

Introduction

This dissertation project is going to focus on Solidarity, a 'libertarian socialist' group active in Britain from 1960 until 1992.

The main resources for this project have come from the archive of the *Solidarity* journal at the Working Class Movement Library in Salford, personal interviews with ex-members of the group and unpublished internal documents of the group held privately by individuals.

Secondary sources concerning Solidarity are hard to come by. There is only a single piece of academic work that concerns the group. Twenty pages of the anarchist historian David Goodway's book, 'Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward' are dedicated to Chris Pallis (aka Martin Grainger/Maurice Brinton) 'the principal writer, translator and thinker of the Solidarity Group.'¹ There is also half a page of Trotskyist David Widgery's, 'The Left in Britain 1956-68', which also reproduces six articles written by members of the group as well as two passing references to their existence.² The final secondary source is also the responsibility of Goodway, 'For Workers' Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton' reproduces 43 of Maurice Brinton's articles and pamphlets as well as an abridged version of the chapter featured in 'Anarchist Seeds'.³

A reliance on oral testimony can be hazardous, due to affects of time on the memory and the tendency for respondents to have an axe to grind. This has been counteracted by cross checking oral statements with other respondents and with printed sources.

Goodway himself admits that he knew Chris Pallis 'reasonably well'.⁴ It is sensible to suggest that this personal connection affected Goodway's work, as it reads like a biography of Jesus Christ written by John the Baptist.

Moreover, there has been an increased interest in the practice and politics of Solidarity in recent years. A London based group called The Commune emerged in August of 2008 which has uncritically re-published Solidarity material. Furthermore, the tagline of their newspaper bares the phrase 'for workers self-management', a concept constantly emphasised by Solidarity, indeed their national magazine bore the tagline 'for Self-Management' for a year.⁵

Also, there is much discussion related to the group and an archive of their materials available on the 'libertarian communist' Libcom.org website.⁶

This should come as no surprise. In the words of Richard Abernethy, 'Solidarity punctured and deflated some favourite left-wing illusions.'⁷ Maurice Brinton's (hereafter Chris Pallis) study of the Bolshevik's early years in power is still arguably an essential tool used to refute the Leninist's claims that 'objective circumstances' were to blame for the counter revolution in Russia.⁸ The other stand out area of Solidarity's work is their reports on work place struggles, which differ from the traditional left's as they were not simply generic statements of support but detailed eyewitness accounts based on empirical evidence and written by those involved.⁹ It is quite remarkable that this material is still impressive, 40 years after its publication. The same can be said of Chris Pallis' eyewitness accounts of the Belgian General Strike of 1960, the famous May 1968 events in France and the Carnation

¹D. Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), pp. 288-308

²D. Widgery, *The Left in Britain 1956-68* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976), pp.64, 76-77, 111, 117-123, 180, 185-197, 282-284, 501

³D. Goodway (ed), *For Workers Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton* (Oakland: AK Press, 2004), pp. 1-378

⁴Goodway, *Anarchist*, p.vii

⁵the commune: for workers' self-management and communism from below', <http://thecomune.co.uk/> (Accessed 08/11/2010)

⁶'Solidarity', <http://libcom.org/tags/solidarity> (Accessed 07/11/2010)

⁷Quoted in D. Brown, "The illusion of 'Solidarity'", <http://libcom.org/library/illusion-solidarity-david-brown> (Accessed 10/04/2011)

⁸M. Brinton in D. Goodway (ed), *For Workers Power*, pp. 293-278

⁹For example, *Solidarity Motor Bulletin Number 7* (London: Solidarity, 1977)

Revolution in Portugal. These positive characteristics made Solidarity an influential organisation that sold thousands upon thousands of pamphlets. Solidarity also boasts amongst its alumni *Class War* founder Ian Bone, as well as former Mayor of London Ken Livingstone.¹⁰

My aims and objectives for this project are as follows;

Firstly, to pioneer research into an unstudied corner of history. A rough history of Solidarity is available on the internet but relatively little is known about them. This dissertation intends to address this imbalance by providing a critical history with the use of unpublished internal documents.

Secondly, the organisational question. Solidarity denounced traditional methods of political organisation, this dissertation will examine how 'libertarians' attempted to organise and if this was successful.

Thirdly, internal arguments within Solidarity. Internal disputes inside Solidarity are actually shrouded in mystery, this dissertation will examine them, as well as their causes and results.

Also, the political of Solidarity, what did 'libertarian socialism' mean, where did it come from and what were its effects.

Finally, the importance and legacy of Solidarity. This dissertation argues that by challenging the ideas of traditional left wing politics, Solidarity occupied a void that had been left open in the post-war years for those who were questioning conventional socialist thinking. For some, the politics of Solidarity proved inadequate and they moved onto other things. Those who did so went on to form or take part in the principal political groups espousing left communism in Britain, it is Solidarity's legacy and their part in the history of British ultra-leftism that will finally be examined.

Chapter 1: The ultra-left and the situation in Britain

In this dissertation is going to argue that Solidarity was significant in promoting the views of or similar to the communist ultra-left in Britain from the 1960s onwards, that the group also acted as a midwife for the British communist left as well as almost being a stepping stone between the communist left and traditional leftism. This chapter will lay out my definition of ultra-left communism and left-communism as distinct from traditional socialism/leftism and Trotskyism. The second purpose of this chapter is to briefly document the ultra-left communist tradition in Britain and show that it had become extinct following the Second World War.

Although the term ultra-left and ultra-leftism can be used pejoratively, it is not in this case. To be put simply, the positions of the ultra-left can be summed up as; belief in the capitalist nature of the USSR, rejecting the possibility of using bourgeois parliaments as a revolutionary tribune, giving no support for national liberation struggles, rejecting both the popular and 'united front' strategies, the rejection

¹⁰Solidarity minute book held privately by John Quail, 'Minutes of the Solidarity meeting (Group), 13th Dec. 1968, at WRI.'; I. Bone, 'Carbon Black', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 6, No. 10, pp. 3-7; Goodway, *Anarchist*, p.288

of participation in trade unions and support for workers' councils.¹¹ Within modern day ultra-leftism there is both an anarchist current and a Marxist current.¹² The Marxist current itself, sometimes known as left-communism, is divided between a Dutch/German school and an Italian school.¹³ The leading theorist of the Italian left was Amadeo Bordiga, whilst rejecting united fronts, parliament during certain periods and developing an understanding of the Soviet Union as capitalist, as a Leninist he placed great emphasis on the role of the revolutionary vanguard party.¹⁴ From the Dutch/German perspective, although in 1920 Herman Gorter was calling for a political party 'hard as steel, clear as glass', there was a development of theory by the likes of Anton Pannekoek, who began to emphasise that the communist revolution would not be the act of a political party but the act of the working class itself.¹⁵ As Otto Ruhle said, the revolution would not be 'a party affair'.¹⁶

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The Ultra-left in Britain

There was a tradition of ultra-left communism in Britain before the establishment of Solidarity, however this was wiped out by the defeats of the radical labour movement in the inter-war period and by the events of the Second World War.

This first wave of ultra-left communism in Britain was ridden by Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers' Socialist Federation and Guy Aldred's Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation (hereafter APCF). As well as rejecting parliament, Pankhurst rejected the united front tactic and began to develop an understanding of the Soviet Union as capitalist from the early 1920s.¹⁷ Unsurprisingly, Aldred rejected parliament but the APCF defended the Bolsheviks. For example, in May 1925 the APCF declared, 'we take out stand by the Soviet Union'.¹⁸ This abruptly changed in November 1925 when the organisation suddenly took up Pankhurst's view that the Soviet Union had reverted to capitalism.¹⁹

Although Aldred and Pankhurst were ultra-left in this sense, making significant breaks with established socialist thinking, they were more traditional in other ways due to the fact that they had not the time nor hindsight of history to benefit them in their thinking and topics such as the 'national question' were not even on the radar of British communists at this time. Pankhurst supported a traditional strategy towards trade unions, until her expulsion from the CPGB when she moved to being in favour of 'one big union'.²⁰

¹¹Note, Tony Cliff's International Socialists group distinguished themselves from traditional Trotskyism and traditional leftism with their state capitalist theory of the Soviet Union, whilst otherwise holding traditional Trotskyist positions. Likewise, although anarchists have traditionally rejected standing candidates for parliament, traditional anarchists shared with Trotskyists the aim of capturing trade union leaderships; 'Intakes: Communist Theory - Beyond the Ultra-left', <http://libcom.org/library/beyond-ultra-left-aufheben-11> (Accessed 31/03/2011)

¹²For one ultra-left anarchist current in the United Kingdom, see the Anarchist Federation, 'Anarchist Federation - Organising for Resistance', <http://www.afed.org.uk/> (Accessed 31/03/2011)

¹³O. Mac Giollamoir, 'Left communism and its ideology', <http://libcom.org/library/left-communism-its-ideology> (Accessed 31/03/2011)

¹⁴G. Dauve, 'Notes on Trotsky, Pannekoek, Bordiga', <http://libcom.org/library/notes-trotsky-pannekoek-bordiga-gilles-dauv%C3%A9> (Accessed 31/03/2011)

¹⁵H. Gorter, 'Open Letter to Comrade Lenin', <http://www.marxists.org/archive/gorter/1920/open-letter/ch05.htm> (Accessed 31/03/2011)

¹⁶O. Ruhle, 'The Revolution Is Not A Party Affair', <http://www.marxists.org/archive/ruhle/1920/ruhle02.htm> (Accessed 31/03/2011)

¹⁷M. Shipway, '2. The Russian Revolution', <http://libcom.org/library/anti-parliamentary-communism-mark-shipway-2> (Accessed 31/03/2011)

¹⁸M. Shipway, '5. The Late Twenties and Early Thirties', <http://libcom.org/library/anti-parliamentary-communism-mark-shipway-5> (Accessed 31/03/2011)

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰M. Shipway, '4. Trade Unions and Industrial Organisation', <http://libcom.org/library/anti->

After Pankhurst and her followers joined and then left the Communist Party of Great Britain (hereafter CPGB), they formed the Communist Workers' Party. This did not manage to survive the inter-war period, dissolving in June 1924, whilst Pankhurst herself deserted communist politics. By 1933 Aldred split with the APFC, forming the United Socialist Movement. This group managed to last until 1965 but had abandoned communist positions and was in major decline after the Second World War. The APCF did not survive the war.

Therefore, in post-war Britain there were no groups of any significance supporting positions to the left of traditional socialism. Individuals such as Joe Thomas, 'Britain's original council communist' did exist, but they were hardly influential.²¹ Furthermore, the differences between Lenin and his detractors, such as Luxemburg on the national question were known about but were not readily accessible.²² An opportunity was available for a new political grouping to emerge in Britain that took up positions to the left of Trotskyism, this is the role that Solidarity would play in the 1960s.

Chapter 2: Origins

To understand something, one must know its origins. This chapter will provide a history of the origins of Solidarity, as it is valuable in of itself. In addition, this chapter will show the Trotskyist origins of Solidarity. Most importantly this chapter will also examine the French group Socialisme ou Barbarie (hereafter S ou B) as a product of the crisis in post-war Trotskyism and their centrality to the history of Solidarity.

