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“For Your Freedom and Ours”: Poland’s *Solidarność* and the British Left, 1980–1989

ABSTRACT

Across Western Europe the emergence of Poland’s *Solidarność*, the first independent trade union in a communist state, elicited varied responses. While the assistance provided to Polish workers from continental Europe has been addressed, the solidarity effort in Britain is scarcely understood. Building on Stefan Berger and Norman LaPorte’s previous work, this article investigates the response of the British labour movement across the UK. While the British Left’s response is typically considered lukewarm, this article exposes the discrepancy between the efforts of rank-and-file labour activists and the leadership of key institutions. Drawing upon oral histories with contemporaneous activists, trade union archives, and prominent left-wing publications, it is apparent that this distinction was present in the Trades Union Congress, large trade unions, and the Labour Party. Understanding British solidarity with *Solidarność* ultimately elucidates the permeability of the Iron Curtain and contributes to an understanding of the role East-West socio-political interactions played in the demise of the Soviet Union.

Keywords: Solidarność; Solidarity; Poland; British Left; British labour movement; trade unions; East-West relations

“If the machine’s there, let’s go and get it,” declared Lech Wałęsa, the leader of the recently legalized Polish trade union, *Solidarność* (Solidarity)—the first independent of a communist state in the Soviet sphere of influence.¹ Wałęsa had just been informed that John Taylor, a British political tourist, had located an offset-lithographic printing machine. Captivated by the events unfolding at the Gdańsk shipyard in August 1980, Taylor, a Labour Party member from Dudley, had travelled to Poland on a two-week

1 John Taylor, *Five Months with Solidarity: A First-Hand Report from Inside Hotel Morski* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 1981), 62.

tourist visa.² He sought to use his unique position as a foreigner to obtain for *Solidarność* printing equipment which was near-impossible to acquire in a communist state keen to control the distribution of information at a time of national upheaval. Indeed, equipment from Western European trade unions had been intentionally held up at customs.³ Taylor had discovered the printer while attending an exhibition in Poznań. After deceiving the authorities into thinking the purchase was for export, Taylor, with help from three Polish companions, delivered *Solidarność* their first piece of duplicating equipment in October 1980.⁴

Given that *Solidarność* was officially a trade union, the labour movement conducted a significant portion of solidarity action in Britain. John Taylor personified the British Left's sympathy with the new Polish union. The assistance provided throughout the 1980s was a story of solidarity, caution, and hypocrisy. No other cause garnered sympathy from both the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and a Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) branch in Cardiff.⁵ It was because of this diversity in support, however, that *Solidarność* proved testing on the loyalties of some on the Left. Pro-Soviet apologists in the British labour movement complicated assistance. That the Polish trade union was hailed by Thatcher who suppressed the very trade union rights for which *Solidarność* fought was enough to turn some off.⁶ For others, the desire to expose the Prime Minister's hypocrisy motivated activism.⁷ Hypocrisy was not reserved to the Right, however. The nationalist nature of *Solidarność* and its affinity with the Catholic Church troubled some British socialists.⁸ The same critics, however, without embarrassment, would champion Catholic nationalism in Northern Ireland.⁹

- 2 Phone interview with John Taylor, 18 January 2021, London UK; John Taylor, "On the Campaign Trail," in *For Our Freedom and Yours: A History of the Polish Solidarity Campaign of Great Britain, 1980–1994*, ed. Giles Hart (London: Polish Solidarity Campaign, 1995), 107.
- 3 Taylor, *Five Months*, 67.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 63–64.
- 5 Phone interview with Wanda Kościa, 27 January 2021, London UK. Kościa was a prominent PSC activist.
- 6 Jim Denham et al., "An Open Letter to Frank Chapple," *Socialist Organiser*, no. 25 (13 September 1980), 3.
- 7 Eric Heffer, "Thatcher is a Hypocrite!," *Socialist Organiser*, no. 379 (10 November 1988), 6.
- 8 "A Workers' Poland, Yes! The Pope's Poland, No!," *Spartacist Britain*, October 1980, 5.
- 9 Jo Quigley, "Solidarity in the West Midlands," in *For Our Freedom and Yours: A History of the Polish Solidarity Campaign of Great Britain, 1980–1994*, ed. Giles Hart (London: Polish Solidarity Campaign, 1995), 113.

Despite the fact that the British Left’s relationship with *Solidarność* provoked controversy and exposed political fissures, it has received little scholarly attention.¹⁰ Since the turn of the century, research into the assistance provided by Western European labour movements has been pioneered by Idesbald Goddeeris.¹¹ Analysis of the British Left’s support has enjoyed the publication of only one chapter.¹² Stefan Berger and Norman LaPorte’s chapter therefore provides a useful but by no means complete platform from which to further research the relationship between *Solidarność* and the British labour movement. Given that the chapter focused largely on the Trades Union Congress’ (TUC) slow response, and it being the sole piece of secondary literature, primary sources provide the basis for further investigation. While the British trade union archives at the Modern Records Centre underpinned Berger and LaPorte’s work, the scholars, writing in 2010, were unable to access Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union (EETPU) and National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) documents due to the unions’ thirty-year rule on release.¹³ Now open, sources from these archives shed light on the contrasting levels of support provided by the two unions. Indeed, the EETPU General Secretary, Frank Chapple, was among the most vocal trade unionists championing *Solidarność*, while the story of NUM support—given its President, Arthur Scargill, declared *Solidarność* “anti-so-

- 10 English language accounts emerged in the 1980s. See Neal Ascherson, *The Polish August: The Self-Limiting Revolution* (Middlesex: Viking, 1981); Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity, 1980–1982* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983); Neal Ascherson, *The Struggles for Poland* (New York: Random House, 1987); Denis MacShane, *Solidarity: Poland’s Independent Trade Union* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1981); Taylor, *Five Months*; Colin Baker and Kara Weber, *Solidarność: From Gdansk to Military Repression* (London: International Socialism, 1982).
- 11 Idesbald Goddeeris, ed., *Solidarity with Solidarity: Western European Trade Unions and the Polish Crisis, 1980–1982* (Lanham: Lexington, 2010); Idesbald Goddeeris, “The Transnational Scope of Western Labour’s Solidarity with *Solidarność*,” *Labour History Review* 75 (2010): 60–75; Idesbald Goddeeris, “Western Trade Unions and *Solidarność*: A Comparison from a Polish Perspective,” *The Polish Review* 52, no. 3 (2007): 305–329; Idesbald Goddeeris, “Lobbying Allies? The NSZZ *Solidarność* Coordinating Office Abroad, 1982–1989,” *Cold War Studies* 13, no. 3 (2011): 83–125. See also Stefan Berger, “*Solidarność*, Western Solidarity and Détente: A Transnational Approach,” *European Review* 16, no. 1 (2008): 75–84.
- 12 Stefan Berger, Norman LaPorte, “Great Britain: Between Avoiding Cold War and Supporting Free Trade Unionism,” *Solidarity with Solidarity: Western European Trade Unions and the Polish Crisis, 1980–1982*, ed., Idesbald Goddeeris (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 129–157.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 151.

cialist”—presents a more complex picture.¹⁴ Internal TUC documents have also been consulted.

An investigation into the assistance provided by the British Left to *Solidarność* must begin, however, with the contribution made by grassroots solidarity campaigns given their role in influencing the policy of the trade union movement and Labour Party. The Polish Solidarity Campaign (PSC) was the most prominent campaign group and featured briefly in Berger and LaPorte's account. I conducted interviews with prominent PSC activists (and other key actors) which serve as the basis for analysis of their efforts.¹⁵ Just as Jack Bloom conducted oral histories with *Solidarność* activists in Poland, so do solidarity activists in Britain have their story told.¹⁶ Where possible, interviewee accounts have been used in conjunction with archival documents. By recording the experiences of historical actors, the intention is to add to the historical record for what is a lightly studied field.

