



**After Cable Street -
Joe Jacobs 1940 to
1977**

Alan Woodward

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Thanks Tapes two tapes were recorded by Peter Grafton for his book on peoples experience of WW2. This was Pete Grafton : You, You, & You ! - *people out of step with world war two [1981, 169 pp] and the transcript of the interview by Andy Wiggins was consulted after kindly being supplied by the author*

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Cover photo , Joe from "Out of the Ghetto", 1950  
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1 Foreword

This project started with grand plans for a full length publication on the second part of the life of Joe Jacobs . Very little happened over several months so I decided to produce a small book . This could in no way compare to the original autobiography, edited by Joe's daughter Janet , but would at least record the basic facts and could be used in a bigger later publication . George Shaw, who has the remaining documents in a small archive, intends proceeding with this.

In this little book we are concerned with Joe's life from soon after the famous protest events in East London against the fascists. We start at 1940 and go through to his death in 1977. There were controversies, expulsions and a good deal of political conflict in his very full life. Before examining that more fully , it is necessary to make a brief survey the details of the earlier period , which forms the background,.

Joe Jacobs wrote up most of the manuscript for the first part of his autobiography, which was edited after his death in 1977 and published as - *Out of the Ghetto - my youth in the East End, communism and fascism 1913 - 39* [1978 , 319 pp]. His daughter Janet edited the document , wrote up the last chapters from his notes and privately published the volume . It was subsequently reprinted by Phoenix Press,

The first volume deals exclusively with working class, predominately Jewish, life in the East End of London in the years between the first and second world wars. It is a fascinating chronicle of working class existence in that period and is something of a working class classic. . The book is straightforward and written in plain English, unlike much "Left" reportage, and is thorough and rich with a wealth of detail.

Joe Jacobs was born in 1913 in the East End of London, to Russian/Jewish family. He endured terrible poverty and personal hardships while growing up. His father died a year after he was born and the family was constantly short of money. When Joe was 12, he lost an eye due to a medical problem. An elder sister was lost to TB in squalid circumstances and other family members existed in equally dire circumstances.

Yet despite these situations, politics also seemed a constant. Through his father's first wife, Joe had an elder brother he never met, who returned to Russia to take part in the Revolution. Dave had been a Bolshevik supporter, but later joined the "Workers Opposition" and eventually left

Russia to live in Paris. Other snapshots of family and friends who drifted in and out of the East End socialist and political milieu are described in detail throughout the first book. Joe's own introduction to politics came in 1925 when he was 12 and stumbled across a demonstration in support of the Jewish Bakers' Union. Joe described his feeling as akin to a drug addict's first fix: ' I was elated . . . most certainly something had entered my bloodstream. ' Joe also described being 'profoundly affected ' by the General Strike in 1926, especially after witnessing mounted police attacking a crowd with sticks.

But it was in the Communist Party of Great Britain that Joe was to earn his political stripes. He was a loose contact of the Party, before joining the Young Communists . and later the adult party. It was to become the centre of his life. Joe vividly describes the tremendous variety of activities and organizations in which the Communist Party was involved. It is hard for those of us active today, to imagine the kind of influence the CP wielded. Joe loyally followed the "line" through all its political changes.

Yet he was often considered a trouble maker in his branch. This materialised mainly through differences over opposition to the fascists . Joe had always plumped for direct confrontation but this own organisation, the CPGB, opted for the policy of ignoring them , which was favoured by the Labour Party, and local Jewish dignitaries. The crisis came in the "Battle of Cable Street " when Oswald Mosley and his British Union of Fascists planned to march through Cable Street on Sunday, 3 October, 1936. Joe instigated direct opposition, despite Party . At the last minute, the CP accepted the urgent need to organise resistance. The slogan was ' They Shall not Pass ' and in the end Mosley never got to Cable Street. There was mass physical resistance , fighting, barricades, injuries but the people finally overcame police brutality. Joe rightly commented that it was a defeat for Mosley, courtesy of "Jews and Gentile alike."

Joe had a further criticism. He thought the CPGB was mis-directing its efforts into trying to capture the trade union structure instead of organising in the workplace which he favoured. But the CP dealt ruthlessly with its dissidents and Joe was expelled after a long battle . Social isolation followed but Joe had made his point and his ideas were to stay with him for the rest of his life. His expression of these ideas, through various organisations and bodies, is the theme of this document and though less exciting that the events of his first 26 years are just as important for those involved in the movement for social transformation.

It should be noted that the Stalinist school of falsification are still active after all these years . The role of Joe and the dissident communists in

organising the demonstration events have been effectively written out of history, the official bodies now take all of the praise. This sentence should be started with the word "Predictably", small events as well as the big ones get modified.

It is necessary to record that the construction of this publication has been a little held back by the absence of documents - it is after all over 30 years since even the final events. Janet Simon, born Jacobs, and others has assisted with information but in no way wants any further responsibility for the present text about which she has reservations anyway. Notably absent are the letters from Joe to both Henri Simon and Cajo Brendel but his missives to them are available. No one has any knowledge of the former. Henri wishes to dissociate himself from the present approach though he did provide some basic information. Some of the original papers have been made available to all through [the libcom.org](http://the.libcom.org) website, which readers may well wish to consult.

The sequence of the narrative is that Joe's war time experience is looked at first, then his industrial experience, chiefly the occupation by clothing workers in a Central London factory under his leadership. Joe's activities continued after retirement when he wrote extensively for *Solidarity*, which he had joined. Two contributions stand out, his account of the Post Office workers strike in 1971 - he has been employed in the PO for a few years - and his booklet on the Fisher Bendix occupation in 1972. A political row came out of this but Joe and *Solidarity* were vindicated in the end.

Joe became interested in the ideas of the French based *ICO* group and this began to replace his enthusiasm for *Solidarity*, as the last chapters record. Finally, the most contentious episode is Joe's expulsion from the London branch of the *Solidarity* organisation. Opinions still clash over this and readers will have to make up their own minds about the issue.

For the record it should be noted that the writer was not a member of *Solidarity*, though knew, and knows, people who were, and has bought copies of the publications for many years until the demise in 1992. On the other hand he never met Joe Jacobs, nor any member of his family until recently. A few short paragraphs on the rear cover allows the writer to introduce himself. The story of Joe Jacobs is a sad one. The choice is either to bury it and forget part of our history, or to read, assess and mourn the tragedy. I have chosen the latter

Alan Woodward, September 2011

Joe Jacobs - After Cable Street

Section 2 ; Joe Jacobs ; 1940 1977 ;
Some dates [from Janet Simon's draft]

- 1940 - 1946 war service , including six months in a military prison ;
- 1947 Janet born, sister Helen two years earlier ;
- 1951, July, occupation or, "stay in" at Lewis and Goldstein in Warren Street with Joe as shop steward ;
- 1952 expelled from the CPGB for disruptive activity - a row with the CP controlled NUTGWU branch over issues like branch democracy
- 1953 - 1963 Family lived on the Ocean Estate in Stepney ;
- 1952 approx , Joe involved in Trotskyist movement , applies to join the local Labour Party ;
- 1953 Violent argument with Healy and Banda and leaves pre-cursor to SLL;
- 1950s takes Janet to see Aldermaston marchers in Trafalgar Square ;
- 1950's - 1966 "Wilderness Years", with disastrous plan to set up his own cleaning business, which failed because he charged customers too little and upset the competition. His only foray into capitalism ;
- 1953 association with John Lawrence, a frequent visitor to the house on the Ocean Estate. Through all John's various joinings , leavings and re-joinings of the CPGB, the Labour Party, etc, Joe and John remained friends ;
- 1957 Joe goes to Town Hall Roof when John as leader of the St. Pancras Council raised the Red Flag ;
- 1958 visits John L. in prison, either as a result of this incident or as part of the Rent Strike ;
- 1959 Information , Correspondence, Organisation formed in France ;
- 1962/3 - 1965 Joe was mostly concerned with domestic problems. As his wife's health declined and there were frequent hospitalizations ;
- 1963 Janet joins Healy's SLL aged 16 . the family move to Maida Vale ;
- 1964 she leaves SLL and Joe explains to her about of his experiences of them ;
- 1965: wife, Pearl, dies ; Janet goes to University in York ; family move to Camden from Maida Vale ;
- 1965 Joe starts picking up with his political contacts. He was still in touch with Arnold Feldman. They had remained friends and Joe's family visited his family in Clapton , North London ;
- 1968 still in touch with John Lawrence who was exploring syndicalism, anarcho-syndicalism and contacts with Solidarity in the late 60's and early 70's before he retired to Shoreham and they lost contact ;
- 1967 Joe left the tailoring trade and joins the Post Office at the main sorting office in Mount Pleasant , on shift work
- 1970 leaves Post Office , on ill health grounds

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1970 joins *Solidarity* and Janet joins when at Oxford a year or so later
 1971 The international meetings with French and Dutch associates mostly. Joe met Henri Simon and Cajo Brendel at Boulogne venue where other meetings took place, certainly over the next 5 or 6 years. As Joe became more disillusioned with *Solidarity* he grows closer politically to Henri and Cajo ;
 1971 Joe begins correspondence with Cajo, around council communist issues and events in UK ;
 1971 Post Office strike, Joe goes to the pickets; writes booklet and attends UPW conference where he debates with Paul Foot. Follow up articles ;
 1972 Fisher Bendex occupation , Joe one of the delegation and writes up booklet , clash with Big Flame, having problems with own members; *Solidarity* exposes the weakness of their intervention with “ *Neo-Narodniks*” discussion document ;
 1972 Janet and Henri live in Paris from 1972 - 1978 ;
 1973 Joe corresponds with them ;
 1973 Joe begins writing the book of his story ;
 1975 Joe in Hammersmith hospital for extensive tests ref heart and blood ;
 Echanges et Mouvement [“*Workers News*”] replaces ICO;
 1976 Expelled from the London branch of *Solidarity* but retains national membership ; Gets *New Movement* booklet finally published by *Solidarity* : E&M prioritise this issue ;
 1977 March, Joe dies from a heart condition . His old friend Arnold Feldman follows a few weeks later .

3 Joe and the war

The lull after the events of 1936 continues until the war loomed large for Joe and his family in 1939. War of course is frequently unfortunate for nations but can be a calamity for individuals . In Joe's case the experience was largely one of boredom , ill health , a spell in a detention centre, a brief period where he learnt a trade and then demob. Still, as he recorded later, “ *I wouldn't have missed it for worlds* ” [tapes, also for many subsequent references] . In particular his reflections from inside the nick are likely to be seen as perceptive and relevant today, in the old tradition of *Letters from Socialists in Prison*. This section ends with Joe resuming his old employment, but this time earning a lot more money.

The time sequence and other points are summarised below. Then getting beyond the bald facts we can draw out some points for discussion.

Dates and Events

1939 Joe and Pearl move, with the employer, to Nottingham ;

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- 1941 April ; Called up, conscripted into the Army ,
- 1941-2 Initial training and several postings around the country in the Home Defence Battalion,
- 1942 Joe gets a 'cushy number ' as Company Tailor at a posting in East London ,
- 1943 Joe pulls out and is posted to Aberystwyth,
- 1943 After provocation, he strikes a ' superior officer ' ,
- 1944 Court Martial and sent to a detention centre in Chorley , Lancs. Gets six months , serves four, then back to the Battalion,
- 1945 Trained as an Ammunitions Examiner and does a few months skilled work ,
- 1946 Demobbed, back to a clothing trade, cashing in on renewed demand .

Events - Home Defence Battalion

Joe was allocated to the HDB . This was a unit made up of people with a low health grading , due to a disability. The plan was that basic defence work could be done and fully-fit soldiers freed up to do active service. This in practice meant that Joe's unit was moved around the country guarding aerodromes, and in several regiments : the Wiltshires , Gloucesters, Green Howards and finally the Royal Army Ordinance Core. He was also 'moved on ' when he spoke out with his point of view and produced the Daily Worker , as a loyal communist , to make his point .

He was absolutely bored with the whole process which was largely very long periods of sentry duty around the camp, lots of 'bull' or polishing kit endlessly . There were also periods of punishment for small transgressions, like the four days in 1942 where he just went Absent With Out Leave , AWOL. The result is being 'Confined to Barracks ' , CB , or 'jankers ' . This is being required, after a days work, to report to the Guard House in the evening in full dress uniform to do a few hours cleaning up , or fatigues. I have to report that your writer himself was no stranger to jankers during two years National Service, a decade or so later.

He "volunteered" for work in London, against all that soldiers are supposed to do, and by some curious strike of fortune found himself right back at home. Even more curious, he found there was a vacancy for Company Tailor which was some sewing and pressing the uniforms of various non commissioned officers, NCOs . This was good fortune indeed, a 'cushy number ' , as he could go home every weekend and says himself he was 'a blue eyed boy ' . Some of the sergeants left a cigarette in the pockets for him to find. The first week he left it but subsequently took his reward. For some unknown or unstated reason he decided to pull out from this posting and requested an interview with the Commanding Officer. He said

the sewing was 'not helping his one good eye'. The CO agreed. The following week he was on a charge 'for not booking In and Out' when he went home !! He got jankers, and was posted back to his old unit which then went to Aberystwyth Selection Centre

The Court Martial

To cut a long story short, at this outpost he reported sick with piles on Boxing Day 1943. He faced an irate locum Medical Officer who was fed up with 'malingerers' and said so. Then he assaulted Joe who retaliated, was arrested and charged with striking a 'superior officer'. This was a court martial offence. He was told that in situations like this you acquiesced and reported the abuse later. The proceeding went ahead with Joe steadfastly refusing to appoint someone to defend him until the very last minute. He insisted on pleading 'Not Guilty' having contacted the local paper whose reporter turned up at the court. He was sentenced to six months but had already been in custody for seven weeks, and was now on his way to Chorley Centre. His denunciation of injustice before the Board of top brass officers did not count in his favour.

In detention

A prison is a desperate place. The routine was authoritarian in the extreme and no smoking was allowed anywhere. The Army prison is perhaps the supreme example of regulations, punishment that sometimes killed the victim - as he records - and all the absurdity we have come to associate through the TV series of "*Porridge*". Here too there was a tobacco baron, like Crouchy, who ran the place from his 'office'. The skill of survival was keeping out of trouble and using the diversion, practised as a fine art by the prisoners, which we will examine below.

The inmates were a mixture. Some soldiers who had been AWOL repeatedly, some trained parachutists who refused to jump, some conscientious objectors and lastly the small time offenders, nearly all illiterate. You may say this sounds like any prison and you'd be right. Joe did survive and went out wiser than he went in.

Trained craftsman

After some months Joe got a chance for a training course at a school that lasted 9 months. He came out a fully qualified Ammunition Examiner. Joe was really pleased with this, it was no longer boring and he felt he could contribute something as last. Unfortunately the war was now over and he was to be sent out as "No Longer Fulfilling Army Physical Requirements".

Back to Civvy Street

Joe found that trade was booming . The shortage of clothes over the previous six years resulted in a surge in demand and work was so plentiful that the workers could choose their own employer - usually the one that paid best. This was the post war boom that was to be the pattern for around 30 years before capitalism renewed itself under the leadership of Thatcher. The national union minimum rate was now irrelevant and the workplace union pushed up the rate for the job to unprecedented levels . Union organisation grew and Joe himself said that it took two years to get himself used to things.

This account is based on Joe's papers. These are two exercise books with about 80 handwritten pages, 6 typed sheets covering part of these ; Also there was Joe's contribution to the text from the book by Peter Grafton on 'people out of step ' with WW2 ; the cassette of the interview for this volume and the transcript of the tapes from which the paragraphs were edited . The material, like his original book, is rich in detail and observation. Perhaps a later author may want to edit a full account that would be a substantial volume. For now this small book will have to suffice. The following philosophical discussion also starts off from the papers [Grafton] .

Some matters arising - against the 'tin pots' ,
Joe frequently rails against the injustice and unfairness of what he calls "tin pots" - those un-elected people in positions of authority who control our lives, today as ever. Britain is a quite authoritarian country but this is carefully disguised with an appearance of 'democracy ' . This means that the tin pot leaders are theoretically controlled by the House of Commons regulation but today few believe this fiction. The institutions of State are quite autonomous to social control. [Harvey & Hood] .

Authority still rules so how do the ordinary people make out in this situation ? At the lowest level Joe explains the role of what was called in my generation 'skiving ' . The was essentially escaping the attentions of authority to avoid further work. Individuals should always be going somewhere definite and always be carrying something , a bucket or even a paper file. No matter how bored you are, always give an impression of doing something, don't dawdle, or stop too much for a chat, openly.

This tactic is necessary because of the separation of the individual from meaningful work. It has been called alienation. Perhaps the most comprehensive account of this is by Karl Marx, but his useful social analysis should be separated from his faulty political prescriptions [Fischer]. Anyway , alienation is at a high level in the present type of society - capitalism. In previous stages , in a largely agricultural economy , the labourers - and the vast majority of our ancestors were just that - though

grossly exploited in monetary terms , at least did their job as a whole. The labourer would know what was to be done, would have some lee way regarding doing it and would see the process through - harvesting, helping animal birth , repairing fences or what ever. Even under early industrialisation this tradition of meaningful work sometimes continued , you could see the result of your labour , knew what was happening., had a defined role in the process.

More recent developments

Once capitalism got under way, the two classes - those who owned property and machines and those who owned only their capacity to labour - proceeded to polarise. Industrial work was accompanied by more and more mechanisation of sections of the job, as work became divided accordingly to fit the machines . In factories, people made say 1,000 widgets an hour but had no idea where they went or what they were used for . Even if basic knowledge was acquired , there was no say about the work process, no control of the system about what you did for 8 to 12 hours a day.

Alienation grew by leaps and bounds, people were just "hands" and two quite different attitudes resulted , [Fischer] The first was resistance , and to demand, and work for, even the smallest degree of 'workers control' then expand it. This was closely associated with the early anarchists [Proudhon]. Philosophers speculated of a model society , communism , associationism, where workers would revert back to complete control and the political demands began to be formed round this dream [Morris]. Collective action was the key, and direct action the method. At a higher stage workers went beyond wage work and would occupy their workplaces and sometimes continue production to show management as superfluous, [Libcom.com]. A pre-figurative phenomena.

The second approach was to abandon work as creative - do as little as possible , scrounge (in the positive sense) where you could. - concentrate on the leisure side of life . This idea as a present perspective can be found in *Why Work ?* [Richards V], and was catalogued in the New Movement which created debates in the 1970/80s. It is a feature of some aspects of the libertarian movement, and is widely known in society. Overall the two approaches can be seen to prepare for later discussion on the "new movement but that comes below.

In practice

Of course, people rarely adopt wholesale either of these perspectives but making do, as an individual, plays a part in many lives. Individualism is practiced as skiving in the armed forces , and Joe did a bit himself. Most of

the time however he was tilting at the windmills of authority in a half way house between differing perspectives . His approach to the court martial, refusing representation , pleading not guilty despite admitting the offence under provocation, etc, are examples of his residual revolt .

Back to the war

A second matter arising from Joe's experience, is the application of the collective approach to prison. This involved the art of the diversion. Joe writes extensively about how the inmates outwitted the guards over control, especially issues like smoking and food. In the prison, much of the "discipline" was in the form of physical supervision, and smoking was illegal. As we know, prisons cannot have 100% security and today even mobile phones are available to inmates.

Tobacco was searched for but rarely found, it seems and Joe himself comments that he could have had a machine gun if he wanted. Smoking appears widespread but how was tobacco consumed ? Apart from the use of cubby holes - boiler rooms, behind sheds, hidden corners , etc - most time was spent in the association rooms. In Joe's section there were three of these, with one screw patrolling them all, on the other side of a wire divide. The diversion varied with the individual guard, and once he was distracted , smokers in the other two rooms could indulge.

