or political sense, was neither embraced nor fully supported by either the Royal Academy or the Arts Council. For a long time it was the promotion of the arts by individuals, in particular critics such as David Sylvester and John Berger, which brought public attention to newly emerging themes and newly emerging artists to the public’s attention.

The Critics: Sylvester & Berger

Modern art (the word ‘modernism’ was not in use until the 1960’s) was treated with suspicion in Britain. This was demonstrated when the tutors at the Slade School of Art actually advised its students not to visit the Matisse and Picasso exhibition at the V & A for

⁴¹⁴ Henry Moore in a letter dated 15 January 1955; quoted in Philip James (ed.), *Henry Moore on Sculpture: a Collection of the Sculptor’s Writings and Spoken Words* (London 1966), p.250

⁴¹⁵ His work and his personal reputation had been heavily criticised particularly by Sir Alfred Munnings, president of the Royal Academy 1944-49, who once commented when seeing him at the Athenaeum Club in Pall Mall of which they were both members ‘What’s a bloody charlatan like him doing in this club?’ cited in J.M. Richards, *Memoirs of an Unjust Fella* (London, 1980), p228

fear it would corrupt their understanding of ‘real art’. The concerns relating to the validity of modern art centred round ‘the disputes between realism and abstraction, or a nebulous characterisation between Left and Right’⁴¹⁶. The battle was therefore seen to have a political basis⁴¹⁷. The pre-war generation of Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson and L.S. Lowry, as well as the newly acclaimed Lucien Freud and Francis Bacon were set aside from the artists who were pursuing variations on European styles of realist art, particularly social realism. The critic David Sylvester was not a fan of such ‘banal’ work, and it was John Berger who was the champion of such artists, characterised by the work of the ‘Kitchen Sink’ artists of the Beaux Arts Quartet⁴¹⁸.

Regardless of the style of work produced it was recognised that the changing atmosphere of the times was reflected in the art produced, as the ramifications of the Cold War made the social and political responsibilities of the post-war artists more onerous than they had ever been before. Both critics subsequently highlighted the important social contribution made by the work of their chosen artists, from the celebration of traditional values to the recognition of class expectations and social relationships. Within these concepts, tradition, as a means of affirming national identity, had an important role, particularly when cultural perceptions and differences were under threat (or being reinforced) through Cold War polarisation⁴¹⁹. In the

⁴¹⁶ Robin Spencer, ‘*Brit Art from the Fifties: The Reality Versus the Myth*’, published for Studio international on 10 May 2002 and available via www.studio-international.co.uk/eports/britart50s.asp accessed 12 May 2011

⁴¹⁷ James Hyman argues that the battle was not actually between these two groups but between different types of figurative art, with the critics David Sylvester and John Berger serving as generals at the head of the opposing factions: See James Hyman, ‘*The Battle for Realism: Figurative Art in Britain During the Cold War 1945-60*’ (London, 2001)

⁴¹⁸ The kitchen sink artists were also known as the Beaux Arts Quartet of John Bratby, Derrick Greaves, Edward Middleditch and Jack Smith.

⁴¹⁹ Outside British art, the Soviets were enforcing a policy of cultural conformity that was manifest in the primacy of Socialist Realism, whereas the US influence was seen through their promotion of Modernist realism, as evidenced through the CIA backed competition for a monument to the ‘Unknown Political Prisoner’, and also through the covert funding of the journal *Encounter*, through the Congress of Cultural Freedom. See Frances Stonor Saunders ‘How the CIA plotted against us’, *New Statesman*, 12 July 1999

post-war years the conflicts in British art can therefore be seen in the contest between the two most influential critics and the validity of social realism⁴²⁰.

David Sylvester was an influential art critic and curator, who had contributed to the *Tribune*, the *Observer*, *Encounter* and the *New Statesman*. In addition he had organised influential exhibitions for artists such as Henry Moore, Lucien Freud, Francis Bacon and Richard Hamilton and was often a guest lecturer at the Royal Academy⁴²¹. He was also responsible for introducing the term ‘kitchen sink’ regarding social realism, though it was not meant as flattery⁴²². Just as in the concept of the ‘angry young men’ in theatre, the term came to be associated with gritty, domestic scenes, in which there is an element of utility and endurance. Sylvester argued that there was a new interest among young painters such as John Bratby, Derrick Greaves and Jack Smith in domestic scenes, with a stress on the banality of life. He detailed how the work emphasised ordinary people, in ordinary kitchens, living ordinary lives, stating that the work of Kitchen Sink painters ‘carried implications of social if not political comment’ and that they were representative of social realism.⁴²³ Their work was therefore considered to be a reflection of the depression and disillusionment of the post-war

⁴²⁰ The influence of women was also considerable in that Dorothy Morland ran the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) from 1951, and powerful women dealers were at the helm of the two commercial galleries that were at the focus of the ‘new art’: Erica Brausen at the Hanover Gallery from 1948 and Helen Lessore at the Beaux Arts Gallery from 1951. In addition there was also a strong Jewish influence in realism: from older figures such as Herman, Bomberg and Epstein, to younger artists such as Aerbach, Kossoff, Freud, leading to an assimilation of émigré artists into British culture at a time of xenophobia and latent anti-Semitism. David Robbins (ed.), *The Independent Quartet: Post-war Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (London, 1990) looks at the Independent Quartet and the Institute of Contemporary Artists but virtually ignores the role of David Sylvester.

⁴²¹ In a varied career, he also served for a time as Henry Moore’s personal secretary and acted as the curator for his very successful first Tate exhibition, becoming a lifelong friend and writing his first book on Moore in 1968. He was also a long-time friend of both Freud and Bacon and a champion of their work.

⁴²² He introduced the label in ‘Kitchen Sink Art’ in *Encounter*, December 1954, which was then adopted to cover the work of the Beaux Arts Quartet in particular. The painters hated the ‘kitchen sink’ label, and preferred to be associated with the gallery where they originally exhibited together, Beaux Arts, or referred to as the New Realist Group.

⁴²³ Ibid

generation of artists who endeavoured to shake off the artistic traditionalism of the fifties and show the world in which they lived, warts and all⁴²⁴. Sylvester was definitely not a fan.

Whilst Sylvester supported the establishment view and looked with scepticism at social realism, John Berger sang its praises. He was openly Marxist, a member of the Artists Group of the CPGB (though not a party member) and championed the work of international social realists such as the openly communist Guttuso. At the time he was also the art critic of the *New Statesman* and he gladly adopted the label of ‘kitchen sink’ painters to give a contemporary label to his chosen artists⁴²⁵. As an independent Marxist, Berger may have been radical in his political outlook but he was not posing as a revolutionary threat, he was merely supporting artistic challenges to the conformity and traditionalism of the establishment. Through his support and his promotion of their work, however, the artists of the social realism movement, namely the ‘kitchen sink’ painters of John Bratby, Derrick Greaves, Edward Middleditch, and Jack Smith were all associated with the radical left.