Reviewers of Goddeeris' edited volume have charged the British labour movement with being among the most reluctant to assist *Solidarność* relative to Western European counterparts; Anita Prazmowska wrote that “when Solidarity leaders looked to Margaret Thatcher for support, they cut themselves off from any dialogue with British labour leaders.”¹⁷ As Berger and LaPorte outlined, the response of the TUC was cautious, and the same was true of the Labour Party. This article, however, seeks to demonstrate that the slow response of the leadership of major labour organizations was not mirrored at a grassroots level, or in individual trade unions. Far from avoiding *Solidarność* because of its support from the Right, the new Polish union was understood by many on the Left for what it was—a worker's movement demanding the right to exist as a trade union independent of the state.¹⁸ Genuine grassroots links developed between the British and Polish working classes at a regional, industrial and even workplace level. Given the dichotomy between the view of the leadership and the rank and file, the labour movement cannot be considered monolithic. Also, support or otherwise for *Solidarność* was not static but fluctuated across the decade, deter-

14 John McKinlay, “Scargill Angers Unions with Solidarity Attack” *Glasgow Herald*, September 8, 1983, 1.

15 I conducted 13 interviews in total.

16 Jack Bloom, “The Solidarity Revolution in Poland, 1980–1981,” *Oral History Review* 33 (2006), 33–64; Jack Bloom, *Seeing Through the Eyes of the Polish Revolution: Solidarity and the Struggle Against Communism in Poland* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

17 Anita Prazmowska, “Solidarity with Solidarity: Western European Trade Unions and the Polish Crisis, 1980–1982,” *Cold War History* 12, no. 4 (2012), 714.

18 Solidarity Warsaw Inter-Workplace Workers' Committee, “Open Letter from the Polish Workers to the Western Trade Unions and Workers' Parties,” *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 5, nos. 5–6 (1982–83), 25, Private Papers of Paul Hubbert (Labour Party) [in author's possession, Leeds, UK].

mined by the severity of the situation in Poland (with support increasing considerably after the proclamation of martial law), and the British political context.

To demonstrate the grassroots sympathy with *Solidarność*, this article will first consider the role of solidarity campaigns in mobilizing support from the labour movement. Before building on Berger and LaPorte’s analysis of the slow response of the TUC, it will document cases of grassroots trade union solidarity with Polish workers, as well as the efforts of individual trade unions. The NUM will then be used to further demonstrate that the view of an organization’s leadership often contradicted that of its membership, and that support for *Solidarność* could fluctuate over time. After briefly detailing the support of Trotskyist groups, the so far unstudied response of the Labour Party will finally be considered, which, similar to the TUC, presents a case of misalignment between its slow-responding leadership and active membership.

It is in detailing the assistance provided by the British Left to *Solidarność* that the importance of this investigation lies. That is, understanding how ideological, political, and institutional considerations determined the varied and fluctuating levels of support over time. This understanding supplements literature on the factionalism that plagued the British Left throughout the decade.¹⁹ *Solidarność* was one battleground among many in which grassroots members clashed with their leaders, and where divisions within the leadership of organizations were exposed. An analysis of the labour movement’s solidarity with *Solidarność* also contributes to the historiography on the development of trade union internationalism during the 1970s and 1980s.²⁰ Just as working-class solidarity with Polish workers was considerable, so it was with workers in Augusto Pinochet’s Chile and apartheid South Africa.

A comprehensive understanding of the British Left’s assistance to *Solidarność* can most significantly be situated in and compared with the historiography detailing the action of other Western European labour movements which, relative to the British

- 19 See final three chapters in Eric Shaw, *Discipline and Discord: Politics of Managerial Control in the Labour Party, 1951–87* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); John Golding, *Hammer of the Left: The Battle for the Soul of the Labour Party* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2016); John Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 204–215; Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1997) 202–229; Peter Shore, *Leading the Left* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993), 137–152; Eric Heffer, *Never a Yes Man: The Life and Politics of an Adopted Liverpudlian* (London: Verso Books, 1991), 183–218.
- 20 Andrew Cumbers, “Embedded Internationalisms: Building Transnational Solidarity in the British and Norwegian Trade Union Movements,” *Antipode* 36, no. 5 (2004): 829–850; Roger Southall, “The Development and Delivery of ‘Northern’ Worker Solidarity to South African Trade Unions in the 1970s and 1980s,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 32, no. 2 (1994): 166–199; Ann Jones, *No Truck with the Chilean Junta! Trade Union Internationalism, Australia and Britain, 1973–1980* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2014).

case, have been studied far more. While this article corroborates Goddeeris' conclusion that there lacked a multilateral character to solidarity activity with *Solidarność*, at appropriate points comparisons are made between the efforts of the British Left and other European labour movements, contributing to Berger's call for the "Europeanization of history writing."²¹

Above all else, this study of solidarity with *Solidarność* elucidates the permeability of the Iron Curtain and contributes to an understanding of the role East-West socio-political interactions played in the demise of the Soviet Union.

Solidarność and British Solidarity Campaigns

In August 1980, strikes broke out at the Gdańsk shipyard occasioned by a rise in food prices and the mistreatment of workers. Led by electrician Lech Wałęsa, workers forced the Polish authorities to sign the Gdańsk Agreement on 31 August 1980, the first point of which guaranteed the right to establish "free trade unions independent of the Communist Party."²² And so *Solidarność* was founded, counting over ten million members at its height in September 1981.²³ The implementation of martial law on 13 December 1981 forced *Solidarność* to operate clandestinely, which it did so until the end of the 1980s.

"For today and the days that lie ahead," appealed the *Solidarność* Warsaw Inter-Workplace Workers' Committee after the implementation of martial law, "we are depending on you for help and solidarity."²⁴ That *Solidarność* sought international labour movement support was evident.

Polish Solidarity Campaign (PSC)

Such calls were heeded across Britain as the events in Poland stimulated grassroots sympathy. The earliest manifestation of public solidarity can be found in London-based PSC. Upon hearing of strike action in Gdańsk, a public meeting was orga-

21 Goddeeris, *Transnational Scope*, 65; Berger, *Solidarność, Western Solidarity and Détente*, 83.

22 The 21 Demands, in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 4, no 2–3 (1980), 9.

23 Aleksander Smolar, "Towards 'Self-limiting Revolution': Poland 1970–89," *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-Violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*, ed. Adam Roberts, Timothy Garton Ash (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 127.

24 Open Letter from the Polish Workers to the Western Trade Unions and Workers' Parties, in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*.

nized at Conway Hall, London, on 26 August 1980.²⁵ With over one hundred people in attendance, from left-wing activists to members of the Polish community, PSC was established.

PSC was a non-partisan democratic organization of volunteers. Within a year its membership had reached over one hundred, peaking at 1,200 in early 1982 after the implementation of martial law.²⁶ The only pre-requisite for membership was to share the group’s aims to mobilize popular support for *Solidarność* and to lobby labour institutions—namely, the TUC and Labour Party—to support *Solidarność* and terminate “all organizational, political and social links [with] the ruling political parties and state-controlled puppet trade unions in all Warsaw Pact countries.”²⁷ The latter proved to be the most testing demand for the Left, and necessitated a determined campaign on the part of PSC activists. Through *PSC News* the group published reports from Poland to an English-speaking audience.²⁸

“A few days after the proclamation of martial law,” historian and activist E.P. Thompson recalled, “I attended the most mournful political event of my life [...] a day as bitter and cold as were our hearts.”²⁹ Despite snow beating down unrelentingly, over fourteen-thousand people marched in Hyde Park, London, on 20 December 1981 to protest the proclamation of martial law in Poland.³⁰ The demonstration was the apex of popular sympathy with *Solidarność* in Britain, receiving national coverage as details were read out on BBC News beforehand.³¹ Organized by PSC, it was the pinnacle of their mobilization efforts. Politicians who supported PSC events ranged from Labour Member of Parliament (MP) Eric Heffer to Conservative MP Sir Bernard Braine.³² To some on the Left, that pro-*Solidarność* events were addressed by Conservative MPs only strengthened their scepticism as the Conservative government did little in defence of Chilean workers against Pinochet’s regime, or in condemning

- 25 Giles Hart, “A Brief History of the Polish Solidarity Campaign,” *For Our Freedom and Yours: A History of the Polish Solidarity Campaign of Great Britain, 1980–1994* (London: Polish Solidarity Campaign, 1995), ed. Giles Hart, 13.
- 26 Edward Switalski, “More About PSC,” *For Our Freedom and Yours: A History of the Polish Solidarity Campaign of Great Britain, 1980–1994*, ed. Giles Hart (London: Polish Solidarity Campaign, 1995), 72.
- 27 Appendix 1: “Aims and Objectives of PSC,” *For Our Freedom and Yours: A History of the Polish Solidarity Campaign of Great Britain, 1980–1994*, ed. Giles Hart (London: Polish Solidarity Campaign, 1995), 117–118.
- 28 “Polish Solidarity Campaign News,” *PSC News* 5 (1982), 7.
- 29 Edward Palmer Thompson, *Double Exposure* (London: Merlin, 1985), 123.
- 30 Naomi Hyamson, “Fifteen Thousand March in Solidarity,” *PSC News* 5 (1982), 2.
- 31 Lucy Hodges, “Hyde Park Protest: Thousands Hear Appeals for Food and Medicine,” *The Times*, 21 December 1981, 5.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 36.