Each plan required collective action but of a special kind. One screw , an old soldier, had acquired the art of 'sloping arms' , not on his chest but on his back. This involves cupping the stock of the rifle in the hand and resting the barrel on the shoulder, a standard drill position. He would be persuaded to demonstrate his special skill, then individually instruct the inmates doing the same with a broom, or such like . Strangely they never seemed to get it right and constant re-instruction proved necessary. It all took time.

Meanwhile in the other rooms men grabbed a smoke, A few seconds to roll your own , a look out to keep a covering blanket in place and two people to wave away the resulting smoke from the lights , a tell tale sign. Fifteen or twenty minutes of relative freedom . Game, set and match !

Another guard liked watching fighting , or 'boxing'. In his case a quarrel would apparently spontaneously break out at the crucial time and a fight followed . The guard was asked to let the matter be settled and the artificial fight went on - a bit like televised wrestling. This staged contest could last as long as needed while the smokers indulged .

Queue jumping

A third example was the food rations. The final meal was at 5.30 pm then nothing for 14 hours. What's more, it was just, say two slices of bread and small portion of cheese - there was rationing don't forget. These was hopelessly inadequate for hungry working men . (Joe was in the tailoring section) For the evening meal there were two queues and each person collected their rations with tea , and was supposed to leave. The trick was again the diversion. On a signal, an altercation or whatever took the guards attention away from supervising the queue - men would quickly rejoin the back of this for second helpings. It seemed to go like clockwork.

Matter four , conscientious objectors

Treatment for these was immeasurably better than during WW1 [Weller]. A CO would refuse to join up and his case would be heard by a Tribunal, with representation from libertarian comrades specially trained. The majority would be settled at this level [Shipway] with some volunteering for ambulance work. Even the hard cases found themselves in civilian prisons.

But some ill informed young men would register and report as required. Then they refused to put on the uniform but by now they were in the Army. So they would go through the farce of a military hearing and be sent to an army detention centre for six months . If they refused after this, it was another six months, and another, after which they were discharged. The prisoners Joe apparently managed to talk to were in this category, some from Northern Ireland. But of course there was the usual roughing up process, soaking them while naked, etc, in a bid to get them to put the uniform on. The British Army doesn't change its methods or practices. It is still killing and abusing people.

Their response was a sort of semi passive resistance. They would kick their food tins, loaded with the food all mixed in, all over the floor, a sort of dirty protest in embryo, as the IRA used later. Kept in isolation cells. they would use them as a defence, but talking to the others was obviously difficult. Totalitarian armies still have no answer to the either the determined freedom fighter, or more recently the bomber , many of whom would be prepared to die in protest. But back to Joe and these particular tough boys more often than not won through.

Prison literature

Finally a piece of speculation. There is one possible outlet for the intelligent socialist who finds himself imprisoned due to opposition to capitalist policy. This is the letter out, or document , either smuggled or legitimately sent , where the libertarian or whatever can use the enforced idleness to think about society or plan strategy, or comment on events . The publication as a book may be a last resort.

Just a few of the people who did this were - George Jackson's two books as he discovered socialism . From a uneducated black rebel, he became an acute observer on modern American racism - and the roots of opposition . Sadly he was later judicially shot while 'trying to escape ', the enemy of the State gets little mercy in the USA [Jackson G]. Antonio Gramsci, put away by Mussolini for a decade or so, developed a thorough analysis of capitalism beyond Italy , and saw enough to reject Stalin, before ill health, bought on by conditions, finally overcame him [Gramsci]. Lastly Alexander Berkman's lengthy tale from the penitentiary, as a practising anarchist, has been in print for much of the century [Berkman]

War stories

Overall, a form of delayed action is writing up war memoirs. Many others did this and the result could have been quite revealing. Some war memoirs by non-professional writers include

- ❑ those of a lifelong Communist Party member also from Camden, [Richards P] ,
- ❑ " One of the finest accounts of war at sea ever written" [Mallalieu] a book repeatedly reprinted ,
- ❑ George Coppard's stories of WW1 reflect the ideas of his time, which were quite different to Joe's later thoughts [Coppard].
- ❑ And lastly, a humorous contribution with readings from a soldiers' newspaper of WW1 [Brown].

As it is, we just have Joe's contributions to Peter Grafton excellent volume, still available to this day.

Len Wincott

Another aspect of military matters was Len Wincott and the Invergordon Mutiny. In an article reviewing Len's book [*Solidarity 7/12. The practice was for the regular journals to be grouped into a volume , then numbered consecutively, hence volume 7 , issue 12*] Joe explains he had met Len earlier and had seen him off the Soviet Union in 1934. Len, now 67, had decided to stay in exile as all his present family lived in Russia. His book won high praise from Joe who writes that the naval mutiny was an example of self management , in which the rank and file sailors never surrendered control to any outside organisation and were successful in the struggle against big pay cuts, despite the vindictive reaction of the admirals and the British ruling class. Len had made a visit back to the UK to launch his book and renewed his acquaintance with friends such as Joe. With his personal knowledge of the military establishment , Joe would have appreciated the Mutiny even more in 1974 [Wincott].

Summary

This period was traumatic for Joe but in the end re-inforced his belief in humanity and its ability to control our society rationally. War experience is noted for completely changing awareness among many young impressionable people but with Joe it just confirmed what he believed.

Reading, , references, , in surname order, for further information

- ~ Alexander Berkman: *Prison memoirs of an Anarchist* [1970 USA, 538 pp], from an American jail ;
- ~ Malcolm Brown ; *Suffering from Cheerfulness - the best bits from the Wipers Times* ; [2010, 192 pp] ;
- ~ George Coppard : *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai* [1969, 135 pp]; WW1 tale by a survivor ;
- ~ Ernst Fischer ; *Marx in his own words* [1970, 187 pp] , the American version is *How to Read Karl Marx* [1996, USA, 192 pp] ;
- ~ Pete Grafton : *You, You, & You ! - people out of step with world war two* [1981, 169 pp] narratives from miscellaneous respondents ;
- ~ Antonio Gramsci , ed Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith ; *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* [1971 and later USA, 483 pp] ;
- ~ James Harvey and Katherine Hood : *The British State* [1958 USA , 288 pp], marxist analysis ;
- ~ George Jackson, : *Blood in my Eye* [1972, 174 pp] and *Soledad Brother - the prison letters of George Jackson* [1971, 291 pp] , young black activist discovers political analysis but is killed by authorities ;
- ~ J P W Mallalieu : *Very Ordinary Seaman* [1944 and later , 254 pp] ;
- ~ William Morris: *News from Nowhere* [1890 and subsequently, 193 pp] a new society described explicitly;
- ~ Libcom.org : "*Oh Sit Down - accounts of sit down strikes and workplace occupations in the UK and around the world*" [2009, 109 pp] . Libcom.org is an online, organising, resource , and an archive of news and information on workers' struggles and its website includes much contemporary material ;
- ~ Peter Richards ; *Bombs , Bullshit and Bullets. . . in roughly that order* [2007 , 179 pp] sanitised autobiography by a lifetime communist in Camden ;
- ~ Vernon Richards [Vero Recchioni] editor : *Why Work ? - arguments for a leisure society* [1983 and later, 211 pp] various writers on topics like production for use , useful work or useless toil, alternatives and futures ;
- ~ Mark Shipway : *Anti Parliamentary Communism - the movement for workers councils , in Britain 1917 to 45* [1988, 239 pp],
- ~ Len Wincott : *Invergordon Mutineer* [1974, xx pp] personal account of the Navy fight against pay cuts

4 Shop stewards , Workplaces , Unions and the Occupation

Joe worked generally as a presser in the clothing trade, quite heavy work, and was active in the tailoring unions over several decades . His starring moment came with the occupation by clothing workers of a factory in Warren Street , Central London, where he was shop steward . Joe's political position on being active in workplaces and trade unions was solidly rooted in his experience in them. He also expected his own Party , the Communist Party of Great Britain, to support his views. He had loyally participated in the CPGB's absurd venture into breakaway unions , the United Clothing Workers Union , UCWU, and then the switch back to the conventional one in 1935, the Tailor and Garment Workers Union . However he found the CPGB's concentration on attention to the structure of the national union as distasteful as their policy of ignoring the fascists in the hope that they would go away. In this they were, predictably, following the respectable institutions of the Jewish Board of Guardians and the Labour Party. The Communist Party was being institutionalised.

Notably with a longer view, Joe's views reflect positively the criticism of the council communists who broke with Lenin and Moscow in 1920, though he had no apparent means of linking the two issues [Gombin]. Joe essentially wanted greater concentration on the workplace . His expulsion from the CPGB in 1935 settled the matter for the time being [volume 1] .

It was to be resurrected again after his re-admission to the Party around the late forties and he was subsequently expelled - again - for disruptive activity in now run CP union. By 1970, his views had become more libertarian and, on joining *Solidarity* in that year, became instantly attracted to the life long "council communism" of their international associates , the *Information , Correspondence, Organisation*, or ICO. For the rest of his life he was involved firstly in trying to reconcile the two slightly different ideologies , then seeking expulsion to prove his point. This is looked at more fully in the final chapter but one conclusion can be safely drawn and that is that he had, in this context, found some organisational form more suitable to his views. In this, his trajectory followed almost exactly that of Joe Thomas who went from stalinism to council communism over almost the same period and through much the same stages [Woodward].

Joe's family came from the Jewish population in Poland and what is now Ukraine, itself to be later something of a hotbed of resistance and socialism [Gilbert]. Large numbers settled in East London during the period from 1870 to 1914, about the same time as a larger movement from rural Britain into urban areas. The immigrants in East London went mainly into tailoring, and the community became noted for its radical politics [Fishman]. So it is no surprise that Joe in a relatively radical community and the occupation that had seen several attempts at unionisation, should reflect that situation.

There were numerous attempts to unionise the various trades in the industry, mostly unsuccessful. A big push was made during the epic 'dockers tanner' strike, 1889, in response to call for solidarity and residual organisation remained [Fishman]. In 1906 a further effort was made and this time it was slightly better organised. The strikers demanded better workplace conditions. A bodged compromise was finally made but one positive result was union amalgamation. Not all amalgamations are beneficial but this one certainly was.

1912

The convalescence took some years but when the next episode came, it was greatly aided by the influence of the *Workers Friend* (Arbeter Frint) organisation which had began publishing its journal in 1885. It came under the leadership of Rudolf Rocker, a German gentile socialist, who applied steady and intense work to building up the organisation and journal. Rocker was a life long libertarian and this was anyway the high point of anarcho syndicalist agitations in the 'great unrest' before WW1

There were other anarchist groups and newspapers in these years, including one run by Guy Aldred, Rocker's brother-in-law, and his paper *The Spur*, as well as that of *Freedom*, founded by Peter Kropotkin in 1885. *Workers Friend* was an agitational centre to the group, its function was to care for the families of the Jewish workers against the opposition of the official structures and religion. These were increasingly traditional, conservative and sharply against the anarchism of the WF. The ideas of anarchism always inspired the activists and the journal, and from 1898, Rocker's personal initiative in setting up the more theoretical *Germinal* was a logical step as the movement grew. His book, *The London Years* [1958], is an excellent record of this period.

WF and local structures

Within the Jewish community the sense of community was always strong. Meetings were first held in a selected pub but then a dedicated Club House that was set up in Jubilee Street, off the Commercial Road, E1. This was

a meeting place, hired out to other organisations, as well as a social centre, though the sale of alcohol was not allowed.

Rocker was familiar with the activities in the provinces, making regular visits, and living for a while in Liverpool and Leeds. His book records the activities of city groups in Manchester, Hull, Glasgow, etc. He notes also the role of the UK movement acting as a staging post for further immigration to the Americas. His own trips to the USA, thwarted amid a burst of publicity over his and Molly Witcop's non marriage, and Canada, are a testament to this.

Workers' Organisation

However our concern in this project is the day-to-day, back-breaking efforts to organise the Jewish workers against the sweated labour system in the East End tailoring industry. The economic exploitation of the clothing workers by the master tailors was organised by the City of London financial institutions - not a lot changes here then.

West End tailors

After the relative failure of 1906, years of hard graft climaxed with the mini general strike in 1912, surely one of the supreme examples of hidden history. The action began with the craft based tailors at the other end of London who had been a bit disdainful of the less skilled East Enders who were anyway largely Jewish. There was a good deal of racism in these years about 'foreigners' but the posher group was out on the streets and Rocker saw a chance of solidarity. The East End tailors joined the West End tailors.

WF switched to become a daily paper for the duration and the group was engaged in a permanent round of meetings and other strike work. The strike was eventually won with all its implications for the Jewish workers. [Rocker]

But the issue did not end there. Rocker records the immediate solidarity with the dock strikers, whose own strike overlapped theirs. Three hundred dockers' children were taken into the homes of the Jewish workers, with barely enough to eat themselves but and strong and lasting relations built as a result. The roots of class solidarity run deep.

The breakaway union

Fast forward now two decades, and the picture was somewhat different. Most anarchists joined the communists after the initially successful revolution in 1917 in Russia. The Labour Party, basking in the glory of George Lansbury's mass revolt in nearby Poplar, aided by the new right-to-

vote laws and amid the chaos in the conventional parties, also gained members at the anarchists expense. By the end of the 1920s or at about the same time as Joe was beginning work, the CPGB began an extraordinary venture into the politics of the absurd. Many of the activists had joined the Communist Party, while the official union remained quite reactionary, but a new age was about to begin.

Russian state capitalism still in crisis

The struggle for the leadership of the now degenerated regime, between Stalin and Trotsky, caused the former to engage in a series of desperate measures, in the so called Third Period. The most relevant to our story was the announcement in 1928 of the *Class against Class* policy. The Social Democratic or Labour, Parties, were denounced as class enemies and their trade unions likewise.. Henceforth new unions, controlled by the communists, were to be formed, breakaways from the established ones. In Britain, the CPGB sought to develop "revolutionary" trade unions in rivalry to the established Trades Union Congress ones. In fact only two were set up, one for Scottish miners and the other for Clothing workers, United Clothing Workers Union, UCWU. The more sane communist union leaders, like Arthur Horner, took steps to avoid the lunacy, in his case fighting off attempts to found a similar miners union on his patch In Wales [Pelling]. The temptation to act against trade union reformism still remains

But back to the East End clothing workers. Joe, who was in the trade from 1928, duly joined the UCWU. He was a tailor's presser, a highly skilled job. It is the second highest paid of all the separate skills in tailoring. The highest most skilled is the cutter, or cutter/designer. A top presser, which is what Joe became, would be better paid than a tailor for example. The top presser is responsible for shaping the garment. Joe was capable of shaping a garment that was virtually destroyed in the rain by pressing it on someone! He used to make the families clothes, suits, skirts etc from odd bits of cloth, or 'cabbage', cutting, tailoring, machining and pressing from scratch. He could do the lot. The loss of an eye was not relevant. It had no influence on how skilled he was. In fact Joe was considered one of the most skilled workers in his trade and could get work easily anywhere because of this.. [Janet Simon]

Strikes

Volume 1 has regular notes about the breakaway union and the strikes it ran. These were the Fairdale and Coleman disputes. Joe, despite his commitment, does not appear to be as active as he was later on. The UCWU was effectively an national union in East London, it held its annual conference in sunny Aldgate. The area was strong for the CPGB with a full compliment of local activists.

One unusual pair of members were Ben and Sam Elsbury, the veteran libertarians. One commentator, notes that such was the insularity of the CP members at the time that they seemed unaware of the wider politics of the brothers:

"how Sam Elsbury was first set up and then left in the lurch by the Communist Party or of the fact that Sam's brother Ben, one of the oldest Syndicalists in Britain, later became a prominent Trotskyist". [Richardson].

Sam Elsbury was in fact promised recompense for his expenditure in setting up the new union but the Party later refused this - he then resigned. Also Sam had been active in the anti war movement in WW1 [Weller 85] and was later to run a bookshop in Bloomsbury with a good stock of second hand bargains.

Joe himself noted this isolation factor and said: *"I must have had blinkers on"*. In later documents he comments on the futility of the CP policy. Moreover he was still thinking and noting. In volume 1, he draws attention to booklets, articles that came his way on what were called "stay-in strikes", or workplace occupations, and political work in the factory as such. These were;

- ❑ An article by J T Murphy, before he was expelled, on factory work in the *Daily Worker*;
- ❑ A 1933 Party pamphlet by Idris Cox called *"Factory, cell and street work"*, which Joe links directly to his recruitment to the CP, having previously been active in the International Labour Defence, Stepney branch;
- ❑ A penny pamphlet, 1936, entitled *"A new France is born - the stay in strikers"*. Joe records that he was very impressed as this "sounded like the kind of trade union activity that I thought was important".

Back to square one

However the CPGB experiment was doomed and both breakaways were "liquidated" in 1935, along with a string of front organisations, like the ILD. This was to make way for the Council for Civil Liberties. Although very unhappy with the measure, Joe appears content to have moved back to the NUTGWU. In a tape recorded much later he does speak about the days when the social democrats were regarded as almost as bad as the fascists, but says only that those days are long past.

However his main fight was in anti fascism. In this, he was opposing the CPGB policy of ignoring Mosley and counter-posing direct action

confrontation. Many of the old hands from the UCWU, like Sarah Wesker followed the Party line and the difference grew rapidly in 1935. Joe's critique against "trade union work" as opposed to "street work" incorporated the neglect of the workplace which was gripe number 2 against the Communist Party. Though this was obviously overshadowed by the split about how to oppose the fascists, it was something that clearly clicked in his mind and was to be more important later.

Interlude and a new start.

Joe's expulsion from the CPGB and his war service meant a break from the routine of workplace activity. However, on demob, he was soon back in the clothing trade and at his old job. He was even to re-join the Communist Party, but more of this later.

He records that in the post war period, people were so keen to get back to proper clothing again that the industry was working full out. Workers could get a wage rate much higher than the national union minimum, so few cared about the national union as such. He says that he joined in this bonanza and made sure his own pay kept up [Tape]. Conversely he does point out that in terms of recruiting in the workplace this period was a high point of union activity and membership on the shop floor reached record heights.

Joe goes west

First some background. The main divide in the tailoring trade was between 'Ladies' and 'Gents'. It was extremely rare to work in both. Joe always worked in Ladies, never in Gents. Workshops existed in the East End and the West End. It didn't matter where you lived. Where you worked depended on the economics of the time. (It was a very up and down trade) and how skilled you were. Mostly the West End workshops around the Warren Street/Great Portland Street area were at the higher end of the trade and made garments for the more up-market stores like Selfridges or Harrods. Joe worked in both the East and West End. Despite his Union reputation he got work anywhere because he was considered highly skilled and a good worker. He changed jobs often, but this was quite usual in the trade.

There are unfortunately no records for his activity at work around 1950 when he was union rep at the M & L Goldstein factory in 37 Warren Street. His daughter Janet reports that she still has a leather brief case which was presented to him by the workers with the inscription engraved on it " *To shop steward Joe Jacobs from the Workers of M&L Goldstein 1950*". Presumably, if the workers presented him with this, he must have been much appreciated and had already been the shop steward for some time.

The occupation

It was not long before a crisis occurred . After a series of disputes , the management summarily sacked all 200 of the workers immediately before the summer 'shut down' holiday period that many industries still observed. The unionised workers responded with an occupation of the premises in July 1951. The story of this episode is not well known but a description was given by Joe which appeared in the *Solidarity* booklet by Ken Weller, *A Strategy for Industry* . This makes up the second part of the following extract :

Occupations and sit-ins

It is rather arbitrary to distinguish between occupations and sit-ins. The terms are often used synonymously. It seems to me useful, however, to define sit-ins as being relatively restricted and passive in character, whereas occupation implies positive action actually to take over a plant and deny access to management. The latter predicates a high level of militancy and solidarity, as well as good rank-and file organisation. There have been quite a lot of sit-ins in Britain over the years. Most of them have been of short duration. They have usually occurred in the mines and in the motor industry.