The two most central figures throughout Solidarity's existence were Chris Pallis and Ken Weller. Pallis was born in Mumbai in 1923 to an upper class Greek family, receiving his schooling in Switzerland.²³ At the age of 17 and with the Second World War underway his family took the last boat from France and he became a resident of England.²⁴ At the age of 18 he enrolled at Oxford University in order to study medicine and it was here that he would commence his political activity, joining the CPGB, only to be expelled almost immediately due to his opposition to their stance towards the war. Converting to Trotskyism, he would join the Revolutionary Communist Party by the end of the war but in 1947 ceased concrete political activity, after marrying Jeanne Marty, in order to concentrate on his studies. Upon graduation he became a hospital doctor in Malaya, but became interested in neurology. He moved back to England and by 1957 published his doctorate on 'Anomalies of the Cranio-Vertebral Junction'. He then moved to London and took up a position as consultant in neurology at Hammersmith Hospital, also becoming a lecturer in the Royal Medical Postgraduate School, where he would eventually become head of the neurology department. Upon arrival in London he came into contact with Gerry Healy's entryist organisation, 'The Club', which was growing due to a swell of new recruits from the CPGB who were dissatisfied with the party's response to the Hungarian uprising of 1956.²⁵

One of these new recruits was Ken Weller. Weller had been active in the Islington branch of the

[parliamentary-communism-mark-shipway-4](#) (accessed 31/03/2011)

²¹A. Woodward, *Life and Times of Joe Thomas: the road to libertarian socialism* (London: Gorter Press, 2010), pp. 1-40

²²Luxemburg's exchanges with Lenin on the national question were not re-published by Monthly Review Press until 1976, R. Luxemburg, 'The National Question',

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1909/national-question/index.htm> (Accessed 31/03/2011)

²³Goodway, *Anarchist*, p.293

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Entryism refers to a tactic used by some Trotskyists, wherein small Trotskyist groups dissolve themselves into larger social democratic parties in order to connect more readily with working class militants; Around 7000 of the CPGB's 30,000 members left the party in this period, Bob Pitt estimates that almost 200 of these joined 'The Club', see B. Pitt 'Gerry Healy - Chapter 4', <http://www.whatnextjournal.co.uk/Pages/Healy/Chap4.html> (Accessed 28/03/2011)

Young Communist League (hereafter YCL), which was the second largest branch in the country.²⁶ He had become involved with a dissident group inside the YCL, which produced its own paper that had a 'massive' circulation of up to 800.²⁷ Weller recounted the malaise in the organisation that was effected by the death of Stalin and the uprisings in Poland in March and June of 1953, Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech', the rise of Gomulka in Poland, the lack of democracy in the party, the conservative actions of the party in industry, its failure to criticise the Soviet Union and finally the uprisings in Hungary.²⁸ He became attracted to the Trotskyism of Healy for its critique of the Stalinist bureaucracy and analysis of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution via Peter Fryer, who he had known in the CPGB, and joined The Club, after finally being expelled from the party in 1958.²⁹

Although The Club initially presented a façade of openness and democracy, this was smashed after it was re-named the Socialist Labour League (hereafter SLL), for the purpose of conducting open work outside the Labour party. A 25 man oppositional group, known as the Stamford Faction, including Fryer and Ken Coates, who opposed this turn, were expelled in 1959.³⁰ As Chris Pallis rose to become a member of the SLL's national committee, Ken Weller was discovering that he had left the frying pan for the fire, recalling 'I began to become more and more of a dissident because I felt that most of the criticisms I'd had of the Communist Party were true, in spades, with Healy'.³¹ A characteristic strategic u-turn by Healy saw the SLL step back from industrial work and move back towards the Labour Party soon after the SLL's establishment.³² Ken Weller joined an informal opposition to this move, a collection of seven members grouped around Brian Behan. Despite its small size Behan was a charismatic and important figure inside the SLL, he had met both Stalin and Mao whilst serving as an executive member of the CPGB and had been made chairman of the SLL.³³ Further, Behan would make criticisms of Healy that hit home with a broader layer of party members, he attacked the 'small clique' in control of the SLL and the concentration of power within Healy's hands, as not only was Healy general secretary, he was also International Committee secretary and in practice acted as League treasurer and print shop manager.³⁴ Behan also attacked the fact that Healy could hire full time officers and spend significant amounts of the group's resources without consulting the SLL's elected bodies as well as his ownership of the League's property, which he wanted to be placed under control of the membership.³⁵ Furthermore, the Behan opposition represented what Ellis Hillman described as a 'proletarian tendency', which the outrageously paranoid Healy feared could challenge him.³⁶ Brian Behan had a decade of experience as a labourer and had become a prominent trade unionist. He was twice imprisoned for his industrial work, firstly for organising a go-slow on the Festival of Britain construction site and the second time for his involvement in a strike at the Shell Centre site. Healy had

²⁶The Young Communist League was the youth wing of the CPGB.

²⁷N. Oakes, 'Hungary 1956: Moments of mass apostasy', *Solidarity: A Journal of Libertarian Socialism*, No. 15 (Autumn 1987), p.14

²⁸*Ibid*, pp. 8, 11

²⁹Fryer is famous for his book 'Hungarian Tragedy'; *Ibid*, p.14; J. Quail, *Genesis – Chapter one of the history of Solidarity* (Unpublished), p.4

³⁰J. Higgins, '1956 and All That', <http://www.marxists.org/archive/higgins/1993/xx/1956.htm> (Accessed 28/03/2011); Ken Coates, a former coalminer and CPGB member would join the Revolutionary Socialist League following his expulsion from the SLL. He would organise the 'International Group' within the RSL and go on to help found the International Marxist Group. He would go on to play leading roles in the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, the Institute for Workers' Control and European Nuclear Disarmament. From 1989 to 1999 he was a Labour Party member of the European Parliament and was a successful author.

³¹Quoted in Quail, *Genesis*, p.6

³²B. Pitt, 'Gerry Healy – Chapter 5', <http://www.whatnextjournal.co.uk/Pages/Healy/Chap5.html> (Accessed 28/03/2011)

³³M. Green, 'Brian Behan', <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2002/nov/05/guardianobituaries.booksobituaries> (Accessed 29/03/2011)

³⁴Pitt, 'Gerry Healy – Chapter 5'

³⁵*Ibid*.

³⁶*Ibid*.

thrown all his resources behind this second incident, which he had seen as a life or death struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.³⁷ Weller himself was an active shop steward and had a relatively rich history of industrial experience for his age. The Behan opposition would be expelled after a North London branch meeting in May 1960, with an additional 70 members following them on their way out of their own accord.³⁸

Chris Pallis and Bob Pennington, who as members of the national committee had a hand in Ken Weller's expulsion, would meet their own fate soon after. They had begun to develop a series of criticisms of the SLL, including its position towards the Chinese Revolution, its uncritical positions towards the American and Sri Lankan sections of the Fourth International and their 'fear' of the most slightly unorthodox Trotskyist views, which Pallis thought had reduced the intellectual life in Healy's organisation 'to the level of a religious service'.³⁹ Pallis had first met Cornelius Castoriadis in 1947, through his friend George Petit who, 'tore [Pallis] to pieces' during their discussions on Trotskyism, whilst he was in France.⁴⁰ They met once more, when Pallis returned from his work in Malaya and although he joined the SLL, he began to attend S ou B meetings whenever he visited Paris.⁴¹ Pallis and Pennington's sympathies for Socialisme ou Barbarie were somehow relayed to Jack Gale, a close supporter of Gerry Healy, which resulted in them both being physically assaulted in the summer of 1960 and expelled, Pennington received particularly bad injuries.⁴² The Behan faction possibly escaped this fate due to the number of building workers that supported him.⁴³

The post-war era was a period of relative uncertainty for communists. Not only for the 'official' communists who were in disarray during the mid-1950s, but also for the Trotskyists. Before the Second World War, Trotsky had predicted that the Stalinist system in the USSR could only be a transitory phenomenon. Moreover, he argued that just as the First World War had summoned a revolutionary wave which swept Europe, so would the Second, which would lead to the destruction of the Soviet bureaucracy 'and regeneration of Soviet democracy on a far higher economic and cultural basis than in 1918'.⁴⁴ However, if this revolutionary wave was not forthcoming, then capitalism would be restored in Russia, with no alternative path being envisaged by Trotsky.⁴⁵ Not only had this not unfolded but it also became increasingly difficult for some of Trotsky's followers to persist in defending the Soviet Union as a 'workers' state' and thus more 'progressive' than Western capitalism, when knowledge of such horrors as Stalin's gulags were widespread. And so, although Marxist thinkers had disagreed over the nature of the Soviet Union since 1917, it was following 1945 that new theories of the Soviet Union became more appealing for Trotskyists. Although some theorists that no longer saw the Soviet Union as socialist, such as Yigael Gluckstein (aka Tony Cliff) made a conscious effort to stay within the boundaries of Trotskyism, others such as James Burnham would develop in an increasingly right wing direction and would eventually become neo-conservatives.⁴⁶ Along with Claude Lefort, Castoriadis would be one of the first thinkers active in French Trotskyism to break with orthodox notions of the USSR.⁴⁷ His personal break with Trotskyism and then with Marxism all together, whilst still espousing socialist revolution, would colour the politics of Solidarity greatly and would be the cause of their uniqueness in British politics.

Ken Weller took part in founding a short-lived initiative called the Workers Party, along with other

³⁷Higgins, '1956'

³⁸Quoted in Quail, *Genesis*, p.7

³⁹Pitt, 'Gerry Healy - Chapter 5'

⁴⁰Quoted in Quail, *Genesis*, p.14

⁴¹*Ibid*, p.15

⁴²*Ibid*, p.8

⁴³*Ibid*, p.7

⁴⁴Quoted in M. van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union: A Survey of Critical Theories and Debates Since 1917* (Chicago: Haymarker Books, 2009), p.68

⁴⁵*Ibid*, p.69

⁴⁶'The theory of the USSR as a form of state capitalism within Trotskyism', *Aufheben*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (Autumn 1997), p.29

⁴⁷van der Linden, *Western Marxism*, pp. 116-118

members of the SLL who had left with Behan. This group helped produce a strike bulletin during the large seaman's strike of 1960 but it quickly fell apart.⁴⁸ Along with Norma Maycock and a few others they began to search for as many critical perspectives towards Trotskyism as possible and planned to engage in open discussion with a number of groups.⁴⁹ After showing interest in the writings of Dennis Levin and George Spiro, who had both founded organisations called the 'Leninist League' in Britain and America respectively, they became most interested in the publications of Socialisme ou Barbarie, which were being promoted by their ex-comrades Pallis and Pennington.⁵⁰ Thus re-unification was achieved.

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Socialisme ou Barbarie

S ou B have already been mentioned above, it is not possible to understand Solidarity without attempting to understand S ou B. This is best demonstrated by the fact that Pallis did not consider he had personally contributed to socialist theory, but was merely the translator and transmitter of the ideas of Castoriadis.⁵¹

The most influential figure in S ou B was Cornelius Castoriadis, who wrote under the pen names Pierre Chaulieu and Paul Cardan.

Castoriadis was born March 11 1922, in Istanbul but his family immediately moved to Athens. After becoming exposed to Marxism in his early teens, he joined the youth wing of the Communist Party of Greece aged 15. He went on to join the parent organisation in 1941 but soon after the party decided to ally itself with the bourgeois resistance and he left in protest.⁵² After a short time in the political wilderness he joined the Internationalist Communist Union of Aghis Stinas, who opposed both the Nazis and the Western powers in the war.⁵³ This put his life in considerable danger as the Trotskyists were under threat from both the Nazis and the Stalinists.⁵⁴ Therefore, at the end of the war he fled to France and took up work as a statistical economist for the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation.⁵⁵

Once in France, Castoriadis joined the Parti Communiste Internationaliste (hereafter PCI). His experiences in Greece had led him to oppose the orthodox Trotskyist position of characterising the Soviet Union as a 'workers state' and offering it critical support whilst attacking the bureaucracy, he immediately began spreading his new position inside the PCI. Claude Lefort, a student of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, took up his view and they began to collaborate together politically, forming the Chaulieu-Montal Tendency named after their pseudonyms.⁵⁶ In August 1946, the tendency published 'On the Regime and Against the Defence of the USSR', where they argued that the bureaucracy had become a new elite, conquered all political power and no longer followed the interests of the working class but their own exclusively.⁵⁷ The Soviet Union was neither capitalist, nor a workers state but a

⁴⁸N. Heath, 'Foulser, George, 1920-1975', <http://libcom.org/history/articles/1920-1975-george-foulser> (Accessed 29/03/2011)

⁴⁹Quail, *Genesis*, p.10

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹Goodway, *Anarchist*, p.295

⁵²M. van der Linden, 'Socialisme ou Barbarie: A French Revolutionary Group, 1949-1965', <http://libcom.org/library/socialisme-ou-barbarie-linden> (Accessed 31/03/2011)

⁵³Aghis Stinas and Cornelius Castoriadis', <http://www.reocities.com/antagonism1/stinas/index.html> (Accessed 01/04/2011)

⁵⁴A. Stinas, 'The Massacre of the Internationalist Communists in Greece', <http://www.marxists.org/subject/greek-civil-war/revolutionary-history/stinas/memoirs.htm> (Accessed 01/04/2011)

⁵⁵Goodway, *Anarchist*, p.291

⁵⁶Merleau-Ponty was also responsible for converting Jean-Paul Sartre to Marxism.