South African apartheid. Wiktor Moszczyński, PSC chairman between 1982–1983, explained how PSC avoided platforming politicians with double standards.³³

Aside from organizing public rallies, the primary occupation of PSC activists was as speakers at trade union and Labour Party branch meetings mobilizing support for *Solidarność*. An impressive feat, between 1981 and 1983 Moszczyński spoke at 130 meetings.³⁴ Wanda Kościa, another prominent PSC member, toured trade union branches in 1982 as an interpreter for visiting *Solidarność* representatives.³⁵ Accounts of the reception PSC activists received at meetings provide an insight into the labour movement's perception of *Solidarność*. Moszczyński recalled being introduced at a Labour Party branch meeting as a PSC representative and local councillor. When asked which party he represented, "everyone suddenly breathed easily" when he answered the Labour Party.³⁶ Evidently, some leftists were sceptical of *Solidarność*, assuming that Moszczyński's politics would mirror those of the Polish unions' right-wing supporters. In the opposite vein, Kościa found parts of her experience "very moving." At a meeting of miners in South Wales, she witnessed "real working-class solidarity," with "people who had very little sharing that very little" with *Solidarność*.³⁷ PSC, with considerable success, made the case for *Solidarność* to the British Left.

PSC activity within the labour movement was not confined to grassroots meetings. They also challenged the inaction of the TUC and Labour Party leaderships. Activists picketed executive meetings and conferences, including the September 1980 TUC Congress, the TUC International Committee meeting in February 1981 at which it was agreed that assistance be sent to *Solidarność*, and the Labour Party National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting in July 1982 which decided to sever links with Eastern European communist parties.³⁸ Trade union archives reveal that PSC activists also wrote to the TUC in an attempt to elicit material support for *Solidarność*.³⁹

PSC played a significant role in defining the relationship between *Solidarność* and the British Left. From August 1980 PSC activists mobilized grassroots support within and without the labour movement, worked to quell scepticism of *Solidarność*, and

33 Phone interview with Wiktor Moszczyński, 22 January 2021, London UK.

34 Hart, "A Brief History," 21; Wiktor Moszczyński, "Extracts from Wiktor Moszczyński's PSC Diary," *For Our Freedom and Yours: A History of the Polish Solidarity Campaign of Great Britain, 1980–1994*, ed. Giles Hart (London: Polish Solidarity Campaign, 1995), 94.

35 Phone interview with Wanda Kościa, 27 January 2021, London UK.

36 Phone interview with Wiktor Moszczyński, 22 January 2021, London UK.

37 Phone interview with Wanda Kościa, 27 January 2021, London UK.

38 Berger and Laporte, "Between Avoiding Cold War," 133; Hart, "A Brief History," 15; Moszczyński, "Extracts," 96.

39 Wiktor Moszczyński to Tom Jackson (Chairman of TUC International Committee), 17 February 1981, in: Modern Records Centre (MRC), University of Warwick, TUC Collection, MSS.292D/943.8/1; Robin Blick to TUC, February 1981, in MRC, TUC Collection, MSS.292D/943.8/1.

lobbied for more concrete action from the TUC and Labour Party. That the latter both eventually supported *Solidarność* can in part be attributed to PSC efforts.

Other Grassroots Solidarity Campaigns

Expressions of solidarity with *Solidarność* were not just a London phenomenon. Regional solidarity committees, not affiliated to but modelled on PSC, were set up in various cities, from Birmingham to Manchester, Cardiff to Edinburgh.⁴⁰ Unlike PSC which encompassed a range of political views, regional committees were founded within the labour movement. The Greater Manchester Polish Solidarity Campaign, for example, was established by leftists to deny the right of “Thatcher to parade unchallenged” as a supporter of *Solidarność*.⁴¹ The largest solidarity organization outside London was the Glasgow Polish Solidarity Committee, founded by a local Trotskyist group.⁴² The Glasgow committee, as did other regional committees, held a rally in support of *Solidarność* in January 1982, to which over 800 people attended.⁴³ They played a comparable role in Scotland as did PSC in London by campaigning to improve the slow response of the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC); indeed, the General Secretary of the STUC, Jimmy Milne, a CPGB member, proclaimed the crisis an internal Polish affair, a common copout used by those sceptical of *Solidarność*.⁴⁴ The Stalinist presence in the Scottish trade union movement was a recurrent problem for pro-*Solidarność* activists.⁴⁵

Just as the Glasgow Polish Solidarity Committee was founded from within the local labour movement, so the Leeds Polish Solidarity Committee was at a meeting held in February 1982.⁴⁶ The Leeds Polish Solidarity Committee sought to “organise practical and political support for Polish workers” and established links with the Pol-

40 “Defence Committees in Britain,” *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 5, nos. 1–2 (1982), 39–40.

41 Greater Manchester Polish Solidarity Campaign “National Labour Movement Conference Solidarity with *Solidarność*,” *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 5, nos. 3–4 (1982), 37.

42 Phone interview with Marek Garzdecki, 14 February 2021, London UK.

43 Martin Meteyard, “Glasgow Rally Backs *Solidarność*,” *Socialist Challenge*, no. 230 (28 January 1982), 5, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/socialist-challenge/index.htm> For *Socialist Challenge*, henceforth see this URL.

44 Des Tierney, “Scottish Workers Back *Solidarność*,” *Socialist Challenge*, no. 230 (28 January 1982), 5.

45 Stan Croke, “Scots Stalinists Give Johnstone a Rough Reception,” *Socialist Organiser*, no. 73, February 18, 1982, 5.

46 Brain Dale, “Leeds Polish Solidarity Committee,” February 1982, Paul Hubbert Papers. Brian Dale was a councillor in Leeds and the secretary of the Leeds Polish Solidarity Committee.

ish city of Wrocław, evidencing the more general phenomenon in which the grassroots labour movement made regional links with *Solidarność*.⁴⁷

The city of Leeds exemplifies the contrasting ways in which the British public supported Polish workers, with the Leeds Polish Solidarity Committee not alone in its expression of solidarity. Leeds Solidarity with *Solidarność*, chaired by Janek Niczyperowicz, illustrates the way in which Polish communities provided decentralized support to *Solidarność* on a humanitarian, as opposed to a political, basis. The group was established within the Leeds Polish Catholic Centre to coordinate the collection of goods to be sent to Poland.⁴⁸ Niczyperowicz acted as an interpreter for one delivery of clothes and medicines to Kraków in July 1983.⁴⁹ Much as John Taylor personifies the political assistance provided to *Solidarność* by the Left, so Niczyperowicz exemplifies the effort made by the Polish community to provide humanitarian assistance. The Leeds example notwithstanding, a full investigation into the non-political, humanitarian support to *Solidarność* from the Polish community in particular, and the British public in general, is beyond the scope of this article.

None of the aforementioned groups were considered official representatives of *Solidarność*. This was reserved for the Solidarity Trade Union Working Group in the UK (STUWG), founded in December 1981, which encompassed *Solidarność* members stranded in Britain after the implementation of martial law—they faced arrest upon returning to Poland.⁵⁰ Boasting one hundred members, STUWG possessed an authenticity PSC lacked, and so its members were called on regularly to represent *Solidarność*.

From 1983, the STUWG was superseded by the Solidarity Information Office in London, headed by Marek Garztecki who ran the *Solidarność* branch of the Polish Jazz Society but was stuck in London.⁵¹ Aware of the importance of international representation, underground-*Solidarność* leaders in Poland authorized the establishment of branches in key Western European capitals as official representatives under the auspices of the Brussels-based *Solidarność* Coordinating Office Abroad.⁵² The Information Office in London enjoyed the support of pro-*Solidarność* trade unions. The EEPTU printed the *Voice of Solidarity*, an English-language publication edited by Garztecki providing news of events in Poland.⁵³ Accommodation for the Office

47 Ibid.

48 Phone interview with Janek Niczyperowicz, 17 January 2021, Bradford UK.

49 Phone interview with Janek Niczyperowicz, 17 January 2021, Bradford UK.

50 The composition of STUWG has been covered elsewhere. See Berger and Laporte, “Between Avoiding Cold War,” 142.

51 Phone interview with Marek Garztecki, 14 February 2021, London UK; Hart, “A Brief History,” 23.

52 Goddeeris, “Lobbying Allies?,” 84.

53 Hart, “A Brief History,” 23.

was first provided by the National Union of Journalists until the introduction of a pro-Soviet leadership in 1984, and after by Kate Losinska, President of the Civil and Public Servants Association (CPSA) and a high-profile pro-Solidarność trade unionist.⁵⁴ Aside from media appearances, a key operation of the Information Office was the organization of the ‘Adopt a Prisoner’ scheme in which assistance was provided to detainees and their families in Poland. Details of Solidarność internees featured in various left-wing publications and facilitated grassroots solidarity action.⁵⁵

As members of the new Polish trade union, the STUWG expended much of its effort seeking support from the British trade union movement. As part of a speaking tour in 1982, Garztecki and Piotr Kozłowski, a Solidarność shop steward at the Ursus tractor factory near Warsaw also stuck in Britain, attended hundreds of meetings at trade union branches and workplaces.⁵⁶ Garztecki recalled the “phenomenal” impression Kozłowski made on the British working class; despite orating in Polish, Kozłowski was able to provide an authentic working-class voice.⁵⁷ *Socialist Challenge* reported the “great impact” Kozłowski had “upon miners, steelworkers, union officials and labour movement activists.”⁵⁸ Kozłowski was important for those among the British working class reluctant to support the Polish union given its right-wing supporters.

