

CHAMPAGNE EDITORIAL

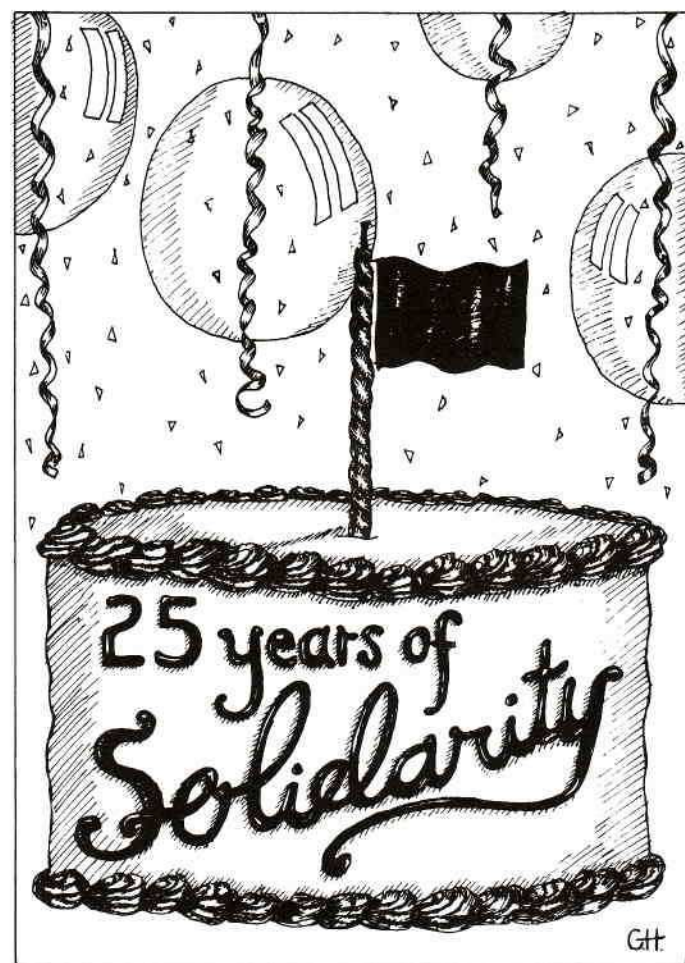
# The first 25 years !

Scarcely imaginable way back in 1960, Solidarity is now celebrating its twenty-fifth birthday. Here we look back over the group's history and original purpose, and forward to lay claim to a future role

IN 1960 a few ex-members of what was then the Socialist Labour League and is now the Workers' Revolutionary Party, having experienced some of the practices which are now being 'exposed' in the present faction-fight within that organisation, came together to discuss what had gone wrong with the leninist dream. Unlike many such groups before and since, who have limited their ambitions to trying to be better trotskyists, we rapidly came to the conclusion that what was wrong was not any particular application of leninist ideology, but the ideas themselves. Indeed, we went further and saw that much of what was wrong was embedded within marxism itself.

The group thus formed was called 'Socialism Reaffirmed' and published a monthly duplicated magazine called Agitator. Some felt this to be too reminiscent of washing machines and after four issues the name was changed to Solidarity. This title was soon applied to the group too.

From the beginning Solidarity was deeply influenced by the ideas of the French group 'Socialisme ou Barbarie', especially those of Cornelius Castoriadis (published by us, under the name of Paul Cardan). We rejected the crude economic determinism and elitism of much of the marxist left and committed ourselves to a view of socialism based on generalised self-management and freedom (see the



Castoriadis texts we published as The Meaning of Socialism, Modern Capitalism and Revolution, and Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society.

Because we believe that ends and means are inseparable, our view of what constitutes a free society leads us to consider as politically positive or negative activities which are not simply different from





1960: CND packs its first 100,000 into Trafalgar Square; the Mini and the M1 are 12 months old. In January (see picture) anti H-Bomb protestors marched on the base at Harrington, Northants. Solidarity was soon to play a significant role in the Committee of 100 and Spies for Peace. Someday the story may be told.

the traditional left but frequently in a different political universe. We make no apology for reprinting yet again from our political statement As We See It :

"Meaningful action, for revolutionaries, is whatever increases the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the equalitarian tendencies and the self-activity of the masses and whatever assists in their demystification. Sterile and harmful action is whatever reinforces the passivity of the masses, their apathy, their cynicism, their differentiation through hierarchy, their alienation, their reliance on others to do things for them and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others - even by those allegedly acting on their behalf".

Seen from this perspective, the traditional left has usually proved to be part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

Over the years Solidarity has made significant contributions towards a clarification of what is wrong and what is to be done (sic). We have constantly stressed examples of self-activity, as well as documenting the real records of existing regimes, especially those enthused over by much of the so-called socialist movement - for example, we never supported the NLF in Vietnam, Pol Pot in Cambodia, Khomeini in Iran, or the IRA.

