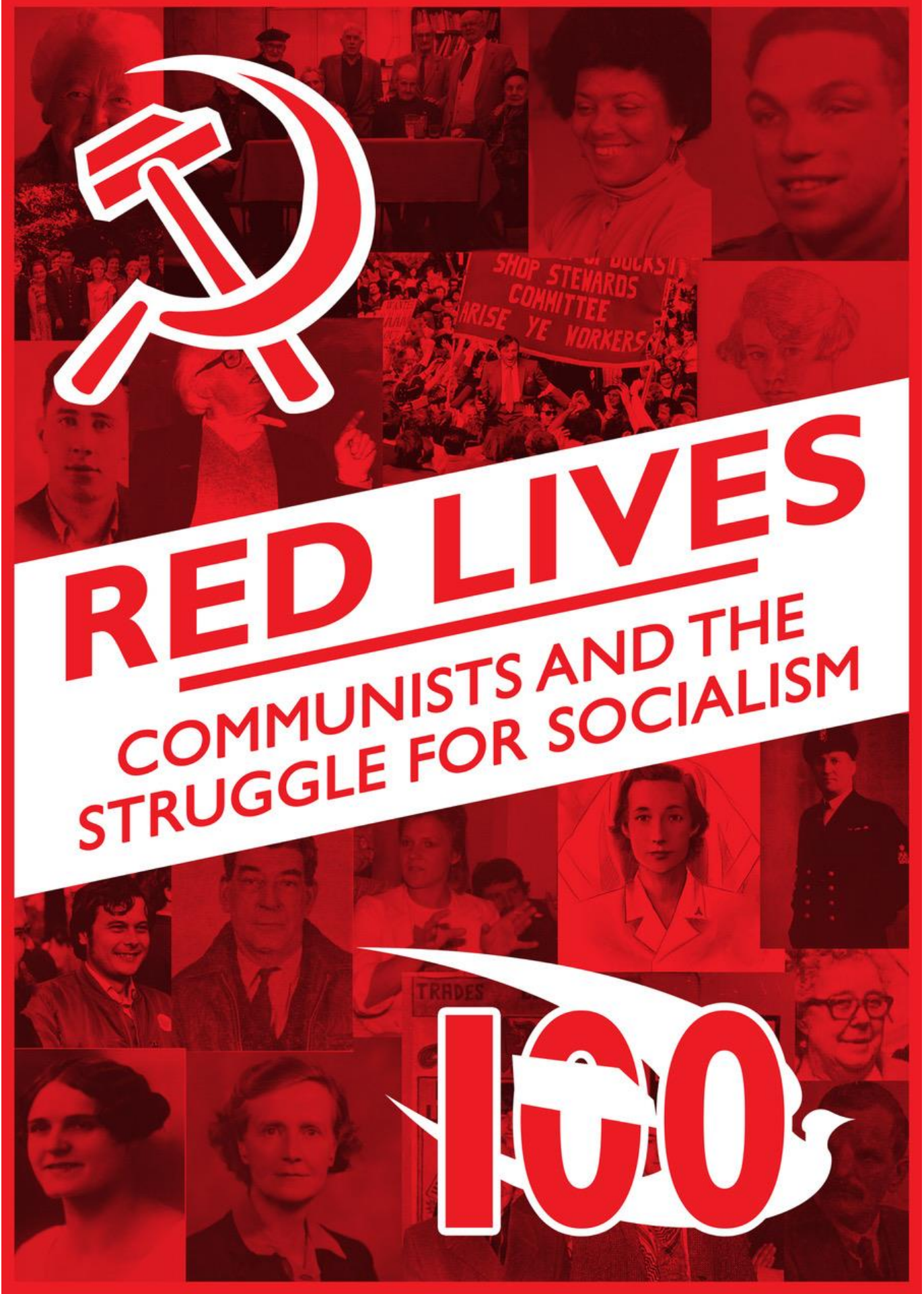




RED LIVES

COMMUNISTS AND THE
STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM

100



A sense of value; a sense of purpose

In early September 2019, in anticipation of its centenary, the Communist Party wrote to its membership asking for recommendations of past members, no longer living, who might be included in a collection of life histories. Red Lives is a selection of these. The editors did not seek well-known names, rather, we wanted to capture the experience and spirit of lay members, to reveal how their activism and communist politics developed over a lifetime.

We were anxious to make sure that the voices of the biographers could be heard unaltered, and so the comrades and friends of these communists express themselves in their own words and using their own phrases. We took the view that only those changes that were absolutely necessary to ensure understanding would be made to the work passed to us.

Communist Party members are volunteers and only contribute in so far as they feel able and of course, this changes through a lifetime. The Party reflects the political experience and understanding of its members, who, as this book demonstrates, are active in a staggering range of social, political and cultural arenas. Members are motivated by an understanding of the political struggle and events of their times, their individual education and collective study of Marxism and the sheer economic needs of their families and local communities. Many take a moral stand. There is no set way of 'how to be a good communist'. Each adds to the definition, in her or his own way, but all struggle to build a just and democratic future.

This has not been an easy book to assemble. Many of the biggest achievements recorded are small in 'newsworthiness' and the impact is localised. In other instances small incremental change led to big achievements, such as when communists fought a street by street battle to force government to open deep shelters, shielding millions from the misery of saturation day and night bombing of tightly-packed communities. In some cases, change is the work of an individual, but more often, the combined effort of many. Our challenge was to uncover these achievements so they could be shared. It may not have been easy, but it was a wonderful education for us.

So many of the discussions and decisions of members in branches, districts, commissions, advisories and committees go unrecorded. At certain times when the party was facing repression, this was mostly for good reason. Outside of core minutes and congresses, there is no uniform catalogue for referencing decisions. Book archives and memoirs are dispersed. Some never made it beyond manuscript. In many cases the stories are being told here for the first time. The 'how' is as interesting as the 'why?'. Well-trodden historical events are given a new perspective, as they are told by those involved.

Many of the stories contained in this volume describe in an open and honest way the difficulties the Party faced during the early 1980s (and which were replicated across Europe), which led to the demise of the CPGB and its rebirth as the CPB - reformed and politically strengthened as a consequence. The biographies that make reference to these events are testament to the commitment of those who continued to recognise the Party as an essential element in any revolutionary transformation of society, and to lessons learned.

This book is a record of lives lived with commitment and integrity, and the belief that the Party is a vehicle for revolutionary change. The biographies are related, as far as possible, using the words of individuals who knew the characters, were inspired by them or who were active alongside them. The resulting picture is a powerful riposte to the opponents of communism, who know so little about our ideas and what motivates working class activists. We hope that this book will help show the reality of thousands of ordinary working people, often vociferously independent in views and action, committed to a political vision, contributing to the decisions and overall direction of the Party. Individuals who recognise the importance of a disciplined approach to political action in confronting capitalism, and an understanding of their place in a worldwide communist movement.

Equally striking is the richness of experience, cultural depth, boundless enthusiasm and commitment of working class people shining out from each story. The 'Party the rich cannot buy' has been financed for over 100 years by pounds raised by these people, certain in the knowledge that its vision is worth fighting for, and sticking with, despite adversity.

There are no stars. They all are.

This book is dedicated to the young communists who have grown in numbers in recent years. It is they who will continue and add to this story.

Simon Meddick

Liz Payne

Phil Katz

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