For the ‘kitchen sink’ artists the promotion of their work was based at the Beaux Art Gallery in London, hence their alternative and preferred title of the Beaux Arts Quartet. Although there is Francis Spalding’s introduction to *The Kitchen Sink Painters*, a retrospective exhibition at the Mayor Gallery in 1991, very little scholarly work has been directed towards

⁴²⁴ S. West (ed), *The Bloomsbury Guide to Art*. (London, 1996). Entry: ‘Kitchen Sink’

⁴²⁵ See Donald Drew Egbert, *Social Radicalism and the Arts: A Cultural History from the French Revolution to 1968* (London, 1970), in which he argues that Berger was one of many voices on the left, though arguably the most influential. Also Deborah Cherry & Juliet Steyn, ‘The Moment of Realism’⁴²⁵ and the related exhibition ‘The Forgotten Fifties’ at Graves Art Gallery, (Sheffield, 1984) which was based on the specific conception of realism through the writings of John Berger (artists such as Bacon and Freud were omitted as they had been championed by other writers of the era). Also Lynda Morris, ‘The Beaux Arts Years 1948-57’ in Paul Huxley (ed.), *Exhibition Road: Painters at the Royal College of Art* (London, 1988) looking at art school radicalism and individual social realists.

them and their work remains marginalised and forever tied to the fifties⁴²⁶. Writers such as Arthur Marwick, Robert Hewison and Bryan Appleyard have invoked the idea that ‘the moment of realism’ purely equated to the ‘kitchen sink painters’, however, the artists were never working to an artistic manifesto or even an agreed programme of social realism. They were actually more akin to rival individuals, each with their own agenda as a result of personal experiences and artistic preferences⁴²⁷.

In contrast to the scant attention paid to ‘kitchen sink’ art, the ‘School of London’ was seen as the resurgence of contemporary painting and was heavily promoted by the Royal Academy and Arts Council⁴²⁸. This marginalisation of social realism is reflected in the fragmentation of the critical support of David Sylvester and John Berger⁴²⁹. Both influenced and stimulated post-war British culture, with their writing reflecting their own personal and political beliefs. Nevertheless politics and art were weary companions following the war and Garrett argued that ‘even social realism need not necessarily imply commitment to a specific political position’⁴³⁰. This infers that social realism in Britain did not necessarily carry with it an association with the left, unlike in France or Italy. Written in 1954 this demonstrates how

⁴²⁶ The ‘Beaux Arts Quartet’ or ‘kitchen sink’ painters have been largely ignored as a realism movement, however there have been individual biographies: James Hyman, *Derrick Greaves: From Kitchen Sink to Shangri La* (London, 2007), and Maurice Yacowar, *The Great Braby: A Portrait of John Braby RA* (Middlesex, 2008)

⁴²⁷ Although they had presented their work through the same gallery, and had come together through the British Council’s choice of entries for the Venice Biennial of 1956, afterwards they went their separate ways. See Arthur Marwick, *British Society since 1945* (London, 1982), Bryan Appleyard, *The Pleasures of Peace: Art and Imagination in Post-war Britain* (London, 1989), and Robert Hewison, *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War 1945-60* (London, 1981)

⁴²⁸ Retrospective exhibitions have included *A School of London: Six Figurative Painters* (1987); *British Figurative Art of the Twentieth Century* (1992); and *From London* (1995). It also provided the centrepiece for the Royal Academy’s survey *British Art of the Twentieth Century*, placing art at the heart of the national tradition.

⁴²⁹ Considered by Hyman to be ‘two of the twentieth century’s greatest art critics’ Sylvester was a powerful champion of realism derived from a reading of late modernism, and Berger a persuasive articulator from a personalised Marxist-Leninist reading of culture. Hyman, *The Battle for Realism*, p.7

⁴³⁰ See Albert Garrett, ‘New Realism in English Art’, Studio, June 1954, vol. 147, no. 147, pp.161-169. This essay argues that there are four classifications to realism: ‘Realism without comment - Objective’; ‘Realism with comment – political’; ‘Sense Realism – comment implied’; ‘Philosophical Realism – all comment’.

contemporary writers tended to disassociate social realism from any political agenda, highlighting the discomfort within critical and academic circles of associating art with politics. An affiliation with communism through the realistic depiction of everyday working class scenes and the anxieties of the post-war era was viewed with wariness, as mirrored in the analysis of British film, theatre, and culture in general. Berger and Sylvester, however, were stronger in their expression of art as social and political commentary. Berger recognised its potential as a weapon of communication in the Cold War and sought an accessible, popular art form that would transform society. Sylvester in contrast served as an establishment figure and master critic, reinforcing the traditionalist stance. Their views were a clear reflection of their personal politics.

Berger was openly Marxist, a member of the Artists Group of the CPGB, had supported the AIA, and in 1952 he presented an exhibition '*Looking Forward*' at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. This was aimed at the working class 'not the critics and the Bond Street art-fanciers', arguing that the public would 'see why painting matters, and help to direct its use'⁴³¹. Berger believed that the future of the country was in the hands of the working class and that the relevant art of the period should reflect this political polemic. '*Looking Forward*' therefore displayed the attitudes of the social realists, and was considered a seminal moment in identifying British Social Realism and in developing Berger's own career⁴³². He ensured that the exhibition emphasised humble subjects, everyday materials, young artists, and focussed on the practice of studying from life. He further stated that the exhibition would be 'the work

⁴³¹ John Berger, 'Dear Enemy.....', *Tribune*, 26 September 1952

⁴³² The exhibition included artists outside of the Beaux Arts Gallery such as Rodrigo Moynihan, John Minton, Ruskin Spear and Carel Weight of the Royal College of Art teaching staff and Claude Rogers of the Slade School of Art

of painters who, in a broad sense, have a common attitude' and 'a constructive attitude based on what must rather vaguely be called humanistic or social faith'⁴³³.

The title of the exhibition carried echoes of both the post-war Labour Movement and the CPGB. '*Looking Forward*' mirrored the Labour Party's General Election literature and more directly it also paraphrased the key policy document of the CPGB, '*Looking Ahead*' written by Harry Pollitt⁴³⁴. This connection to the CPGB was repeated in that Pollitt's stress on the need for a broad front was paralleled by Berger's emphasis on the breadth of realism, with both emphasising the desire for mass support at a working class level. In addition Pollitt argued that the CPGB should use indigenous institutions to achieve their aim, proposing the use of Parliamentary means to achieve socialist revolution. Berger also stressed the importance of utilising the native tradition and subsequently used a state institution, the Arts Council, to tour the exhibition so that it might reach a wider audience⁴³⁵.

At the same time that '*Looking Forward*' was touring in 1953, and a year before David Sylvester wrote his essay '*The Kitchen Sink*' for *Encounter*, the Walker Gallery in London opened an exhibition '*Paintings for the Kitchen*' to which he referred.⁴³⁶ Although this was a thematic title, the phrase 'kitchen sink' painters subsequently became associated with the

⁴³³ As stated in the 'Foreword' for the exhibition. At the time the most credible political challenge in art to Berger's concept of realism came from the 'constructionist abstraction' of artists such as Victor Passmore, Adrian Heath, Anthony Hill, Mary Martin and Kenneth Martin, however, they incorporated their formalism with the early idealism of modernism and the utopian spirit of revolutionary Russia and was therefore less of a reflection of British social attitudes in the post-war era of reform and rebuilding.

⁴³⁴ Harry Pollitt, *Looking Ahead* (London, 1947)

⁴³⁵ The touring exhibition of 1953 conducted through the Arts Council was slightly scaled down, however, it also included two works by Peter de Francia which had not been shown at the Whitechapel: *Man with a drill* and *Execution*.