⁵⁷van der Linden, *Western Marxism*, p.116

new type of society, which strove for expansion, just like Western capitalism.⁵⁸ Although Lefort had been 'overwhelmed' by Castoriadis' analysis, they failed to gather much support within the PCI and less than 20 sympathisers were to break from the PCI with Castoriadis.⁵⁹ Their new group was named Socialisme ou Barbarie, after the term used by Engles and Rosa Luxemburg and produced a journal from March 1949 with the same title, declaring their break with Trotskyism as it was incapable of finding an 'independent ideological basis for existence'.⁶⁰ Their characterisation of the Soviet Union began to change and it was now referred to as 'bureaucratic capitalism', although there was theoretical effort put into justifying this change.⁶¹

The majority of the group also rejected the Leninist idea of injecting political consciousness from the outside, however they maintained the need for a vanguard party that could lead and co-ordinate the struggles of the working class as well as seizing state power.⁶² This created tensions with a minority lead by Lefort and an exchange of views was held in the journal. This disagreement was exacerbated with the May 1958 crisis and the coup by the French army in Algeria, as in the eyes of Castoriadis these dramatic events expedited the need for a revolutionary party.⁶³ It appears that the exit of Lefort and the 'left wing' of S ou B was engineered by Castoriadis and others at the group's September 1958 conference by making the minority feel that they had no other option than to split.⁶⁴ This group, which included Henri Simon would form a new group called Informations et Liaison Ouvrières.

Although it is hard to see what Solidarity inherited from Castoriadis' advocacy of a vanguard party, which was significantly different from the Trotskyist conception, the influence of S ou B's views of trade unions and approach to the work place are more obvious. S ou B had an orientation towards the working class in factories, the most important of these being the Renault factories in Paris-Billancourt, although S ou B did organise in other places, such as the insurance firm where Henri Simon worked. The main S ou B member at Renault was Daniel Mothe who had previously been aware of the Johnson-Forest Tendency.⁶⁵

S ou B's approach to industry was at least partly inspired by the pamphlet 'The American Worker', published by Johnson-Forest, it was a detailed account of the grind of factory life and workplace resistance as well as weekend and family life in contemporary America, with an accompanying Marxist analysis.⁶⁶ The *Socialisme ou Barbarie* journal followed this example by increasing their reports of the developments in factories and establishing a factor paper.⁶⁷ They were also influential in the establishment of an independent monthly paper for car factory workers at Renault in May 1954.⁶⁸ Soon after, similar newspapers appeared in other firms and other factories outside Paris and in 1958 they began to work together.⁶⁹

It was through this empirical work in and study of factory life that S ou B also moved away from Trotsky's approach to trade unions. Instead of working inside them and aiming to capture their

⁵⁸ Similar to the 'bureaucratic collectivism' of Craipeau, Schachtman *et al.*

⁵⁹ van der Linden, 'Socialisme ou Barbarie'

⁶⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*

⁶¹ van der Linden, *Western Marxism*, p.116

⁶² van der Linden, 'Socialisme ou Barbarie'

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ The Johnson-Forest tendency refers to the Marxist theorists C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya who used the pseudonyms J.R. Johnson and Freddie Forest respectively. They were pioneers of a Trotskyist variant of the state capitalist theory of the USSR whilst in America. This led them to collaborate with Castoriadis very much during their earlier years. However, although Johnson-Forest would break with Trotskyism, they became advocates of 'Marxist-Humanism' unlike Castoriadis who would break from Marxism completely.

⁶⁶ P. Romano and R. Stone, 'The American Worker', <http://libcom.org/history/american-worker-paul-romano-ria-stone> (Accessed 02/04/2011)

⁶⁷ van der Linden, 'Socialisme ou Barbarie'

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

leadership to turn them into revolutionary organisations, many in *S ou B* came to the idea that it was necessary to work outside them and set up new organisations, Castoriadis himself would come to see trade unions as 'cops of the system' by 1959.⁷⁰

Therefore, when considering Solidarity one should see it as a reaction against the Trotskyism of Gerry Healy. And that in search for a critique of Trotskyism it's members turned to Castoriadis for a sense of theoretical grounding. The politics of Castoriadis himself should be seen as an attempt to overcome the most mechanical and deterministic aspects of Trotskyism. The politics of *S ou B* would slaughter some sacred cows of Trotskyism and these ideas would be taken up by Solidarity as their own.

Chapter 3: Early years and organisational teething problems

The aim of this chapter is to look at and analyse some of the politics of Solidarity and attempt to present their originality in the context of their contemporaries. The chapter will also shed light on the activities of Solidarity outside of London, which today are unknown to those who did not participate in them. Finally, this chapter will look at the results of Solidarity trying to transcend the ordinary model for the organisation of revolutionaries and their attempts to move from an informal grouping to a political organisation with a formal structure.

Discussions between the Pallis-Pennington and Weller-Maycock groupings moved quickly and by August 1960 a group of between 12 and 15 people, including; Pallis, his wife, Pennington, Weller, Maycock, Nick Ralph, Sylvia Bishop and Eric Morse were in negotiations with a view to produce a common platform.⁷¹ Largely written by Pallis, it was released as a leaflet in October 1960 and served as an early basis of agreement for the small collective.⁷² Introduced as an 'outline [of] certain ideas which might form a basis for a regroupment of revolutionary socialists', it was a summarised version of an article from the first issue of *S ou B* and according to Weller, it was written with the aim of stripping away all the jargon and clichés that accompanied typical socialist articles in an attempt to communicate their message more clearly.⁷³

As John Quail has written, this leaflet is significant as it challenges the assumptions of the Leninist left 'on its own ground', still using the language of Marxism.⁷⁴ It repeats Marx's own belief that 'the emancipation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves' and stands vigorously opposed to the Leninist ideas concerning the relationship between political organisations and the working class.⁷⁵ The leaflet marks its opposition to the perceived Leninist attitude of seeing the working class as levers to be turned or troops to be ordered on the battleground of revolution by declaring that 'the proletarian movement is the *self-conscious, independent* movement of the immense

⁷⁰^q*Ibid.*

⁷¹^qQuail, *Genesis*, p.10

⁷²^q*Ibid.*

⁷³^qQuoted in *Ibid*, p.16

⁷⁴^q*Ibid*, p.17

⁷⁵^qQuoted in H. Draper, 'The Principle of Self-Emancipation in Marx and Engels', <http://www.marxists.org/archive/draper/1971/xx/emancipation.html> (Accessed 04/04/2011)

majority, in the interest of the immense majority' [original emphasis].⁷⁶ And rejecting the Leninist vanguard party, because the 'historical task' of the working class cannot be entrusted to anyone else, 'no "saviours from on high" will free it.'⁷⁷ Instead, the duty of the revolutionary organisation is to submit itself to the working class 'as an instrument of struggle', it should:

... assist workers in dispute [...] generalize [sic] the working class experience, provide a framework for linking up autonomous organs of working class struggle and constantly stress the ideas and revolutionary potentialities of *independent mass action*.⁷⁸ [original emphasis]

Moreover, the structure of revolutionary socialist organisations should not be rigid and tightly controlled as in the Leninist tradition:

The structure of the organization [sic] should reflect the highest achievements of working class struggle (i.e. workers' councils) rather than imitate capitalist typed of orgaization [sic]. It should anticipate the socialist future of society rather than mirror its capitalist past. In practice this means:

That *local organs have the fullest autonomy*, in relation to their own activities, that in keeping with the general purpose and outlook of the organization [sic];

That *direct democracy* (i.e. the collective decision of all those concerned) is resorted to wherever materially possible;

That all central bodies having power of decision involving other should be constituted by *delegated*, these being *elected* by those they represent and *revocable* by them, *at any time*.⁷⁹ [original emphasis]

In addition, the leaflet claims to have proved Lenin wrong on the matter of 'trade union consciousness', which he thought the working class could not move beyond by itself, by citing the Paris Commune, Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the Spanish Revolution of 1936 and the Hungarian revolt of 1956 as evidence.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the statement seems to hint that the working class may develop a socialist consciousness spontaneously, as 'by its everyday struggle in capitalist society, the working class develops a consciousness which has an essentially socialist content.'⁸¹ The 'traditional working class organizations [sic]', i.e. the social democratic and Communist parties are damned as no longer expressing the interests of the working class, as are the trade unions.⁸² Whilst recognising that the working class formed trade unions 'to fight for both its immediate and long-term interests', in the epoch of modern capitalism they had 'degenerated and now express non-proletarian social interests', implying that it is necessary to work outside them.⁸³ Following the tradition of Castoriadis and S ou B the statement is at pains to emphasise that nationalisation and a planned economy do not equate to socialism. Indeed, 'if the workers do not themselves manage society, "nationalization" [sic] and "planning" can become ruthless instruments of exploitation.'⁸⁴ Socialism is counter posed as meaning 'workers' management' of both the economy and society, with the working class exerting its rule through factory committees and workers' councils.⁸⁵

With this statement distributed, the early days of the group were productive. In the spirit of their

76^q Socialism Reaffirmed Leaflet, October 1960' in Goodway, *For Workers' Power*, p.17

77^q *Ibid.*

78^q *Ibid.*, p.19

79^q *Ibid.*

80^q V. Lenin, 'The Spontaneity of the Masses and the Consciousness of the Social-Democrats', <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/ii.htm> (Accessed 04/04/2011); Goodway, *For Workers' Power*, p.18

81^q *Ibid.*

82^q *Ibid.*, p.17

83^q *Ibid.*, p.18

84^q *Ibid.*, p.19

85^q *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19

reaction against the Leninist form of organisation Socialism Reaffirmed had no constitution or formal membership, as this was a small group of likeminded people with a similar back-story. This was no problem in the early days and much could be produced with little or no arguments along the way. A journal called *Agitator: For Workers' Power* was produced from November 1960 and appeared monthly for at least the first five issues.⁸⁶ The production of their early popular pamphlets was prolific also, with three produced in five months.⁸⁷ The first of these, *Renault Workers Fight Sackings*, was written by a group of French metal workers from motor factories in Paris and Le Mans.⁸⁸ Its original print run of 500 copies quickly ran out, 'particularly encouraging' for Socialism Reaffirmed was that 53 of these were sold at a North London Amalgamated Engineering Union shop stewards' quarterly meeting, 150 were ordered by the Fords Shop Stewards Committee and orders were also made from the Renault works in Acton, London and several Amalgamated Engineering Union branches.⁸⁹ Also, the second of these, Pallis' eyewitness account of the Belgian General Strike, soon sold over 1000 copies.⁹⁰