The same applies to the activity of solidarity campaigns more generally. Collectively, the above groups made the case for Solidarność to elicit grassroots solidarity with Polish workers, to dispel any association of Solidarność with its right-wing supporters in the British government and the US administration, and to disprove the pro-Soviet idea that the Polish authorities were the legitimate representative of the Polish working class. They illustrate the spontaneous mobilization of sympathy for Polish workers both within and without the labour movement, in contrast with the dithering response of larger labour movement organizations like the TUC. That these groups lobbied the Left successfully was evident in the grassroots solidarity that manifested, with the Coventry Massey Ferguson tractor plant providing an apt case study.

54 Phone interview with Marek Garztecki, 14 February 2021, London UK; Hart, “A Brief History,” 23; Berger and Laporte, “Between Avoiding Cold War,” 142.

55 “Adopt a Prisoner,” *PSC News* 6 (1982), 8–9; “Defence Committees in Britain,” 39–40.

56 Phone interview with Marek Garztecki, 14 February 2021, London UK; Penny Duggan, “Build Labour Movement Support for the Polish Workers,” *Socialist Challenge*, no. 230, January 28, 1982, 6; “Birmingham Backs Solidarność,” *Socialist Challenge*, no. 230, January 28, 1982, 4; “Solidarity in Scotland,” *Socialist Challenge*, no. 228, January 14, 1982, 7; Meteyard, “Glasgow Rally Backs Solidarność.”

57 Phone interview with Marek Garztecki, 14 February 2021, London UK; Berger and LaPorte, “Between Avoiding Cold War,” 138.

58 Helen Slydmovics, Barry Wilkins, “South Wales Workers Pledge Support to Solidarność,” *Socialist Challenge*, no. 242 (22 April 1982), 4.

Solidarność and the British Trade Union Movement

“In a tremendous display of working-class solidarity,” relayed Les Hartopp, a worker at the Massey Ferguson factory in Coventry, “the meeting wholeheartedly supported the recommendation” to boycott Polish parts.⁵⁹ Piotr Kozłowski had appealed to Massey Ferguson workers throughout January 1982 to express solidarity with their Polish counterparts by refusing to handle components from Ursus tractor plant where he worked.⁶⁰ After hearing Kozłowski’s plea, over three-thousand Massey Ferguson workers unanimously voted to support it.⁶¹ Similar action was taken at the Manchester Massey Ferguson factory.⁶² This was an act of genuine working-class solidarity between British and Polish workers as grassroots links developed at the workplace level.

Massey Ferguson workers were not alone in their expression of solidarity. The adoption of internees after the implementation of martial law was a central means through which organizations on the Left supported Solidarność activists. Workers at the British Leyland’s Albion plant in Scotland, for example, adopted prisoners, providing material assistance to the internees’ families.⁶³ Unions would often adopt their detained Polish counterparts. The National Union of Students raised funds for the Polish Independent Students’ Association (Niezależne Zrzeszenie Studentów, NZS), the student branch of Solidarność, and adopted Jarosław Guzy, its President who was imprisoned at Białołęka detention camp.⁶⁴

Twinning arrangements between British trade unions and regional branches of Solidarność provide another example of grassroots solidarity.⁶⁵ In 1987, the National and Local Government Officers’ Association (NALGO) twinned with the Szczecin branch of Solidarność, paying legal fees and supporting the families of the imprisoned.⁶⁶ This phenomenon was reflected on the European continent. In France, the Regional Paris Union (Union Régionale Parisienne) made links with the Mazowsze region of Solidarność, and

59 Massey Ferguson, “Workers Black Polish Parts,” *Socialist Challenge*, no. 230, January 28, 1982, 6.

60 *Ibid.*

61 *Ibid.*

62 Joe Singleton, “British Labour Movement Response to the Military Coup in Poland,” *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 5, nos. 1–2 (1982), 38–39.

63 Singleton, “British Response,” 38–39.

64 Chris Serge, “Solidarity with Poland in the British Student Movement,” *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 5, nos. 3–4 (1982), 38.

65 Vladimir Derer: “What You Can Do to Help,” *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 4, nos. 4–6 (1981), 2; “What Your Union/Labour Party/Students Union Can Do,” *Socialist Challenge*, no. 228, January 14, 1982, 7.

66 Berger and Laporte, “Between Avoiding Cold War,” 147.

the Paris branch of Workers’ Force (Force Ouvrière) with Gdańsk.⁶⁷ Given that British trade unionism was organized on an industrial basis while Solidarność took a geographical form, regional links were less common. That said, the aforementioned tie between the Leeds Polish Solidarity Committee and Wrocław provides an example of localized links between British and Polish workers through which personal connections formed.

Many high-profile trade unions expressed solidarity with Solidarność early on and were quick to condemn martial law in December 1981. The General and Municipal Workers’ Union called on the TUC, whose support had so far been sluggish, to maximize its assistance to Solidarność, and, after martial law, expressed specific concern for the fate of Bogdan Lis, the vice-chair of the Founding Committee of Solidarność who had attended the union’s congress in 1981.⁶⁸ Similarly, NALGO wrote to the Polish ambassador concerned for Mieczysław Kukuća, a Solidarność member who had attended their 1981 congress.⁶⁹ This concern for specific individuals is representative of the personal ties that formed between grassroots British trade unionists and Solidarność members as solidarity surpassed the political to take a personal form.

The EEPTU is often cited as the British trade union most ardent in its support for Solidarność. Indeed, John Lloyd in his *History of the EEPTU* considers the support “unrivalled.”⁷⁰ Frank Chapple, the union’s General Secretary, was among the most vocal supporters of Solidarność. EEPTU archives reveal the union’s willingness to support Solidarność. After Wałęsa expressed an urgent need for office equipment in December 1980, the union’s Executive Council unanimously agreed to “respond to the appeal.”⁷¹ As mentioned, the EEPTU also printed Garztecki’s *Voice of Solidarity*.⁷²

That Solidarność enjoyed Chapple’s support was not always a blessing, however. Chapple, considered an anti-socialist ‘right-winger’ presiding over an undemocratic trade union, was a divisive figure in the labour movement and his support damaged the perception of Solidarność.⁷³ This confrontation within the trade union movement provoked by Solidarność influenced, in contrast to the efforts of grassroots activists and individual trade unions, the cautious approach taken by the TUC whose affiliates encompassed the whole spectrum of political opinion on the Left.

67 Andrzej Chwalba and Frank Georgi, “France: Exceptional Solidarity?,” *Solidarity with Solidarity: Western European Trade Unions and the Polish Crisis, 1980–1982*, ed. Idesbald Goddeeris (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 198; Goddeeris, “Transnational Scope,” 66.

68 Singleton, “British Response,” 38–39.

69 Berger and Laporte, “Between Avoiding Cold War,” 137.

70 John Lloyd, *Light & Liberty: A History of the EEPTU* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1990), 607.

71 EEPTU Executive Council Minutes, 15 December 1980, in: MRC, Electrical Trades Union Collection, MSS.387/1/4/32.

72 Lloyd, *Light and Liberty*, 607; Hart, “A Brief History,” 23.

73 Jim Denham et al., “An Open Letter to Frank Chapple,” 3; Tom Marlowe, “Solidarity Needed From the Left,” *Socialist Challenge*, no. 227, January 7, 1982, 2.