⁴³⁶ David Sylvester, 'The Kitchen Sink', *Encounter*, December 1954, vol. 3, no. 6, pp.61-64

‘Beaux Arts Quartet’ with Sylvester being credited with naming them⁴³⁷. Sylvester’s ‘campaign against the Berger line’ (which had resulted in his Encounter article) was based on the belief that Berger had ‘won considerable support, financial as well as moral, for inferior artists’. This became the basis for their artistic conflict⁴³⁸. Inferior artists or not, the social realists of the Beaux Arts Quartet produced work which provided a connection with the general public. It reflected the everyday lives of the working class viewer, and in doing so, highlighted the class divide within art and the challenges of the post-war era at a social and political level.

Social Realism: John Bratby

Regardless of the name, be it kitchen sink or social realism, the depiction of everyday working class environments and the visual representation of the struggles faced by the working class in post-war Britain was a radical concept in British art. As well as being thematically challenging, the fact that such art was championed by an openly Marxist critic and member of the Artists group implied that it was not only left-wing, but had communist support and as such should be treated with suspicion. This immediately placed the artists of the Beaux Arts Quartet as radical outsiders, both artistically and politically. It also demonstrates how radicalism and communism were connected by association. In fact the artists were all individuals with their own agendas, and the first to be considered is John Bratby.

⁴³⁷ Hyman argues that more credit should be given to other writers, particularly Berger and Minton, see Hyman, *The Battle for Realism*, p.120. In particular this highlights John Minton, ‘Three Young Contemporaries’, *Ark*, 1955, no.13 which refers to Smith, Greaves and Middleditch who were Minton’s pupils at the Royal College of Art, and John Berger ‘The Young Generation’, *New Statesman*, 25 July 1953, vol. 156, no. 1168, p.101

⁴³⁸ As stated by Sylvester in his ‘Curriculum Vitae’ serving as the forward to his revised edition of his essay collection: Sylvester, *About Modern Art*, p.17

Bratby was born in 1928 in Wimbledon to a middle class family and this initially separates Bratby from his working class contemporaries within the Quartet. Through an ex-serviceman's grant he attended the Kingston School of Art from 1947-50 and from there he attended the Royal Academy of Art from 1951-54⁴³⁹. By his background Bratby was distinct from the three other members of the Quartet and this became evident when his depictions of drab domestic interiors were actually presented with the use of bold, contrasting bright colours. This can clearly be seen in *Still Life with Chip Fryer* (1954) in which the domestic chaos of a gritty, cluttered kitchen table is presented to the viewer in a bold but cold colour scheme⁴⁴⁰. Within the disorder, ordinary kitchen utensils are turned into semi-abstract shapes, and long before pop art, Bratby included conspicuously branded popular packaging, ensuring that the contents of the kitchen would be easily recognisable to the working class viewer⁴⁴¹.

The scene is recognisable as working class in that the walls are a bland pale blue and the floor is bare, signifying the austerity of the era. It is therefore a practical observation that incorporates the clutter of domestic urban life whilst illustrating the banality of the working class environment. The use of bold colours, however, adds an element of light and hope to the utilitarianism of the scene. Though no figures are present, the clutter and abstract assembly suggests there has been a lot of recent work in the kitchen, leaving the discarded packaging and utensils strewn over the table. The dog, surreptitiously hidden in the top of the painting, is suggestive of a family environment and the themes of the family and domesticity are utilised to illustrate normality and the reality of everyday existence. These themes

⁴³⁹ Unlike the other three members of the quartet he did not attend St. Martins School of Art. For a comprehensive study of the artist see Maurice Yacowar, *The Great Bratby: A Portrait of John Bratby RA* (London, 2008)

⁴⁴⁰ For image see page 216.

⁴⁴¹ You can clearly see packets of Saxa Salt and Coleman's Mustard on the table, the inclusion of which immediately created a sense of familiarity for the viewer, and this was a theme deliberately exploited with the later emergence of 'pop art'.



John Bratby

*Still Life with Chip Fryer*⁴⁴²
1954

Oil on board



John Bratby

*Washday in the
Tenements*⁴⁴³
1956

Oil on board

⁴⁴² Tate Britain Collection: Image available via
<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cQuartetid=999999961&workid=1452&searchid=9522>

⁴⁴³ Jonathan Clark Fine Art, London: Image available via
http://jonathanclarkfineart.com/art/main.php?g2_itemId=4425

continued in Bratby's work, and as his own life circumstances changed, his depictions of family environments and the warmth of his palette was to grow. *Washday in the Tenements* is an exterior landscape through by its composition the viewer is actually enclosed on all sides, so there is a feeling of confinement within a domestic space⁴⁴⁴. The viewer subsequently has nowhere else to look other than the courtyard, and attention is immediately drawn to the contrasting red jumper of the central figure who is partially covered by the drapes of off-white washing. Set against the grey tones of the flagstones and the hanging sheets, the warm tones of her jumper serve as a connection to the red brick walls of the tenement building. She therefore represents the connection to the family living space, to the sense of community. This is continued as surrounding her are further reminders that this is a communal area, with chairs scattered around the scene indicating that this is a meeting place. The child sitting out in the pram and the other woman nearby reinforces the concept of an everyday family environment in which people get on with their daily existence: from putting out the washing to meeting for a chat whilst letting the baby get some air. Two work bikes with baskets are also casually leaning against the outbuildings, they are not put away or tied up, indicating they are in frequent use and temporarily left there. This enhances the feeling of practicality to the whole scene as this is a well-used area with its debris of life depicted for all to see.

Once again Bratby has painted a working class domestic scene, this time of an outside communal space in which there is no glamour or celebration, but the depiction of the trivial. A mother is hanging out washing in a communal yard at the rear of the tenements while the baby watches from the pram. This is the reality of the everyday existence within a working class community in the post-war period. Although there is a sense of grime in the grey,

⁴⁴⁴ For image see page 216.

lifeless tones of the courtyard floor and the washing, there is also a sense of warmth in the rustic tones connecting the woman to the building itself. This connects the warmth of the family to the home and establishes a sense of belonging. Typical of his work, Bratby offers a view that is not negative but hopeful, there is warmth here, but it needs to rise above the clutter and grime to be seen. Through both paintings, Bratby is portraying a radical artistic concept in radical way: the working class environment and the struggles it faces in a stark, realistic representation. He is challenging traditional notions and themes of art whilst presenting a political view, and through the group's associations with the Artists Group, the CPGB and Berger, his work was treated with suspicion by the establishment.

He continued to produce social realist work throughout the fifties, representing Britain at the Venice Biennale in 1956 alongside the other members of the Beaux Arts Quartet, after which the Tate Gallery bought *Still Life with Chip Fryer* for its contemporary art collection⁴⁴⁵. In addition he won the junior prize at the inaugural John Moores Art Exhibition in Liverpool in 1957, won the Guggenheim Award in both 1956 and 1958, and he was subsequently made an associate of the Royal Academy in 1959. He became a Royal Academician in 1971. Bratby was unusual as it was not just in his art that he communicated his disillusionment with post-war society. After considerable critical and commercial success in the fifties, he was suddenly dropped by the influential critics in 1960 when abstraction and pop art monopolised their attention. This caused Bratby to turn his attention to writing and between 1960 and 1963 he completed four 'luridly autobiographical illustrated novels'⁴⁴⁶. The most reflective was his

⁴⁴⁵ *Still Life with Chip Fryer* was the first social realism painting bought by the Tate Galley by a British or foreign artist, and the first real example of acknowledgement from the establishment.