Solidarity would become very involved with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (hereafter CND), particularly with Committee of 100.⁹¹ The attraction for Solidarity was the emphasis on direct action, which could be seen as a revival of the older syndicalist tradition and the potential for an internationalist outlook for the campaign. Solidarity stressed the need to be against all nuclear weapons, not just those in Britain. This was in opposition to the Stalinist and Trotskyists who refused to come out against the 'workers' bomb' of the Soviet Union and were ridiculed for this by Solidarity forthwith. Solidarity's most high profile achievement in this period was the distribution in the streets of Moscow of an article penned by Ken Weller headed 'Against All Bombs' in July 1962.⁹² This would be described by *The Guardian* as 'the most direct challenge to official Soviet policies and ideas to have been presented to the Soviet man in the street since freedom of speech died under Stalin.'⁹³ Solidarity would criticise the pacifist nature of the anti-nuclear movement whilst attempting to connect the struggles of industrial militants and those opposed to the bomb. However, Solidarity still attracted a significant amount of 'anarcho-pacifists' in its early days.⁹⁴

Although the London based Solidarity group would quickly flourish, the many seeds of potential Solidarity groups outside of London failed to sprout. An early provincial group was established in Reading by a young activist called Howard Jackson, who had encountered Solidarity after buying Ken Weller's pamphlet *The BLSP Dispute – the Story of the Strike* at an early 1962 CND demo in London.⁹⁵ Jackson was attracted to Solidarity after he had 'become disillusioned with traditional Left politics', he had developed a taste for direct action through his position as convenor for Reading Committee of 100 and therefore Solidarity's support for 'people acting for themselves' was appealing.⁹⁶ After a number of visits to London, 'an informal group of six to eight Solidarity sympathisers in Reading developed'.⁹⁷ Nothing much more was to come of this until Solidarity founding member, Eric Morse, moved to Reading and *Solidarity* Vol. 2, No. 8 informed its readers that it 'hoped [...] to see the formation of a

⁸⁶ 'About Ourselves', *Agitator: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (April 1961), p.18

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ 'Letter to Readers', *Agitator: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Feb 1961), p.16

⁹⁰ Brinton, 'The Belgian General Strike: Diary, December 28-31, 1960' in Goodway, *For Workers' Power*, pp. 21-40

⁹¹ The Committee of 100 was formed in Autumn 1960 by members of the CND who were dissatisfied its legal methods and constitutional approach. Bertrand Russell resigned as President of the CND in order to form this more militant group.

⁹² K. Weller, 'Against All Bombs' in Widgery, *The Left in Britain*, pp. 122-123

⁹³ Quoted in C. Pallis, 'Solidarity Forever?' By J. Sullivan and T. Hillier',

<http://www.whatnextjournal.co.uk/Pages/sectariana/SFReply.html> (Accessed 17/03/2011)

⁹⁴ J. Sullivan and T. Hillier, 'Solidarity Forever?',

<http://www.whatnextjournal.co.uk/Pages/sectariana/Solidarity.html> (Accessed 04/04/2011)

⁹⁵ Quail, *Solidarity – Organising for the revolution and an organisation for revolutionaries* (Unpublished), p.4

⁹⁶ Quoted in *Ibid*, pp. 3-4

⁹⁷ Quoted in *Ibid*, p.4

number of new Solidarity groups: Reading, Ilford, Scotland and Merseyside' in the near future.⁹⁸ As well as selling the London publication, this group published its own leaflets and at least two pamphlets of their own, both on the subject of Civil Defence.⁹⁹ Unfortunately, the group seems to have revolved around Jackson, although the group was described as 'flourishing' by May 1963 and participated in the banned demonstration in Trafalgar Square against the visit of Queen Federica of Greece in July of that year.¹⁰⁰ They also organised a demonstration against the Home Secretary, which managed to be so disruptive that when he spoke in Reading the meeting was broken up, but the group became 'informal' again by the end of the year when Jackson had to devote more time to his family and finally collapsed when he left the area in 1969. It is typical for small groups to revolve around key individuals. That is what is so unfortunate about this case, Solidarity hoped to transcend traditional problems of political organisation but in many ways they had not. The lack of a formal structure to the group compounded this problem, as without Howard Jackson the other members of Reading Solidarity felt isolated and unable to carry out political activity without him.

This experience seems to be typical of autonomous Solidarity groups and supporters outside of London, especially in the earliest years. We can know little about them apart from the snippets of information that can be gleaned from *Solidarity* back issues. The first mention of an autonomous Solidarity group outside of London is in September 1962, when a group was set up in the Dartford area of Kent, John Quail suspects that Andy Anderson, who split members away from the SLL in the area, may have formed this.¹⁰¹ They reprinted Victor Serge's *Kronstadt 1921* but do not appear again in the London magazine after that.¹⁰² *Solidarity* Vol. 2, No. 8 reported groups on the horizon in Ilford [...] and Merseyside as well as 'supporters' groups' in Gravesend and Exeter, although nothing is heard of these groups afterwards.¹⁰³ In March 1964 the formation of new groups is reported in Durham and Manchester. The grouping in Durham appears to have emerged out of a group of ex-Trotskyists calling themselves 'Icepick', Ken Weller addressed a meeting there, but both of these groups seemed to have been transitory.¹⁰⁴ In mid-1963 the following passage appears in *Solidarity*, 'We have just been notified of the formation of another autonomous Solidarity group, in Glasgow. They have just published their first leaflet entitled *Mass Action or Mass Graves*.'¹⁰⁵ This is curious because it demonstrates the ease in which people were able to enter 'the Solidarity movement', informing the founders in London when there had possibly been no contact between them before hand. A leaflet was issued stating their objectives, emphasising 'action':

The object of the group is to help create working class consciousness and solidarity, by propaganda and **struggle**, and create sympathy for strikes and other working class action among the public, who are too easily turned against their fellow workers by the vicious propaganda of the yellow press.¹⁰⁶ [original emphasis]

As well as issuing the standard Solidarity declaration that the group did not wish to 'lead' struggles for 'factional ends', the statement appeared to be optimistic about its potential and the value it would have for workers, especially those taking unofficial action.¹⁰⁷ Many of the Solidarity members in Scotland had been involved in Young CND and had been influenced by someone with a background in the Committee of 100 called Ian Sutherland, this explains their emphasis on producing materials on the peace movement in their early years.¹⁰⁸ One ex-member, who had been in both the Young CND and the

98^{ibid}; 'About Ourselves', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 2, No. 8 (Feb 1963), p.23

99^{ibid}; 'About Ourselves', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 2, No. 11 (Summer 1963), p.6

100^{ibid}; Quail, *Solidarity*, p.5

101^{ibid}, p.8

102^{ibid}; 'About Ourselves', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 3, No. 7 (Feb 1965), p.5

103^{ibid}; 'About Ourselves', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 2, No. 8 (Feb 1963), p.23

104^{ibid}; Quail, *Solidarity*, pp. 7-8

105^{ibid}; 'About Ourselves', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power* Vol. 2, No. 11 (Summer 1963), p.6

106^{ibid}; 'About Ourselves', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 3, No. 7 (Feb 1965), p.6

107^{ibid}.

108^{ibid}; Respondent E, interviewed by author via email on 9 April 2011. Copies of interview held by author

Revolutionary Socialist Students' Federation, recounted that the main attraction of Solidarity was that the only other options were the YCL and the SLL.¹⁰⁹ The Glasgow group produced at least three issues of their own paper; the first issue 'appeared three weeks' before the publication of *Solidarity* Vol. 3, No. 7 of February 2 1965 and a third was produced by May 1965, as well as 'several pamphlets dealing with Glasgow Housing, Glasgow Underground, and the problems of architects.'¹¹⁰ A national paper was produced from October 1965, called *Solidarity: Scotland* and became their main publication, lasting for over two volumes, whilst local journals focused more on local factory struggles.¹¹¹ A group was formed in Aberdeen around 1968, by ex-members of Young CND, as well as producing a journal they also produced a bulletin called *The Aberdeen Paperworker* aimed at the local paper mill.¹¹² The Aberdeen group contained a significant amount of future members of the Communist Workers Organisation, this was perhaps foreshadowed by their interest in the German revolution and articles on the left wing of the Communist Party of Germany.¹¹³ Ian R Mitchell, now a successful author on the subject of mountaineering was a member of Solidarity (Aberdeen) and penned a pamphlet on the Communist Party of Germany.¹¹⁴ *Solidarity: Scotland* appeared until at least 1968, at least one other pamphlet was produced, again on the peace movement, entitled 'A Way Ahead: For A New Peace Movement'.¹¹⁵ As of July 1967 there was no formal membership structure for Solidarity members in Scotland.¹¹⁶ Solidarity Glasgow would continue to be active until May 1973, when some of their number would sign an open letter citing problems with the political activity of Solidarity.¹¹⁷ In the late 60s there was evidently still Socialism Reaffirmed members in the North of England, as they were reportedly taking part in the 'Northern Libertarian Alliance'.¹¹⁸ A meeting of around 20 people was held in Manchester at the beginning of June 1966, which planned to produce a paper 'to report and analyze [sic] industrial struggles in the North West'.¹¹⁹ A paper called *Solidarity (North West)* did appear a year later, at the earliest, and ran for at least 3 issues. It seems *Solidarity (North West)* was maintained by two residents of Salford called Janet Harris and Ian Smith, they produced at least two pamphlets as well, the second of which was written by building and construction workers and appeared in February 1970.¹²⁰

Although Socialism Reaffirmed's London publication had originally appeared monthly, by the end of 1962 it was mostly bi-monthly, at best, and appeals were often made for supporters of the group to take out a subscription or help contribute articles. By 1963 the circulation of the paper had reached just over 1000, the publication of pamphlets remained rapid and the group's first paper back was produced, *Hungary '56* by Andy Anderson. However, the growth of the London group and the failure to maintain a stable autonomous group outside of the capital must have given reason to suspect that business could not continue as usual.¹²¹ By February 1965 plans had been laid to create a 'formal' organisation in the London area, these were revealed in April.¹²² Following 'a series of fortnightly meetings', the name of the "Socialism Reaffirmed Group" (which was unwieldy) was 'officially'

109^{ibid}.

110^{ibid} 'About Ourselves', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 3, No. 7 (Feb 1965), p.6; 'The New 'Glasgow Solidarity'', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 3, No. 9 (May 1965), p.27

111^{ibid} *Solidarity: Scotland* (October 1965); Respondent E

112^{ibid} Respondent E

113^{ibid} 'Germany: 1919', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power (Aberdeen)*, Vol. 1, No. 2; R. M 'K.A.P.D. and the German Revolution', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power (Aberdeen)*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 8-10

114^{ibid} R. M, 'Spartakism to National Bolshevism - the KPD 1918-24',

<http://libcom.org/history/spartakism-national-bolshevism-kpd-1918-24-solidarity> (Accessed 09/04/2011)

115^{ibid} 'About Ourselves', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (August 1966), pp. 23-24

116^{ibid} 'Glasgow Meeting', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 4, No. 8 (July 1967), p.14

117^{ibid} Unpublished documents held privately by Mike Ballard, 'Now we see it, Now we don't' (May 1973), pp. 1-3

118^{ibid} 'About Ourselves', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 3, No. 7 (Feb 1965), p.7

119^{ibid} 'About Ourselves', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (August 1966), p.24

120^{ibid} *Building Workers Pay Deal* (Salford: Solidarity (North West), 1970), pp.11

121^{ibid} 'About Ourselves', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 2, No. 9 (Spring 1963), p.27; A. Anderson, 'Hungary '56', <http://libcom.org/library/hungary-56-andy-anderson> (Accessed 06/04/2011)

122^{ibid} 'About Ourselves', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 3, No. 7 (Feb 1965), p.7

changed to 'the London Solidarity Group' and 'decisions were taken to create a more formal organization [sic].'¹²³ It was admitted that most of the group's work had fallen on a 'small group who have done the lion's share', to remedy this, 'an editorial group of 3 was elected, as well as international and home correspondence secretaries. Different comrades were put in charge of Accounts, Subscriptions, the Treasury and several other "functional" jobs.'¹²⁴ Further:

We will continue to have regular **Solidarity** working meetings at which, such things as correspondence, publications, finance and circulation, as well as our industrial work will be discussed. We hope to integrate many more people into our activities.