Trades Union Congress (TUC)

“Who’s he? What’s that?,” was the reaction of Magda Wójcik, who made up half of the International Department of *Solidarność*, to a letter received in January 1981 from Len Murray, the General Secretary of the TUC.⁷⁴ That *Solidarność* knew nothing of the British trade union confederation four months into existence exemplifies the TUC’s slow response which was in contrast to that of other countries. *Solidarność* enjoyed instant backing from all the major French trade union confederations, for example, and the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO).⁷⁵ The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the European Trade Union Confederation, of both the TUC was a member, also made immediate statements of support.⁷⁶ In contrast, the TUC at its annual congress held in September 1980, just one week after the foundation of *Solidarność*, was embroiled in a dispute over the new Polish trade union. Although Berger and LaPorte have narrated the development of TUC support for *Solidarność*, various arguments are worth reiterating with new evidence, while novel points need making.

The years of détente that preceded the foundation of *Solidarność* saw the development of good relations between the TUC and communist trade unions in Eastern Europe, including the official Polish Central Council of Trade Unions (*Centralna Rada Związków Zawodowych*, CRZZ).⁷⁷ The Economic Department of the TUC had a scheduled trip to visit Poland as a guests of the official union in late-September 1980.⁷⁸ With *Solidarność* discrediting the claim made by the CRZZ to represent Polish workers, this begged the question, as the *Guardian* reported, “should the TUC go to Warsaw?”⁷⁹ In the event, the visit was cancelled by the CRZZ. This episode, however, laid the groundwork for the unclear position taken by the TUC during the Polish unions’ first six months of existence.

74 Taylor, *Five Months*, 6; Phone interview with John Taylor, 18 January 2021, London UK.

75 Idesbald Goddeeris: “Introduction: Solidarity, Ideology, Instrumentality and Other Issues,” *Solidarity with Solidarity: Western European Trade Unions and the Polish Crisis, 1980–1982*, ed. Idesbald Goddeeris (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 2–3; on AFL-CIO support, see Gregory Domber, “The AFL-CIO, the Reagan Administration and *Solidarność*,” *The Polish Review* 52 no. 2 (2007): 277–304; Arthur Rachwald, *In Search of Poland: The Superpowers’ Response to Solidarity, 1980–1989* (Stanford: Hoover Press, 1990), 50.

76 MRC, TUC Collection, MSS.292D/943.8/1, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions Executive Board, 27–28 November 1980.

77 Berger and Laporte, “Between Avoiding Cold War,” 129.

78 Phone interview with Tom Jenkins, 25 January 2021, London UK; MacShane, *Solidarity*, 144.

79 “Should the TUC Go to Warsaw?,” *Guardian*, 22 August 1980, 10.

Following the cancellation of the trip, the TUC Congress passed an ambiguous motion which “expressed hope that talks taking place in Poland would reach a solution satisfactory to all those involved.”⁸⁰ This was far from unequivocal support for *Solidarność*, but instead characteristic of the TUC’s attempt to toe a cautious line between maintaining friendly relations with communist trade unions while upholding their belief in free trade unionism.⁸¹ An internal document reveals that, while the TUC sought to establish contact with *Solidarność*, it felt that “the CRZZ should be informed.”⁸² It is telling of the TUC’s ambiguous response that, while recognizing that *Solidarność* was struggling for independent labour representation, they remained courteous to the CRZZ who by extension ceased to be true representatives of the Polish working class.

That said, while the TUC’s outward support for *Solidarność* was feeble in comparison to other trade union confederations, there were internal conversations considering how best to assist Polish workers, albeit not in the summer of 1980 but at the start of 1981.⁸³ Tom Jenkins, who held the Eastern Europe remit within the TUC International Department, recalled his frustration with the presentation of the TUC as failing to support *Solidarność*.⁸⁴ Jenkins had received a letter in February 1981 from Robin Blick, PSC Secretary, which claimed that *Solidarność* had “had no support from the British TUC.”⁸⁵ Jenkins noted his irritation, scribbling on the letter that “PSC should check their facts” as the TUC had established contact with *Solidarność*.⁸⁶ In an institution the size of the TUC, however, that leading figures were sympathetic was not enough to determine central policy as decision-making procedures were cumbersome. In an interview, Jenkins was also keen to stress that, for the small TUC International Department, Poland was one among a miscellany of issues that occupied time in the working day.⁸⁷

It is beyond doubt, however, that, in comparison with the AFL-CIO and Western European equivalents, the TUC’s approach to *Solidarność* during the Polish unions’

80 MRC, TUC Collection, MSS.292D/943.8/1: Poland: Trade Union Developments, 6 October 1980.

81 Berger and Laporte, “Between Avoiding Cold War,” 150.

82 MRC, TUC Collection, MSS.292D/943.8/1: Poland: Trade Union Developments, 6 October 1980.

83 MRC, TUC Collection, MSS.292D/943.8/1: Poland: Trade Union Developments and Contacts, 2 February 1981.

84 Phone interview with Tom Jenkins, 25 January 2021, London UK. For depictions in the press of the TUC failing to provide assistance See John Patten, “An Eerie TUC Silence on Poland’s Strikes,” *Guardian*, 25 August 1980, 10.

85 MRC, TUC Collection, MSS.292D/943.8/1: Solidarity with Polish Workers Leaflet, enclosed in Robin Blick to TUC, February 1981.

86 MRC, TUC Collection, MSS.292D/943.8/1: Robin Blick to TUC, February 1981.

87 Phone interview with Tom Jenkins, 25 January 2021, London UK.

incipient months was lukewarm at best, in stark contrast to the backing given by the individual British trade unions and grassroots labour activists. Before detailing the increase in TUC support following the visit by leading *Solidarność* member Bogdan Lis, it is worth considering why the TUC response differed so markedly from other trade union confederations.

Central to Berger and LaPorte's analysis was that the TUC sought to balance intra-union tensions with the desire to maintain cordial relations with communist Eastern Europe, all while upholding the ideal of free trade unionism.⁸⁸ Denis MacShane relayed an image of the TUC as "a carthorse lugging around a huge trade union movement."⁸⁹ The range of political viewpoints within the TUC, from pro-Soviet communist party members to fervent anti-communists like Chapple, meant policy decisions took time and necessitated compromise. This goes some way to explain the TUC's initial ambiguity.

That the TUC was the sole British trade union confederation was significant. Unlike elsewhere in Europe, a lack of competition with other confederations left no incentive for the TUC to distinguish itself in terms of level of support. *Solidarność* featured more prominently as an issue in countries with multiple trade union confederations like Belgium, France and Italy.⁹⁰ The aforementioned intra-union tensions were only so problematic because the TUC, as the only trade union federation, encompassed such wide-ranging political opinion.

For those within the TUC already suspicious of *Solidarność* given Chapple's support, that Thatcher also looked favourably at developments in Poland provided another cause for scepticism.⁹¹ In January 1981 *Solidarność* adviser Dr Janik Strzelecki met with Conservative MPs at the Conservative Central Office.⁹² That he visited the TUC at Congress House on the same day epitomized the unique ability of *Solidarność* to receive interest from groups which, in their domestic context, were opponents. Alongside Thatcher and Chapple, that US President Ronald Reagan supported *Solidarność* did not bode well given the anti-Americanism present in British left-wing culture. Given the internal tension *Solidarność* provoked, the TUC appeared initially content with leaving solidarity activism to the ICFTU as a substitute for its own action, a decision also taken by ambivalent trade union confederations in West Germany and Sweden.⁹³

88 Berger and Laporte, "Between Avoiding Cold War," 150.

89 Phone interview with Denis MacShane, 27 January 2021, London UK.

90 Goddeeris, "Introduction," 10.

91 Berger and Laporte, "Between Avoiding Cold War," 135.

92 "Polish Sociologist in Talks with MPs and TUC," *The Times*, 21 January 1981, 2.

93 Kim Christiaens and Idesbald Goddeeris, "Beyond Western European Idealism: A Comparative Perspective on the Transnational Scope of Belgian Solidarity Movements with Nic-

A genuine desire to maintain affable relations with the CRZZ and other trade unions across the Iron Curtain was another factor identified by Berger and LaPorte to have influenced TUC policy.⁹⁴ That the TUC’s initially cautious policy was partly driven by the desire to not aggravate Cold War tensions was evident in Bogdan Lis’ analysis of his visit to London in February-March 1981. Speaking to Denis MacShane in Gdańsk, Lis relayed his frustration at the frequency with which Len Murray referred to the “TUC’s concern about the dangers to world peace if anything should go wrong in Poland.”⁹⁵

Yet to be considered as a further explanation for the TUC’s lukewarm response, however, are the personal relationships that developed between British and communist state trade unionists during this time of increased interaction. Friendships formed at various social engagements and on holidays. MacShane identified that “well-intentioned pro-détente union leaders” were placed in an uncomfortable position when they had to question whether their hosts at “plush Black Sea resorts” actually represented Eastern European workers.⁹⁶ An analysis of comments made by Bill Sirs, the General Secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) and member of the TUC General Council, are elucidative of the complacency among some in the TUC leadership towards unrest in Eastern Europe. That Sirs supported the right of Polish workers to free trade unions was evident; he sponsored a campaign to boycott Soviet goods in 1981.⁹⁷ Yet, upon listening to and broadly accepting Wiktor Moszczyński’s criticisms of the CRZZ, Sirs was keen to ensure that the assessment was not extended to his opposite number in Poland, of whom he was personally fond.⁹⁸ Similarly, in a BBC interview in August 1980, Sirs expressed sympathy with his Polish colleagues for their problems.⁹⁹ Sirs is representative of a culture among the trade union leadership who, while broadly sympathetic to the demands of Polish workers, remained naively sympathetic to those with whom they had personal relations.