⁴⁴⁶ Andrew Lambirth, 'Bratby, John Randall (1928–1992)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, Jan 2009 available via <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50848> accessed 17 June 2011

first: *Breakdown*, published in 1960⁴⁴⁷. Here Bratby depicts the gradual mental breakdown of an artist in crisis in which his feelings concerning the futility, banality and despair of everyday life are emotionally expressed. This fear of mental breakdown was very relevant in that there was a strong history of mental instability and illness in his family, and his manic creative production and mood swings had been an element of his work from the beginning⁴⁴⁸. This manic nature did not wane and his production of four books within a three year period, in addition to continual art production, is testament to this⁴⁴⁹. Politically, there is no evidence that Bratby attended any meetings of the Artist's Group of the CPGB and he was not formally affiliated with any political party. He did provide works for exhibitions including those of the Marxist AIA, and his concerns regarding the working and living conditions of the everyday environments he encountered result in his work being seen as a left-wing artistic depiction. This was further reinforced by his championing by Berger and his association with social realism which cemented the perception of him as being sympathetic to the communist ideals. His art, however, was no more preaching revolution than celebrating traditionalism. He was representing to the viewer his own observations of a changing life in the post-war era and the struggles faced. His work was seen as politically radical as it was a left-wing critique of the surroundings and the lives of those around him, and subsequently by association it was considered supportive of communist ideology. Although his initial social realist style lost favour, he continued to produce work for the rest of his life though on a less acclaimed level.

⁴⁴⁷ See J. Bratby, *Breakdown* (London, 1960). This was followed by *Breakfast of Elevenses* (London, 1961), *Break-Pedal Down* (London, 1962), and *Break 50 Kill* (London, 1963). He continued to write for many years and produced a host of unpublished sequels and short stories.

⁴⁴⁸ His grandfather had been died in an insane asylum, his uncle had been confined for life in a mental institution, and his father suffered from long periods of mental instability and acute paranoia, leaving Bratby with a life-long concern for his own mental health. During his time at Art College his manic behaviour and mood swings had also alienated him from his fellow students. He had lived his life in extremes, often finding himself in a state of poverty, sleeping rough or hiding in the college attics after spending all his funds on prostitutes and alcohol, while manically producing work.

⁴⁴⁹ Bratby continued to produce art right through to his death and from 1967 produced a series of portraits which eventually numbered more than 1500 works.

Derrick Greaves

Another artist who exhibited with Bratby and was a member of the Beaux Arts Quartet is Derrick Greaves. Born in Sheffield in 1927 to a working class family, Greaves won a scholarship to study at the Royal College of Art (RCA) in 1948-52⁴⁵⁰. He also won a further scholarship to study in Italy for one year, and it was during this time that he met the communist Renato Guttuso and was strongly influenced by his realist style of painting⁴⁵¹. This was soon to be seen in his own work. Greaves quickly established a reputation, holding his first one man exhibition at the Beaux Arts Gallery in 1953, before being shown in conjunction with his three contemporaries of Bratby, Edward Middleditch and Jack Smith by 1954. An early example of his depiction of social realism can be seen in *Sheffield* (1953)⁴⁵², in which he created an exterior landscape of his home town, stating “I was... painting what was around me, believing that if you ignored what was at your very elbow, you were in dire peril”.⁴⁵³

At first glance the painting is that of an industrial scene, desolated and devoid of life. It is dominated by the skeleton of a factory that sits high above an industrial town full of factories and chimneys, but there is no smoke rising and no other signs of activity. This representation of stillness and isolation within a built up environment is echoed by the lack of colour to symbolise light and hope. There is no sunshine or blue to the sky, there are no signs of vegetation. The earth is industrially scored and although there are light grey clouds in the sky, they are broken by earthy tones that mirror those of the landscape. In the forefront of the

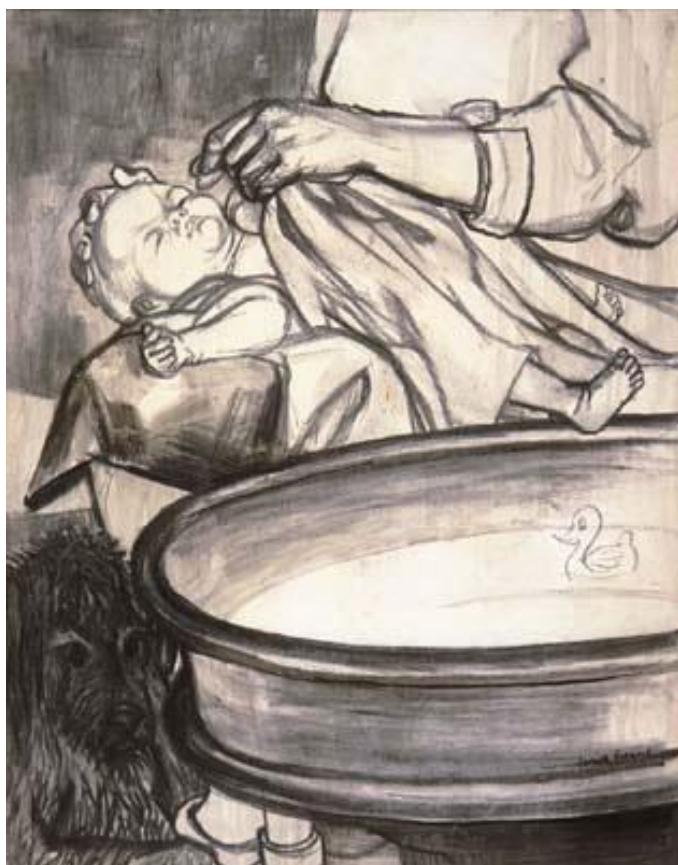
⁴⁵⁰ Greaves went on to become a painter and graphic artist, teaching for many years at St. Martin’s School of Art in London, and later became head of printmaking at Norwich School of Art from 1983-1991. For a comprehensive biography see J. Hymen, *From Kitchen Sink to Shangri La* (London, 2007).

⁴⁵¹ Having spent time with Guttuso during his scholarship, when Guttuso visited London in 1955 Greaves held a party for him, which was also attended by most of the young emerging painters such as Smith and Middleditch.

⁴⁵² For image see page 221.