An interesting occupation took place in July 1951 when some 200 clothing workers at the M. and L. Goldstein factory at Warren Street (in the West End) were locked out one week before their annual holiday. The factory had been the scene of a long struggle with the management, with the workers actually running the factory for two weeks and proving that the company's problems were due to defects of the management. The following account was given to the author by Joe Jacobs -

'We decided to oppose the lock-out by staging a 'stay-in', an occupation of the factory. We had to answer all the objections to this course. We were told that we would antagonise the leadership of the Tailors and Garment Workers' Union, who had been negotiating for some time', and that they would "never give us recognition". We were informed that the police would be called. Another problem was that the labour force consisted of about two-thirds women and girls. When it got to the vote almost everybody was in favour of the 'stay-in' We knew that two factories in East London employing about 150 workers would strike in sympathy and that about 70 workers in the remaining unorganised factory, with about 200 employees, would also support us.

'It was decided that about half the workers would barricade themselves in the factory on the top floor. The rest including women with young children

would operate from the street. This meant organising food and other supplies - which would be hoisted up in buckets. About 100 workers proceeded to make themselves secure on the top floor. The lift was put out of action. The one door leading from the stairs was well secured. The only way in was over the roof by way of the fire escape which, in our own interests, we could not risk closing. We knew that the police would be called in and would try to get in from the roof.

'Sure enough the police arrived and surrounded the building. In the meantime we had been busy putting up banners and posters on the outside of the windows. People gathered outside and supplies began to arrive. We felt able to continue for a long time provided the police did not intervene. But at a meeting to discuss what to do if they did, it was decided that we did not stand much chance of resisting physically as the support on the ground was not big enough.

'Several hours later the attack came. A large force of police came over the roof-tops and into the top floor. We had to agree to leave or face a violent struggle with very limited forces. 'Had this been a large factory with widespread external support the police would have had great difficulty in removing us. And possibly would not even have attempted to'. [Weller ' 72].

There were other important features of the dispute and one major consequence regarding Joe and the Communist Party after the occupation. Joe's papers reveal other details. The dispute went on for ten weeks at least , as some on the appeal leaflets make clear, being dated 21 September. Attempts were made to get at least one factory belonging to Davis and Frost - who were the main customer and probably financier for Goldstein - out on strike, but there is no more information on this [Jacobs 1951, which is the source for the following 15 paragraphs].

There was a move to re-start negotiations. A meeting , eventually held in Finsbury Town Hall, outlines the framework for the agenda.. There would be representation from Davis and Frost , D&F, from their factory at 10 Little Portland Street, as well as M and L Goldstein, MLG, and the union side would comprise mainly union full time officials . D&F also issued a statement about its link with Goldstein's and invited inspection by union officials of the financial books at its Great Portland Street offices.

One interesting pre-condition was that beforehand the union would prepare and hand in a list of current employees on strike and available to re-start work. The management would then, at the meeting, outline its plans for re-organisation which the union side wanted. This is an old trick practiced by employers for generations and used as recently as the Ford Visteon

occupation at Enfield in 2009 to the writer's personal knowledge.

The names of workers are then available to the employer for accounting and legal purposes. Employers do not know how many of their ex workers have found other employment or moved on, and could possibly be excluded from the settlement. The list would be also a measure of the workers current strength.

Secondly for preparing an injunction, names are often essential to make it stick. D&F did in fact get an injunction, made jointly with D & A Dresses, on 29 August, but choose to specify only Joe Jacobs and the NUTGWU. It referred to picketing at the shop and also outside its premises at 283 Oxford Street. Solicitor Lucien Fior obtained this

Joe did prepare a preliminary list of staff, presumably strikers, including hand pressers, Hoffman pressers, under pressers, male cutters, male tailors, female tailoresses, female finishers, male machinists, female machinists, special machinists, totalling 119 and 86 respectively. This looks like the original 200 suggesting that solidarity action by other D&F workers in support had lasted only a few days.

He further prepared a general statement on the strike, originally 4 pages long but amended to a fifth page with the addition of a trade union appeal. The document has details of past disputes, allegations of management incompetence and noted the size of D&F profits despite the usual seasonal slack periods. A summary of the typed manuscript was issued as a printed leaflet in the name of M & L Goldstein [Outworkers D&F] Dispute Committee.

Also in the papers are a series of witness statements about events at the factory at 37 Warren Street, the significance of which is unclear. These were one from the proprietor of the nearby John's café, about the possible removal of stock; a statement by one Daniel Gertsy concerning casual employment and a picket statement regarding late afternoon and evening use of premises. Lastly there is a handwritten note about the shares of the company secretary and factory manager, a Stanley Goldstein. Details of the Bevenden Trust, at 52/54 High Holborn, London, are noted for some reason.

The strike committee itself appears active. Leaflets by "L Kosky, secretary of the M & L Goldstein and D&F Dispute Committee", called members to a meeting on 21 September at Berwick Street, with speaker from strike committee itself. Another one was held at Cresse Street, this one at 1 pm. There were presumably many others.

Solidarity

Perhaps the most relevant documentation concerned those responding to the appeal for support for the strikers. The national union, in the form of a standard letter from London Mantle and Costume branch, was addressed to all shop stewards on 26 July, and outlines the facts. This was signed by M. Mindel, secretary, and H. Kantor, Chair of the branch. These of course were old antagonists of Joe's from the 1936 conflict in the CPGB and were to figure later in his second expulsion.

From workplaces

More importantly, other rank and file workers did respond and we have details of a few of these.

- ❑ The sheet metal workers in NUSMW, from the London District, and Motor Stewards Association sent a letter mentioning collections inside their own industry and sending £5 on account;
- ❑ Duple Motor Bodies Shop Steward's Committee, on 2 Aug, sent a £6 donation, "from a works collection for three disputes including yours. A Receipt is requested, good wishes sent" and includes a request to be kept up to date. This came from Secretary's home address in Fulham, SW6. We can only assume this was done. Their strike the previous year was renown [Duple];
- ❑ Green and Hearne and Company - industry unknown - addressed to "the strikers of Davis and Frost" organisation, with a shop stewards signing the letter, and 'comforts' [unspecified] enclosed;
- ❑ Leeds clothing workers officer Jim Roche sent a support letter of good luck mentioning his idea picketing shops selling Townwear and Dressy Frocks. He wanted more leaflets and, while going on holiday himself, had set up a meeting to discuss more activity in the city. Jim Roche was prominent in the 1971 Leeds clothing workers strike, which wrote up for the Trade Union Register [1970], and featuring in the film 'Leeds United'.

A final note about the first two/three of these support letters. Conventionally the revival of the national shop stewards movement began in the West London aircraft factories [Zinkin] but the prompt responses from North London shows its spread and depth. As ever, much of workers history was unrecorded.

Trades council

One campaign deserves special mention. The London Trades Council, "established 1860, 600,000 members", as the headed paper notes, sent out a special letter of appeal on coloured paper. This was dated 18th of

September, and recommends the following action :

- ☐ send support by money, and usual resolutions .
- ☐ also write a letter of protest to the employer ;
- ☐ consider having a union speaker from the strike at your branch,
- ☐ and help by circulating of facts of the case.

The circular was signed confusingly by 'J Jacobs' and the unwary might assume that Joe had collected another position . Actually the signatory was Julius Jacobs from the furniture workers union, who Joe mentions in the first volume as being an associate. Later a small size summary leaflet mentioning Townwear and Dressy Frocks was printed and sent out to London unions .

Two points to make here - while the heading boasts of 600,000 "members", trades union councils have no direct membership, only the that of affiliated union branches, for which a small annual per capita charge per head is made. As with all official statistics , we have no means of verifying accuracy. [Jacobs , Julius]. Secondly , the LTC was disbanded to following year as part of an anti communist purge by the Labour Party officials at the TUC - who sponsor trades union councils. A more conventional federated structure . which still operates. was used to replace the offending body.

Expelled again

One final consequence for Joe was that he was again disciplined by the CPGB. Though allowed in again , he was carefully monitored and was already being investigated. He was considered senior enough to speak - and possibly attend regularly ? - at the industrial Advisory Committee for Clothing. The ACs were the mechanism used by the CPGB to supervise the activities of the comrades who were active in the trade unions , having a strong content of the political leadership. It was his speech here that prompted the investigation that was underway before the occupation. The dispute broke out between Joe and his union branch over the issues in the strike and he was to be the subject of a further expulsion in 1952, [Pelling] This is examined mote fully in the next chapter.

Finally, in conclusion of this section on the occupation and strike , a few comments can be made . The first concerns the fact that the occupation took place at all. Most examples of this form of direct action occur in the coal mines , or docks or engineering factories where there are special conditions or traditions in favour. The fact that the relatively unorganised - 13% (according to Joe), workers of totally mixed origin and gender and age were able to stage such an event right in the middle of London , was a considerable achievement in itself. It seems that Joe's personal interest in the subject was the crucial factor.

Secondly the occurrence in a Communist run union gives an indication of the two dimensions of its leadership. This dual role was a factor in its continual loss of members and is part of its political legacy.

We now end this section and move onto other areas before returning to industrial aspects in which Joe, no longer working, kept going through political work around workplaces.

Readers who want more information are referred to the following texts, listed by author's surname :

- ~ Ken Coates , Tony Topham and Michael Barrett Brown ; *Trade Union Register 1970* [1970, 391 pp]. one of three annual publications ;
- ~ Duple Motor Bodies Shop Steward's Committee [NUVB] : *How Duples Won* [1950 , 27 pp] story of the victorious Hendon strike ;
- ~ William J Fishman : *East End Jewish Radicals 1875-1914* [1975, 336 pp] ; excellent text for the time and place ;
- ~ Clive Gilbert : *A Revolution in Jewish Life - the history of the Jewish Workers Bund* [1987, 32 pp] ;
- ~ Richard Gombin : *The Radical Tradition - a study in modern revolutionary thought* [1978, 153 pp] ; an easily available account of council communism's early years ;
- ~ Grafton see below
- ~ Joe Jacobs : Papers [1951]
- ~ Julius Jacobs foreword ; *London Trades Union Council* [1950, 160 pp] post mortem for anti communist purge victim ;
- ~ Henry Pelling : *The British Communist Party - a historical profile* [1958, 1975, 204 pp] ; most informative book free from political invective.
- ~ Al Richardson : *Joe Jacobs - out of the ghetto*, [3 pp] review in *Revolutionary History* , 5/1 , 1993.
- ~ Rudolf Rocker: *The London Years* [1958 and 2005, 228 pp] informative account of the organisation of the Jewish community in East London up to WW1; Rocker was subsequently to be general secretary of the syndicalist International Workers Association from Berlin before being forced to flee to the USA after 1933.
- ~ Jim Roche : *The Leeds Clothing Strike* [11 pp] in Ken Coates , Tony Topham and Michael Barratt Brown : *Trade Union Register* [1970, 391 pp] ;
- ~ Solidarity booklets and bi monthly journals ,
- ~ Ken Weller :: *Don't be a Soldier - the radical anti war movement in North London 1914-1918* [1985, 96 pp], comprehensive account of a real anti war movement ;
- ~ Ken Weller : *Strategy for Industrial Struggle* , Solidarity pamphlet 37 [1972 ? , 28 pp]; industrial document for an exciting period .

~ Alan Woodward; *Life and Times of Joe Thomas* [2009, 40 pp] ;
another

who went from Stalin to libertarianism,

~ Peter Zinkin; *A Man to be Watched Carefully* [1985, 168 pp] industrial
reporter from CPGB writes his autobiography.

5 Joe and the international dimension

Joe had responded all his life as part of his normal political activity to the international dimension, but this now assumed a central role for him. To that extent his main contribution to political work in international organisations came late in his life. It was the after effects of joining *Solidarity* - a problematic matter that is examined elsewhere - that introduced him to the mainly French organisation that the British structure had been associated with in, one form or other, for a decade . Joe began attending a series of the meetings of the *Information Correspondences Ouvrieres*, ICO, held around the country but especially in Boulogne. From 1971, this blossomed into a political relationship with the two main activists Henri Simon and Cajo Brendel. Later the *Echanges et Mouvement* organization was set up , in 1974, and this is still functioning at present ,

The French movement

The post trotskyist movement found expression in the formation in 1949 of *Socialism ou Barbarie*, or SoB. It lasted for 17 years and was dominated by two founder members Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort . Part of the impetus for the new organisation had been the appalling record of the French communist party , PCF, as part of the government 1945 to '47. The PCF had been openly reformist, repressing workers organisations as part of a respectable capitalist party in government . However , with the outbreak of the Cold War, it had been unceremoniously booted out and tried to re-gain its radical credentials within the labour and workers movement , with predictable limited success.

Both the founder members had been in the French section of the trotskyist Fourth International, PCI, which had a few hundred members, and had formed a dissident current there . Their background and fundamental political beliefs were quite different. Castoriadis , a middle class student, had been in the Greek communist party and later the trotskyists This was a dangerous choice as both NAZIS and communists were physically eliminating these dissidents. Castoriadis fled to Paris. Lefort , from an academic family, came to the new organisation with predictable views about anti-centralism , federation, and the dangers of the vanguard party. Such differences were to grow and eventually to split SoB.

Henri and Cajo

The politics of these writers can be categorized as broadly "council communist", accordingly to Henri Simon, rather than the more structured and marxist ideas of Cornelius Castoriadis that were in some senses to characterise *Solidarity*. The conflict of these two concepts, close but not identical, was to affect Joe's relationship with his own group.

Joe's insipient libertarianism may well have resulted in conflict with *Solidarity* in any case but his association with 'council communist' ideas - discernable from volume 1 and his critique of the CPGB - was expanded by the international comrades and probably made it even more likely. The never ending debate over the nature of the socialist organization - given that the leninist preference for a traditional vanguard revolutionary party was rejected out of hand - was to create several files of correspondence between the three main players. It was also to result in the separation of Joe from *Solidarity*, which is also looked at elsewhere in this document. Also at this time was the family relationship of Joe's daughter, Janet, with Henri Simon, and their residence in Paris and London for several years.

For now, we should firstly put Joe's international role into a pre *Solidarity* context and secondly into a political one of the development of the left in France, with its oscillation between "authoritarian" marxism and more libertarian perspectives [Gombin].

Historically

Joe had from the earliest days adopted a generally internationalist approach. Though strongly defensive of the Jewish population in East London where he had been brought up, there seems to be no trace of any leanings towards zionism. He had been relaxed about the international element which was still at this stage part of the normal ideological of membership of the CPGB. He had made journeys to France and Belgium, and in one case had smuggled a refugee into the country, as the first volume of his biography explains [Jacobs].

He knew many who went to Spain, and some who died there and was enthusiastic about the cause of the republican government. Though some writers like Rudolf Rocker, [1937] were exposing the actual fallacy of the "internationalism" of the Stalin dominated Spanish Communist Party which eventually undermined the revolutionary cause, much of this went over the heads of CPGB members. It has taken decades for the truth to emerge, with even prominent leaders like the T&GWU's Jack Jones resisting

Moving on

Joe served in the armed forces in WW2, as did many of those in the peace and trotskyist movements normally opposed to capitalist wars. This 'for or

against ' issue was a hotly debated at the time [Shipway].

He was impervious to the policy somersaults of the Soviet Union at the beginning of hostilities . His sturdy internationalism was retained, and afterward the hostilities he associated himself with the small party that was the British section of the trotskyist 4th International. It was in this organisation that he met two people who were to be lifelong friends, Arnold Feldman and John Lawrence. He sided with the latter in the dispute within the organisation in 1953 against Gerry Healy [Hunter] and probably earned his enmity that was to result later in physical threats to Joe and his rapid exit from the then Socialist Labour League [McIlroy]. Such tales were common and need no further elaboration here. He tactfully did not explain his experience to his daughter Janet who joined the SLL at the age of 16 in 1963, but did so after she had found out for herself the nature of that organisation and left it a year or so later [Janet Simon]

The following years were to see little further activity on Joe's part regarding international activity. We have no information about his immediate response to the Paris events in 1968, or even the tumult in this country around the Vietnam war at this time .

The *Solidarity* sequence

Joe's membership of *Solidarity*, or *Solidarity-for-workers-power* as it is often called, dates from 1970 and so does his association with the continental comrades, specifically the ICO. There are already excellent sources for the rich and complex history of the French "left". One of theses comes from an author who was himself a member of ICO [Gombin]

Before coming to that, it is worth noting that similar groups were established at this time within official trotskyism, in Britain and the USA especially. The British group led by Ygael Gluckstein, aka Tony Cliff, came to be known as the *Socialist Review group* , later *International Socialists* then, confusingly, the *Socialist Workers Party*. Others followed the path. In America , the partnership of CLR James, known as "Johnson" and Raya Dunayevskaya or "*Forrest*" , formed an alliance better known as "*Correspondence*" then "*News and Letters*". Marty Glaberman was later prominent in what became known as marxist-humanism [Glaberman]

The practice of assuming cover names was widespread , with Castoriadis adopting "*Pierre Chaulieu* ", "*Pierre Coudray*" and "*Paul Cardan*", and so on, [Simon H] ; Lefort responded to the name of "*Montal*" [Callinicos].

More on SoB

The key politics of SoB can be summarised briefly as defining the Soviet

Union first as a new elite of bureaucrats, then as bureaucratic capitalism, indeed as a model for western capitalism. State ownership was not sufficient on its own to be socialist. Castoriadis wrote the statement of the position, or Programme, which emphasized the fight of the rank and file against hierarchy and bureaucracy.

This general analysis however could not solve the organisation problems of its dual foundation . Was SoB to -

- ☐ be just a collection of like minded militants ?
- ☐ or should it define itself as a vanguard party ?
- ☐ was the democratic centralism of the marxists to be abandoned or just modified ?

In the end SoB was to split into various groups from 1958, 1962 and 1965. One dimension was Lefort's libertarianism, developed especially through his relationship with Maurice Merleau-Ponty and temporarily *Le Temps Modernes* journal before the Sartre take over. To be fair he had been equally critical of the anarchist perspective also.

From the past

Anton Pannekoek, the aging veteran of the German and Dutch council communists had become involved in 1953 . Despite discussions - or perhaps because of them - Castoriadis has clamped shut details of the exchange but E&M were later to publish them. He summarised his position saying that the organisation should not attempt a general liberation struggle but should restrict itself to propaganda and theoretical debate. His two letters were a re-statement of the founding ideas of council communism in 1920 Germany. Specifically his contribution was a repeat of the extended discussion in the Dutch council communists of nearly two decades previously. Perhaps the best summary of the politics of the history is to be found in the reliable writings of Richard Gombin [1977] .

The split

More letters, articles and much talking followed from both viewpoints, and the mid years of the 1950s saw an intensification of the industrial struggle in the factories. Eventually in 1958 the long predicted split finally took place, resulting in *Information et Liaison Ouvrieres*, later *Information Correspondences Ouvrieres*, a libertarian alternative.

The ILO had been formed as a result of the French government removing the delayed draft for students in the desperate war in Algeria in that year. A big protest movement had developed, comprising the anti war students who were determined not to be called up. This movement was quite separate from the workers' groups, who made up the membership of the ICO, and

lasted to the conclusion of the conflict in 1962.

SoB continued.

Castoriadis had believed that it should act as co-ordinator for workers struggles and also as a vanguard , albeit defused, and this should constitute a new type of party . He proposed further amendments to marxist theory - the central contradiction was no longer to be the economic one of exploitation for accumulation of capital but the more political one of authority - the conflict of managers and managed. Alienation remained as a general concept.

More splits and the openly marxist journal *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, appeared, with an emphasis on the struggle in the workplace. But the Castoriadis amendments to the foundation marxism created growing disillusionment and SoB was finally dissolved in 1965. The original politics were to find an unlikely home in the British *Solidarity* organisation, where Chris Pallis both translated and interpreted some Castoriadis documents.

Informations Correspondance Ouvrieres

Meanwhile our main concern is centred on the new ICO, with its distinctive political concepts being formulated around the personages of Henri Simon and Lefort. This is of course where we came in . Joe attended his branch in *Solidarity*, London , and participated in the "international" ICO meetings from 1971 . His daughter Janet acted as translator for these but Joe was keenly interested in the broad sweep of ideas which overlapped but was not identical to those of *Solidarity*.