[...] We have also agreed to set up a Solidarity Group fund, This will be used for the political and industrial work of the Solidarity group. So far this money has been raised by collections at our working meetings but we have now taken the decision to encourage regular contributions from supporters, so that we can begin to budget ahead. This money will be used for public meetings, leaflets, sending speakers and generally helping other **Solidarity** groups, establishing international links and for our industrial work.¹²⁵ [original emphasis]

The article also suggests a conscious move away from the 'anti-bomb' movement, labelling industrial work 'first priority'.¹²⁶ Finally, as part of this move towards more formal organisation, *Solidarity* was no longer produced on a 'Roneo' duplicating machine but on an offset lithographic printing press, resulting in higher quality of production and also allowing for the inclusion of photographs.

The move away from the peace movement was permanent, as articles on the CND and Committee of 100 ceased to be published, however the status of *Solidarity: For Workers' Power* as a printed paper was brief, reverting back to duplicated format by Spring 1967. The same could be said of the move towards a formal membership that evidently failed, it was therefore necessary to issue further statements on organisational structures. This came in the form of another reflective piece, 'Six Hard Years' of March 1967, co-authored by Pallis and John Sullivan. Those labelled by Sullivan as 'anarcho-pacifists' had remained in the group, despite the lack of coverage in *Solidarity* of the peace movement, they attempted to have the sub-heading 'For Workers' Power' removed from the paper but failed as a small majority of the group opposed this.¹²⁷ It seems the pacifists began to leave after an article undersigned by three other members of *Solidarity* defended 'workers courts' inside factories that were distributing 'proletarian justice' to scabs.¹²⁸ Because the formal membership structure had failed to materialise those that disagreed with this position simply 'took their distance from the group', without any formal statement or act of resignation being made.¹²⁹ If any were in doubt of *Solidarity*'s position on both anarchism and pacifism, this was confirmed when Vol. 4, No. 4 (Nov 1966) of the magazine carried articles, both signed by Sullivan, criticising part of the Spanish CNT for co-operating with the Spanish fascist government and another attacking the peace movement as 'a semi-religious cult with its own rituals, customs and uniform'. The article concluded with the following paragraph:

... It is time for socialists to abandon this stinking corpse before the Christians and the pseudo-anarchists are joined by spiritualists, phrenologists, and all the sad company of utopians. It may be difficult for many socialist to sever their connection with the pacifist movement – after all many of them came from it. But continued association with it is now not merely time-wasting but deeply compromising.¹³⁰

123^q 'About Ourselves', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power* Vol. 3, No. 8 (April 1965), p.5

124^q *Ibid.*

125^q *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6

126^q *Ibid.*, p.6

127^q Sullivan and Hillier, 'Solidarity Forever?'

128^q i.e. trade unionists physically assaulting workers who dared to cross a picket line.

129^q *Ibid.*

130^q Sullivan, 'Vietnam: Socialism or Pacifism', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Nov 1966), p.24

The article 'Six Hard Years' 'announce[d] the intention of leaving the peace milieu', although in retrospect Sullivan thought this article 'highly inadequate in that it praise[d] the peace movement with faint damns'.¹³¹ The article also admitted that the influence of Solidarity had not grown and that the only autonomous group to survive outside of London was in Scotland. This was put down to the non sectarian nature of Solidarity who had 'not sought to recruit or proselytise', had 'subordinated' themselves to struggles and had refused to put loyalty to an organisation before loyalty to 'their principles or to their class'.¹³² A meeting was advertised, appealing for assistance from *Solidarity* readers, where it was intended to once again institute formal membership.¹³³ This brought forth a number of letters and 'several serious offers of help' as well as an attendance of 23 to the aforementioned meeting, where after Ken Weller had reviewed the six year history of Solidarity a new text was presented as 'the provisional political basis of a more formal Solidarity regroupment'.¹³⁴ This text, 'As We See It', was not politically different to 'Socialism Reaffirmed' in any significant way.¹³⁵ Steps were then taken 'to create a real and substantial Solidarity group', with two further meetings agreeing that formal members of Solidarity must be in 'general agreement with the ideas outlined in our previous publications, with the statement 'As we see it', and with such further ideas as the group may collectively develop in the future.'¹³⁶ Further, they must agree to take part in practical activity to spread the ideas of Solidarity and pay a subscription. New Solidarity members were to be admitted by a simple majority and 'isolated individuals' were free to join Solidarity (London) but the long-term aim was to develop autonomous groups throughout the country.¹³⁷

Following these decisions, 35 Solidarity members met in Glasgow to help facilitate communications between the two existing autonomous groups and a conference was held in Birmingham on the weekend of 30 March to clarify ideas and discuss how best to establish Solidarity on a national scale.¹³⁸ This attracted 40 'readers and supporters (from London, Scotland, Wales, Leeds, Birmingham, Luton and Oxford)' and an 'Industrial Committee' was set up to co-ordinate work, mainly in the motor and construction industries.¹³⁹ Interestingly a proposal was made to seek closer relations with the International Socialism group, but was soundly defeated, it can be presumed that this motion was moved by Sullivan and Hillier.¹⁴⁰

In conclusion, the relatively uniqueness of Solidarity and their enthusiasm for the peace movement lead to some early growth. However, Solidarity was only able to maintain one stable group outside of London. This problem was recognised with one attempt to address the problem not getting off the ground. A second attempt to create a formal structure for Solidarity was attempted with more enthusiasm. Unfortunately, as shows in the next chapter, these organisational plans did not amount to much in reality.

131^qSullivan and Hillier, 'Solidarity Forever?'

132^qQuoted in Quail, *Solidarity*, p.9

133^q*Ibid.*

134^q*Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 4, No. 6 (April 1967), p.12; 'Structure and Function', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 4, No. 7 (May 1967), p.15

135^qBrinton, 'As We See It' in Goodway, *For Workers' Power*, pp. 153-154

136^q*Ibid.*

137^q*Ibid.*

138^q'Glasgow Meeting', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 4, No. 8 (July 1967), pp. 13-14

139^q'Solidarity Conference Report', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (May 1968), p.14

140^q*Ibid.*, p.15

Chapter 4: The 'marxist faction'

This chapter aims to look at the continued failure to implement organisational decisions made by the group. It will also look at the small amount of growth achieved by the group in the early 1970s and the 'marxist faction' who operated within the group.

Perhaps the most useful document relating to Solidarity is Sullivan and Hillier's 'Solidarity Forever?' Written in 1969 by two ex-members as they left to join the International Socialists, it is the most insightful publically available source regarding Solidarity, in that it attempts to shed light on the internal workings of the group.¹⁴¹ Solidarity is credited as an 'attempt to transcend the usual form of political organization [sic]', but in the final analysis, 'was a group of friends who formed a retinue around the leader, M.B.' a 'group of friends', being noted as an organisation exclusive as any vanguard party, by Solidarity itself.¹⁴² Further described as an 'ambiguous' and 'ideologically fuzzy' group, these features 'prevented it from being torn apart by the doctrinal quarrels which have split Marxist groups.'¹⁴³ This had the result that although Solidarity could become a broad church for political views, 'there was no need to quarrel about abstract matters ... the failure to think or discuss had fatal consequences [and] reflected the suppressed realization [sic] that the group contained incompatible elements.'¹⁴⁴

These 'incompatible elements' refer to the two different strands of origin in Solidarity, the 'anarcho-pacifists', older members who had been involved with the Committee of 100 inside the CND and the 'syndicalists', more interested in industrial issues.

There also appears to have been a poor political culture inside Solidarity, as many of the pamphlets produced by the group were often not discussed amongst the membership, appearing "out of the blue and would be issued without discussion after having been read by one or two people."¹⁴⁵ An ex-member who was part of the London group from August 1971 to September 1972 confirms this state of affairs as 'a classic example of tyranny of structurelessness', recalling that he never participated in a single vote during his time there.¹⁴⁶ By no fault of their own, the group would be dominated by older members who were more knowledgeable or could fall back on a 'party piece'. Joe Jacobs had taken part in the battle of cable street, 'Arnie' had been a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Ken Weller was a founding member and as a shop steward in the motor industry was responsible for most of their popular industrial reports and Pallis was one of the county's leading brain surgeons as well as being a former leading member of the SLL.¹⁴⁷ There would be discussion of current events at weekly

141^qThe International Socialists were the forerunner to the Socialist Workers Party.

142^q'Structure and Function', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 4, No. 7 quoted in Sullivan and Hillier, 'Solidarity Forever?'

143^qSullivan and Hillier, 'Solidarity Forever?'

144^q*Ibid.*

145^q*Ibid.*

146^qRespondent C, interviewed by author on 5 January 2011. Tapes of interview held by author

147^q'Arnie', short for Arnold Feldman, was Joe Jacobs' best friend.

meetings and time was spent deciding what would be written for the next issue of the paper and on the finer points of the publication of 'As We Don't See It' but especially when the reproduction of Paul Cardan's pamphlets was concerned 'Chris would propose and we would agree'.¹⁴⁸ The younger members of the group could not have been well read enough to have challenged Paul Cardan's anti-Marxism or objected to his conclusions. The most negative aspect of this gap in ability is that when translating Paul Cardan's 'Workers Councils and the Economics of A Self-Managed Society', Pallis would tone down some of the least communist aspects of the pamphlet, as revealed by Adam Buick of the SPGB.¹⁴⁹

Attempts to change this mode of operation were made, as shown in chapter 4. Hillier had a hand in drawing up a 'draft structures' document, with a final draft circulated amongst the national membership as the 'constitution of the London Area Members' on 29 November.¹⁵⁰ But in the end, according to Sullivan and Hillier, this formal structure was 'largely inoperative' and 'ornamental' with a lack of desire to implement it shown by the 'leader'.¹⁵¹ Some members 'felt morally bound to decline membership' and those seven described as syndicalists by John Sullivan announced that they would be forming a new group on 31 January.¹⁵² As several of this number happened to live in South London it was announced by Pallis that this was really a geographical division of labour and welcomed by himself and Aki Orr as, 'a positive development of the groups politics, and a sign of the groups maturity.' £20 was even placed at the new group's disposal, in effect the group had split over political differences and the importance of this played down.¹⁵³ The seriousness of this split can only truly be understood once one learns that this new group eventually became 'hostile' to the original Solidarity group, it truly was a split, as suffered by traditional left wing organisations, only in Solidarity's case it had not been acknowledged as such and no efforts were made to seek lessons from the experience.¹⁵⁴

This is the critique of two people in a single instance and it would be unfair to generalise as the result of a single account. However, the continued complaints over Solidarity's organisation, detailed below, would suggest that Sullivan and Hillier's criticisms were accurate.