⁴⁵³ Derrick Greaves interview for Graves Gallery, Sheffield Museums to celebrate Yorkshire’s Favourite Painting, available at: <http://www.yorkshiresfavourites.org/paintings/sheffield.html> accessed 11 May 2011

Derrick Greaves, *Sheffield*⁴⁵⁴ (1953), oil on canvas



Derrick Greaves

*Baby, Bath and Dog*⁴⁵⁵
(1956)

Charcoal on paper

⁴⁵⁴ Museums Sheffield: Image available via
<http://www.yorkshiresfavourites.org/paintings/sheffield.html>

⁴⁵⁵ James Hyman Fine Art, London: Image available via
http://www.jameshymanfineart.com/pages/artistsingle/569/sold/derrick_greaves -baby,_bath_and_dog.html

painting, the stand-alone factory seems desolate in that the windows are gone and the frames are broken, allowing you to see right through the building to the emptiness beyond. The scene does not suggest the warmth or comfort of the tenements depicted by Bratby. This is not the hub of the community, it is the debris of industry in a town that is now still. Whilst the depiction is that of an industrial society, there is no representation of society itself, in that there are no people and no evidence of current activity. It is as if the heart has gone from the community. The painting could therefore illustrate how the machinery of progress actually destroyed the traditional environment and those within it, but during the fifties Sheffield was actually a thriving town, clearing away the pre-war slums and the debris of war and rebuilding⁴⁵⁶. Behind the empty broken factory is not a town in decline but is actually a town rebuilt. There is order in the structured lines, and the further you move away from the lone factory on the hill the lighter the sky becomes, representing the hope for the town's future. The painting therefore symbolises the need to step away from the confines of the past, and to provide a better life for the working people of the town through clearing away the debris of the earlier mistakes. Greaves saw both the past and the future in Sheffield and presented his vision to the viewer in his own earthy tones.

This muted palette continued in his work relating to the depiction of the British working class environment, though when he painted Italian working class characters in their own surroundings his colours were much warmer in tone and the setting much lighter⁴⁵⁷.

⁴⁵⁶ Pre-war Sheffield had been dominated by back-to-back housing and heavy pollution from the steel industry, with George Orwell stating in *The Road to Wigan Pier* that it 'could justly claim to be the ugliest town in the Old World'. During the war its industry was used to manufacture weapons and ammunition making a target for heavy bombing. This resulted in the 'Sheffield Blitz' of 12th & 15th December 1940, which left large areas devastated: see M. Watson & J P Lamb, *Raiders over Sheffield: The story of the air-raids of 12th and 15th December 1940* (Sheffield, 1980). Following the war slum clearing programmes resulted in large areas being re-developed for industry and new roads to serve the city centre commercial areas.

⁴⁵⁷ This can be most clearly seen in a series of paintings featuring Italian farm workers and their carts created in the mid-1950's, such as *The Cart* (1955), oil on canvas.

Obviously for Greaves the sun did not shine down on Sheffield. Another piece which demonstrates his ascetic representation is *Baby, Bath and Dog* (1956) in which Greaves presents this simple domestic scene in charcoal⁴⁵⁸. The setting is unsophisticated, with the scruffy dog sitting at the feet of a mother as she bathes her child. Although it is a tender scene, due to the sombre tones the only warmth is created by the thin outline of a rubber duck that floats on the water. It is therefore a simple, plain and a normal domestic scene without artistic embellishments, typical of Greaves style at the time⁴⁵⁹.

Social realism it may be, but political? Actually, Greaves was the most openly political of the Beaux Arts Quartet, strongly left-wing and supportive of, though not a member of, the Communist Party. He also submitted work for the AIA, the exhibitions of the Artists Group, and the exhibitions of John Berger. He was also later a supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Along with the other painters of the Beaux Arts Quartet, Greaves had also represented Britain in the Venice Biennale in 1956. In the supporting catalogue they were billed as ‘Four Young Painters’, adding that although they represented the same realist style, they had ‘neither produced a manifesto or formed a Group’. They were four individuals who exhibited at the same gallery, distancing them from any political connection⁴⁶⁰. This non-political stance was contradicted the following year when his work was included in John Berger’s touring exhibition ‘*Looking at People*’⁴⁶¹. Greaves accompanied the tour to the USSR and it was the first exhibition of British art in the Soviet Union since 1917. It was also one of the high points for Social Realism and for Greaves up to that time as he won the gold

⁴⁵⁸ For image see page 221.

⁴⁵⁹ After the fifties Greaves left the style of social realism becoming disillusioned with figurative painting stating “to do this in England at the present time is, I have realised, aesthetic suicide”. Aware of the change in commercial tastes, his later more abstract work emphasised colour rather than texture and setting.

⁴⁶⁰ J.P. Hodes, ‘Four Young Painters’ in catalogue for 28th Venice Biennale 1956.

⁴⁶¹ The exhibition eventually consisted of 157 pieces, including works by artists such as Paul Hogarth, Carel Wright, and Ruskin Spear, but Greaves was one of the few artists to accompany the tour.

medal for painting⁴⁶². His reputation was further enhanced when he was awarded a prize at the 1957 John Moore's Exhibition, with Bratby and Jack Smith also amongst the winners. By 1958, however, Greaves began to move away from the social realist style and the Beaux Arts Gallery. With the advent of the popularity of abstraction and pop art Greaves lost favour with the critics, and aware of the change in commercial taste, he began to produce bold colour and abstract prints. No longer a social realist, he began exhibiting his work at the Zwemmer Gallery and therefore his association with the movement was lost⁴⁶³. Overall Greaves was the most openly political of the social realists, which would perhaps explain why he was never elected to the Royal Academy despite his success. He did however teach at St. Martin's School of Art and the Royal Academy Schools⁴⁶⁴.

Edward Middleditch

Throughout the fifties and into the sixties Greaves maintained a friendship and professional association with Edward Middleditch, another of the Beaux Arts Quartet. Following extensive military service during the war, Middleditch attended the Royal Academy School of Art 1949-52. In contrast to Bratby and Greaves, his work did not tend to focus on domestic scenes but on the representation of nature, mostly in landscape and cityscapes. This was not typical of social realism and its associated realistic depictions of the working class domestic environment, making Middleditch unique. A rare example of the domestic environment was *Cat on a Chair* (1952), in which a cat sits on a wicker chair next to the cooker, staring

⁴⁶² As part of the exhibition he was awarded the Gold Medal for Painting at the Moscow Youth Festival 1957.

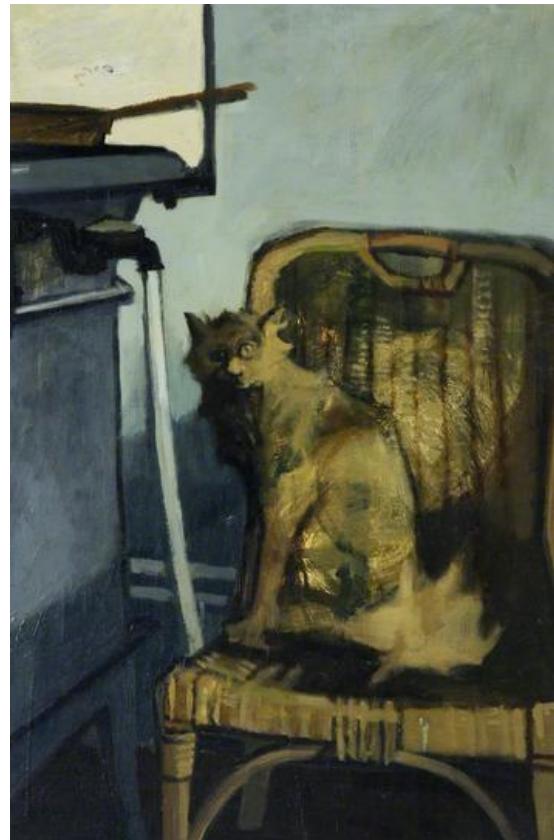
⁴⁶³ Critics were unimpressed with his changing style, and in Time Magazine he was dismissively compared to 'a plumber who could paint a still life whilst focussing on a hardy piece of enamel ware'. See *Time Magazine*, 'Sink or Swim', 26th October 1959, v.74, i.17, p.62

⁴⁶⁴ From 1954-1964 he taught at St. Martin's School of Art and throughout the 1960's taught at the Royal Academy Schools. He was later Head of Printmaking at the Norwich School of Art from 1983-91.