Council communist dissidents - a summary of the background from 1918
The influence of the Dutch comrades has been crucial for the development of the communists dissenting from the official leninist version . Anton Pannekoek, a scientist by trade , survived right up to 1960, and had a personal history going back to the pre WW1 German SPD, the split with the leninists in Moscow and the subsequent history of the German and Dutch movements . His political partner had been Hermann Gorter, a poet and popular activist in the council communist party , the German Worker's Communists, or KAPD. His challenge to Comrade Lenin , the famous *Open Letter*, won the argument but not of course the dispute, still has been reprinted regularly over the intervening years. [Gorter][Appel]

The original impetus for workers councils , now defined as the central feature of the new idea, had come from the East European strike wave culminating in 1905 where the workplace soviets had first appeared. [Luxemburg]. These soviets should not be compared to the ones after 1917 in Russia where the crucial role was played by the district soviets which

were overseen by a political executive and the Party communism of the emerging state capitalist regime [Brinton]

To complete this brief account of the history, we should add that the dispute arose originally with the official dominance of the Russian communists over the quite different parties in the urban, not rural, West. The dispute was conducted in marxist terms, with many previously loyal Bolsheviks departing from Moscow to establish their own organisation. Anarcho syndicalist ideas about workers councils were part of the debate. Gradually the difference became a separate political theory in its own right, identified through the label of "council communism".

A new dimension entirely was added during the Spanish revolution after 1936 when a section of the Spanish Anarchists in the CNT union, broke ranks as the war with the NAZI-backed mutiny of Franco was gradually being lost, and called for what was essentially a council communist organisation. These were the *Friends of Durruti*, named after the eminent political and war leader, a small but influential group that resisted expulsion attempts from the CNT with rank and file support [Guillamon]. The more modest UK developments can be found in Mark Shipway [1988].

Finally in modern times, council communism was revived by publications on the 1956 Hungarian workers councils [James] and the Paris events in May 1968. The texts from ICO for the May '68 events were accurate - but the later orthodox politician, Daniel Cohn Bendit, used them in a quite unprincipled way without acknowledgement, in his book. The ICO texts were later published as a chapter in a book on workers movements [Rachleff]. Curiously Cohn Bendit's book has been a best seller since then. The ICO centred international group - based on France, with Belgian group Liaisons, the group in Holland and a few comrades in the UK like Joe - inherited this tradition.

The politics of ICO

Continuing the traditions of Claude Lefort, who curiously soon left the organisation for the development of his academic career, ICO differed marginally but definitely from the Castoriadis concepts. While these saw national trade unions as degenerate and corrupt, the ICO approach was more dialectical:

- Trade unions were essentially the pivot for the relationship with the capitalist class and had always been such. There was no question of "betrayal", or "leading the fight", the role of the trade unions had a double face - both to seek organisation at the outset, recruiting to extend memberships and provide some services for the members, but also to mediate in disputes and facilitate compromise agreements with

the management.

- ❑ The important thing anyway was that workers should be aware of the real position, free from a political overlay. The provision of information, dismissed by the vanguard groups as mere "servicing" was an essential role, justifying the existence of the organization as a collective body;
- ❑ This networking task of facilitating communication between groups of workers was critical, and as the more centralised structures, with their negative impact on workers' personal consciousness, went into further decline, these assume greater significance;
- ❑ When new methods were adopted - or re-adopted - in the class struggle like occupations, such actions regardless of legality, were to be fully supported as direct action and part of the workers council programme.
- ❑ The political parties or groups played no constructive role in the advance of the workers interests, invariably seeking to impose their own proposals and solutions to conflict situations. History confirms their irrelevance.
- ❑ The end result was anyway the initial workers control of the workplaces, through the mechanism of the councils, repeating the anarcho-syndicalist projection for collective control of society, and leading to this wider objective.

New start

By 1974 the original composition of ICO had changed. The student remnants of the ILO were merged into the main organisation in 1962, and more had followed after the events of 1968. The basis of the worker groups was not maintained, there was also the change with people leaving, and it was felt that it should be replaced by a new group, Echanges et Mouvements in that year. The essential political ideas politics of E&M seem identical to ICO and the main leaders were unchanged, Henri Simon and Cajo Brendel.

There was to be a journal *Echanges* published from 1975 to the present and available in several languages, though not English since 1993. The constituent groups, who have varied as the years pass, have been either individuals or groups located in France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Norway, the U.K., and the U.S.A.. These were notably Belgium, France, (*Liasons*), Holland (*Daad en Gedachte*), Italy (*Collegamenti Wobbly*), Scandinavia (*Motiva Forlag*), and Spain (*Etcetera*), and finally a group based in Detroit and one other in that country, Red and Black. These have come and gone over time.

The politics

E & M is a network based originally on the groups outlined in several paragraphs above and continuing the traditions of earlier bodies and it drew up a basic programme after extensive discussion in 1980. This, as

amended, is on the website of E&M and is reproduced below :

Some Basic Principles

One. *In capitalist society the true contradiction is not one of ideas - revolutionary, reformist, conservative, reactionary, etc. - but one of interests. No kind of will or desire can overthrow commodity production or abolish the wage system. This will only break down as a result of class struggle arising from the very position of the working class in the system of capitalist production.*

Two. *According to a widespread opinion "class consciousness" and "unity" are seen to be the main and necessary conditions for what is considered as "revolutionary behaviour" or as "working class action". This view overlooks or misinterprets how action and consciousness are influencing each another. Workers don't act as a "revolutionary class" because first of all they are or become "conscious" of what they want. "Unity" is not a precondition for, but is created in and as a result of struggle. Workers are a "revolutionary class" because their position as a class inside the capitalist system makes it inevitable that the mere defence of their own interests brings them into direct opposition to the fundamentals of the existing order. Such struggles are fought continuously in the factories and elsewhere, and potentially they are revolutionary.*

Three. *The development of class struggle with all its changing forms is therefore far more important than the development of the so-called "revolutionary movement", regardless of the meaning given to this word.*

Four. *The break with any form of exploitation or political practice and thought (reformism, etc.) is not a matter of theoretical discussion and conceptions but a matter of class struggle and workers' practice, a practice which is the result of their daily conditions of exploitation.*

Five. *Trade unions are institutions in capitalist society whose function is to regulate the labour market. To be able to do so, they have to keep a balance between on one hand workers' interests (trying to maintain the loyalty and the support from the workers) and on the other hand the interest of capitalists (trying to maintain the confidence of, as well as, their usefulness for management.) But in modern capitalism the historical trend pushes toward their complete integration. Performing their initial function in these conditions they are more and more transformed into mechanisms of disciplining the workers. Calls for rejecting the unions or for their support or for reforms have no meaning at all. It is more important to see what is the specific and concrete role of unions in the development of class struggle. One has to be well aware of the fact that the same rank and file workers*

who at one time support unions will oppose them in practice when their own interests force them to go against the present social order. In general we can say that particularly in the highly developed countries the post-war development of class struggle has greatly reduced the possibility of mediating between the classes and has created a situation where workers find themselves permanently opposed to the unions. The same development of the actual class struggle has rendered obsolete any kind of syndicalist project.

Six For similar reasons it is useless to call for the rejection or support of parliamentarism. The fate of parliamentarism depends exclusively on class struggle inside the capitalist system. Whatever may be the reason for those who want to call themselves "revolutionaries" not to participate in parliamentary work or not to vote in an election workers have other reasons when they don't go to the polls. If they stay at home on election day, they don't do so with revolutionary ideas in mind. They abstain because parliament, parliamentary parties and politicians don't have anything to say to them, because they have understood none of the political parties is defending their interests and that it does not make much difference if this party or another is in office.

On the other hand workers who go to the polls and share parliamentary illusions will not refuse to participate in unofficial strikes or factory occupations if they seem necessary. Both categories behave in the same way in practice irrespective of their attitude in elections. They do so without a revolutionary theory about parliament and without being conscious that they are attacking the order of bourgeois society.

Seven The so-called "revolutionary movement" and the "revolutionary groups" tend to be weaker and weaker nowadays and clearly suffer the fate of atomisation. They are weak because workers are more and more acting for themselves and by themselves. It is more and more clear that their means of action and methods of struggle are and cannot be prescribed or taught by any sort of movement or group formed for this purpose outside or inside the working class.

Class struggle exists and develops independently of these "revolutionary groups" or "movements". The level and size of the so-called "intervention of revolutionary groups in the struggles" never determine or fundamentally influence the level and size of working class struggle. We may be individually involved in such struggles either because we belong to the collectivity involved in a particular struggle or because we participate in one or another of the host of temporary organisms created during a particular struggle and for that struggle alone. We consider that outside these struggles the exchange of information, discussions and the seeking of theoretical insights are an essential instrument of our own activity which

eventually might serve others as well.

Eight In very general terms "revolution" is usually defined as the overthrowing of capitalism. If we wish to characterize it in a different way we could say, e.g. that it means on one hand the decline and disappearance of all kinds of practical organizational forms "representing" and repressing workers' interests and of ideological expression of such attempts, on the other hand the generalization at the same time of autonomous workers' practice

Further notes on the bulletin "Echanges"

The bulletin was started as a means of spreading and receiving information. Those participating in this project decided not to bother with the clarification of standpoints held in common (which usually accompanies the birth of a new group) but to accept the existing tacit agreement. The basic implicit agreement which underlay the content and form of the information published was still badly defined at the start, but as the project developed, it revealed a sufficiently unified approach among participants even if participants were very diverse as explained above.

This tacit agreement expressed itself in the analysis of various phenomena of the class struggle taking place every day and placed in the context of a more general understanding of the world. These phenomena include what many other people think to be individual forms of protest which are in fact part of a collective movement (e.g. absenteeism, turnover, refusal of work, etc.) This is necessarily linked to the critique of the existing theories of modern society.

To do this, we must have information about these conflicts and theories. If inside *Echanges* we sometimes draw different conclusions from a specific fact or from a set of facts, we still think that the information which describes these facts should have certain qualities. Here too, a few simple principles guide our way of selecting the information published in the bulletin:

- ❑ The *raison d'être* of the bulletin is directly determined by the double inadequacy of the official means of information: lack of information on class conflicts, exaggeration of the importance of political and economic information (two ways of masking reality).
- ❑ Hence the double task of looking for information concerning the experience of struggle of all sorts and of making a meaningful choice from the mass of political, diplomatic and economical news.
- ❑ We have few fixed preconceived conceptions limiting our gathering of information or of analyses concerning the meaning of class conflicts today or the forms these conflicts will take in the future. It is not what workers think, even about their own struggles, that

matters but what they actually do and the real meaning of their activity. We think we have to learn from these struggles and to consider their links with the general movement of struggles and with the situation of capitalism as a whole. So we despise using empty bluff, empty rhetoric or self-satisfying proclamations or offering "advice" or "lessons" to the workers. We see this attitude as an elitist conception seeking to use and dominate workers' struggles.

- *As its name implies, the bulletin Echanges wants to be more than a one way means of information. It is conceived rather as a collective letter to which each reader is encouraged to contribute according to his/her possibilities and need, in exchange for what he/she expects to get from others. However, several years experience shows that even with the best intentions, one cannot, just by wanting to, escape certain traditional forms of activity. Presently, the exchange of views and material, the contribution of texts and the practical production of the bulletin are the work of a minority as opposed to the majority of readers. But the original conception remains a goal of Echanges.*

Readers may feel, like the author, that this is little to criticise in ICO Principles and that they deserve support.

Back to the main subject. Joe was an energetic participant in both group activities like the letter exchanges and the "international" meetings at Boulogne and elsewhere. These lasted for up to three days with a flexible agenda but more often than not discussing the question of organisation. Attendance was not large and from made up of participants from France, Holland, Belgium and the UK, though sometimes people came from Germany and Italy. Joe was energetic in ensuring advance circulation of his documents to be discussed.

Cajo Brendel

At the same time Joe began a correspondence with Cajo Brendel, the experienced Dutch council communist, whose organisation was "*Daad en Gedachte*", *Action and Thought*. Cajo liked debating political issues with industrial militants and the exchange of letters went right up to the month of Joe's collapse and death. Later he was to enter a long debate with long standing miners union militant Dave Douglas that sparked several publications, including the E&M *Goodbye to the unions* [1992]. He was main theorist of a version of council communist political philosophy. His many publications constitute a strong case for this idea and his busy intellect thrived around political inquiry with militants like Joe. His publications available in English are *Thesis on China*, *Kronstadt* and the

East German revolt in 1953. He died in 2006.

Joe's letters , from 1971 to 77, are concerned with both theoretical and practical concerns , mainly exchange visits. In terms of ideas., there is much bantering about being a marxist or not., and quotations from Marx and Lenin. Cajo is asking Joe questions but as his letters are not available ,we cannot know what they were.

1974 was the busiest year with more than 10 letters, some up to 7 pages long. Joe mentions his dissent with the Ulster Workers Councils booklet , the final paragraph of which comments on their non-socialist nature. Joe apparently felt this was direction by *Solidarity* that he disapproved of. He complains of a lack of text on the situation in Poland and mentions contact with Peter Rachleff , the editor of an excellent book of readings on workers councils, *Root and Branch*. He talks briefly about false consciousness - itself a contentious concept, possibly loaded with the implied superiority he opposed - but does not delve deeply.

The bulk of the comment is about the industrial situation and events in Britain. This is mainly informed and relevant but Joe complains of a lack of full information. He writes many paragraphs on the miners and the dockers which in a post-Thatcher era , seem optimistic but "not euphoric" , he assures us.

Joe's other correspondents were Henri and Janet Simon, the former having been a key lieutenant to Lefort and a driving force in the ICO movement. His main publications in English have been an excellent book on *Poland* [1985] and the booklet *New Movement* [1976], which was hotly debated in *Solidarity* but remained the central statement of *Echanges et Mouvements* organisation. The standard text is the *Solidarity* translation with a reply/comment by them. Joe did in fact begin writing an addition to this, *Britain and the New Movement*, but this was unfinished.

These letters are more of a private nature , lots of family matters especially after the birth of Janet's daughter, Claire. Later his developing illness is discussed , along with family re-unions. Politically the subject matter often appears to duplicate his correspondence with Cajo but here he is more personal and at greater length.

He complains bitterly about what he saw as exclusion of his critical views, but this is likely to have been the usual administration of the base level units, like *Solidarity* London. He consistently complains about the way discussion always appears to be searching for the "socialist content" in events. Of course, socialists would support any resistance to capitalism

like strikes, but its own concerns would mean identifying the elements linked to rank and file action especially. This is for educative purposes and to be able to clarify the issues for any leaflets or discussion with the participants. Joe thought this was being too "pure".

He identified with Simon's *New Movement* ideas and thought the "elite" running *Solidarity* were being slow in propagating the document, because they were stuck partly in the 'Old Movement' tradition. Meetings of the national *Solidarity* organisation gave him a platform, which he used fully, and the final publication included an assessment or reply by his antagonists. This said, basically that the phenomena selected were far from new - more part of the perennial working class revolt - and that the document appears obscure in parts and with an occasional contradiction. There was a divergence of views. Readers will have to make up their own mind but we return to the subject in a later chapter.

The booklet on Poland is probably Henri's best known publication in English. A first version came from E&M in 1982 but a second was published by Black and Red, a North American libertarian organisation, in 1985. This did not include an index and reading references were confined to the text. Even so, it is a brilliant account of the rapid transition of *Solidarity* from being a workers co-ordinating committee into a trade union of a traditional type.

This had many of the faults we associated with the union above the workplace ;

- ❑ the adoption of a general mediating role between the rank and file and the capitalist powers,
- ❑ at best, an ambiguous approach to unofficial strikes, at worst condemnatory,
- ❑ the "national interest" apparently displacing workers interest,
- ❑ quite inadequate election of union leaders, and so on

Of course unions have made this transition in many countries and many circumstances. I am a bit disappointed that examples of say the German unions in 1918/19, or the Knight of Labor in 19th century America are not even mentioned for comparative purposes. However the basic description of an emerging organisation in a revolutionary situation becoming institutionalised in a matter of months make this an essential text for socialists and those with an interest in labour issues. It stands as a good critique of state capitalism and trade unions. The writing is concise, and the language and approach is not academic.

Conclusions

Joe's internationalism eventually became an important element in his political thought and action. The writer of this document is deeply sympathetic to his preference and will be participating in the movement as usual.

Reading

- ~ Jan Appel: *The Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution* [1930 Berlin & 1990 translation, 589 pp] privately published: economic proposals for the period after the revolution. It is also autobiographical, and formed basis of educational work of Dutch councilists, GIK, in 1930s.
- ~ Cajo Brendel : see text
- ~ Maurice Brinton (*Chris Pallis*) : *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control, 1917-21* [1970, 86 pp] see also Goodway, David
- ~ Alex Callinicos: *Trotskyism* [1990, 103 pp] ;
- ~ Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit : *Obsolete Communism* - the left wing alternative [1969, 256 pp] ;
- ~ Echanges et Mouvements (Advocom) ; *Goodbye to the unions* [1992, 43 pp] ;
- ~ Martin Glaberman: *Punching Out and Other Writings* [2002 USA, 220 pp] ;
- ~ Richard Gombin: *The Origins of Modern Leftism* [1975, 144 pp] ;
- ~ David, Goodway editor : *For Workers' Power - the selected writings of Maurice Brinton* [2004, 379 pp] ;
- ~ Herman Gorter: *An Open Letter to Comrade Lenin* [1921, 1995, 41 pp] , short but effective demolition of the leninist claim to socialism ;
- ~ Agustin Guillamon; *The Friends of Durruti Group 1937-1939* [1996, 114 pp] ;
- ~ Bill Hunter: *Lifelong Apprenticeship - life and times of a revolutionary, [1997, 440 pp];*
- ~ CLR James as JR Johnson, Grace C Lee and Pierre Chaulieu, Cornelius Castoriadis) : *Facing Reality e new society, where to look for it , how to bring it closer,* [1958, USA, and later, 174pp]
- ~ Peter Rachleff , the editor R & B ; *Root and Branch ; the rise of the workers movement ;* [1975, 544 pp] an excellent book of readings on workers council ;
- ~ Rudolf Rucker: *The Tragedy of Spain* [1937& 1986, 48 pp],
- ~ Mark Shipway: *Anti Parliamentary Communism - the movement for workers councils , in Britain 1917 to 1945* [1988, 239 pp],
- ~ Henri Simon : *Poland 1980-82- class struggle and the crisis of capital [1985 Canada, 144 pp],*
- ~ Henri Simon : *The New Movement* [1976, 13 pp] with Solidarity reply;
- ~ Janet Simon ; conversations, 2010

- ~ Rosa Luxemburg : The Mass Strike , the Political Party and the Trade Union [1908 & 1997, 122 pp]
- ~ Woodward, Alan : *Party Over Class ; how Leninism has subverted workers council organisation* [2002 - second revised edition, 77 pp]

6 Strike Reporting from the outside

After the excitement of the occupation and Joe's adventure into trotskyism , there seems to be an interlude on his activities at the workplace. We know the basic facts - he kept working in the clothing trade, the family moved to Maida Vale then to Camden in 1965, then for some reason he packed in this traditional work and looked elsewhere. His daughter Janet recalls that previously while still living in Stepney, he did try to set up a dry cleaning shop. This failed because Joe charged too little and managed to upset some local people - he was obviously not cut out to be a capitalist !

A radical change

Joe has described these years as the barren years. However they also mark the turning point in his political philosophy as he began them as some form of marxist but ended them, presumably with some awareness, in a semi- libertarian organisation. Joe joined *Solidarity* in 1970 along with his friend Arnold Feldman. This transition is not unique . Eminent figures like the American writer Murray Bookchin and the French activist Daniel Guerin took this path and have written books to celebrate the process. In the ordinary ranks of the CPGB, Joe Thomas left the Party and ended up founding the Movement for Workers Councils [Woodward]. Joe's own story about the overall change is in an article he wrote about the myth of the a golden past , *The Good Old Days* [*Solidarity*]

It is worth re-iterating the two major systems within the labour and socialist movement about the analysis of the past and the direction for the future - the case for marxism and its feuding followers has been well publicised. The dispute with the anarchists going back to the first International Workingmen's Association is quite well known as well. Bakunin's prediction of a new ruling class appeared verified when the Russia 1917 revolution became state capitalist , despite the claim to 'communism '.