Furthermore, in Pallis' reply to 'Solidarity Forever?', although he deals thoroughly with criticisms made of Solidarity's role in the occupation of the Greek Embassy in response to the Colonel's coup. He ignores the critiques of organisation, effectively side stepping the question.¹⁵⁵

* * * *

A small period of growth would occur for Solidarity out of the protests around the Industrial Relations Act of 1971.¹⁵⁶ One of these new recruits, 'Frank Smith' had been a member of the International Socialists until he left to join Solidarity in 1971. When asked about the attraction of Solidarity, he recalled that he began to feel that the positions of the International Socialists were no longer revolutionary, he felt he was used as 'demo fodder' who had to sell the paper, canvass for Labour MPs and put pressure on union officials, he began to believe this was not the work of revolutionaries, thinking 'is it correct to call on the TUC for a general strike when it was obvious that the trade unions were sabotaging the movement?'¹⁵⁷ At this time Ken Weller's pamphlet 'G.M.W.U. Scab Union' was influential and is recounted as being an attraction to the group, setting out a vision that it was not just the undemocratic nature of trade unions that were the problem but the trade union

148^{ibid.}

149^{A. Buick, 'Solidarity, the Market and Marx',}

http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/glasgow/Solidarity_Market_Marx.html (Accessed 15/03/2011)

150^{Solidarity minute book held privately by John Quail, 'Minutes of the Solidarity Group meeting, Friday 19th November 1968, at WRI, 3 Caledonian Rd, N1.'}

151^{Sullivan and Hillier, 'Solidarity Forever?'}

152^{Solidarity minute book held privately by John Quail, 'Minutes for the 'Solidarity' Meeting dated Friday 31st. January, and held at W.R.I.'}

153^{ibid.}

154^{Respondent F, interviewed by author on 21 march 2011. Tapes of interview held by author}

155^{Pallis, 'Solidarity Forever?'}

156^{Respondent C}

157^{Respondent A, interviewed by author on 15 January 2011. Tapes of interview held by author}

bureaucracy itself.¹⁵⁸ It would be untrue to say that Solidarity were unique in this regard, the Liverpool based 'Big Flame' group, formed in 1970 and which had initially been based around shop stewards would come to a position close to left communism, that shop stewards were becoming integrated into the union hierarchy and management, with Solidarity still defending the steward position.¹⁵⁹ Chris Pallis' book 'The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control' was also seen as important at the time, in that it seemed to provide a socialist alternative to the International Socialists' demand for nationalisation under workers control.¹⁶⁰

This demonstrates how Solidarity had made a real break with the traditional left, however Solidarity would demonstrate itself to be in an *ambiguous* position as it was effectively stuck in the middle of traditional leftism and the school of thought known as left communism.

While the International Socialists, IMG and even Big Flame were calling for victory to the IRA, Solidarity featured many articles refusing to support them.¹⁶¹ Members of Solidarity from Aberdeen wrote a 1972 article entitled 'Theses On Northern Ireland', with their main conclusions endorsed by the London Solidarity group.¹⁶² This document gave no support to the IRA and condemned the 'recruit-hungry Bolsheviks – who encourage the Nationalist backwardness of both sides' and stating that 'BOTH sides seek a military solution: both sides seek to impose their will on a minority.'¹⁶³ As well as pointing out that 'Historically, the practice of supporting "progressive" forces has led to socialists being implicated in the establishment of the most ferociously reactionary regimes.'¹⁶⁴ However other articles in the journal would suggest that it was merely the militarism of the IRA that Solidarity opposed, not national liberation in general, with a May 1971 article advocating support for the 'People's Democracy' group, who sought a united 'socialist' Ireland, describing them as the 'most conscious revolutionaries in Northern Ireland', 'on the side of ... libertarian socialism' and that they were the 'only group where libertarian socialists can operate.'¹⁶⁵ This ambiguity is best exemplified by an article entitled 'Whose Right To Self Determination?' written by Aki Orr that consistently argues against the right of nations to self-determination but then concludes by saying that, 'Revolutionaries might decide, **as a matter of political tactics**, to support a struggle for self-determination.'¹⁶⁶ 'Frank Smith' would join Solidarity along with 'Juan McIver'.¹⁶⁷ However, these two young Marxists would cause quite a stir within Solidarity. With the use of internal documents we can have an insight into the debates held inside Solidarity and appreciate the important position that Solidarity would hold for the development of the communist left in Britain.

Juan McIver, originally hailing from Chile had come across the publications *Internationalism* and *Revolution Internationale*, produced in America and France respectively and began to criticise the politics of Castoriadis and of Solidarity from a Marxist but anti-Leninist position. The earliest available internal documents signed by McIver, alongside 'J.I.M.' are in opposition to the publication of a pamphlet concerning education, by Bob Dent, a non-Solidarity member. The argument of the pamphlet is labelled as 'one of individual anarchism' and not contributing to the understanding of the role of education under capitalism.'¹⁶⁸ However, McIver's fight within Solidarity appears to have begun in earnest in January 1973 and centred around the national question, his attacks on Solidarity's stance

158[¶]*Ibid*; Respondent C; M. Fore, *G.M.W.U. Scab Union* (London: Solidarity, 1970), pp. 1-17

159[¶]*Shop Stewards and the Class Struggle: A Big Flame Pamphlet* (Liverpool: Big Flame, 1973), pp. 1-18

160[¶]Respondent A

161[¶]IMG stood for the International Marxist Group who contained figures such as Ken Coates and Tariq Ali.

162[¶]N. Miller and I. Mitchell, 'Theses on Northern Ireland', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 7, No. 1, p.19

163[¶]*Ibid*.

164[¶]*Ibid*, pp. 21-22

165[¶]L. W, 'Occupied Ireland', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 6, No. 9 (May 1971), pp. 24-25

166[¶]A. Orr, 'Whose Right To Self Determination', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 15-18; Orr is a noted Israeli author and political activist.

167[¶]McIver would become responsible for Solidarity's 'mascot' hedgehogs.

168[¶]Unpublished documents held privately by Mike Ballard, J. McIver and J.I.M, 'Critical Remarks on the Dent/Wellings Pamphlet: LSE: A Question of Degree' (13 October 1972)

toward the national question. The starting point for this discussion would be McIver's production of an unsigned leaflet for a Vietnam war demonstration entitled 'Against both blocs! For the working class!' arguing a clear left-communist perspective.¹⁶⁹ This leaflet described the Vietnam War as inter-imperialist and argued against 'identification' with sponsors of the Indochina Solidarity Conference as well as Labourites, Stalinists and Trotskyists as 'All these tendencies advocate critical or uncritical support (spot the difference) for the state capitalist imperialisms.'¹⁷⁰ Although some Solidarity members distributed it, others found the sentiment expressed 'appalling' and 'politically erroneous in equating the plights of the Vietnamese workers and the American workers.'¹⁷¹

McIver's following documents, centred around the publication of Bob Potter's pamphlets on Vietnam further show that although Solidarity had formally broken with the politics of the traditional left, there were still some hangovers, on the national question in particular which on second look would suggest that at least some members of the group had not broken from the traditional left entirely.

These pamphlets, while criticising the National Liberation Front (hereafter NLF), concluded that revolting peasants had to support the Vietcong, that revolutionaries had no option but to join the NLF, as it is impossible to be neutral 'while aircraft are flying over one's home, dropping bombs' and that they should adopt a similar attitude to Tito's partisans.¹⁷² This in fact demonstrates a more consistent application of the Leninist position by Bob Potter than by the Leninists themselves, that of *critical* support for national liberation struggles.

Potter's position was defended by members of the London Solidarity group who still saw the NLF as more progressive than the armed forces of the South.¹⁷³ As McIver pointed out, this was the position of the Vietnamese Trotskyists, who reaped the consequences during the Saigon uprising of 1945, an episode documented by Potter himself, apparently without learning the proper lessons from it.¹⁷⁴ McIver put forward the only options for revolutionaries in Vietnam, either at great risk to follow the example of some communist during the Second World War who agitated a class line amongst factory workers and fraternised with German troops, or as this was near impossible in Vietnam, to simply flee the country all together and find safety.¹⁷⁵ McIver elaborated that:

Leninism is not just a monstrosity of **organisational** forms (the elite 'vanguard' party) but has a **programmatic** approach. Support (even 'critical') for any 'people' in struggle during an inter-imperialist war is capitulation to imperialism. This conclusion cannot be avoided.¹⁷⁶

But as well as dissatisfaction of the politics of the group, McIver also wrote polemics directed at Solidarity's organisational method that would ring true with those offered by Sullivan, Hillier and other ex-members.¹⁷⁷ All the 'means of production (duplicator, files, minutes book, stocks of literature, correspondence)' were the property of Pallis and Weller and an 'informal leadership' had developed.¹⁷⁸ McIver claimed in his documents that many members had protested this but to no avail, a majority vote was taken in the summer of 1972 to let premises in order to spread out the concentration of resources, however this decision was 'met with silent non-cooperation by the older members'. This final point echoes the failure of Solidarity to carry out decisions to make a change in organisational in the past.

169^aUnpublished documents held privately by Mike Ballard, 'Against both blocs! For the working class!'

170^a*Ibid.*

171^aUnpublished documents held privately by Mike Ballard, J.M and J.I.M, 'Some Thoughts on Vietnam and Solidarity' (26 January 1973), pp. 2-3

172^a*Ibid.*, p.3

173^aUnpublished documents held privately by Mike Ballard, J.M and J.I.M, 'Hobson's Choice or A Revolutionary Perspective?' (2 February 1973), p.1

174^a*Ibid.*

175^a*Ibid.*, pp. 1-2

176^aUnpublished documents held privately by Mike Ballard, J.M and J.I.M, 'Some Thoughts on Vietnam and Solidarity', p.2

177^aRespondent C

178^aUnpublished documents held privately by Mike Ballard, J. McIver, 'Organisational Critique', p.2

McIver would make other organisational criticisms that had already previously been made in the Sullivan/Hillier pamphlet and by other individuals. These being Solidarity's lack of practical activity and being primarily a 'publishing house', lack of internal political education and a high turnover in membership '50% decrease in London over 6 months'.¹⁷⁹ McIver also referred to many 'mysterious' splits that have been undocumented, these problems were blamed on a lack of conviction, similar to the 'ideological fuzzyness' bemoaned by Sullivan.

The situation outside of London remained one of autonomy of the worst kind. A group declared to be established in Oxford in the 1970s was later described as 'a phantom'.¹⁸⁰ Members of the group would report back to meetings what they were all doing as individuals outside of the group but the group would have no collective life of its own.¹⁸¹

Although it can be presumed that McIver was planning to split Solidarity by 1973, an outsider would have been completely unaware as to the apparently quite heated discussion that was taking place within the London group. Indeed, before mentioning in the journal that the 'marxist faction' had demonstratively left the group at a conference of the group in April 1973, there is no mention of these quite clear political divisions.¹⁸² This is in fact reminiscent of Trotskyist practice. For example, the large split in the British 'Workers' Power' group of July 2006, which took outsiders by surprise.¹⁸³ Although the author would not wish to suggest that McIver and the 'marxist faction' were 'gagged', they were actually responsible for editing the journal for a time, it is useful to contrast the attitude taken by Solidarity towards political differences when compared to the Marxist publication *Vorwärts*.¹⁸⁴ *Vorwärts* was a lively source of debate, with conflicting views published that held no punches.¹⁸⁵ This practice is one medicine for avoiding the numerous political splits that Solidarity bemoaned, although Solidarity do not seem to have realised this. This is not to say that Solidarity had a dictatorial editorial attitude, one member recalled an article being rejected, although this was surprising.¹⁸⁶ However, Sullivan did note that articles which did not sit well with Pallis would be delayed 'for technical reasons' whereas articles typical of Solidarity would quickly be reproduced.¹⁸⁷

McIver managed to form a small group of sympathisers within Solidarity. As well as gaining support from 'J.I.M' in London, he impressed a comrade in the Solidarity (Oxford) group when invited to speak about the crisis in his home county of Chile, which was front-page news at the time. This member of the Oxford group recounted that when he heard McIver say that revolutionary socialists should give no support to Allende it was a notion he had never heard before and found it hard to understand at first.¹⁸⁸ McIver would proceed to engage in persistent correspondence with other members who had doubts surrounding Castoriadis' critique of Marx, before splitting from the group in April 1973.

McIver's activity would have an effect on the group. Although Solidarity did publish Bob Potter's third pamphlet, McIver seems to have left his mark as an appendix was attached stating disagreement with certain sections of his work and 'Third Worldism or Socialism' which McIver had a hand in penning was also included.¹⁸⁹ Solidarity members in Glasgow would also resign from the group, in May. Judging

¹⁷⁹ Respondent C would often be the only Solidarity member to attend demonstrations and would encounter members of the South London group he had never met before.