Edward Middleditch

*Cat on a Chair*⁴⁶⁵
(1952)

Oil on canvas



Edward Middleditch

*Pigeons in Trafalgar Square*⁴⁶⁶
(1958)
Oil on canvas

⁴⁶⁵ Museums Sheffield: Image available via
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/paintings/cat-on-a-chair-72380>

⁴⁶⁶ Leicestershire County Council Artworks Collection: Image available via
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/paintings/pigeons-in-trafalgar-square-82699>

defiantly at the viewer⁴⁶⁷. The setting is of a bare, plain kitchen dominated by cold blue tones, with the ochre tones of the cat blending into the wicker chair. It is a normal domestic scene in an austere working class kitchen, yet there is no clutter of family life and the room seems bare, with the only indication of domesticity being the pan.

For Middleditch the domestic scene was a rarity, and it was work such as '*Pigeons in Trafalgar Square*' (1958) which solidified his reputation in the fifties as the creator of austere, bleak and elegiac landscapes⁴⁶⁸. Such representations echoed the post-war mood as the threat of communist expansionism and the potential for nuclear conflict was left hanging over Western Europe. Middleditch used the very British setting of Trafalgar Square to highlight the sense of foreboding, and cold blue tones dominate, offering no feeling of welcome for the viewer. The pigeons, a species often interchangeable with the dove and seen universally as symbols of peace, are shown bathing in the cold, dark puddles shaped to suggest a mushroom cloud following a nuclear blast. The rising puddles effectively form a ladder which leads the viewer through a Trafalgar Square which is unrecognisable. It is deserted of crowds and signs of humanity, showing only regimented paving slabs which lead to two solid, square buildings that funnel the viewer through a passageway towards the light. The puddles guide the viewer towards the exit, yet they end at the bollards which serve as a barrier to the unknown and after that the viewer is on their own. This adds a sinister element in that viewer does not know where the passageway will lead, and the future is therefore uncertain.

⁴⁶⁷ For image see page 225.

⁴⁶⁸ For image see page 225.

Within the concept of social realism, this depiction is a reaction against the beautification and commercialisation of everyday imagery. Middleditch portrays this sombre scene without embellishments or ornamentation, but there are also the overtones of fear, regimentality and control reflecting the anxieties of the era. This work indicates the strong sense of morality in his paintings and although he later moved away from the social realist style, he maintained a degree of acclaim⁴⁶⁹. He also became an associate of the Royal Academy in 1968 and a full member of the Royal Academy in 1973. As a former radical his association to the Academy was strong and he became Keeper of the Royal Academy Schools in 1985 following his retirement as Head of Fine Art at Norwich School of Art, where Derrick Greaves was also Head of Printmaking⁴⁷⁰. Middleditch continued to produce work until his death in 1987 and his later focus on light and nature was a repetitive theme among the social realists, with Jack Smith being another example of a transforming artist.

Jack Smith

Born in a working class area of Sheffield not far from Derrick Greaves, Jack Smith's training had similarities with all three other artists in the quartet in that he too had studied at the Royal College of Art⁴⁷¹. When Smith emerged as a social realist, we actually get to see a sink in *Mother Bathing Child* (1953) as that is where the child is being bathed⁴⁷². The painting was based on his own crowded domestic environment, as at the time Smith and his family were sharing a house with Derrick Greaves and his family. Unlike his personal circumstances,

⁴⁶⁹ His work gradually became much more abstract with a focus on natural themes and patterns within nature .

⁴⁷⁰ He taught at the Chelsea School of Art 1958-1963 and at St. Martin's School of Art throughout the sixties. He was Head of Fine Art at Norwich School of Art in 1964 until his retirement in 1984 when he was elected Keeper of the Royal Academy Schools. Although he started out as being very much a radical painter outside the traditional artistic establishment, he ended his life at the very heart of it having been absorbed into the system.

⁴⁷¹ He had initially studied at Sheffield College of Art 1944-46, then after a break for Military Service he studied at St. Martin's School of Art (1948-50) before joining the Royal College of Art 1950-53.

⁴⁷² For image see page 228.

Jack Smith

*Mother Bathing Child*⁴⁷³
(1953)

Oil on board



Jack Smith

*Creation and Crucifixion*⁴⁷⁴
(1955-6)

Oil on hardboard

⁴⁷³ Tate Gallery (purchased 1955): Image available via <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=13506>.

⁴⁷⁴ National Museums Liverpool (purchased 1957): Image available via http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker/johnmoore/prizewinners/winners/jack_smith.aspx.

the painting is neither crowded nor cluttered (as in the work of Bratby), as here the room is entirely bare save for the mother and child. There are no embellishments whatsoever and the only other piece of ‘furniture’ apart from the sink is the geyser providing hot water. Although bare, the tones are earthy and this is not a cold environment, merely a practical, austere one, in which a mother is caring for her child. In an era when a majority of inner city working class housing did not have bathrooms, the bathing of a child in the sink would have been a totally normal occurrence due to necessity. The painting would therefore have had an immediate connection with a working class viewer by presenting an environment with which they were familiar. The painting that won him the first prize at the John Moore’s Art Exhibition in Liverpool in 1957, however, was entirely different.

In the prize winner *Creation and Crucifixion* (1955-6) we see bold colour, clutter and the debris of family life all bathed in an intense dreamlike light⁴⁷⁵. It is in stark contrast to his bare, muted earlier work. The vestiges of family life are placed before the viewer as a makeshift washing line clings on to a shirt while chairs, some fallen, are casually strewn with washing, and the brightly coloured table cloth is littered with the debris of the day. This is a well-used, practical family space chaotically presented reflecting the anarchic attitudes of the time. Although Smith was classed with the ‘kitchen sink painters’ in this work he was not interested in depicting real life and the everyday, here he wanted to make the ordinary seem miraculous. Regardless of this one piece he was seen as a radical, left-wing painter in that he was a social realist, promoted by Berger, who had also presented work at both the AIA and the Artists Group exhibitions and was therefore supportive of communist ideals and associated with the CPGB. In fact, like the other members of the quartet he changed as the

⁴⁷⁵ For image see page 228.

critical reception of social realism changed. He soon abandoned social realism to develop a bright abstract style and went on to teach at the Chelsea School of Art becoming Head of Painting⁴⁷⁶. He also maintained a degree of independence by turning down an invitation to become a member of the Royal Academy, stating that he considered their paintings were hung too close together purely for commercial purposes during their annual summer shows⁴⁷⁷. He may no longer have been considered a radical but he was anti-establishment at heart.