Libertarianism - a slightly more general form of anarchism - poses its own ideas. A working definition might be " *a social philosophy which , in opposition to a system obsessed with economic determinism and political party solutions , seeks a planned and ordered society which allows the maximum freedom for the activity, development and satisfaction of the*

individual. It rejects supernatural theories beyond humanism. While it makes no claim to be "scientific", it celebrates diversity, imagination, co-operation and bottom-up control of workplaces, communities, institutions and society. Being concerned with the collective ownership and management, it is often associated with other non-market, non-State beliefs like anarchism and socialism. [Bookchin vol 4]

"The proper study of mankind is man" it could be said. The battle lines were well drawn and persist to this day within the movement.

Events

Meanwhile back in the modern world of Britain, momentous happenings occurred around 1960. Many of the CP exiles - departing as a result of the Russian suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, after a frustrating period with Healy's SLL organisation, themselves formed a new body, more or less "marxist-libertarian". This was *Solidarity* which we examine at some length in another chapter.

New work

Around the mid sixties, Joe began work in the Post Office at the huge Mount Pleasant office in Farringdon. He was on shift work - as were large numbers of staff - but his hours changed. He notes in his brief introduction to the booklet on the 1971 strike, that in this workplace he sustained an injury that led to a premature retirement in 1970. However it is likely that the cause of his ill health was that he fell over in the street, and damaged his foot. This led to the back problems that prompted his retirement. There is no record of his activity in this short period at this workplace as a member of the Union of Post office Workers but Joe came back into activity when the dispute occurred, regularly visiting picket lines.

As an ex postal worker, within a month of the end of the strike, he wrote a booklet on the 1971 Post Office strike that included reprinting leaflets issued to the strikers. This was *Sorting Out the Postal Strike a postman's personal account of the strike* [Jacobs]. He also reviewed the International Socialists booklet in an issue of *Solidarity* dated May 1972

The strike

The facts of the dispute can be briefly stated. After much high level talking, the dispute, engineered by Ryland, the deputy leader of the PO, began on 20 January. The strike was taken up with enthusiasm by posties and lasted for a long 44 days. Each Thursday there was a demonstration/march in London. The UPW put out a daily strike bulletin which was information full. When the funds of the union ran out - it had only a small and recently set up strike fund - other unions and members both promised and delivered money support. Most of this was required, for accounting purposes, to be

in the form of what were technically 'loans'.

The logic of capitalism then struck a fatal blow. After 6 weeks, the UPW bankers, The Co-operative Bank, told the union it could not accept any more loans, so Tom Jackson, the new general secretary, went back to the General Council of the TUC for a financial bail out. To his amazement, the assembled company dishonoured their previous and much publicised promises - no more cash ! The UPW were forced back to accept a humiliating return to work as the hardship claims of the single strikers just could not be met .

This was truly a betrayal almost of 1926 dimensions. Of course the role of national unions has always been to reign in militant action - its why they are there - but in this case promises had been made. The contemptible actions of the TUC were one of the worst cases up to that point. To that point yes, but since then we have seen the wholesale adoption of the market led, anti workers philosophy that disqualifies Labour Governments and Party , and the bureaucracy of full time officials of the Union structure from any role of defending the workers interests.

Back to the strike - publications

Directly afterwards, both Joe and Paul Foot of the International Socialists, took up their pens. The latter wrote a long account which included a lot of the historical and union background. It is perhaps a little unfair to compare the two publications . Foot had all the resources of a national newspaper at his hands, as well as a political group, while Joe was writing from a rank and file position with minimum facilities . Nonetheless there is virtually no antagonism at this time , as if neither was aware of the other. Joe had joined *Solidarity* by now and the relations between that organisation and the International Socialists were generally good . The IS was still relatively libertarian , not yet having begun its transition to the one true revolutionary party that has been its downfall in recent decades.

The IS document has half its length - 11 pages - on the framework, before looking at the strike , but it tells the story with some accuracy. Foot outlines in detail the general political perspective , the split in the employers as PO Chair Lord Hall voiced his dissent at the extreme aggression and was instantly placed by Ryland , the ultimate hatchet man. Foot suggests the reason for the infamous betrayal by the TUC was a chance to "talk" with the Heath government over the anti union law, the Industrial Relations Bill. For this miserable concession the TUC carried out their historical role , and put the boot in. Few suspected the leaders of the movement could be quite so callous.

"Revolutionary" omissions

There is a downside to the Foot booklet. Of course the crucial factor, as with government reports, official documents and the like, is what is not said. The IS publication fails to look at the autocratic practice of the general secretary and the negotiations and conduct of the strike - these were after all the pattern common to trade unions. It neglects to mention the solidarity action of telephonists, it omits largely the protest actions that often follow such "Agreements", such as the Liverpool posties who stayed out for a further day. It was quite uncritical of the actions, or non actions, of the Communist Party who could have led a substantial revolt.

It was left to Joe Jacobs and *Solidarity* to publicise these hidden facts. The documents, plus a report of the UPW conference, *A Day at the Seaside*, critical of Paul Foot and his speech at a fringe meeting at the conference in Bournemouth of 1971, are clear in their politics. Though the author of the report is only identified by the initials J I M [possibly Juan McIver], the whole issue is fundamentally stated and Joe's *Solidarity* credentials clearly promoted. By the time of the Annual Conference in the Spring the slightly different perspectives were a cause of much argumentation, quite often appearing after a major dispute is lost. Here the issue was simple. Despite similarities, the two publishing groups had substantial disagreements over the way forward. It is also true that Joe emphasized the constructive role of direct action while Foot spoke vaguely about the political nature of the struggle.

Other documents

Two other sources have been consulted over the dispute. The official history of the union by Alan Clinton, and the recently published rank and file account of the Bristol posties by Dave Chapple [Clinton] & [Chapple]. One international comparison of a contemporary strike in the USA which can also be read constructively, is examined. [Brecher] For information about the recent CWU strike, there are details in an excellent letter-sized volume, recently published in 2009 [Mayall].

The history of the UPW, as the union was called until 1980, is a huge and detailed book. As well as sections on the early strikes in the Post Office, it has more than a chapter on the impact of guild socialism - the full time union officials' version of workers control - but for all that, it is concerned with the functioning of a union within the regulation of capitalist control, parliament, etc. For our purposes, there is a chapter on the '71 strike which confirms the main details. It does add more evidence about the rank and file protests at the end of the strike from South East London to Liverpool Amalgamated branch. It reveals details of at least one secret meeting between general secretary Tom Jackson and Ryland, and

describes the latter as "unfeeling and unbending". Generally this is a handy reference book but not essential reading.[Clinton]

Bristol fashion

The same cannot be said of "*George Massey*" and the Bristol posties [Chapple]. This well-illustrated book, salvaged from a union office, is a detailed record of the activity over the years seen through the eyes of an activist who became an overseer in 1959. He made a long oral contribution. Like Joe, George Henry Massey, was a CPGB member and broke with the Party in the '30s on political grounds - because he asked too many questions about the show trials of the old bolsheviks. Like Joe he re-joined after the war but in his case stayed in, despite Hungary and all that, until after his retirement, in 1976. Meanwhile he had assumed a managerial position, while working with the CPGB (Advisory) Committee, as Joe had done. He remained an honorary UPW member but was active in the managerial unions.

Originally, George and three other members had set up a workplace branch of the CPGB but as security was a key priority this was given the somewhat ambitious title of the Rosa Luxemburg Group. While this might be of some interest to those of us who once considered themselves as Luxemburgists, it turns out to have been a standard workplace branch of the now reformist Communists. It had its own journal, secretly distributed, and was organisationally kept separate from local postal union work.

The main function of the RL Group was to lead a union reform group in Bristol, across the existing grades of staff. The emphasis on control from the bottom up, in this case the UPW constitutional commitment to guild socialism, but it is sad to have to report that is mainly of interest to the UPW/CWU members. Its aim to rejuvenate the local leadership is admirable but in fact has little of the great Polish socialist's wider vision for a new society. Guild socialism is now largely forgotten but some sources remain [Ostergaard]

When George was effectively expelled by the CP, the R&F group shuddered to a halt. For more information on the CP workplace units, see McIlroy [2,000] whose extensive research and writings in fact cover a later period. There is plenty more to discuss - and possibly disagree about - on related topics in the book. The book is curiously non political, unlike the Brecher book below. and the writer would like the author go from merely recording the facts to an analytical style that befits the one time Chair of the National Shop Stewards Network.

The 1971 strike

The book does have a chapter on this and relays a lot on local information. It is largely taken up with personal reminiscences but the main details confirm the Clinton account. George assisted the UPW branch activists and acting, in a personal capacity and as honorary member :

- ❑ staffed the UPW office,
- ❑ organised a levy in his own union getting around 20% response,
- ❑ went on some local marches and demonstrations
- ❑ explains how the strike breaking telephonists were boycotted afterwards

Despite its modest intentions, this is a book worth reading. Its' narrative of the strike is a microcosm of the national event and the full Minutes of the rank and file group are reproduced for study. This is the author's third book for the Somerset Socialist Library, in Bridgewater and can be obtained from them at £10.

Comparison and speculation

There is much talk today about banning strikes in the public sector. The effectiveness of any future legislation may be assessed from an international comparison. There is a very full and explicit story of the contemporaneous postal strike in the USA [Brecher or Aronowitz]. This was an illegal strike from the outset, so the obstructions were enormous. It was the first semi national walk-out for some decades and the main cause was wages well below the official poverty line.

Starting in New York, it spread to other cities, despite appeals by national and local union officers. The whole battery of intimidation, media pressure, legal threats over several days failed to prevent the action spreading. Finally the US President called in 25,000 troops. These fraternised a lot but did little to get the mail moving. Finally union reps agreed to call off the action providing official action was called. A hasty deal got the posties an immediate 6% rise and another 8% later that year. This was one of a series of unofficial actions in these years [Zerzan] and was considered by some as part of a new movement in society.

Finally, today

'Roy Mayall's' timely book, gives the inside story from a postal worker about what's happening to a major public service currently and the reasons why posties took one day strike action in 2009. Its outline of working conditions is quite unusual and is a thorough account of the Government and Royal Mail's offensive against ordinary workers. [Mayall]

In summary

The '71 strike was the first example of Joe as a reporter of strike action rather than as a workplace participant. There appears to be no difference between Joe and *Solidarity*, at this time. Some months later Joe also reported an apparent rupture, as the official UPW Circulars abandoned its close relations with the organisations of the traditional left, and began to condemn them, [*Solidarity*].

1972

In quick succession we now look at a further example of Joe Jacobs, ace industrial reporter. In the following year there was a burst of occupations around Manchester over an engineering pay claim and this a story all on its own [Chadwick]. Also in these years there was a further series of occupations and work-ins against the closures of factories and our next example is one of these. This was not comparable to the Upper Clyde Shipyard work-in but of considerable local importance.

Fisher Bendix and occupations

Originally the booklet on the subject was an account of two visits to the factory by seven comrades describing the well executed occupation and the usual high level of organisation by the workers. The previous events to this are the take over by Thorns, and a long subsequent strike - the shop stewards had now pre-empted a closure of the workplace by themselves planning an occupation in January 1972, and centralising the resources of stock and spare parts. Appeals for support met a good response but the final settlement after 4 weeks was constructively criticised in subsequent articles. The occupation story was told by Joe Jacobs' in *Solidarity*, pamphlet number 39, entitled *Under New Management?*

An intervention by the *Big Flame* group

At the same time however there had been a communication from the *Big Flame* group who launched an astonishing attack saying the pamphlet was "criminal", bolstering up old attitudes and accusing *Solidarity* of being merely a publication house 'divorced from working class struggles'. By this they meant not being committed to a policy of direct intervention, as they were. Their letter said basically that the stewards had not organised the occupation and that most workers remained passive to the action.

Solidarity then printed a Discussion Bulletin the following month entitled *Solidarity and the Neo Narodniks*. This went through *Big Flame* allegations in some detail and showed they were contradictory. Their own newsletter revealed the facts to be as *Solidarity* had said. Moreover *Big Flame* had publicised a so-called *Statement from the Workpeople*, which was in reality a concoction of reformist and Stalinist rhetoric aimed at undermining the

occupiers. The document went on to look at the basic politics of "autonomy" and "spontaneity", and the difference between being 'militant' and being 'revolutionary'. A valuable service.

It described *Big Flame* as being "worker populist" though the organisation was to undergo some rapid transformations in its life. It became associated with the Italian group *Lutta Continua* - the Struggle Continues - and had phases of supporting the armed struggle and parliamentary candidates, following its example.

Reasons why (1)

The influence of Maoism - and the internal revolt against the official CPGB leaders - was gaining strength at this time and the whole affair could well be seen be a reflection of that. The other issue only partly revealed even now was the extent to which BF was acting as a recruiting agent for the T&GWU. Certainly members of the other major union in the workplace, the engineering AEU, felt that was happening [Weller 2010]

Reasons why (2)

A few years later Big Flame, apparently named after the response to the GEC events of 1970, published their own "Introduction". This mentions casually that some of their own members had been influenced 'by libertarian groups like *Solidarity*'. The implication is that internal politics may have been part of the reason for the ill founded attack, to pull possibly wavering members round. At any rate there is no mention of this episode in the booklet despite plenty of other examples of 'intervention'. It was obviously not rated as a 'success' worth mentioning, and was confined to 'the dustbin of history', as they might say.

In the last analysis, Big Flame lost more and more members to the Labour Party, after two smaller groups had joined it. After involvement in the doomed but costly *News on Sunday* adventure, it was finally wound up around 1983 - the whole decline being an model of how marxist left groups finally perish

The right way

The conflict was an excellent example of how a revolutionary group like *Solidarity* can effectively assist workers in struggle by rational analysis and publication. The perspectives of occupations - an example of the direct action associated with council communism but also the problems of isolation and defensiveness - were examined constructively.

For Joe the conclusion was that original material was vindicated and his position strengthened. *Solidarity* reprinted the original pamphlet with a

slightly expanded final section on occupations generally and this was thus the second edition. Comparison were made with earlier occupations in the UK, and abroad. This part was written by Mark Fore, or Ken Weller. Another victory for the "libertarian marxists"

Our attention in this book now turns to other aspects of Joe's life .

Reading references . Readers who want more information are referred to the following texts listed by authors surname :

- ~ Stanley Aronowitz and Jeremy Brecher : *The Postal Strike* [In USA , 1970, 11 pp] in Root and Branch (editors) :
- ~ *Root and Branch - the rise of the workers movements* [1975 USA, 544p] a unique collection of readings on episodes of workers control from Russia 1917 to Paris 1968. A useful contribution on little known American history ; see also Jeremy Brecher and John Zerzan:
- ~ Big Flame : *An Introduction to Big Flame - our politics, history, structures and publications* [1979 ? , 11 pp] ;
- ~ Jeremy Brecher : *Strike* [1975 , revised ed 1997, 421 pp] probably the best account of American workers struggles ;
- ~ Graham Chadwick : *The Manchester Engineering Sit- Ins 1972* [12 pp] in Michael Barratt Brown and Ken Coates *Trade Union Register 3* [1973, 296 pp] ;
- ~ Dave Chapple ; *Grasshoppers, Stonkers and Straight Eights - George Massey and the Bristol Post Office workers 1930 - 1976* [2010 , 240 pp, A4 format] ; personal account of a career rebel in a big city workplace, union orientated. Unique local history volume ;
- ~ Alan Clinton , : *Post Office Workers - a trade union and social history* [1984, 713 pp], a substantial volume on the different unions that went to make up the CWU, which is quite political explicit , detailed and readable. Goes up to 1976
- ~ Paul Foot : *The Postal Workers and the Tory Offensive* [1971 , 23 pp], an account of the big strike by UPW of that year, from an SWP perspective.
- ~ Joe Jacobs : *Sorting Out the Postal Strike* [1971 , 10 pp 'Solidarity for workers power' pamphlet no 36] a postman's personal account of the strike .;
- ~ Joe Jacobs : review of the IS booklet , *Solidarity* ;
- ~ Roy Mayall : *Dear Granny Smith - a letter from your postman* , [2009, 120 pp] Personal statement ref 2009 strike which takes the form of a narrative and cleverly outlines the posties case while ridiculing management ; the author has adopted a pen name for obvious reasons .

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- ~ John McIlroy : *Every factory a Fortress - Communist Party workplace branches in a time of militancy 1956 -79*, Parts 1 and 2 [40 & 50 pp respectively] in Historical Studies in Industrial Relations 11 & 12 , University of Keele, [autumn 2000 & autumn 2001 respectively.],
- ~ Geoffrey Ostergaard : *The Tradition of Workers Control* [1997, 154 pp], lots on guild socialism ; introduction by Brian Bamford.
- ~ Root and Branch (editors) : *Root and Branch - the rise of the workers movements* [1975 USA, 544p] a unique collection of readings on episodes of workers control from Russia 1917 to Paris 1968. use contribution on little known American history ;
- ~ Solidarity booklet, author unknown : *A Day at the Seaside* [1971, 4 pp, in 'Solidarity for workers power ' journal, vol 6, number 10], an article critical of Paul Foot and his speech at a fringe meeting at the Union of Post Office Workers conference in Bournemouth in 1971.
- ~ Ken Weller : *discussion 2010*
- ~ Alan Woodward; *Life and Times of Joe Thomas* [2009, 40 pp] ; an active comrade exchanges Communism/marxism for libertarianism.

7 Politics and organisations

The last years from 1970 to his death in 1977 were for Joe perhaps the most eventful and documented of his life. In this last chapter but one, we look at the transition from a marxist type approach to a more libertarian one. We can recap the general position - volume one of his biography gives a detailed account of his anti fascist work and subsequent expulsion from the Communist Party of Great Britain. In the war years and after, he was not active in organisations , but loyally bought and used the *Daily Worker*. By the time of the occupation at Goldstein's in 1951 he was back in the Party again . He was also active within the CPGB industrial Advisory Committee but a dispute with his local branch over the conduct and implications in the dispute - apparently over the priority between the rank and file [Samuel] - again led to his expulsion. This has been examined earlier and it only remains to fill in a few points regarding his relationship with the Party, before the main item .

Joe had addressed the supervisory Industrial Advisory Committee on Clothing of the CPGB in 1950 and his speech caused a political inquiry from some of the members. They sought "clarification" . [Letters] This was proceeding, with Joe called for interviews at the London CP office before the Goldstein's episode. After the occupation Joe raised some matters about the conduct of the strike in the Stepney branch and

suggested some form of personal attack on himself. He persisted with this, wanted a meeting of the branch committee and rejoined the attack by a sharp criticism of the political leadership. Eventually he was thrown out for "disruptive activity", after using the appeals procedure to the CPGB Conference Control Commission

There are accounts of meetings entirely taken up with the issue, as the old enemies, or comrades, from the 1930s defended their position. Joe was a forceful character and may well have collected considerable support. Eventually internal opposition did gain enormous support after the publicised open repression in East Berlin 1953 and in Hungary 1956 and the true nature of the state capitalist regime was clear for all to see [Samuel]. As we know this led to a huge exodus from the ranks with enormous consequences in unions and political groups [Pelling] but more of the consequences later.

For now, Joe was out. Next, we have mentioned his expedition into trotskyism, his clash with Gerry Healy and his thugs and his association with John Lawrence and Arnold Feldman, a veteran trotskyist. Both became firm friends. He was reported as being at meetings of the Committee of 100 [Burton] and taking his daughter Janet on his shoulders to Trafalgar Square for a peace demonstration/march in the 1950s. Though few accounts exist of the work of the C100 and its Industrial Sub Committee, and other committees, one was printed in *Solidarity* in issue 2/2. [*Solidarity* 1962.]