In a similar vein, some of the older generation in the British Left possessed a natural sympathy towards the Soviet project. While for some this was ideological, others reminisced favourably of the contribution made by the Soviet Union in the defeat of

aragua, Poland and South Africa in the 1980s,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 3 (2015), 644.

94 Berger and Laporte, “Between Avoiding Cold War,” 150.

95 MacShane, *Solidarity*, 118.

96 MacShane, *Solidarity*, 115.

97 Davy Jones: “Solidarity with Solidarność” *Socialist Challenge Pamphlet*, April 1982, 12, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/img/img-pamphlets/solidarity.pdf>.

98 Phone interview with Wiktor Moszczyński, 22 January 2021, London UK.

99 Christopher Booker, “Stealing the Clothes of Poland’s Heroes,” *Daily Telegraph*, 3 October 1981, 10; John O’Mahony, Tony Richardson “Fighting to Break Links with Police State ‘Union,’” *Socialist Organiser*, no. 79, 1 April 1982, 12.

Nazism. This mindset of older activists was not uncommon at Labour Party and trade union meetings.¹⁰⁰

Overall, the TUC's sluggish response can be explained by their intention to keep at bay the intra-union tensions and concern that the Polish crisis might threaten European stability. That leading British trade unionists had personal affinity with their Polish communist counterparts only compounded this desire to tread cautiously.

The TUC's non-committal policy towards *Solidarność* remained in place until the end of February 1981. An official visit by Bogdan Lis was a turning point which saw the TUC formally establish links with *Solidarność*.¹⁰¹ Just as Piotr Kozłowski had a profound impact on the British working class, so Lis did on trade union leaders. Jenkins, who was involved in the organization of the trip, described Lis as a "good operator."¹⁰² Lis was a young, charismatic engineer who had an instant compatibility with fellow working-class trade unionists, unlike the Polish intellectuals who had thus far been the only personal contact between the TUC and *Solidarność*. Like Jenkins, Eugeniusz Smolar, who interpreted for Lis during the trip, recognized the importance of Lis presenting a working-class face of *Solidarność*, noting the rapport Lis established with trade unionists.¹⁰³ Smolar recalled the TUC's shock when Lis revealed that he was a member of ruling the Polish United Workers' Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*, PZPR), showing trade union leaders that, far from an anti-communist organization, *Solidarność* was a genuine workers' movement encompassing communists and non-communists alike.¹⁰⁴ At a press conference Lis sought to ease concern as to the nature of the demands of *Solidarność*. He expressed an awareness that "the geopolitical conditions [...] are such that we [*Solidarność*] have to retain a level of common sense and moderation in our demands."¹⁰⁵ This helped both to appease the TUC's worry that the rise of *Solidarność* threatened the stability of Europe, and to reassure the broader labour movement that *Solidarność* was first and foremost a trade union seeking to defend the right to independent labour representation.

That the visit had the intended effect of gaining TUC support was evident given that assistance considerably increased thereafter with £20,000 being made available for office and printing equipment, as well as trade union education courses for *Solidar-*

100 Phone interview with Wiktor Moszczyński, 22 January 2021, London UK; interview with John Taylor, 18 January 2021, London UK.

101 MRC, TUC Collection, MSS.292D/943.8/1: Draft: Visit of Solidarity Representatives, 27 February 1981; Draft: Address of Welcome for Mr. Bogdan Lis, 27 February 1981.

102 Phone interview with Tom Jenkins, 25 January 2021, London UK.

103 Phone interview with Eugeniusz Smolar, 20 January 2021, Warsaw Poland.

104 Ibid.

105 Christian Tyler, "TUC Advisers for Polish Solidarity," *Financial Times*, 3 March 1981, 9.

ność members.¹⁰⁶ As mentioned, the donation of printing equipment was particularly important given the difficulty to obtain independent means of printing in the Eastern bloc. Lis’ visit was one among many by Solidarność representatives across Western Europe to establish the new Polish union within the world trade union movement.¹⁰⁷ While it is often assumed that Western activists initiated support for oppressed people in the Second World, in fact the reverse was often true; it took Solidarność activists like Lis to visit Western Europe to elicit support from the more cautious labour movement organizations.¹⁰⁸

While assistance from the TUC picked up following Lis’ visit, it was not until the implementation of martial law that support became absolute.¹⁰⁹ The increased severity of the situation in Poland occasioned a shift in policy across Europe. The TUC International Committee met on 21 December 1981 and advocated “full freedom for Solidarity,” while the General Council stated its “full support for Solidarity.”¹¹⁰

Resolutions were passed in support of Solidarność at every TUC Congress from 1981 to 1987.¹¹¹ Yet, even following martial law, the TUC were not immune from attacks in the press for certain policy peculiarities.¹¹² They seemed to seesaw in their participation in various international solidarity initiatives. The ICFTU’s ‘International Day of Action’ on 31 January 1982 was among the first expressions of international solidarity with Solidarność, yet the TUC ignored the call to organize a demonstration, leaving it to PSC and individual trade unions to coordinate.¹¹³ Michael Walsh explained that the TUC refrained from organizing demonstrations on international issues.¹¹⁴ The TUC used the considerable grassroots solidarity activity to excuse itself from public demonstrations, suiting their cautious approach.

It seemed, however, that by the end of 1982 the TUC were more willing to express public solidarity, likely given the reassertion of support for Solidarność at their September congress. In November 1982, only three months after failing to support a demonstration in August, the TUC encouraged its members to partake in a march

106 Phone interview with Tom Jenkins, 25 January 2021, London UK. For the initial assistance provided by the TUC, see Taylor, *Five Months*, 6; Tyler, “TUC Advisers for Polish Solidarity,” *Financial Times*, 9; Robert Porter, “TUC Decides to Back Solidarity,” *Daily Mail*, 3 March 1981, 2.

107 MacShane, *Solidarity*, 118.

108 Christiaens/Goddeeris, “Beyond Western European Idealism”, 652–653.

109 “Support for Solidarity Pledged,” *Financial Times*, 15 December 1981, 10; Berger and Laporte, “Between Avoiding Cold War,” 137.

110 Singleton, “British Response,” 38–39.

111 Berger and Laporte, “Between Avoiding Cold War,” 137.

112 Robert Taylor, “TUC is Odd Man Out on Solidarity,” *The Observer*, 29 August 1982, 2.

113 Goddeeris, “Western Trade Unions and Solidarność,” 317; Berger, *Solidarność, Western Solidarity and Détente*, 82.

114 “TUC is Odd Man Out on Solidarity,” 2.

organized by PSC, and asked its affiliated unions to join the call by the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITWF) to boycott Polish shipments on 10 November.¹¹⁵ While solidarity with *Solidarność* took a predominantly bilateral form, initiatives like those undertaken by the ICFTU and the ITWF were an exception to the rule.¹¹⁶ Christiaens and Goddeeris, however, note that the transnational initiatives originated in the offices of international labour organizations, and the extent of multilateral grassroots solidarity was limited.¹¹⁷

The TUC's support for *Solidarność* became unequivocal as the decade progressed. In September 1983 the International Committee declared *Solidarność* the "only organisation in Poland which we recognise," while in November 1986, TUC General Secretary Norman Willis moved the application of membership for *Solidarność* at the ICFTU congress.¹¹⁸ Upon his visit to London in 1989, Wałęsa expressed his gratitude to the TUC for their support.¹¹⁹ That said, despite PSC efforts, at no point did the TUC break links with the CRZZ. The TUC insisted that the link provided a unique opportunity to lobby the Polish authorities on behalf of *Solidarność*. Tom Jenkins, however, admitted that the links were not all that deep and lacked much efficacy as leverage in hindsight.¹²⁰

That the TUC eventually provided unequivocal support for *Solidarność* yet maintained links with the CRZZ was representative of their attempt throughout the decade to reconcile support for free trade unionism with a desire to maintain cordial East-West relations. The personal affinities that developed between leading British and official Polish trade unionists compounded the reluctance to provide support. The degree of support fluctuated over time, determined by an interplay of forces from internal political considerations to the severity of the situation in Poland. The ambiguity that defined the TUC's position in the early 1980s was the antithesis of that taken by various individual trade unions and the grassroots labour movement. Yet, as the decade progressed the TUC began to reflect the feeling of the movement more broadly.