¹⁸⁰ Respondent B

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² A. O, 'Political Consequences of A Philosophical Illusion', *Solidarity: For Workers' Power*, Vol. 7, No. 6 (April 1973), pp. 19-20

¹⁸³ M. Fischer, 'Workers Power split', http://www.cpgb.org.uk/article.php?article_id=598 (Accessed 17/03/2011)

¹⁸⁴ Respondent C

¹⁸⁵ R. Dominick, 'Democracy or Socialism? A Case Study of *Vorwärts* in the 1890s', *Central European History*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (December 1977), p.291

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Sullivan and Hillier, 'Solidarity Forever?'

¹⁸⁸ Respondent B, interviewed by author on 15 January 2011. Tapes of interview held by author

¹⁸⁹ B. Potter, *Vietnam: Whose Victory?* (London: Solidarity, 1973), pp. 30-35

by their resignation letter it would appear that the resignation of the 'marxist faction' played a part in their decision to leave, although they had not corresponded with the faction, as they knew 'very little' about their political views.¹⁹⁰

To sum up this chapter; Solidarity was able to achieve another small amount of growth owing to their critique of the trade unions in the period of increased industrial unrest surrounding the Conservative Party's Industrial Relations Bill. Unfortunately, inability to organise effectively hamstrung the group. Solidarity's critique of the left and of Trotskyism would attract 'Juan McIver', however McIver would cause trouble inside the group with his clear ideas and Marxist conviction.

Chapter 5: Interlude – Anti-organisation elements and the expulsion of Joe Jacobs

The purpose of this short chapter is to examine the only instance of someone being expelled from Solidarity, quite an achievement for a 'libertarian' organisation.

Joe Jacobs would become the only member ever to be expelled from the London Solidarity group, in January 1976, a year before his death. He would reproduce his experiences in a pamphlet, 'Why Was I Expelled From Solidarity (London)?'¹⁹¹ However, this expulsion should not be seen as Solidarity's turn towards an ultra-bolshevised form of organisation. Jacobs had become influenced by the ideas of Jacques Camatte, that all political organisations become gangs or 'rackets'.¹⁹² He had also married the daughter of Henri Simon, formerly in S ou B, who held similar views.

Believing that Solidarity was a 'gang' like all other political groups, Jacobs spent two years attempting to disrupt the group from functioning, which he admitted to a meeting of the group himself.¹⁹³ The business meeting that voted to expel Jacobs only had eight people present, four people voted to expel Jacobs, three abstained and Jacobs himself voted against.¹⁹⁴ David Brown came to similar conclusions but would leave the group without causing such disruption. In his resignation letter, as well as claiming that 'all organisations are despotic', he also criticised Solidarity for failing to understand Marx and his labour theory of value.¹⁹⁵

This small chapter is of interest because it reveals another small parallel between Solidarity and S ou B. Henri Simon would reject Castoriadis' hegemony over the *S ou B* journal and would eventually reject all political organisations. It is a strange quirk that his son in law would take a somewhat similar

¹⁹⁰Unpublished documents held privately by Mike Ballard, 'Now we see it, now we don't' (May 1973), p.1

¹⁹¹Unpublished documents held privately by Mike Ballard, J. Jacobs (et al), 'Why was I expelled from Solidarity (London)'

¹⁹²J. Camatte, 'On organization', <http://www.marxists.org/archive/camatte/capcom/on-org.htm> (Accessed 09/04/2011); J. Jacobs, 'The organisation question',

<http://libcom.org/library/organisation-question-joe-jacobs> (Accessed 09/04/2011)

¹⁹³Jacobs, 'Why was I expelled from Solidarity (London)', p.9

¹⁹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵Unpublished documents held privately by Mike Ballard, D. Brown, 'The Illusions of Solidarity' (Feb 1976), pp. 1, 5-9

trajectory. It also warrants consideration that Jacobs took Solidarity's criticisms of political organisations and spontaneity to the *n*th degree and this would lead him to turn against Solidarity itself.

Chapter 6: 'Social Revolution' - The merger, and the beginning of the end

This chapter is going to be devoted to the group Social Revolution (SR). It is going to show how Marxists continued to be associated with Solidarity and how it was the Marxists again who attempted to address the organisational problem in Solidarity. This chapter is going to show that the Social Revolution group did succeed in solving Solidarity's organisational problem but would practically destroy the group in the process.

Not all that long after Solidarity had parted company with one set of Marxists, they were to re-new that association in 1976 by jointly publishing an essay called 'A Contribution to the Critique of Marx' with Social Revolution.

The origins of Social Revolution were in the SPGB (hereafter SPGB), who recall the following:

During the 1960s the Party was enthused by a healthy influx of new recruits initially politicised by the CND marches, Vietnam and the May Events of 1968 and who sought to make a more genuinely revolutionary stand than those of their generation who joined the so-called 'new left'. The boost to Party membership and activity at this time was considerable.¹⁹⁶

The SPGB did, indeed they still do, have a clear conception of socialism and were attractive due to their state capitalist analysis of the Soviet Union.¹⁹⁷ First hand accounts testify to the importance of the state capitalist analysis in Solidarity as well as the SPGB, Tony Cliff's International Socialists would also make great political capital out of their slogan, 'Neither Washington Nor Moscow!'¹⁹⁸ Some of the '68' generation who joined the party wanted to change its direction, in the SPGB's own words:

[they] wanted to change the emphasis of the Party's propaganda efforts towards taking a more positive attitude to industrial struggles, claimants unions and tenants associations but also to women's liberation and squatting.¹⁹⁹

This is confirmed by a source who remembers that this new arrival of younger members became worried that the SPGB was not doing anything to develop its theory and that it had become 'ossified'.²⁰⁰ A group around 12 to 15 of these dissidents formed an unofficial faction around a journal, initially

¹⁹⁶DAP, 'Getting Splinters', <http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/june04/index.html> (Accessed 18/03/2011)

¹⁹⁷Founded in 1904 by former members of the Social Democratic Federation around a set of eight political principles and socialist objectives which have been retained to this day. The SPGB opposed the First World War on grounds of class and in 1918 described Russia as "State Capitalist". The Party has no leadership. For the SPGB, Socialism is only possible through parliamentary action by a Socialist majority.

¹⁹⁸Respondent D, interviewed by author on 16 November 2010. Tapes of interview held by author

¹⁹⁹DAP, 'Getting Splinters'

²⁰⁰Respondent D

called *Critical Theory and Revolutionary Practice*, produced in time for a 1972 conference.²⁰¹ Four more issues of this journal were produced as a dissident publication, focusing on workplace and women's struggles, the later of which the SPGB found particularly reformist. The fifth issue, labelled *Libertarian Communism* declared that parliamentary elections were a waste of time and that workers' councils were the way in which the working class was historically organised, unsurprisingly they were expelled for contradicting party policy in October 1974. *Libertarian Communism* was continued as a discussion journal and *Social Revolution* created as an agitational paper, throughout this time they were heavily influenced by early publications of the 'marxist faction' that had erupted from Solidarity at around the same time as their own expulsion from the SPGB.²⁰²

After spending some time as a political organisation in its own right, it was not long before members of Social Revolution realised that they shared various aspects of their political beliefs with Solidarity and managed to jointly publish John Crump's 'A Contribution to the Critique of Marx'.²⁰³ Crump had essentially written a Marxist critique of Marx and believed that the followers of Marx should not hang on his every word and also set out an understanding of a Marx trapped between his desires to be a communist and to be a revolutionary, in an era when communism was not a material possibility. Crump thought this explained the state capitalist aspects of Marx's writings and that communists should hold to the communists aspects of Marx whilst rejecting the rest.

Solidarity and SR did hold many beliefs in common. These being a state capitalist analysis of the USSR, a critique of the traditional approach to trade unions and an emphasis on the need for workers' councils and working class autonomy. They also organised using a system of autonomous local groups.

However there were also differences. The first of these was in size. SR was a much younger and smaller group than Solidarity, this lead some SR members to have some fear of working in unfamiliar surroundings and becoming 'swamped'.²⁰⁴ The second was organisation. SR was aware of the organisational sufferings of Solidarity and their domination by Chris Pallis and Ken Weller, joint seminars between the two groups sometimes were dominated by the 'tyranny of structurelessness' and the Manchester group of Solidarity had recently dissolved itself in order to force the national group to produce a national magazine.²⁰⁵

The main point of contention would be over Castoriadis. After breaking with Trotskyism, Castoriadis would break with Marxism completely, resulting in a significant loss of members from S ou B. Although Castoriadis had held a critique of Marx's theory of history since the formative years of S ou B, he eventually came to see Marxism as inherently wrong and responsible for Leninism, Trotskyism, Stalinism and Maoism.²⁰⁶ As Solidarity did not have an independent political understanding of their own this became their de facto position. The two other problems of agreement were on the content of capitalism and socialism itself. In Castoriadis' large work 'Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society' he had equated socialism with equal wages.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, Castoriadis no longer saw the problem confronting the world as capitalism, but as bureaucracy. This was because capitalism had solved its crises and the real crisis now was the contradiction between 'order-givers

201^qAdam Buick, General Secretary of the party from 1993 – 1995 and second most prolific writer for *Socialist Standard* of all time was an initial contributor to this journal.

202^qRespondent D

203^qJ. Crump, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Marx', <http://libcom.org/library/a-contribution-to-the-critique-of-marx-solidarity-group> (Accessed 19/03/2010)

204^qUnpublished documents held privately by Mike Ballard, S. Stefan, 'In Solidarity for Social Revolution?' (15 April 1977), p.4

205^qStefan, 'In Solidarity for Social Revolution?', p.5; Jacobs, 'What was I expelled from Solidarity (London), p.1; Stefan, 'In Solidarity for Social Revolution?', p.5; This national magazine *Solidarity: For Self-Management* was short lived and not a success, only selling a few hundred copies of each issue.

206^qP. Cardan, *The Fate of Marxism* (London: Solidarity, undated)

207^qC. Castoriadis, 'Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society', <http://www.lust-for-life.org/Lust-For-Life/WorkersCouncilsAndEconomics/WorkersCouncilsAndEconomics.htm> (Accessed 10/04/2011)

and order-takers'.²⁰⁸ This may seem an odd claim in 2011 but it needs to be understood in the context of the lost post-war boom.

Solidarity and SR held a series of joint seminars with a view to a fusion that lasted two years. Hopes were high that the fusion would provide more 'impetus for the libertarian movement.' and that it would lead to a trend towards similar unity initiatives and held avoid the duplication of efforts.²⁰⁹ However, in reality Solidarity was in decline, with what Chris Pallis called its glory years behind it. Similarly if SR did not merge with Solidarity then plans were to cease publication of *Social Revolution*.²¹⁰

Eventually the merger went through at the end of 1977, all but one of SR's members voted to merge whilst Solidarity's members were more sceptical.²¹¹ Pallis was an enthusiastic voice for the merger in the Solidarity camp.²¹²

Changes were made to 'As We See It', although not all of the changes were made that SR hoped to see. Organisational changes were made as well. Elected officers for the position of International Secretary, General Secretary, General Treasurer and Publications Secretary were created and a new document concerning organisation was published that concentrated the relationship between autonomous groups and the national organisation.²¹³ A new permanent internal bulletin system was also created, whereas in the past internal bulletins had only been temporary affairs. Decisions regarding the new *Solidarity* magazine read as follows:

'Editorial functions: the editorial group has the right of commenting politically on articles, where there is unanimity in its point of view. Each editorial group (EG) must make it clear that they are expressing the opinion of that EG – which may not be the opinion of Solidarity or SR as a whole. Where there is no unanimity, accounts should be given of disagreements, briefly, and perhaps individual, personally signed contributions accepted.'²¹⁴

During discussions the two groups had expressed hope for a genuine fusion 'not a coming together of factions' and the new organisational document bureaucratically forbade the formation of formal factions. This led to a state of affairs where once again political divisions were made across geographical lines. The magazine was rotated around autonomous groups and for the first time Solidarity had solved its organisational problems and the group was not dominated from London. However, the political differences between the Marxists and the followers of Castoriadis were too great. Each issue of the magazine started to appear like it was produced by a different political group entirely. One issue would contain a long critique of the economics of Castoriadis whilst the next would carry a critique of Marx.²¹⁵

To make matters worse, Chris Pallis had disappeared from the group after someone who he personally despised had been readmitted to the group.²¹⁶ Solidarity would eventually implode in the early 1980s. As members of Solidarity became disillusioned by the constant arguments, some became

208^qP. Cardan, *Redefining Revolution* (London: Solidarity, undated), p.8; P. Cardan, 'Modern capitalism and revolution', <http://libcom.org/library/modern-capitalism-revolution-paul-cardan> (Accessed 10/04/2011)

209^qStefan, 'In Solidarity for Social Revolution?' (15 April 1977), p.1

210^q*Ibid*, p.2

211^qRespondent D

212^q*Ibid*.