Joe in Solidarity

As recorded previously, Joe was now part of the broadly libertarian movement and we now turn to his relationship with his new organisation. He took part in activities, apparently happily. *Mark Hendy recalls* -

"I can't help with JJ except to say I liked what I saw -- but it wasn't much. I experienced two phases in *Solidarity*. The better one came later, when Joe had recently joined. There were seminar-ish meetings on Saturday afternoons at LSE and Joe came along to several I think. He would also have come to closed group meetings but I don't remember these. . . .

Another week I gave a talk on the real gains of struggle and no non-members turned up. I think Joe may have given one too -- there were several others. The meetings had none of either that sectarian rancour of hair-splitting debate or that blockheaded togetherness of mechanical materialist street theatre and sub-Stalinist sentimental folk bollocks etc. The feeling was positive and Joe was part of it. "[Hendy]

Solidarity

We have recorded the background for this group but a smaller

organisation, again from ex trotskyist members also took up a similar position while retaining leninist ambitions - the International Socialists. As these two groups were to form the core of semi - libertarian movement, for around two decades - quite distinct from mainstream anarchism and trotskyism - we have to divert our attention to an outline description of the former and a few paragraphs on the latter..

Solidarity, summary notes from the outside

It was perhaps predictable that at a time of political turmoil that followed the Russian Communist repression of the Hungarian workers councils, and Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalinism, there would be a resurrection in some form of new organisations. In the UK, this could be said to have occurred with the setting up, in 1960, of an organisation which became *Solidarity for workers power*. This published a journal of the same name, and better known as just *Solidarity*. The political ideas came partly from the French group *Socialism or Barbarism*, and specifically the thoughts of Greek ex trotskyist Cornelius Castoriadis, also known as Paul Cardan or Pierre Chaulieu and many other names.

Solidarity was not an entirely homogenous organisation and many strands of thought existed. Sections of the membership who were explicitly "Marxist" were associated with a group called World Revolution - Juan Mclver and Jim Young. This group produced their own bulletin and developed a theory based it seems on the writings of the Italian ultra Leninist, Amadeo Bordiga. They were suspected of trying to collect members from *Solidarity* and this was reinforced when they left and produced their own newspaper, largely an English version of a French original. Predictably they subsequently split more than once.

A second group, *Revolutionary Perspectives*, apparently existed in Scotland and eventually reverted to some form of Leninism, it is reported. A third, more explicitly council communist, defected to the Merseyside *Workers Voice* in 1973.

Most members of *Solidarity* came from the CPGB exiles after 1956, a good number of whom, despite the best propaganda efforts of the Communists, were workers and not intellectuals. Some of these had been associated with Peter Fryer's *The Newsletter*. This was at that time masquerading as an independent workers journal/organisation. Soon after, its true nature, and its link with the trotskyist Socialist Labour League was revealed, there were a number of splits and a group of these souls looking for an organisation, established their own, *Solidarity*, originally named the *Socialism Re-affirmed* group.

Overall , it could be said that the prevailing ideology was marxist, but without the organisational chauvinism.

Structure

In the organisation, the London Group, sometimes identified as the North London Group, was by far the main unit. After some years, other groups were established, including other parts of London. There were groups in Aberdeen, Bilston, Bristol, Cardiff, Chelmsford, Coventry, Dundee, Durham, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Lancaster, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, North Kent, Oxford, Romford, South Wales, Swansea, Tunbridge Wells, Warwick, etc. Some were permanent, others transient.

These were described as autonomous and were either represented at national meetings by "delegates" or individual members. The London Group had regular meetings mainly in members homes, normally weekly, but information on meetings of other groups was published locally.

A formal organisation

From 1960 to 1967, there were no formal structure just a loose arrangement to which supporters could belong. Then at a national meeting in Birmingham in 1968, it was decided to establish a national structure and to establish the conditions of membership. It is interesting that at the 1968 meeting that agreed to the formal structure with membership and so on, a resolution proposing closer links with the International Socialists was rejected. This is in spite of the printing in the IS Journal of several texts that were supported by Solidarity, and the IS speakers at the London group meetings

From 1968 there were fairly regular national *Solidarity* meetings with a variable attendance. There seems to have been political discussion and organisational decisions. Reports of the meetings were published in the journal quite openly and without censorship based on so-called 'security'.

Programme

The formal programme shows the many strengths and few weaknesses of the organisation. After discussion, the ideas of *Solidarity* were consolidated in a document *As We See It*, in 1967. This was later expanded by identifying a number of negative constructs under the title *As We Don't See It*. This was collectively written by group discussion
[*Solidarity*]

Membership conditions

These were that members should support the ideas contained in the programme, be active in practical activity, pay some form of membership

dues and be accepted by simple majority vote of members . This was reported in issue 5/1.

The levels of the members donations were self regulated but appear to have been a more reliable source than the appeals to members for funds that occur regularly in the journal. Membership was of one of the autonomous groups and membership fees were paid to the local organisation. This was spent on leaflets and such like, and on the local journal if one was published.

Members would be encouraged to join an established group then local ones as these were formed, if this was convenient. The line between members and supporters does not appear to have been tightly drawn but membership was not more than 200 at any one time it seems, or 60, according to an IS account [Widgery]

Some important members

Brief details of some members are included throughout this section. Chris Pallis, who was a senior NHS neurology consultant in his day job and functioned politically under the pseudonym of Martin Grainger. He also used the name Maurice Brinton in later years. In his medical career, where he was quite prominent, he wrote several books on neurology.

He had been on the Central Committee of the Trotskyist SLL, after an period during the War working with German prisoners in Oxford. He took a special interest in the French situation and often did translation work as well as writing some informative booklets. His eye witness account of the May events in *Paris : May 68* was still being re-printed 30 years later, and pamphlet 35, on the *Paris Commune of 1871* is one the best on this subject.

Though not a member of the International Socialists, he was on the editorial board of the newly founded International Socialism journal. However another EB member, although libertarian, called Peter Cadogan, exposed Pallis's actual occupation to the capitalist press for some unknown reason. He was ejected for this irrational and foolish act. He became active in the management of the Conway Hall in central London.

Maurice Brinton's book on *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control* is by far the best on the subject and remains in print some decades after its first publication and is reviewed below. Though there was at the time not much information on the subject, there was an exchange of views between the later editor of *Socialist Worker* Chris Harman, and Brinton, arising from a review of the booklet by the former. However, the latter won the debate,

unacknowledged, comfortably. *The Irrational in Politics* examines the roots that underpin popular consciousness, specifically sexual repression. This looks beyond Gramsci and Freud to a relatively unexplored area. The booklet is still in print.

Pallis was responsible for the translation and re-publication of several Castoriadis texts including *Modern Capitalism and Revolution*, *Workers Councils and the economics of self management*, *The Fate of Marxism* and *The Crisis of Modern Society*. Chris Pallis eventually died in 2005.

Ken Weller

Weller who had followed the route mentioned in the paragraphs above, was to be the mainstay of the industrial reporting, especially in the car industry. He also used the pen name of Mark Fore. His address in SW 16 was the journal address in the Spring of 1967, and consistently from 1973 onwards, in East Ham. Previously the publication address had been the ILP, 197 Kings Cross Road, N1. He was born into a working class family in Islington in 1935 and joined the Young Communist League in 1951. He was expelled in 1958 and was a founder member of *Solidarity*.

He worked in the London Electricity Board and as an engineer, briefly in Fords but for a long time in Standard Telephone and Cables, Southgate, with Ted Corbett, also in the AEU, previously with the Revolutionary Communist Party and Avis Walker of the Electrical Trades Union. After a severe road accident in 1970, where his motor bike was - symbolically ? - smashed into by a car load of off-duty policemen, he did not work again, concentrating on domestic duties and *Solidarity*.

He wrote numerous *Solidarity* pamphlets as well as contributing to most issues, but mainly on the car industry. In addition he is the author of the study of the anti war movement from 1914 to 18 in London, *Don't be a Soldier*, an invaluable account of the Labour movement. He says this is part of a project to write a workers history of Islington, for which he has voluminous notes, but may never get written.

Akiva

Akiva or Aki Orr, active in radical anti Zionist politics, was a seaman in the Israeli Merchant Marine service and led a strike there. Tony Cliff says in his autobiography, *A World to Win*, that Aki left the International Socialists in 1968 soon after joining, claiming that socialism existed in the factories. He was involved in 1972 in the reprinting of An Open Letter to IS Comrades, published originally in 1968, together with a 1961 text on Revolutionary Organisation. The former, which was previously addressed to delegates to the IS Annual Conference, uses the booklet on the French events of 1968

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by Ian Birchall and Tony Cliff, to raise the issue of IS's growing Leninism. It was a persuasive document.

He became a teacher in computing, wrote regularly for the journal and then returned to Israel. He remains active in this century, still writing critical articles in English, which attract an international audience and the attention of the State authorities.

Other members came from groups like The North Kent Socialist League, including Terry Burton. There was a continuous exchange of members to and from the IS group.

Activities

Though the membership of the group was only a few hundred, the relatively high level of consciousness, supplemented by the information in the journal, resulted in effective action in a number of areas. These were primarily at workplaces but also within the rank and file union, and anti war movements, assisting the homeless and towards the eighties, the struggle against racism and fascism. A larger area of activity was in the three Vauxhall factories at Luton, Dunstable and Ellesmere Port in the early 1960's

Solidarity was heavily involved with anti nuclear war work in the 1960's. Perhaps their most prominent feat was *the Spies for Peace* exposure about secret, secure underground *Regional Seats of Government* for the leaders in the event of the hydrogen bomb being used. There were many marches and demonstrations on the issue. Virtually all the group behind the exposure were Solidarity supporters, who also worked in the various forms of Committees of 100. This militant group practised different forms of action to the conventional Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament groups. There was a big divide because the C100 believed in the practice of direct action, while the ban the bomb groups tended to have a more conventional pattern of activity and a different political membership as well.

Another area of activity concerned accommodation. The problem of housing remained for workers the most pressing of social services. Optimists said it was the last unsolved problem of modern capitalism but the long post war boom was soon to end. Multiple occupation under appalling conditions was the fate of many working class families, including that of the writer, while the bomb damage had resulted in a big wave of squatting in unoccupied high class houses in West London, and less controversially, at disused Army camps.

Solidarity was consistently involved in a good deal of work around

homeless in North Kent, including hostel dwellers and two booklets were published. The King Hill campaign was one of the more successful in terms of resistance rather than immediate results like the Tunbridge Wells events, below. It is widely believed that the powerful and influential television play, *Cathy Come Home*, was written as the result of contact with the King Hill campaign. The housing action body *Shelter* was formed afterwards as a consequence of the outcry after its broadcast. Ron Bailey who was also active in the Ilford Libertarians, was a key person in the various squatting actions that characterised the 1960's. There were movements all over London. He remained active for several decades, in Green politics at the end of the century.

Publications

The actual process of publication was seen as an attempt to put principles into practice. Hence a collective approach was adopted regarding the editing, production and distribution. There was a certain amount of socialising.

Solidarity was published for five issues in 1960 under the title of the *Agitator* and then under its general heading . This sequence ran to 89 issues in 8 volumes over a decade and a half. It was followed by *Solidarity for Social Revolution*, after an amalgamation with members of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, which totalled 16 issues and *Solidarity for Workers Self Management*. In the eighties, a new second series of *Solidarity* journal was published that terminated in 1990's with the issue 2/33.

There was been a constant flow of one-off pamphlets which numbered over 60 by the finish. In addition there were several regional journals during the first decade, specifically South and West London, Scotland, South Wales and the North West. On the industrial side, there was also a *Bulletin* for the motor industry in the seventies

In the eight volumes of the main series of the journal, there was an irregular column entitled *About Ourselves* which gave news of internal developments, publications, and so on. A similar column, *On the Solidarity Wavelength*, gave details of the translation of publications into other languages. There are details of international discussion conferences in volume 7, and of links with French group, Information and Correspondence of Workers, ICO, in volume 5/ issue 3. There were internal bulletins published much later and the content of these can be found by consulting the archives at International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, or British Library, or the writer

Format

With the exception of a brief period where the journal was litho printed, it was duplicated for all the main series and much of the supplementary publications in the pamphlets and regional editions. There was a political decision to use this basic format as it greatly increased flexibility and allowed more freedom to publish in full without the constant pressure of editing. Pages could just be added as articles came in.

Style

Much of the language in the articles was that of the members, and there was a definite element of humour in both written material and cartoons. This is in sharp contrast to the turgid columns of print in other left publications and their uncritical approach to political conventions. There was a policy of editing articles that were overlong or boring, but not on political grounds.

Circulation

The circulation rose from around 350 copies of the issues in volume 2 to nearly 2,000 four years later. Many of the pamphlets were re-printed several times, with 1,000 or 1,500 copies going out each time. The re-launched second series reached nearly 1,000 after two years in 1985. These figures are stated to be for "paid and distributed" journals, not for issues stored under beds as were so many trotskyist newspapers.

Content of publications

A thorough survey of all the publications is a big task. All this outline can do is to mention some major headings -

Workers organisation under capitalism

Items on workers' rank and file liaison bodies include a brief one on the *London Shop Stewards Defence Committee* in 4/1, which looks like an unedited statement. A brief critique of the *Lucas Aerospace Shop Stewards Combine Committee* appears in 8/7. The report is a reasonable introduction. Issue 4/12 featured a shrewd report of one of the early national meetings of the CP run Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions,. This was easy meat - the conference manipulation, the silencing of opposition, the political bankruptcy of the CP, etc.

The pamphlet on the *Great Flint Sit-In* records the huge impact of the workers action in the early thirties in the USA. Maurice Brinton writes an excellent account of the use of troops to break strikes by the Attlee labour government in 3/4. This was later reprinted, twice in 1965 and 66, as *Solidarity* pamphlet 19. The Motor Bulletin number 1 links up Ford Workers struggles in 1973 in Antwerp, Genk, Bordeaux, Cologne, Melbourne and Amsterdam. The whole series is concerned with international contacts by

rank and file car workers within the industry.

Ken Weller outlines the key points of the industrial perspective in 4/10 : the undemocratic and unrepresentative nature of the national unions in contrast to the strengths of work based organisation , opposing the Agreements that stifle unofficial action, and defending the essential element of control over work and work conditions as a start to socialist control. It could be said that there were echoes of Gramsci here....[Gramsci]

Much the same message comes through in pamphlet 37, *Strategy for Industrial Struggle*, by the same author. This publication however managed some notoriety, as it was quoted at length by a member of the lunatic Right, Richard Clutterbuck. It was, said the outraged Mr Clutterbuck, a text for "sabotage of industry" - all that advice on how to run a work-to-rule !!

Issue 4/12 looks critically at the *Institute of Workers Control*, as does 6/6 and 6/7. While the first of these presents a sound critique of the IWC and its legitimising of a reformist union leadership, the second is chiefly concerned with demolishing workers participation, a largely superfluous job, one suspects.

Secondly ,

Workers Control, self management and power : very early on, the core of the organisation , Socialism Re-affirmed, published *The Meaning of Socialism* which contained the main theoretical points. The *Socialism or Barbarism* document, later published as a pamphlet, was the basis for the re-groupment of revolutionary socialism in 1961.

Workers councils are looked at in the extended article in series 2/ number 15 on the Hungarian revolution and in Andy Anderson's book, an excellent account of this most pivotal event . There is an eye witness account of the Algerian councils in 3/3, with the dominance of the Party, the FLN. Most of 8/3 is described as a Dossier on Portugal. It is not a full account, which is in Phil Mailer's authoritative book *Portugal - the impossible revolution*, published by *Solidarity* in 1977, but one that includes some valuable re-prints of translation of leaflets and documents. There is also a criticism of an article by Tony Cliff of the IS , for what it doesn't say, that is, the view of the IS on Leninist approaches to workers councils.

Issue 2/18 has a useful review by Liz Willis of Assef Bayat's book on the Iranian workers councils, *Workers and Revolution in Iran*. The difficulties faced by the shoras is looked at thoroughly and despite repression by the religious authorities, outbreaks of resistance occurred for some years.

There is a critical view of Yugoslavia, or rather the inadequacy of the academic opposition, in 8/2. However, there is not much on the state run so-called "workers councils".

Alexandra Kollontai's summary of the case for the *Workers Opposition*, leading up to the Tenth Congress of the CPUSSR in 1920/1, is also important when put into the context of the repression of Kronstadt. Two pamphlets on *Kronstadt* by Victor Serge and Ida Mett contain detailed information on the nature of the revolt and the workers organisation, not the alleged foreign agencies, which organised it.

Three, political issues

On the political party aspect, three issues in volume 6, numbers 2, 3 and 4, look at the *German Workers Communist Party, KAPD* and workers council communism. There is the publication of the *Manifesto of the Czech Workers Council Party* in 8/2, in May 1975; this document of the underground party rejects the politics of the USA and USSR and re-states the basic ideas of worker council communism. It sees the general strike as the first step towards the overthrow of the ruling "bureaucracy". A reprint of an article by Anton Pannekoek on *Party and Class* is in 7/12, but this is brief and not very substantial. The *Kuron and Modzelewski Document* on early Polish opposition to Stalinism is assessed in 4/3 and 4/4.

There is a long article on Guy Aldred and review of a book on *Anti Parliamentary Communism* in the UK in 2/22. This sparked off some debate in subsequent issues but not on crucial aspects.

The anti war emphasis emerged again with the brilliant booklet on Vietnam by Bob Potter. He is an Australian Marxist who had been prominent in the 1958 T&GWU bus strike and produced its daily bulletin. He also wrote an informative pamphlet on the *Mount Isa* strike in the Australian outback

Other revolutionary aspects are in *Lenin and Workers Control*, 5/9. This relates to the period when the issue at stake was whether the trade union bureaucracy should run the factories rather than the Bolshevik Party, in 1919. The great leader was of course arguing against collective management and for one-man management. Enough said.

The end

The 1990s were truly midnight in the century, as the cause of workers socialism slipped deeper into oblivion. Solidarity was finally wound up in 1993 and with this, the role of this important revolutionary organisation ended. These notes barely do justice to it and readers wanting more information are referred to the excellent publication on the writings of Chris

Pallis [Goodway] or the writer's small article in *New Interventions*. The long awaited history of *Solidarity* by John Quail is likely to be the definitive version.

More background

Our second look at the framework of the semi-libertarian world at this time concerns the early International Socialists. Following the 1930s "Oehlerites" pioneers, similarly pro leninist but anti Stalin and trotskyist groups were established after WW2. In America , the partnership of CLR James, known as "Johnson" and Raya Dunayevskaya or "*Forrest*", formed an alliance better known as "*Correspondence*" then "*News and Letters*". These are the marxist-humanists. In France, we have already examined Cornelius Castoriadis and "*Socialism Or Barbarism*" from 1949. The British group led by Ygael Gluckstein, aka Tony Cliff, came to be known as the *Socialist Review group* , later *International Socialists* then, confusingly, the *Socialist Workers Party*

The International Socialists, from 1962, were active in the CND and Labour Party Young Socialists, and soon gathered a membership of more than 1,000. More libertarian groups like Solidarity-for-workers- power, and orthodox trotskyists, also grew. The IS platform was that the rank and file union members in the workplaces, created by the post war adoption of a booming permanent war economy, were the crucial part of the future ; that the Labour Party and national trade unions were hopelessly compromised and finally that Russia was state capitalist - an anarchist idea from the 1920s, elaborated by Cliff - with the communists now reformists, despite their political manipulations and evasions.