Overall when considering the Beaux Arts Quartet, they not only resented their dismissive title of ‘kitchen sink painters’, they actually had little in common with it. They did not confine themselves to the domestic subjects that the term ‘kitchen sink’ suggests, as they presented landscapes, cityscapes, portraits and aspects of nature. Their work did nevertheless have qualities that separated it from other post-war work being produced: a willingness to accept the everyday and the refusal to let artistic taste or expectations moderate the subject. Social realism echoed the issues of the period and benefitted from the climate in which the portrayal of reality was a dominant concern. Their working class imagery and abrupt handling registered as a protest against the more sombre, gentlemanly art associated with the contemporary teaching at the Royal College of Art (where all four artists had studied). At a time when British culture predominantly served the interests of the middle class, the representation of working class themes was being pursued not just by the Kitchen Sink artists, but were soon to be highlighted by the ‘Angry Young Men’ of British theatre and film⁴⁷⁸. By 1954 the paintings of Bratby, Greaves, Middleditch and Smith represented a

⁴⁷⁶ He worked at Chelsea School of Art from 1957 until he retired.

⁴⁷⁷ *Telegraph*, 20 June 2011, Jack Smith Obituary

⁴⁷⁸ It was only two years after the exhibitions highlighting the artists at the Beaux Arts Gallery that ‘Look Back in Anger’ was premiered at the Royal Court.

challenge to the status quo in post-war British art comparable with that seen later by John Osborne in theatre. Art was the catalyst for social realism in British culture. The themes were not nostalgic landscapes, classic portraits and ornamental still life's, but kitchen tables, washing lines and inner city desolation. Social realism represented the desire to cast off middle class accepted artistic conventions and to connect with the working class.

Although the artists themselves did not deliberately attach a political purpose to their work, and there was no agreed manifesto, this did not prevent John Berger, the Artists Group and the AIA from hailing them and their work 'a movement of protest'⁴⁷⁹. Their work was consequently perceived by the critics and public alike as radical social commentary that through association with Berger, the Artists Group, the AIA and the CPGB, was supportive of communism. In addition, their work was also permeated with an awareness of the anxieties that influenced the contemporary political climate. As Bratby stated, the concerns of the era such as the division of Europe and the fear of the atomic bomb had created an atmosphere that was 'the colour and mood of ration books'⁴⁸⁰. It is unsurprisingly the work of Edward Middleditch which best demonstrates this awareness, as he was the oldest of the Quartet who had served and been injured in the war, and who seemed the most aware of the consequences of fear and conflict⁴⁸¹. Middleditch was willing to push the boundaries and represent the economic hardship and underlying pessimism and despair in a recovering Britain, most potently seen in *Pigeons in Trafalgar Square*⁴⁸². That all four artists should then gradually

⁴⁷⁹ John Berger 'Social Realism and the Young', *New Statesman*, 30 July 1955, vol. 50, no.1273, p.132

⁴⁸⁰ As stated by John Bratby in F. Spalding (introduction), *The Kitchen Sink Painters* (Mayor Gallery, London, 1991), p. 11. In his novel 'Breakdown', Bratby writing as the character Brady further states that in the artist's work can be found 'the tensions and unrest of our atom-bomb threatened age'.

⁴⁸¹ See *Pigeons in Trafalgar Square* on page 239. Also there is a haunting element to his work and a specific allusion to death in a series of works relating to a dead chicken in a stream, and a series relating to the remorselessness of water.

⁴⁸² See page 210.

move away from their social realist style as the sixties developed symbolises the growth of optimism and the emergence of colour into the lives of the masses following the grey and austere fifties. It also highlights the changing commercial tastes in art and the adaptability of the artists to requirements.

The social realism of the Kitchen Sink painters was perfectly attuned to the emotional and aesthetic mood of the fifties and post-war Britain, and as Britain moved on, so did the painters. Pessimism became optimism and the sombre tones of social realism became the glorious colour of pop art and abstraction⁴⁸³. Presented at the height of the Cold War, when Khrushchev was vilifying modern art and condemning ‘degenerate’ art exhibitions, abstract expressionism subsequently stood for rebellion against oppression. It was a celebration of all that was Western. It represented in artistic form the freedoms associated with democracy and capitalism, and although the representation of well-known labels and symbols of commercialism was nothing new, its celebratory presentation was⁴⁸⁴. So as our era began by embracing traditional values and celebrating the family, it gradually found those middle class concepts challenged by the realistic depictions of working class everyday life rather than the idolised representations of the past. It then transformed again into a celebration of all that symbolised the commercial success and the rising standard of living within the democratic West.

⁴⁸³ Abstract expressionism had been introduced in 1956 with the Tate’s ‘Modern Art in the United States’ exhibition, presented at a time when Khrushchev was vilifying modern art and condemning ‘degenerate’ art exhibitions. Abstract expressionism therefore stood for rebellion against oppression and a celebration of all that was western and representative of the freedoms associated with democracy.

⁴⁸⁴ Bratby had incorporated familiar products and labels into his work of the early fifties, even before Richard Hamilton.

But did the representation of communism have a strategic role to play? Unlike film or theatre there are no overtly communist depictions within British post-war art that could claim to have had any influence. Nor could you effectively argue that the CPGB or the Artist's Group had any significant influence regardless of their intentions. That does not mean that communism and left-wing ideology had no contribution to make. The depictions of working class life and the championing of social realism by the Marxist critic John Berger undoubtedly challenged the middle class dominated artistic expectations as the fifties developed. It invited working class eyes to see art that was relevant to them. In that way, the post-war years and in particular the fifties broke a class barrier in art and introduced socially relevant art to the masses, just as writers such as John Osborne were to do in theatre. The everyday lives of the working classes became suitable material for communication to the viewer, not as a supporting narrative but as the main theme for consideration and analysis. The social realists of the Kitchen Sink artists had achieved that, manifesto or not. They did not present pro-communist art, and although left-wing they did not present overtly political work, but they did represent the realities of the working class and the anxieties they faced. They were radical in what they produced, how they produced it and in the political message behind it. Subsequently their promotion by an openly Marxist critic, their support of the communist AIA, their support from the communist Artists Group, and their promotion as the challengers to status quo of the artistic establishment led them to be considered not as radicals but as communist supporters and the promoters of communist ideology.

Conclusion

The Representation of Dominant Negative Stereotypes

In contrast to previous studies which have been set within the context of a propaganda analysis, this thesis has discussed how cultural life in Britain was influenced by the less conscious portrayal of communism outside the state apparatus for propaganda. It has therefore focussed on the communication of individuals and groups presenting their own perception of communism through the media of British film, theatre and art. This study has therefore addressed a gap in the scholarly literature which has previously focused on the cultural contest between the USA and the USSR, as domestically communism was presented as being both ‘un-British’ and a threat to traditional British values and beliefs. This threat was highlighted in the post-war years as communist expansionism, the division of Europe, and the growing fear of nuclear war helped to fuel the suspicion surrounding domestic communists. In addition, the changes and reforms experienced both domestically and internationally established how notions of traditionalism, and the celebration of ‘Britishness’, became associated with patriotism and security. Artistic production was inevitably shaped by the

historical background and the changing geo-political circumstances, and within British culture negative stereotypes dominated.