115 "TUC to Back Solidarity Rally," *Financial Times*, November 2, 1982, 11; Berger and Laporte, "Between Avoiding Cold War," 144.

116 Goddeeris, "Transnational Scope," 65.

117 Christiaens and Goddeeris, "Beyond Western European Idealism," 645–646.

118 "Total Support for Solidarity is Underlined," *Financial Times*, September 9, 1983, 10; Robert Taylor, "Willis Backs Solidarity in Western Union" *Observer*, November 23, 1986, 2.

119 Hart, "A Brief History," 46.

120 Phone interview with Tom Jenkins, 25 January 2021, London UK.

National Union of Mineworkers (NUM)

Much as the TUC failed to reflect the grassroots sympathy felt by the trade union movement towards *Solidarność*, the case of the NUM serves as a microcosm for the way in which the view of an individual union's leadership did not necessarily mirror the feeling of its membership. The opinion of Arthur Scargill, NUM President, risks the union being lumped on the pro-Soviet side of the *Solidarność* debate. In a letter to *News Line*, the daily paper of the Workers' Revolutionary Party, Scargill stated his opposition to *Solidarność*, deeming it “an anti-socialist organisation which desires the overthrow of a socialist state.”¹²¹ “British Scargill Denounces the Polish Scargills,” the *Socialist Organiser* aptly described the ordeal.¹²² Featured in the NUM 1983 Annual Report, Scargill's response to the backlash noted that the letter was his “personal view.”¹²³ Yet, it was signed off with his title as NUM President and sent with NUM-headed paper.¹²⁴

Scargill's views should not be taken as that of the union's leadership as a whole. Mick McGahey, Vice-President of the NUM, spoke on behalf of Scottish miners in support of *Solidarność*.¹²⁵ That he was a CPGB member was no contradiction. Of the Eurocommunist faction which emerged in the 1970s, he sympathized with the efforts of Polish workers to obtain democratic workers' control. Moreover, Scargill's criticism of *Solidarność* was not shared by NUM members. The union sent a delegation to the Polish Embassy in February 1982 demanding the release of Josef Patyna, a Polish miner who had visited the NUM in 1981.¹²⁶ In so doing, the delegation mirrored the

121 “Arthur Scargill to Michael Banda, 21 July 1983,” *News Line*, September 7, 1983, enclosed in Scargill, *Solidarity & Workers' Revolution Party Pamphlet*, 8, Private Papers of Simon Pirani (former SWP activist). Scargill was responding to “An Open Letter to Arthur Scargill: Withdraw Attacks on Polish Workers,” in *News Line* (16 July 1983), enclosed in: Scargill, *Solidarity & Workers' Revolution Party Pamphlet*, Simon Pirani Papers.

122 “The British Scargill and the Polish Scargills,” *Socialist Organiser*, no. 145, 15 September 1983, 2.

123 MRC, National Union of Mineworkers Collection, MSS.429/NUM/4/38, Arthur Scargill, Appendix XII, Media and Press Smear Campaign—President's Reply, 15 September 1983, enclosed in: Annual Report and Proceedings, 1983.

124 Arthur Scargill to Michael Banda, 21 July 1983, in *News Line*, 7 September 1983, enclosed in: ‘Scargill, *Solidarity & Workers' Revolution Party Pamphlet*,’ 8, Private Papers of Simon Pirani.

125 Marlowe, “Solidarity Needed from the Left,” 2.

126 Wiktor Moszczyński, “Solidarity and the TUC,” *PSC News* 7 (1982), 12; Singleton, “British Response,” 38–39.

particular sympathy felt by British leftists towards Polish trade unionists with whom they had personal contact.¹²⁷

That Scargill was isolated in his criticism of Solidarność was evident in the reaction it provoked.¹²⁸ Annesley NUM branch proposed a vote of no confidence in the President's leadership, evidencing the disenchantment felt by grassroots members.¹²⁹ Sid Vincent, leader of the NUM Lancashire branch, proclaimed that "miners have always been supporters of Solidarity."¹³⁰ Other trade union leaders were quick to dismiss Scargill's comments to avoid British trade unionism from being associated with them, particularly given reports of their use by the Polish authorities' as evidence of the condemnation of Solidarność by British trade unions.¹³¹ Evidently, the 'NUM stance' on Solidarność cannot be defined by that of its leader. Instead, as was also the case with the TUC, there was variation within the organization. This was reflected in the Austrian Trade Union Federation (*Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund*) leadership who, after claiming that Polish refugees posed a threat to Austrian workers, were challenged from within.¹³²

A little over a year later with the miners' strike in Britain underway, the doubts sown into the Left by the likes of Scargill as to the working-class nature of Solidarność were dispelled. "To the striking miners of Great Britain," read a statement made in June 1984 from the Solidarność Committee in the Upper Silesia mining region, "Solidarity miners send you fraternal greetings and our [...] solidarity for your struggle."¹³³ The statement represents the industry-based links between grassroots trade unionists in Britain and Poland—the political support provided to Solidarność by NUM members since 1981 was reciprocated three years later. Not only was this embarrassing for Scargill, but it also exposed the hypocrisy underpinning Thatcher's support for Solidarność. Thatcher's government were in conflict with the NUM who enjoyed the sup-

127 Singleton, "British Response," 38–39.

128 Robert Taylor, "Now Scargill Upsets NUM Rank and File," *Observer*, 11 September 1983, 4; "Miners: He's Gone Too Far This Time," *Daily Mail*, 9 September 1983, 9; Bryan Carter, David Norris, "Fury at Scargill Letter," *Daily Mail*, 8 September 1983, 1.

129 David Amos, "The Nottinghamshire Miners, the Union of Democratic Mineworkers and the 1984–85 Miners' Strike: Scabs or Scapegoats?," PhD dissertation, University of Nottingham (2012), 45–55.

130 Philip Bassett, "Scargill Attacked by Union Leaders," *Financial Times*, September 8, 1983, 1.

131 McKinlay, "Scargill Angers Unions"; Robert Porter, Bryan Carter "Moscow Plays Scargill's Tune," *Daily Mail*, September 9, 1983, 9.

132 Oliver Rathkolb, "Austria: An Ambivalent Attitude of Trade Unions and Political Parties," *Solidarity with Solidarity: Western European Trade Unions and the Polish Crisis, 1980–1982*, ed. Idesbald Goddeeris (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 279; Goddeeris: "Transnational Scope," 62.

133 "Solidarność Miners' Statement in Solidarity with the NUM" *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 7, no. 2 (1984), 25.

port of Solidarność. Moreover, her government, to break the miners’ strike, increased coal imports threefold from the Polish regime she had condemned after martial law.¹³⁴ Trade unionists were quick to point out Thatcher’s double standards.¹³⁵ When the Prime Minister visited Poland in November 1988 even her Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Charles Powell, noted the exposure to accusations of hypocrisy. That the proposed closure of the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk coincided with Thatcher’s visit was no accident—according to Powell, the Polish authorities were saying to the Polish people who lined the streets to greet the Prime Minister, “we are being Thatcherite. See how you like it.”¹³⁶

The miners’ strike, however, brought its own problems for NUM-Solidarność relations. Indeed, sympathy for Solidarność was not static throughout the 1980s. In comparison to the support provided by sections of the NUM in the early 1980s, by the summer of 1985 sympathy had abated somewhat. Marek Garztecki received no response from the NUM head office, the Yorkshire region, or the South Wales branch to his plea to ‘adopt’ imprisoned Polish miners’ leader Tadeusz Jedynek.¹³⁷ Given the recent defeat in the miners’ strike, NUM apathy towards Jedynek’s plight can partly be explained by their diverted attention and likely strained funds. Yet, a *Sunday Mirror* article published in July 1984 in which Wałęsa appeared to criticize Scargill’s approach to the miners’ strike while praising Thatcher likely soured perceptions of Solidarność for the NUM.¹³⁸ The article, in the context of Scargill’s popularity reaching its zenith among trade unionists during the miners’ strike, reignited vocal opposition to Solidarność among sections of the Left.¹³⁹ Both the British political context and the dwindling prevalence of the Polish crisis as an international issue determined the fluctuations in NUM support for Solidarność.