The 1968 events in Paris changed the IS perspectives and Cliff now wanted an independent leninist revolutionary party. Together with his supporting intellectuals - Harman, Birchall , Harris - he pressed ahead but over the years, the IS lost key members like Michael Kidron and a whole generation of committed members. The SWP was set up in 1977, with a consolidation in 1982 resulting in more losses. Regardless, the party gained further strength from campaigns like those opposing the Labour government's Income Policy, a national Rank and File movement , the Right to Work, a Shop Stewards Defence Committee and the Anti Nazi League in the 1970s and 80s. Cliff's books, on domestic matters were influential, and the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky replaced Luxemburgism.

Hence this section has an unhappy ending .The switch from a relatively libertarian open movement to a tight, revolutionary party began to have consequences, The Party expanded , partly by recruiting from other groups at their meetings , and this activity was seen as parasitical.. The

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decision to close down the rank and file union journals just before the biggest strike of the century, [the miners in 1984] , the rejection of any possibility of mass resistance to the Poll Tax and the sudden somersault to the politics of elections and parliament in 2002 were stages in a process that transformed the revolutionary party into just another name on the voting paper. Such is the inevitable fate of leninist groups.

The main theme

Back to Joe. He had joined *Solidarity* with Arnold and for some years functioned well within that organisation . He had reported on the postal strike and Fisher Bendix occupation and had his writings ratified and re-printed.

He had participated energetically as Mark Hendy recalls, above, and this included attending the small but interesting national meetings of the French based ICO , with Cajo Brendel and Henri Simon. The relationship with the latter was further strengthened as his daughter Janet who was now also in Solidarity, formed a partnership with the Paris based activist. She moved to the French capital. Joe opened correspondence with both Cajo and Henri/Janet, part of which remains .

Over a few years he became attracted to the politics of the ICO , or Echanges et Mouvements as it was to become in 1975. He began to re-think yet again his political ideas, as he had on "communism " or the British version of it anyway. Joe became involved with the originally "council communist" group and their issues, which overlapped, but not exactly, those of Solidarity.

Enter the controversy

Joe's article on *The Good Old Days* confirms the general historical outline which can be read from the notes on Solidarity above [Solidarity]. An early point of dissent came over the publication of Henri Simon's *The New Movement* in France in 1974. The NM issue was to roll into the next decade with other publications , especially from the USA with the writings of John and Paula Zerzan , and the E&M publication *Refusal of Work..*

However our terms of reference are mainly Joe's support for the ideas, and this runs to 1977. Up to then the more numerous later developments had hardly occurred and Joe appears concerned with what been succinctly put together in Henri Simon's booklet which was published with a critique by *Solidarity* in February 1976 [Simon]. Incidentally the first modern use of this expression to be found so far is in 1968 [Coates] .

The case for and against the NM

The text of the HS publication was 33 paragraphs, followed by about the same length of comment. This was the practice often when *Solidarity* reprinted material from another source which they generally agreed with but had a few reservations. It seems that the ideas in the text are substantially based on the ICO discussions over recent years where *Solidarity* members as such, rather than official delegates, had participated. Hence the theme was not unknown.

Henri Simon dates the NM right back to dissent in the previous centuries but specifically from the Leninist repression of the workers councils in 1917. Here he is repeating the council communist experience very closely but this is implied rather than acknowledged. In the opening 15 paragraphs, he draws a line between the New and Old Movements saying the latter are characterised by a "party" organisation, and especially the self-promoting attitudes that some have called party chauvinism. He notes the development of a new version of the Old model as a tactic, before looking more seriously in para 20 at what he has been defined as the core of the NM - a movement for autonomy without any mediating bodies.

In his description of what others had seen as the "council communist" movement, or "libertarian socialism", he characterises this as the autonomous movement but is this just a new name for an existing phenomena? He outlines the flexibility of the manifestations which are often centred around one specific cause or issue, and the underlying existence of networks of communication and liaison. He notes alienation becoming organised dissent, though without specific examples. One important absentee is the refusal of work, or revolt against work, that was later to be a central theme. He writes of the essence of the movement as direct action in all its forms

So far so good. As a re-statement of the libertarian position, made by many bodies, while possibly a trifle vague, the document is quite useful. However one contentious conclusion follows. He insists that each aspect of the NM contains a personal truth and that all such organisations are absolutely equal. There are no elites as such, above the others. This could be a glitch of the translation possibly, or more likely a development from the anti Party position implicit in organisations of the day?

As the comment from *Solidarity* points out, not all the bodies given as examples or in the recent past, can be regarded as equal and that there are both reactionary and commendable versions. One example they quote is the Ulster workers councils which were openly sectarian. a subject which in itself caused considerable debate within ICO apparently [Simon]. *Solidarity* sees the use of the political yardstick - in their case of basic

marxism - by political organisations as essential to assess their support or opposition. To that extent there is no equality, rather groups for and against the final goal of socialism, as defined.

It is difficult to quarrel with this critique ; if the reading of the text was correct - the wording is ambiguous in places - a clear difference had been established . As they say, revolutionaries are not mere surf-riders on the tides of history but conscious agents for their beliefs. There are many smaller points worth exploring at some time but the central point is here .

There does not appear to be any protest that this was not the correct interpretation, and after 1976, the movement promoted by Echanges et Mouvements, as the ICO had become, continued and expanded its evidence base . Joe did prepare a follow up article [papers] on *Britain and the New Movement*. This is eighteen pages of hand written script written in May 1975, presumably using the original French text published the year before. This was a few months before he was voted out of his Solidarity London branch

Joe's views

The article can be summarised as being made up of three strands . The first traces out in more detail the unofficial movement in the UK by workers in the docks, mines , metalworking factories, railways and Post Office. This history is now well known. In the second element , Joe traces out the evidence for the NM and lists the following but gives no actual details : petro-chemical workers, dustmen in several cities, bus drivers in Glasgow, nurses , teachers, engineering workers and printers, farmers, fishermen doctors, university lecturers and professors, registrars ; law breaking by students, school scholars , community action groups , women's' and gay libertarian groups, permissiveness in all its forms (?); people objecting to censorship and the whole ecological movement.

He may have collected this list from a number of sources read by activists, including the *Morning Star* , as the *Daily Worker* had become in 1966, but the point is well made. A vast majority of the activities of the labour and socialist movement goes unreported in general. He is opening up the case for "un-hidden history".

In the third strand, he goes beyond Henri Simon and is very critical of what he calls the "libertarian left". It seems he means *Solidarity* here. He was now in conflict with the organisation and could forget about caution . He says that the comrades do not acknowledge that their "appeals" seem to have been rejected by the NM especially when they emphasise the "socialist content".

He gives few examples but does mention the attitude to the "worker participation" schemes that were roundly condemned at the time by *Solidarity* among others. This is an unfortunate example as, with hindsight of later events - the attack on shop stewards starting with the sacking of Derek Robinson of British Leyland, Longbridge, factory - it is generally admitted that the worker participation of senior shop stewards - all communists - in management committees, was a significant factor in weakening shop floor support and widening a gap with the workers and other workplace officers. The apprehension of the libertarian left - and others - did prove well founded.

More

Joe continues the attack, seeing no role for what he calls the "high priests" who 'seek to intervene in an exemplary fashion with its ideas'. This first expression had been used in the past against *Solidarity* by some of its opponents. Though not a member of *Solidarity*, the writer has been active in industrial and political events for nearly 50 years and has read most of the *Solidarity* booklets and journals over that period but he cannot recall one example of an attempted 'intervention' by that organisation. Its approach has been - and most individuals who write usually adopt this - to state the facts as they see them, expose any contradictions or special pleading or deceptions by the authorities and to make comments about support or solidarity. Such advice as they offer, reminding people of past events etc, can be followed or ignored, and are offered in that spirit.

The leaflets produced for distribution in industrial disputes - like the ones Joe wrote in the PO dispute - follow this pattern. Organisations attempting 'interventions' like Big Flame and the International Socialists had been exposed as such. Essentially the one dimensional description of *Solidarity* as part of the Old Movement, simply is not believable.

The NM after Joe

Later the Movement did change its case a little but continued apace. We have mentioned the E&M booklet on the *Refusal of Work* and the writings of John Zerzan.

The American dimension

John Zerzan's main writings are based largely on the USA.. His main contribution picks out the features of the refusal to work - absenteeism, overtime rejection, sabotage, a preference for redundancy - as the core of the new movement, with all its implications, and this is considered in the E&M booklet.

A second article will last beyond the NM debate and catalogues extensively the total subversion of the national union structure to a partnership with heads of capitalist enterprises. Further, using examples from the illegal postal strike of 1970, etc, he implicates its influence over even union branch or "local" activists. That officers of locals could co-operate with the open corruption of the trade union bosses is almost unbelievable - a startling package that suggested the traditional analyses of linking branch leaders with workplace interests is in sharp need of revision. Zerzan's intention was presumably to undercut the libertarian prioritising of workplace organisation - though this is neither stated nor overtly argued for - but libertarians are likely only to re-draw the line of differentiation.[Zerzan]

Zerzan later became a champion of the Primitivist school of anarchism which challenged many existing ideas.

A manifesto

The Refusal of Work [E&M] or revolt against work, adduces European evidence of a wider existence of the new phenomena as part of the revolt among ordinary workers. This is done through the systematic attack of a writer, one C Reeve, of undisclosed political affiliations, who strongly criticises Zerzan's ideas. Charles Reeve was the pen name of a French activist who was sceptical of the NM idea. His contribution invoked a ranting and insult-ridden reply from the American but certainly created a debate. His points were that the new phenomena were not really new, were a weaker alternative to traditional collective methods and that the existing institutions were basically sound.

Of course readers must make up their own minds but this writer feels that the features listed should be considered as part of the effort/pay bargain of normal industrial negotiations, that their occurrence depends totally on specific conditions as to whether they are a lesser alternative; and that overall, the total is insufficient to justify the title "New".

The expression "Movement" again depends on definition. If this is thought of as "*a coherent body, within a social context, which is characterised by internal communication, learning and reflection, and self recognition. A movement is likely to incorporate awareness of the past and the possibility of a changed future.*" [Bookchin]. The such a definition would seem exclude, not justify, the use of the term

In passing we can note that most of the sources quoted in RoW are plainly capitalistic like editors of newspapers, experts in the form of sociologists, journalists, medical people and industrial relations.

Summary

In conclusion we can say that the NM debate is now closed in the resurgent renewal of capitalism known as new capitalism or 'neo liberalism'. Attention was focused for a decade on the outbreak of class war in all its traditional manifestations - severe attacks on workers their jobs and living standards, etc . But that is another story.

For our purposes, the debate appeared to open up a new level of criticism in Joe's mind of *Solidarity*. This final schism and his "expulsion " are the subjects of the last chapter.

Reading, , for further information, listed by authors surname :

- ~ Terry Burton, email, 2010 ;
- ~ Murray Bookchin, from volume 4 of : *The Third Revolution - popular movements in the revolutionary era*, 4 volumes , [1996, 406 pp ; 1998, 351 pp .2003, 350 pp; 2005, 289 pp] = 65 chapters and a total of 1,385 pp, a considerable achievement ;
- ~ Ken Coates and Tony Topham , eds : *Industrial Democracy in Britain* [1968] later *Workers Control - a book of readings and witnesses for workers control* [1970, 464p],
- ~ Echanges et Mouvements : *The Refusal of Work* [1979, 64 pp] major document on the New Movement ;
- ~ David Goodway , editor : *For Workers' Power - the selected writings of Maurice Brinton* [2004, 379 pp] which includes useful accounts of debate over original publications, plus reprints of his three main works .
- ~ Mark Hendy , email, 2010
- ~ Letters and papers of Joe Jacobs ;
- ~ Henry Pelling : *The British Communist Party - a historical profile* [1958, 204 pp] ;
- ~ Raphael (Ralph) Samuel ; *The Lost World of British Communism*, Parts 1 and 2 [51 pp & 50 pp] in *New Left Review* no's 154 and 156 respectively , [1985 & 1986] ;
- ~ Henri Simon : *The New Movement* [Solidarity 1976, 24 pp] ; with comment of equal length by *Solidarity* ;
- ~ Solidarity ; *As We See It*, [1967]. *As We Don't See It*. [19**], two statements of the program ;
- ~ David Widgery : *The Left 1956 - 68*, [1976, 549 pp],
- ~ Alan Woodward : *Life and Times of Joe Thomas* [2009, 40 pp] ;
- ~ John Zerzan ; *Trade Unions or Socialism - the revolt against work* [1976, 20 pp] a Solidarity reprint of two articles but lacking a wider perspective .
- ~ John Zerzan : *Organised Labor versus The Revolt Against Work* [17pp] in *Unions against Revolution* : G Munis and J Zerzan, [1975, 62 pp]

8 Expulsion and Conclusion

So we have now arrived at 1975 and the climax of Joe's relationship with *Solidarity*. We have looked at his growing dissatisfaction with that organisation but it remains to identify clearly the events surrounding his expulsion and the after effects.

There are a good many papers that have been used in his document - virtually all handwritten notes - from these years. Some are dated, some are not, some have headings but a few are untitled. It is necessary to list them within a chronology of events, then perhaps go over some of them. The general themes can be highlighted and some comments from those people in *Solidarity* at the time have been added for a context.

Dates, documents and events

1974

Aug : tried to get a reply published to an article by Aki Orr, unsuccessfully ;
 Oct : "The significance of struggle " [3 pp]
 Oct : schedule of an attempted reply to Aki Orr's article in *Solidarity* 7/11, [no details] [2 pp];
 Oct : further schedule and thoughts on "socialist content " [1 pp] ;
 Oct : critique about *Solidarity* and what it is was trying to achieve [3 pp];
 Nov : "Some thoughts of a troubled mind " [4 pp] ;

1975

May : Joe writes his article on the New Movement in Britain . This remains unpublished ;
 Dec : Arnold discovers Joe is now thoroughly dissatisfied and is seeking to wreck *Solidarity* London ; he informs the branch and some members propose his expulsion as his behaviour has been very disruptive.

1976

Jan : Vote in London branch resolves to expel Joe by 4 votes to one with 3 abstentions ;
 Jan : National meeting of *Solidarity* in Liverpool where the issue is raised ;
 The London Branch "*Letter*" is circulated ; Joe attends and voices his protest, other members speak in his support and assure him of national membership safeguarded ; there was a long and serious debate.

Solidarity publishes Henri Simon's document on the *New Movement* as a booklet with comment of about equal length ;

Nov : Joe writes up his experience in " *To Whom it May Concern , Why I*

was expelled from Solidarity London " (TWIMC) [16 pp] ; (earlier drafts were prepared from February)

1977

Jan : "Organisation ? Some random thoughts and assumptions" [3 pp] ; a document on "The Organisational Question " can be read on libcom website

Feb : "Social Revolution and Solidarity "[Notes 2 pp] ;

Mar : "On organisation - thoughts and assumptions" [7 pp].

March, Joe dies.

In addition to the above texts, the following are undated, and some untitled;

- ❑ [notes on his problems with some writers, [4 pp] ;
- ❑ Education [notes on individual development and society, 4 pp] ;
- ❑ [notes on change and its dimensions , 4 pp] ;
- ❑ " Why do I belong to Solidarity ? [4 pp] " ;
- ❑ [notes on socialism , socialist content and self management, 4 pp]
- ❑ [Reflections on Solidarity organisation and members, 4 pp]

These do give some insight into Joe's thinking at the time and we can pick out some of the main points further down.

The Case against Solidarity.

We now come to the essence of ideas which we will need to separate out from the tactics that he followed . The analysis first . There ought always to be a continuous process of review within political organisations. This should encompass the extent to which the original perspectives have been kept to , how recent events may require some modification of those perspectives and so on.

In the old International Socialists for example such reviews formed a permanent part of national and district activity at all aggregates or members meetings . For *Solidarity* there does not seem to be evidence of a review of this sort around this time , though it did go on apparently. There is Dave Lamb's long document on *Consciousness Raising* which looks generally at the subject and a statement by *Solidarity* member John Walker which was appended to one of Joe's documents. This appears to possibly fit the bill but has disappeared without trace. Yet there was a bitter and well fought debate - and we don't have evidence of the case against the organisation .

Meanwhile in this vacuum, perhaps the writer's critical comments on one *Solidarity* publication can give some idea of what such a review could be based on. This is not intended as a full critical comment on the booklet or the organisation, just a small collection of points indicating what could have

been presented. In the event it must be recorded that Joe's tactics were not to raise the standard around a political document, in favour of a more dubious tactic of personal exposure which effectively backfired on him. More of this later however.

A critical view

The publication under review is "*Workers Councils and the Economics of a Self Managed Society*" [Solidarity pamphlet 40] from 1972. This is largely a reprint of an article by Castoriadis in 1958 '*The Content of Socialism*' Henri Simon recalls that even at that date its centralism was extensively debated [Simon H]. For the reprint, Chris Pallis, in close collaboration with Castoriadis, edited the original, and added graphics and more footnotes.

The object of the exercise here is to examine Solidarity's political decision in the selection of the original text and the value of the additions. It is clear from the start that there is nothing in the pamphlet about the historical experience of workers councils, or the publications about them, pre 1972, except the Russian events. Even these, which are the only historical content, are exclusively political - and of course finally it should be noted that the author most quoted is Marx, indeed more so than all the others together.

No mention for example of Gaston Leval's monumental survey of the Spanish collectives [Leval], nor the ICO originated material of the councils in France in 1968 [Cohn Benûit] or of the astonishing Hungarian structures of 1956 [Anderson]

Still centralising

Apart for the ahistorical nature of the booklet, the centralist theme predominates throughout, as opposed to the promotion of local autonomy. For example, *Solidarity* footnote 12, on page 14, comments "*Those who argue about the 'intrinsic merits' of decentralisation seldom pursue their thoughts to their logical conclusion. Do they really envisage every town and every village generating its own electricity (or atomic power), arranging its own jet aircraft schedules, importing its own tea or sugar, growing its own bananas or building its own neurological centres? Or will the 'free' society dispense with these altogether?*". In answer to the main point, the answer has to be simply YES, particularly atomic power and jet aircraft schedules.

The mocking tone of the last sentence shows a complete neglect for environmental considerations despite fellow libertarian Murray Bookchin's existing publications and campaigns [Bookchin]. Later books are even more explicit, [Biehl]. Earlier publications by the well known novelist Ethel

Mannin touch on the subject as well [Mannin]

The text deals with local autonomy in quite an unusual way. Assuring us that the decisions of local bodies is sure to coincide with those of the centre, because of the perfect system of leadership representation, a sceptic would only wonder where he or she had heard these assurances before. Yes that's it - all the apologists for marxist structures from mainstream communism to trotskyist projections make precise this assumption [Callinicos] . Readers will not need reminding of the earlier definition about the libertarian philosophy and its independence from both profit making and State influence - federation is a far safer concept.

Graphics

Perhaps it is a little unfair to criticise the Solidarity illustrations which do only reflect the text but they are the most visible. The technically excellent cartoons show all the base units simply as "factory councils". Now much of the experience in fact shows that a wider section of workplaces have participated in the base units, including in 1968 , insurance company workers and atomic energy technicians [Cohn Bendit /ICO], plus hospitals and food processing units in Ireland in the 1920s [Kostick].

Another absentee is the residential neighbourhood councils, very prominent in the German revolution after 1918. The text looks very briefly at such councils basically as being under the main workplace council control.

More diligent readers may have noticed the influence of the residential councils in Nantes in west France in 1968 [Cohn Bendit /ICO],. Since 1972, the neighbourhood councils have been crucial to insurrections in Portugal , Argentina, Bolivia and so on. Any suggestions for the future need to be inclusive about these but despite its very prescriptive approach , the booklet neglects them

Finally

Much of the second half of this lengthy publication is concerned to prescribe the authors thoughts about management , the economy , the planning process and so on. This is blue printing of the crudest kind . In reality all such decisions will be made by the revolutionary participants at the time and under the prevailing conditions The strong response of this writer was a desire to write in the margin the following annotations ; *"most of this is stating the bleeding obvious , the bleeding irrelevant or is none of your bleeding business."*

Summary

The paragraphs above are not intended to supply a critique of either the

publication or *Solidarity*. The central theme for example of the main purpose of the awaited revolution being the liberation at work is a welcome and neglected one. This "first freedom" is indeed the top priority for libertarians, in the view of this writer, and well worth longer consideration. But the aim of the brief criticism is to show that *Solidarity* is not immune from a critical review process and that Joe, had he made these and other similar points, could well have made a case.