It has not been all beer and skittles. We have had our share of ups and downs, schisms and resignations. But unlike so many other groups we remain on comradely terms with our ex-members. This flows from our rejection of the idea that we are the sole guardians of the sacred flame, that all who disagree with us are at best ignorant and at worst in the pay of the CIA, etc., etc. Such attitudes, which are still widespread, are part of the rotten baggage of the leninist past. Few, even of those who now sharply differ from us,



to regret their time in the struggle. On the negative side, it must be stated that while we have never been organisationally disappointed - we do not believe that the revolution is vested in us alone - we have failed to build a movement network of autonomous groups. But this may perhaps have had to do with the nature of libertarian ideas - that they flourish in times of political confidence and wither in times of difficulty and retreat - as our own history shows.

In the past Solidarity has played a useful role in the development of such movements as the squatters, the direct-action orientated and generally independent anti-nuclear movement, and the emergence of new forms of struggle in industry, to mention but a few. We have also seen how such genuine mass movements have been recuperated and drained of all radical content by conventional politics, and have become institutionalised and subordinated to the interests of

their dominant elites. "Popular planning" and "accountability" are now the catchphrases of every politician. This, too, has been a major theme of our literature.

To be as relevant in the future as we have been in the past we have to develop an analysis of these new processes. In a period where the institutional left has received a number of massive defeats, there is an opportunity to develop a libertarian revolutionary critique of the new "parasitocracy" which is living off the backs of the working class via local government grants and jobs, while its fellows in industry have created a huge trade union sub-bureaucracy which in whole areas has taken over the previously quasi-independent shop stewards' movement and brought the writ of the trade union leadership into the workplace. We see a new class growing to power using the slogans of socialism, but having little to do with socialism as we define it. There is work to be done.

## RIOTING

# Community warning

The Autumn's spate of inner-city disturbances may have  
succeeded in gaining for the police an extension of their already  
sweeping powers. Certainly an ailing government has received  
a badly-needed law-and-order shot in the arm. Have the riots had  
any positive outcomes? ANDY BROWN assesses  
the events in Brixton.

IN 1981 AT THE HEIGHT of the riots the establishment was clearly alarmed. Such events had not happened in mainland Britain on such a scale this century, and few people knew exactly what to expect. The media were in a state of genuine panic, searching for the mystery men in balaclavas who were behind it all, and even experienced politicians like Michael Heseltine

seemed to be wondering whether the time had come to adopt new strategies before it was too late.

Four years on things look rather different. Riots have become an almost accepted hazard of life in the inner city, and it would be very easy to be cynical about them. After all, why should a riot have any more political significance

than, say, the regular confrontations between rival football fans, such as the recent one in Leicester which was nearly a riot itself? The venue may be different; but perhaps the content is similar.

There is certainly evidence for such a point of view. I doubt whether the women raped in Brixton think much of the political motives of their attackers. Such actions might, I suspect, be seen by some comrades as revenge attacks carried out by the poor against the rich (anyone remember Eldrige Cleaver?) There was, however, precious little class solidarity shown by some rioters in Brixton. There were fights between rioters over loot, there were muggings of fellow rioters and of bystanders, and there were a number of small black-owned shops which became targets for no good reason. Take into consideration the deaths of the two Asians in Handsworth who were a long way from being rich exploiters, and you do not have a movement it is easy to be proud of.

And yet, there is another side to the story. Speaking to people involved in the Brixton riot reveals that numbers of them were acting from conscious political motives, that many put themselves at considerable risk by attacking the police station for several hours, and that many co-operated to defend themselves and their area while neglecting the opportunity to loot for personal gain. Several people saw the action as a necessary response to a dangerous police force which had to be undertaken if there was to be any prospect of controlling the police in the future. As such the attack on the police station seems to have been approved of by a majority of black people in Brixton while the attacks on individuals and the shops was not at all widely welcomed. Similarly, in Tottenham the riot was perceived as a necessary response to increased police harassment over the previous few weeks. It seems that the remarks of prospective MP Bernie

Grant, unpopular as they may have been to an outside audience, were the least he could say to maintain credibility among his constituents. Seen in this context, the riots look much more positive. The bravery (to the point of foolhardiness), the initiative, and the ability to work for a common purpose without any controlling authority were all impressive. At the end of the riots, when they felt safer, the police behaved with casual brutality, but they had got the message - any time they are pushed too far, parts of the inner city community (both black and white, it should be stressed, for as usual the media got it wrong in pointing almost exclusively to blacks) can act to defend themselves. Such defensive actions are not the start of the revolution and they are certainly messy and contain incidents which no socialist defends, but they are actions taken by real people in response to a real need to defend themselves. As such they are reasonably effective and worthy of support.

Any award for bad press coverage must surely go to the Daily Express for the piece headlined 'Pretty face on the front line' which went on "Amid the ugly scenes in Brixton there was at least one pretty face. Tense and alert 19 year old police girl Andrea Taylor was still worth a second glance even in her 'No 2' uniform". And the SWP must qualify for some award for opportunism for having leaflets reading "If you would like more information about the Socialist Workers' Party please..." out on Brixton streets within 24 hours of the riot.

Finally, readers should note that many people have been speaking since the riots for the Brixton community. This is virtually impossible to do. The comments in this article about the reactions of the community are generalisations based on speaking to a number of people who may not be representative. They should be treated with due caution.