At a political level the changing fortunes of the Communist Party of Great Britain clearly demonstrate the growing suspicion towards the domestic communist movement, and by association, political radicalism. In reality, the CPGB actually posed no domestic threat and they remained a minor party with little influence in British politics. Its traditional power base within the unions was eroded by infighting and concerns of corruption, and the National Cultural Committee, the Artists Group, and the cultural magazine *Realism*, had no cultural influence of note through lack of a consistent strategy, lack of financial backing, and lack of support. The representation of communist ideology and communist characters was therefore left to individuals within the selected media, and overtly positive, or at the least sympathetic portrayals were few and far between. As a result, the creative media helped to reinforce an anti-communist and anti-radical cultural ideology by continually presenting examples of the dominant cultural stereotypes: the sinister other, the militant, and the subversive.

Although the dominant trend, not all representations were negative. In both theatre and art more sympathetic, atypical characterisations were presented, such as the disillusioned idealists, the politically naive, or the realistic portrayal of the working class environment, even if their promotion was far less overt. This demonstrates there was a sliding scale of representation beginning with the most strongly overt characterisations as found in British film. Main stream commercial theatre also offered stereotypical negative representations, but in addition independent theatre questioned the ideology and intentions of communists

through more considered portrayals. This could be seen through the examination of a communist family within the domestic environment. In contrast, within art overt communist portrayals are entirely absent, as in social realism it is the reality of the working class environment which becomes the focus for attention, not the characters which inhabit it, and overtly political portrayals were replaced by social commentary.

When considering the independence of cultural production, in film the commercial ramifications of corporate strategies, cinematic production and distribution ensured that pro-communist material did not gain financing. Independent producers and creators, however, could present their own stories and values and the work of the Boultings subsequently reflected their personal, anti-communist beliefs. In theatre, once again mainstream commercial theatre productions stayed with negative, anti-communists portrayals. This left independent playwrights such as Arnold Wesker to present sympathetic communist portrayals, but they were seen in domestic dramas not political ones, as angry young men came to dominate emerging theatre, ensuring commercial success and the transference to mainstream theatre. In art the overt communist portrayals as seen in film or theatre were replaced by the far more covert social commentary of social realism. However, the radical artists of the social realists gradually became the respected teachers and members of the Royal Academy, rendering the relationship between the portrayal of communism and the *avant garde* of art as being virtually redundant. From film through to art, the representation of communism therefore becomes less explicitly threatening as the creators become more entwined with the establishment and commercial considerations of mainstream production and promotion.

The perception of communists and radicals be they in film, theatre, or art were hard to separate as they had an uncertain boundary within British visual culture. In the immediate post-war films, for example, radical challenges to authority over rationing and even moves for independence would be applauded as a stance against oppression. Although sympathetic communist characters could occasionally be seen in domestic dramas, they were presented as naive fools or radicals seeking change who had been tricked by wicked communist manipulators. This reinforced the concept of the connection between communists and radicals. As the East-West divide was firmly established, however, political challenges were seen as subversive and un-British. In film, the most overtly anti-communist media considered, a sympathetic approach to communism simply did not appear. The closest example was Bernard Miles' *Chance of a Lifetime*, and in contrast the work of Boulting brothers demonstrated how negative, aggressive, and naive portrayals of communists dominated. This can be seen in the disillusioned idealist and nuclear paranoia portrayed in *Seven Days to Noon*, followed by the fear of revolutionary militants and a domestic fifth column in the overtly anti-communist *High Treason* (impressive for a film which did not mention the word 'communist' once). Moving away from dramas, *I'm All Right Jack* introduced Britain to Fred Kite, militant shop stewards, communist unions and class divisions, while the last film considered, *Carlton-Browne of the F.O.*, was the only one with an international setting and highlighted Cold War rivalry, imperialist attitudes and political ineptitude. All films presented a very British, class driven framework with typically robust stereotypes abounding. Such popular films presented strong, negative, stereotypical representations of communist characters, easily recognisable to the audience. In the most popular form of entertainment positive communist portrayals were absent.

In contrast to film, in which there was no alternative ‘audience’ to the established cinema chains, theatre did have other options. In addition to institutionally backed commercial theatre, such as those of H.M. Tennant productions, the West End, and theatres supported by the Arts Council, there was also another layer. Small, independent companies produced original work such minor ‘reps’ and the politically radical Theatre Workshop. Instead of stereotypical negative communist portrayals, the audience could therefore see alternative, more sympathetic communist characters set within the domestic environment. The line between the two was not rigid, and established writers such as J.B. Priestley challenged the boundary between institutional and independent with biting social commentary. Arnold Wesker also used the radical English Stage Company at the Royal Court to present communist characters dealing with family strife that became commercially successful. So although you could see sinister communist politicians and corrupt diplomats in the West End, you could also see communist mothers and children arguing at the Royal Court, and dockers debating what next in ‘rep’. Once again, it was domestic anxieties that were being reflected in the portrayals on stage. Commercial and institutional obligations did affect what was on offer, and although the dominant portrayal in popular theatre was negative, there were alternative communist characters to see in the smaller productions.

British art in the post-war years was far less overt in its portrayal. Communism and the *avant garde* of British art had tenuous links through the support of the AIA and the Artists Group, and the openly Marxist critic John Berger. Within the artistic establishment, communism was openly associated with the radical left, and in turn with the emergence of social realism and its depictions of the everyday working class environment. The work of the social realists Bratby, Middleditch, Greaves and Smith demonstrated how the everyday working and

domestic environments were used to highlight oppression, fear and class division. Although surprisingly the least overtly political of the media, the influence of John Berger illustrated how an association with a Marxist critic labelled the social realists as being communist painters. By cloaking their political intentions in social commentary, the social realists presented work which reflected the realism and angst of the post-war years and also proved themselves to be commercially aware. They could not ensure exhibition space and audience attendance with overtly political art, therefore political radicalism became social commentary.

Overall this thesis has examined how post-war British film, theatre, and art represented communism in the creative media, reflecting the domestic and international anxieties of the era. Recognisable stereotypes were placed into familiar settings which allowed the audience to relate to the portrayals before them. Communism, and the threat posed by communists to the domestic environment, became a recognisable theme with overtly negative characterisations dominating the most popular media: film. In contrast, the structure of theatre allowed for alternative portrayals of communist characters to be placed before the audience, but once again it was the negative portrayals which dominated in the most popular and institutionally supported theatre of the West End. In contrast to the obviously communist representations in both film and theatre, within art the *avant garde* cloaked itself in social realism and a much more covert portrayal emerged: the working class environment replaced overt communist characters. Political radicalism became social commentary as the familiar depiction of the everyday was the message itself. In general the representation of communism in British film, theatre, and art in the post-war years helped to create and maintain the impression of a recognisable communist enemy through the use of stereotypical portrayals.

The representation of the communist as the antithesis of British democracy, freedom and traditionalism was presented to the audience in recognisable form. Although there were alternative characterisations, the dominant form was that of the subversive or the militant, and consequently this helped to perpetuate the socially constructed anti-communist ideology within Britain. From the sinister other to the bolshie shop steward, from drama to comedy, and from bare sinks to derelict factories, communism continued to represent a challenge to British traditionalism and freedom.

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‘Fred Kite and comrades’: From *I’m All Right Jack*,

Image courtesy of the B.F.I. http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/boulting/all_right_jack.html

John and Roy Boulting

Image courtesy of the B.F.I. Screenonline <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/446435>

Poster for *Seven Days to Noon*

Image courtesy of the B.F.I. stills and poster galleries:

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Poster for *High Treason*

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