The tactical mistake

But Joe took another route. His choice of seeking personal martyrdom to prove his case, such as it was, was not a success. His criticism may have gone beyond the argument above, or been quite different, but in the event, the issue that dominated the discussion was his destructive behaviour. We now turn to this

In his own words

Perhaps the main document is *To Whom It May Concern* [Jacobs]. This was apparently published sometime in 1976 - from references made in it - but has the appearance of a round up of charges and replies. Some of this seems to refer to the *Letter* circulated at the National meeting and some to charges apparently made in the course of the episode. Unlike the others, this is typewritten and may have been used as a basis for an article or speech, at the end appealing to people to make up their own mind.

It comprises a short Preface which is mainly an attack on *Solidarity's* ideas and organisation. He wonders why the policy documents have not been used to expel others - of course as he notes elsewhere, there was no provision within the *Solidarity* structure to expel anyone for anything, and during their 33 years of existence, no one except Joe was expelled. Many left of their own accord, as Joe was urged to do regularly. He was insistent on expulsion to prove his point about *Solidarity's* decline.

On the *Letter* itself, he says it is devious and 'shit throwing'. He says the word 'leninist' is used indiscriminately. In contrast he points out that he did himself produce a statement but says this was rejected unread, at the expulsion meeting. He does not say who rejected it and how he knows that none of the people present, eight in number, actually read it.

He quotes the famous words by Rosa Luxemburg [Cliff], repeated in a *Solidarity* booklet, about the mistakes of workers being more valuable than the infallibility of the cleverest central committee, and says he would add, after this, "or any self appointed, self defined, so called revolutionary organisation". Of course all small revolutionary or political groups are exactly that and would react sharply to any outside definition, control or appointment. *Solidarity* did not have a central committee, though some

members were inevitably more influential than others. Some critics have discerned an example of the 'tyranny of structurelessness' from a small group of leaders.

His words are quoted back at him :

- ❑ he was accused of saying 'all political groups are rackets . . . ' but claims he never used the word 'all'.
- ❑ the word 'gang' was used, it seems, and he protests at its use but does not deny this ;
- ❑ he was also accused of saying that he was 'proud' that he had been able to persuade or drive out of the group 17 people ' and does not deny this ;
- ❑ he denies demanding the closure of *Solidarity*, saying he only wanted it to stop claiming to be a 'revolutionary group' ;
- ❑ in what some may see as a possible contradiction to this, he then states that his alternative for *Solidarity* would be a social organisation , producing texts and information. The writer thinks that this was similar to that developed by Dutch council communists, GIC, in 1930s [Appel];
- ❑ he says when demanding the 'liquidation' of the group , he was told this was unique , but says many before him, from Marx to Castoriadis, had done the same.

Finally in this selection, he is critical of his friend Arnold or "AF" who voted for his expulsion, saying he believes very strongly in his missionary endeavours , and more. In conclusion he says that he believes that people seeking to oppose capitalism by establishing organisations cannot escape the impact of the dominant ideology , as Marx said . This had happened to *Solidarity* , only a capitalist type organisation would be created and he wanted to "combat these organization". Of course it is clear that individuals can escape the dominant ideology - like Marx , etc , even Joe himself - so why these individuals cannot form an association is not explained.

To go on would risk repetition but I think enough has been written to show the tenor of the document . Joe's ideas about *Solidarity* ceasing to be a revolutionary libertarian organisation in his view , might be called the displacement of original ideas with organisational ones, or organisational chauvinism, in some circles .

More on the expulsion

Joe records that this meeting was short - it began after 8.30 pm and they were in the pub by 10.40 pm . *Solidarity* London members , faced with this unparallel situation apparently decided to treat it as a huge joke to show how unreal it was . Terry Liddle remembers -

"I knew Joe Jacobs from Solidarity. He had some sort of fall out with

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Solidarity and he demanded they expel him. This they did rather tongue in cheek. Ken Weller would know the full details".[Liddle]

In the event, as Joe records , John Quail drew up a Formal Declaration, typed, unsigned and undated, and circulated this , saying it was "a serious matter " . It is unclear whether people took him at his word :

"WHEREAS it is the avowed intention to disorganise, disrupt , filibuster, fuck over , shit in the ear of , squeeze orange juice over the library books of, put ex-lax in the coffee of , and generally shuck the groove of the Solidarity group and

WHEREAS he has declared his wish to be expelled from the Solidarity group to prove some point or other and

WHEREAS the members here present feel impelled to laugh to keep from crying, the Disciplinary sub group of the executive committee of the central committee of the Solidarity Group

RESOLVES that Joe Jacobs be expelled from the Solidarity group and be asked to hand back his bronze proficiency medal and certificate of merit ."
[papers]

Joe doesn't see the joke and protests, in TWIMC , claims that he never sought expulsion. Be that as it may, from his evidence about the *Solidarity* attitude to his articles in reply to ones by Akiva Orr , there does appear to have been some obstruction, instead of publishing and dealing openly with the presumed differences. Was this typical or a one off ?

Ken Weller , who is regarded as the villain as he originally proposed Joe's expulsion, described his own views as :

" When Arnold said he had spoken to Joe who confirmed his views and intentions, I confronted Joe with this and he did not deny it. When I thought of all the time spent listening to Joe going on and on, in successive meetings at his flat, I was angry and thought ' I don't see why we should have to put up with this ' . I asked him why , if he disagreed with us so much , he did not leave and find an organisation he liked better ? So we took steps to expel him, as he apparently wanted.

We have had disagreements within the branch before, and minority views, I've been in a minority myself a few times but we've lived with that There was no personal animosity , and he was quite free to attend the national meeting afterwards. He did so. I was under the impression that he had read and interpreted in his own way the writings of a French writer Jacques Camatte, but the reason for the expulsion was the continuous disruption of our meetings. "[Weller]

It should be noted that in the article above mentioned as being available on the libcom website [search for Joe Jacobs], Joe notes the Camatte writings but says he disagrees with the conclusions. The article, published by the US "Fifth Estate", repeats much of his thinking outlined herein.

Briefly, the other the texts

The general trend of the documents show Joe is concerned over *Solidarity*, exploring different aspects. Whatever his state of health, Joe was clearly keeping his brain in operation and expressing his ideas. In the opinion of the writer the texts show some confusion about ideas and some examples can illustrate this.

Political

To return to the point looked at above about Solidarity being self appointed, etc, this is the nature of political organisations who would not tolerate any other arrangement. Here Joe is confused in comparing the role of the revolutionary group to that of a trade union. Within this context, any delegate or representative is required to be elected by the members, recallable by them and accountable to the appropriate organisation, this is ABC stuff. Unions represent people of various interests and views - or no views - so basic "democracy" is essential.

A revolutionary group is by contrast a voluntary structure by people with a close similarity of ideas and of what needs to be done. There is a need for elementary accountability within the revolutionary socialist group but this can take different forms and change over time. Any direct comparison with the trade union is not valid, the structure and function of the two types of organisation are quite different.

Joe keeps returning to the alleged "interventions" by *Solidarity* on the basis of 'socialist content'. The intervention is a specifically marxist/leninist concept, implying as it does the existence of a vanguard party whose role can be defined as influencing and recruiting those with a "false consciousness" that precludes their participation in the crucial role of 'building the Party'. It was introduced as a tactic as a result of the leninist influences on national parties after 1917. The victims were those in the anarchist or syndicalist movement, or social democratic (Labour) and trade union movement. Over the years it has been one of the most hated and despised aspects of the leninist parties - people talk wistfully about the days before the antagonism and in-fighting associated with it.

Non-leninists continue to carry out their usual function - distribute leaflets offering solidarity, draw out the positive aspects of the case in point, ask

permission before selling their journals on picket lines instead of just barging in, give back a percentage of the sales money to the organisation and do not seek to recruit members out of the situation. *Solidarity's* record show this in practice - the events around the Fisher Bendix occupation are an excellent example, and it is interesting to note that Joe supplies no evidence of the alleged specific interventions.

Servicing and beyond

On the 'socialist content', Joe engages in a tortuous argument about nobody having personal experience of socialism (the only criteria, he insists) and therefore people cannot know what a 'socialist content' is in fact. He appears to think that any activity beyond simple communication is invalid, while most socialists could define other pointers in that direction:

- ❑ An independence from capitalist - and state capitalist - thought and organisation, and likewise from social democratic and trade union sources;
- ❑ The promotion of basic structures elected by assemblies or mass meetings, and an accountability to these rank and file councils or communes;
- ❑ A federal structure of base bodies instead of a centralised one;
- ❑ And so on, up to a social transformation resulting the collective control of all institutions, instead of private or state ownership.

These points were made by *Solidarity* in their comments on the New Movement as examined previously.

Finally

An additional illustration of the continuity of marxists-leninist ideas in Joe's thinking, is his comparison of the activist with the scientist. In several places he compares social ideas with scientific ones. The comparison began with Engels and led to the expression "scientific socialism". Basic scientific knowledge concerns the natural world and its phenomena. The method, regardless of the personal beliefs of the scientist, is to observe, write up, compare the results to established thesis, or existing knowledge, and then publish the conclusions. Others can repeat the experiment or observations, question the comparative evidence and argue for the validation or modification, of the conclusions.

In contrast socialism is a belief concerning human society. "Scientific" observations are not possible as the observer is himself a player in the society, humans are immensely variable, dependent on social circumstances and most social changes occur frequently and without any records.

While science is not value free and conclusions depend on the political views of the commentator - witness the climate change debate - the natural world is quite different to the human one. The marxist claim to be "scientific" can be seen as a technique to validate the arguments for the Party, a bit like the Pope and his infallibility over religion. A more modest claim for "systematic" socialism would be more defensible, if not necessarily correct. Joe's use of the idea, while not explicit, can be drawn from his texts and obscures his criticisms in a considerable way.

This is very much a personal account. For readers wishing to make up their own minds a reminder that some texts as a whole can be seen on the website at libcom and it is hoped to expand these.

For reference, In TWIMC, he recommends as reading :

- ❑ Henri Simon's *New Movement* ;
- ❑ "the organisation" *Invariance*, Anne VIII. November 1975. Jacques Camatte, B P 133, 83 170. Brignoles. France ;
- ❑ 'The tyranny of structurelessness' by joreen. Reproduced from 'The Second Wave' Copywrite 1972 . by Female Liberation Inc ;
- ❑ 'On spontaneity and organisation' . Murray Bookchin, Solidarity pamphlet 49 ;
- ❑ "Alternative Socialism" by the Birmingham Alternative Socialism group [address in Moseley];
- ❑ and two Solidarity pamphlet on organisations.

Lastly

Several Solidarity members commented on the general situation without see this text. Terry Liddle, Mark Hendy, Dave Morris and Ken Weller have already been quoted . John Quail, author of a major book on the history of anarchism , [Quail] adds :

" Alan and others,

I would welcome your account . I was one of the people who voted to expel Joe from the London Group and I am happy to comment. Much was made of it by Joe but it was a farce in reality given the small size of the group and its modus operandi at the time, and Joe's description of us as simply another gang whose members were all gangsters preying on the essentially revolutionary working class. His job therefore, he said, was to do all in his power to disrupt our work. No organisation however libertarian can accept such a member.

I look forward to the piece.

Regards, John Q"

[Quail email]

Conclusion - Joe Jacobs

So Joe died in the period after the events described here happened.. Strangely, his life long friend Arnold Feldman died a few weeks later. David Brown, who had supported Joe, also resigned from Solidarity in 1976. His letter explains that he thought the group had separated from his interpretation of the economic writings of Marx. The writer does not feel competent to comment on this .

It seems a great tragedy that having been removed, substantially, from three forms of political organisation over the years, he was still looking for some else. It may well be that he had found this with the friends in the ICO/E&M for which he had undoubted enthusiasm.

Another possibility remains .The last destination of people who have found other organisations quite useless has been the wider libertarian movement, as we have noted above. Joe may well have subsequently discovered the political analysis in the writings of Peter Kropotkin , Errico Malatesta , Guy Aldred or the more modern Colin Ward more to his liking [Joll & Goodway]. There is little evidence he had investigated the works of the great anarchist/libertarian writers except one reference to the *Freedom* journal. Perhaps it is also a comment on *Solidarity* that it too had nothing to say on the subject of broadly libertarian thought or organisations, and its own intellectual basis was exclusively marxist .

In terms of organisations Dave Morris recalls :

"As far as I recall Joe Jacobs was at the Libertarian Industrial Network meeting I attended in the '70s at the Centro Iberico, I don't remember him talking too much ! I think that was the only time I met him.

He adds :

' The LIN was trying to develop flexible networks within various industries and regions encouraging grass roots communications and co-operation among radical activists. Looking back, it is possible he may have been interested in such flexible, libertarian forms of workplace links and organising. Although the LIN never established itself, LIN contacts in London - including myself (a postal worker), Adam Flowers (train driver) and Joe Thomas (print worker) - went on to set up the London Workers Group.

The LWG was very active and fairly influential from 1977 to 1983, and for those years provided a new and different model as a locally-based, libertarian workers solidarity and mutual aid organisation, open to all workers, promoting discussion, supporting each other and supporting shop floor disputes and struggles around London. It involved anarchists, council communists and independents. At one point over 20 workers were regularly

attending weekly meetings. Although this successful model of local workers organisation unfortunately failed to take hold, LWG was instrumental in helping found the Direct Action Movement (now renamed and still active as the Solidarity Federation) and some LWG activists went on to form the highly-influential Class War in the early 1980s , also still active.'

Libertarian option

While the writer personally finds things to disagree with in the libertarian school of politics, he also finds much of its philosophy a welcome change from the marxist version, as Joe might have done , and like him, he came to this set of ideas late in life. But all this is speculation and for now we can only remark on what might have been. People change both their political opinions and organisational affiliation within our society where the tendency towards diversity appears to be growing. As such Joe's story is probably not untypical, but a bit more colourful than most.

We can end with two paragraphs from his obituary in Solidarity 8/6 :

"Joe had been a rebel since childhood and a revolutionary all his political life. Active in the workers movement in the 1930's (see his article "The Good Old Days" in Solidarity 7/10), he was expelled from the Communist Party for advocating street mobilisation and working class direct action as a means of fighting the fascists in London's East End.

After an association with Trotskyism in the early 1950's, Joe joined Solidarity in 1970. He wrote our pamphlets The Postal Strike and Under New Management in 1971 and 1972 respectively. In the last couple of years. Joe developed severe disagreements with the London group. These led to a parting of the ways. Despite this we all retained personal respect and affection for him. He was young at heart and he gave unstintingly of himself to the revolutionary movement. We regret he did not live to see the triumph of the cause to which he devoted so much of his life'

Reading

- ~ Jan Appel : *The Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution* [1930 Berlin & 1990 translation, 589 pp] privately published: economic proposals for the period after evolution. It is also autobiographical , and formed basis of educational work of Dutch councilists, GIK, in 1930s.
- ~ Janet, Biehl, editor : *The Murray Bookchin Reader*, [1997, 244 pp] ; excellent but excludes the last books he wrote ;
- ~ Murray Bookchin, as Lewis Herber : *Our Synthetic Environment* [1962, xx pp] ; and : *The Problem of Chemicals in Food* [1952, xx pp] ;

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early ecological texts ;

- ~ Alex Callinicos : *Trotskyism* [1990, 103 pp] ; general summary
- ~ Tony Cliff : *Rosa Luxemburg*, [1959 First, unamended, edition, 90 pp] ; avoid later leninist version ;
- ~ Cohn-Bendit, Daniel and Gabriel : *Obsolete Communism* - the left wing alternative [1969, 256 pp] ; uses unacknowledged much material from ICO sources ;
- ~ David Goodway: *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow ; left libertarian thought and British Writers from ~William Morris to Colin Ward* [2006, 401 pp] - the author casts a wide net ;
- ~ ICO : *Mass Strike in France* [1975, 75 pp] in Rachleff below
- ~ Joe Jacobs *To Whom It May Concern* [1976, ? pp]].
- ~ James Joll : *The Anarchists* [1964, 303 pp] ; now dated but still wide ranging ;
- ~ Conor Kostick : *Revolution in Ireland - popular militancy 1917 to 1923* [1996, 239 pp] ; model volume ;
- ~ Gaston Leval (Pierre Robert Piller) : *Collectives in the Spanish revolution*, [1975, 368 pp] ; the English volume is translation of an earlier French book ;
- ~ David Lamb : *Consciousness Raising* , [unpublished , 1972, 31 pp] ;
- ~ Papers and documents from Joe Jacobs, accessible from [source address] ;
- ~ Ethel Mannin : *Bread and Roses - an utopian survey and blue print* [1944, 192 pp] ;
- ~ John Quail : *The Slow Burning Fuse - the lost history of the British anarchists* [1970, 350 pp] ; unique text ;
- ~ John Quail ; email , 2010
- ~ Peter Rachleff , the editor R & B ; *Root and Branch ; the rise of the workers movement* ; [1975, 544 pp] an excellent book of readings on workers council ;
- ~ *Solidarity* ; "Workers Councils and the Economics of the Self Managed Society" [Solidarity 40, 1972, 60 pp] an edited version of a 1958 SoB text ;
- ~ Terry Liddle , email, 2010
- ~ Mark Shipway : *Anti Parliamentary Communism - the movement for workers councils , in Britain 1917 to 1945* [1988, 239 pp], the main source for these years ;
- ~ Henri Simon , conversation, 2010,
- ~ Henri Simon : *The New Movement* [1976, 24 pp] with Solidarity reply;
- ~ Ken Weller , conversation , 2010
- ~ Alan Woodward : *The Deeper Meaning of the Struggle - an outline history of the international shop stewards movement and socialism* [2009, 64 pp], much needed perspective on workplace organisation and its politics .
- ~ Alan Woodward: *The New World , perspectives on workers control in*

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The author

Alan Woodward was born in 1939 into a London working class family, failed the 11+ exam, had a successful secondary modern education nonetheless and did national service in RAF. After training and working for a while as a teacher , he began a "heroic" career as an agitator in North London factories. Victimised out 5 years later , he resumed education and then spent three decades in running and taking shop stewards courses. He worked in the Midlands, London , in colleges and

universities and WEA, for several union organisations and rank and file bodies. He was always active in the workplace and union.

Politically he was active in the Labour Party Young Socialists, against the bomb in CND, and then in the newly formed International Socialists. Events move on and after two decades battling against increasingly sectarian marxist organisation, he is now active in the libertarian movement. This is much pleasanter and more rewarding. He attends demos and marches - from the rather grand Aldermaston to the lowly patients pickets against insurance-run polyclinics. He was recently involved in the Ford Visteon occupation in Enfield and wrote up his experience in a booklet. Every participating worker got a copy.

Now, past 70, he has retired technically but still reads widely, thinks in a hurry and writes obsessively. A new career, encouraging girls football for grandchildren, takes much of his time, as does the Radical History Network. He hopes to live long enough to see the workers in the East and the South resuming successfully the struggle against international capitalism.

Publications include *Ford Visteon Enfield Workers Occupation - an eyewitness account and first thoughts*; *Party Over Class - how leninism subverted workers councils organisation*; *A Short Guide to Workers Council Socialists*; *Readers Guide to Workers Council Socialism*; *A Political Economy of Workers Socialism*, *A Guide to the Health, Safety and Welfare at Work*; *Going to Meetings*; several booklets on strikes; also as editor *Fragments - episodes in local workers history*, vols 1,2 and 3, and *The NHS is 60*. Unpublished texts include *Red Reading for socialists*

[This book can be seen as the second part of the life of Joe Jacobs. ; the first part is in *Out of the Ghetto - my youth in the East End, communism and fascism 1913 - 39*; though this document is not linked to that volume] £3-00

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