213^qUnpublished documents held privately by Mike Ballard, 'Report & Minutes of Solidarity Conference In Oxford: Weekend January 21st-22nd 1978'; 'Solidarity: How We Work'

214^qUnpublished documents held privately by Mike Ballard, 'Solidarity/Social Revolution Working Group on Publications', p.1

215^qAki, 'Economic Crisis, Myth and Reality, *Solidarity: For Social Revolution*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (Dec 1978), pp. 6-12

216^qRespondent F

involved in a solidarity campaign for the Polish trade union Solidarnosc, this angered the ex-members of SR as Solidarity had always had a clear stance towards trade unions. The final straw came when it was revealed that two members of the group in London had become members of the Labour Party, the ex-members of SR demanded that they be expelled and when that did not happen the group fell apart. The national organisation was dissolved at a meeting in June 1982.²¹⁷

A national newspaper would be revived that lasted until 1992, edited by Paul Anderson who would become editor of *Tribune*. However it was only produced four times a year and the politics it contained had changed substantially, even lending support for reformist political parties in South America.²¹⁸

In conclusion, the merger of the Solidarity and Social Revolution was probably the correct choice at the time. Although it revealed fatal flaws in Solidarity, it would have led to the stagnation of Solidarity and disbanding of Social Revolution if it had not taken place. The merger did revive the organisation temporarily and as well as the organisational problem finally being addressed in a satisfactory manner the magazine became host to well structured and valuable debate. In retrospect it did also help to clarify the ideas of some of those involved.²¹⁹

Chapter 7: After Solidarity - The ultra-left in Britain

The evidence for Solidarity's importance for the ultra-left in Britain is the fact that the British communist left all have their origins in Solidarity. After departing for Newcastle to study in the early 1970s, a young ex-member of the London Solidarity group who had been identified as part of Solidarity's 'left wing' by Juan McIver attempted to set up an autonomous Solidarity group in the North East with his partner, this group would be 'working class', differentiating it from the London group which had a student composition.²²⁰ A meeting attempting to found this new group attracted 50 people, although the organisers were too inexperienced to make use of this.²²¹ Despite this apparent failure, the organiser of the meeting had impressed the author of Solidarity (Aberdeen)'s pamphlet of the German Communist Party. He had reconstituted himself as Revolutionary Perspectives and had begun translating historic texts of the communist left for the first time.²²² They soon decided that there was a common agreement and Revolutionary Perspectives became three people.

Concurrently, Solidarity's 'marxist faction' had named themselves Council Communism.²²³ Revolutionary Perspectives had been in contact, not only with Council Communism but also with a Liverpool based group called Workers' Voice (hereafter WV).²²⁴ Like Solidarity, most members of WV had emerged from the SLL, but unlike Solidarity most of them had the experience of working as shop stewards.²²⁵ Originally known as Class Voice at the beginning of 1971, they soon became WV after merging with a London based group that had been known as Workers Review.²²⁶ The two groups parted company again two years later over the question of parliament 'as a tactic to spread socialist propaganda', WV were evolving out of their previous Trotskyism after discovering and republishing

217^qUnpublished documents held privately by Mike Ballard, 'Solidarity Infernal Newsletter June 1982'

218ⁿN. Terdre, 'Workers' party grows fast in Brazil, *Solidarity: A Journal of Libertarian Socialism* Vol. 1, No. 12 (Summer 1986), pp. 12-15

219^qPersonally conversation with Respondent G.

220^qRespondent C

221^q*Ibid.*

222^qJock, 'History of CWO (Internal Document)' (Unpublished, March 2007), p.2; O. Ruhle, 'From the Bourgeois to the Proletarian Revolution,

'<http://www.marxists.org/archive/ruhle/1924/revolution.htm> (Accessed 10/04/2011)

223^qJock, 'History of CWO', p.2

224^q*Ibid.*

225^q*Ibid.*

226^q'Sectarianism unlimited', *World Revolution*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (April 1975), p.9

the writings of Sylvia Pankhurst from old copies of 'Workers Dreadnought'.²²⁷

These three groups would attend a series of conferences in 1973, attended by the French group Revolution Internationale and the American group Internationalism, with a view to create a united communist left organisation in Britain.²²⁸ Council Communism would be the most enthusiastic party, forming what they called the International Tendency in January 1974 with these two foreign groups, changing their name to World Revolution and publishing a paper of the name from May 1974.²²⁹ These conferences would come to involve Rivoluzione Internazionale from Italy, Accion Proletaria from Spain and Internationalismo from Venezuela. The most dominant figure in these discussions was Marc Chirik, he had witnessed the October Revolution on his brothers shoulders and after taking part in the foundation of the Communist Party of Palestine and Gauche Communiste de France as well as taking part in many other organisations, he fled to Venezuela in 1952 in anticipation of World War Three. When World War Three did not come he founded both Internationalismo. World Revolution was won over by Chirik to the idea that the Bolshevik party lead and contained the most advanced elements of the October Revolution.²³⁰

World Revolution and Revolutionary Perspectives almost had a common understanding, however they became divided on the question of when the Russian Revolution degenerated, whether capitalist crisis was caused by the tendency for the rate of profit to fall or 'saturated markets' and the character of the transition from capitalism to communism.²³¹ Meanwhile, tensions between World Revolution and WV had become strained, coming to a head when WV abruptly announced that they were breaking off relations with World Revolution due to their views on the period of transition, which would see the two groups come into 'violent conflict [...] during any revolutionary upheavals.'²³² This put Revolutionary Perspectives in a difficult position but seeing as they had just written a six-page platform at the behest of World Revolution, only to have it denounced, they began to work more closely with WV, issuing joint leaflets and visiting factories together.²³³ World Revolution took part in the founding of the International Communist Current hereafter ICC) at a conference in January 1975, with the international groupings mentioned above and became its British section.²³⁴ Most radical groups grew in size during the 1970s but Revolutionary Perspectives and WV both tripled in size in the space of a few months and in an atmosphere of optimism they fused to form the Communist Workers Organisation (hereafter CWO) at a conference in Liverpool in September 1975, being denounced by World Revolution for 'incomplete regroupment' in the process.²³⁵

When the growth of the CWO was halted, tensions began to grow that saw the former members of WV in Liverpool dissolve themselves in September 1976.²³⁶ This demoralising affair lead to members of the CWO in Scotland, including ex-members of Solidarity (Aberdeen) demanding that the CWO join the ICC and they made this move themselves after a meeting in Glasgow in July 1977.²³⁷

Juan McIver would resign from World Revolution around 1980, writing a long denunciation of Marc Chirik.²³⁸ Those members of the CWO who had joined the ICC left in 1981 with a few others to form the

227^q*Ibid*, p.10

228^fF. M, '1995: 20 years of the ICC', <http://en.internationalism.org/node/625> (Accessed 10/04/2011); Jock, 'History of CWO', p.2

229^q'Sectarianism unlimited', p.10

230^qJock, 'History of CWO', p.2

231^q*Ibid*, p.3

232^qQuoted in 'Sectarianism unlimited', p.9

233^qJock, 'History of CWO', p.3

234^q'Greetings to the International Communist Current', *World Revolution*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (April 1975), p.1

235^qJock, 'History of CWO', p.4; Nodens, 'An incomplete regroupment - CWO', *World Revolution*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (December 1975), pp. 25-28

236^qJock, 'History of CWO', p.4

237^q*Ibid*.

238^q*Ibid*, p.5

Communist Bulletin Group, whose irregular publication mostly concerned the activities of World Revolution and the CWO. Both McIver and members of the Communist Bulletin Group are believed to have had their houses raided and endured physical assaults from the ICC in the early 1980s.²³⁹

In the final years of Solidarity: For Social Revolution, members of Manchester Solidarity had initiated a joint publication with dissident members of Manchester ICC called *Wildcat*. It was distributed for free at workplaces, universities, dole offices, strikes and demonstrations, with a member of Solidarity noting that it provided him with 'a valuable new focus for [...] local political activity.'²⁴⁰ Ex-Social Revolution and Solidarity members in Stoke-on-Trent had established a similar group called Careless Talk.²⁴¹ They were both involved in a series of conferences with similar groups that brought out a magazine called *Intercom* at least three times a year for a short period. Careless Talk and Wildcat had been the most enthusiastic supporters of this project and they merged together. Wildcat would become burnt out due to massive activity during the miners' strike, during which time they produced a joint leaflets with the Communist Bulletin Group. Some members of Wildcat would reform as Subversion, which also died a natural death. Members of Careless Talk would end up in the Anarchist Federation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Solidarity was an important political organisation. It played an important role in critiquing the dominant trends in socialist thinking but the amount of ambiguity around political positions would cause serious problems that eventually proved fatal. The lack of an independent set of political beliefs would prove troublesome as the group simply followed where Castoriadis led. Despite some of the most glaring problems with Castoriadis' theories, Pallis would not publicly critique any part of them until 1983.²⁴² Even once it had followed Castoriadis' anti-Marxist turn Solidarity still maintained associated with Marxists. This led to heated debate within the group and it is a fault on the part of Solidarity that this debate was not opened up in the journal for the public to bear witness to. All these Marxists would try to drive the group forward and all would fail in different respects. Solidarity's role for the communist left was important as well, it would provide a space for those questioning prevailing socialist thought to develop themselves before embarking on other projects.

Glossary of terms

State Capitalism: A social system combining capitalism – the wage system of producing and appropriating surplus value in a commodity economy – with ownership or control by a state.

Trotskyism: Political ideology of the followers of Leon Trotsky. Orthodox variants held to the nature of the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers' state, the theory of permanent revolution, the

²³⁹This is a serious charge, although impossible to prove outright, the likelihood that it is true comes from the fact that the charge comes from a number of different sources; Ingram, 'Open Letter to the International Communist Current', <http://libcom.org/history/open-letter-international-communist-current> (Accessed 10/04/2011); Respondent E

²⁴⁰Unpublished documents held privately by Mike Ballard, M. Ballard, 'Wildcat and Me – A New Romance?', p.1

²⁴¹Respondent D

²⁴²M. Brinton, 'Castoriadis's Economics Revisited', in Goodway, *For Workers' Power*, p.217

united front against fascism and the need for a vanguard party as well as commitment to waging a war against reformist trade union leaders from inside the unions themselves. Trotskyism has been the dominant strain of thought amongst the revolutionary left for decades.

Ultra-left: The term originated in the 1920s in the German and Dutch workers movements, originally referring to a Marxist current opposed to both Bolshevism and social democracy, and with some affinities with anarchism. The ultra-left is defined particularly by its breed of anti-authoritarian Marxism, which generally involves an opposition to the state and to state socialism, as well as to parliamentary democracy, and to wage labour. In opposition to Bolshevism, the ultra left generally places heavy emphasis upon the autonomy and spontaneous organisation of the proletariat.

United Front: A tactic in which two or more subjects, especially political parties, collaborate against a common enemy or for any agreed objective, without giving up their differences. The slogan of a united front was raised by the Trotskyist in the late 1920s/early 1930s in response to the rise of fascism in Germany. Trotsky said that in order to unite the working class, the Social Democrats and the Communists should form a 'United Front'.

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