The trade union movement in general were central to the British Left’s assistance to Solidarność. The rank-and-file labour movement and various individual trade unions displayed considerable spontaneous sympathy. Members and regional leaderships often diverted from the position of the central leaderships, as was the case with the NUM and TUC. Both the NUM and TUC also exemplify that the level of support for Solidarność fluctuated over time, influenced by an interplay of domestic political factors and the severity of the situation in Poland.

134 Brendan Keenan, “Poles Turn Down Short-Term Coal Supply Plea,” *Financial Times*, 17 May 1984, 12; John O’Mahony, “Workers’ Unity East and West,” *Socialist Organiser*, no. 200, 11 October 1984, 10.

135 Heffer, “Thatcher is a Hypocrite!,” 6.

136 National Archives, Kew, Records of the Prime Minister’s Office, PREM/19/2385, Charles Powell to Margaret Thatcher, 31 October 1988.

137 Marek Garztecki to Chris Ford, 3 July 1985, Private Papers of Chris Ford.

138 Robert Eringer, “Why Scargill is Wrong—By Lech,” *Sunday Mirror*, 29 July 1984, 7.

139 O’Mahony, Workers’ “Unity East and West,” 10.

Solidarność and British Left-wing Organizations

The landscape of left-wing British politics in the early 1980s was fraught with factionalism. Following the 1979 election defeat, the emergence of Solidarność coincided with a battle raging for control of the Labour Party between the Left and the centre. Solidarność provided another channel through which the enmity that plagued the Left could manifest. This domestic political context goes some way to explain the Labour Party's cautious policy towards the new Polish union which, like the TUC, dithered behind the considerable solidarity activity of both grassroots members and individual MPs. The CPGB also found the Polish crisis problematic, with a debate taking place between pro-Soviet elements sceptical of Solidarność and Eurocommunists keen to distance themselves from Soviet communism. Small Trotskyist groups were also immediate supporters of Solidarność.¹⁴⁰ The degree of support for Solidarność from the left-wing organizations was shaped both by ideology and the domestic political context.

When discussing who was most forthcoming in support of Solidarność, Nina Smolar, a Polish émigré living in London, stated “the Trotskyists—because they saw the imperative of struggling against the dictatorship of the bureaucracy.”¹⁴¹ It is unsurprising, therefore, that Trotskyist-influenced publications backed Polish workers. *Socialist Organiser*, a weekly circulated within the Labour Party by the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory, and *Socialist Challenge*, the publication of the Trotskyist International Marxist Group, were central in calling for left-wing leadership of the solidarity campaign in Britain, complaining that the Right occupied the space.¹⁴² Trotskyist influence was also evident in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, a journal founded in 1977 to provide Marxist analysis of political developments in Eastern Europe.¹⁴³ They too argued for “unconditional solidarity with Solidarity on the part of the British labour movement.”¹⁴⁴ It was around such publications that aforementioned regional solidarity committees formed.

140 “Poland: Round 1 to the Workers,” *Socialist Challenge*, no. 162, September 2, 1980, 1.

141 James Mark, Anna von der Goltz, “Encounters,” *Europe’s 1968: Voices of Revolt*, ed. Robert Gildea, James Mark, Anette Warring (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 156–157.

142 “Polish Workers: Birth of Our Power,” *Socialist Organiser*, no. 24, August 30, 1980, 1; Zbigniew Kowalewski, “A Matter for Workers Everywhere,” *Socialist Challenge*, no. 227, January 7, 1982, 3.; Penny Duggan, “Socialist Challenge says Solidarity with Solidarność,” *Socialist Challenge*, no. 228, January 14, 1982, 7; Marlowe, “Solidarity Needed From the Left,” 2.

143 Bent Boel, “Western Trotskyists and Subversive Travelling in the Soviet Bloc Countries, 1956–1989,” *Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 25, no. 2 (2017), 244.

144 “Socialists and Solidarity,” *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 5, nos. 1–2 (1982), 1.

The above Trotskyist publications performed a key role in keeping Poland in the minds of the labour movement. *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, for example, dedicated whole issues to events in Poland.¹⁴⁵ Nina Smolar, and particularly her husband, Eugeniusz Smolar (Deputy Director of BBC Polish Section from 1982) played a significant role in providing publications with translated material from Poland.¹⁴⁶ Eugeniusz Smolar, with colleagues at the BBC Polish Section, founded the Information Centre for Polish Affairs as a means to distribute information from their Polish informants to the British labour movement, the Foreign Office, and the British press.¹⁴⁷

The Labour Party fell victim to criticisms of inaction waged by the above publications. As a large institution encompassing a range of political views, the party shared with the TUC the problems created by the emergence of *Solidarność*. While the Labour Party did not have communist party members, there were pro-Soviet elements who approached the Polish union with suspicion. As such, the Labour Party's initial policy towards *Solidarność* was also defined by ambiguity and caution. Persistent calls were made by pro-*Solidarność* activists for the party to sever links with official communist parties in Eastern Europe and to cease inviting communist delegates to conference.¹⁴⁸ That is not to say that individual high-profile Labour MPs or the party's membership did not support *Solidarność*.¹⁴⁹ It is important, therefore, as was the case with the trade union movement, to distinguish between the official policy of the Labour Party leadership and that of its membership and personnel.

Despite the prominence of *Solidarność* in the press in the early 1980s, it was never discussed at a Labour Party shadow cabinet meeting, and was raised only briefly as any other business at a meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party in December 1981.¹⁵⁰ This is reflective of the party's general ambivalence towards *Solidarność*. While trade union congresses across Europe were passing resolutions on Poland during 1981, at the Labour Party Conference in September *Solidarność* received little attention; a resolution on Poland moved by Acton Constituency Labour Party (CLP) was rejected by

145 *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 4.1–3 (1980); *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 4, no. 4–6 (1981).

146 Phone interview with Eugeniusz Smolar, 20 January 2021, Warsaw, Poland.

147 Alban Webb, “The BBC Polish Section and the Reporting of Solidarity, 1980–1983,” in *Diasporas and Diplomacy: Cosmopolitan Contact Zones at the BBC World Service (1932–2012)*, ed. Marie Gillespie and Alban Webb (London: Routledge, 2013), 97; “Uncensored Poland News Bulletin, 23 October 1980,” *Information Centre for Polish Affairs*, Private Papers of Eugeniusz Smolar.

148 Naomi Hyamson, “Labour Party Rally,” *PSC News* 7 (1982), 15.

149 Hart, “A Brief History,” 36; Dale, “Leeds Polish Solidarity Committee.”

150 “Shadow Cabinet Minutes, 1980–1985,” British Online Archives (BOA), British Labour Party Papers, 1330/SC/1980/81(82)(83)(84)(85); BOA, British Labour Party Papers, 1330/PM/1981/82, Minutes of Party Meeting, 17 December 1981.

the Conference Arrangements Committee.¹⁵¹ Strong criticisms were levelled against the party leadership for inviting delegates from the Czech and Soviet communist parties to the 1981 conference. By also inviting Czech dissident Rudolf Battěk, who was unable to attend given his detention by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, *PSC News* remarked that the Labour Party had paradoxically invited “the jailers and the jailed.”¹⁵²

In contrast to the TUC, the Labour Party’s ambiguous approach to *Solidarność* did not turn into unequivocal support with the proclamation of martial law. The emergence of *Solidarność* coincided with the party’s key decision-making body (the NEC) being firmly under the control of the Left, with some representatives expressing scepticism towards the new Polish union.¹⁵³ A meeting of the NEC less than a week after martial law laid bare the internal fissures within the leadership. Eric Heffer proposed that the NEC lobby the Polish authorities to “rescind the state of emergency [and] release all detainees.”¹⁵⁴ Heffer’s motion was defeated, receiving only two votes in its favour from Neil Kinnock MP and Tony Saunois, the Young Socialists’ representative.¹⁵⁵

For Saunois, his support was underpinned by a Trotskyist analysis of the events in Poland, considering *Solidarność* a working-class organization challenging the Stalinist bureaucracy.¹⁵⁶ To understand why the Labour Party failed to express support for *Solidarność* before martial law, and why Heffer’s motion was rejected immediately after, the party’s ambiguous approach must be placed in its political and historical context.

Similar explanations as were posited for the TUC’s sluggish response can be extended to the Labour Party. During the 1970s the Labour Party formed closer relations with the communist parties of Eastern Europe given its “Left can talk to the Left” tradition.¹⁵⁷ Also, given the inextricable link between the Labour Party and the trade union movement, the same trade union leaders who, as previously mentioned, had formed personal relations with their counterparts in communist unions were often on the Labour Party NEC. Like the TUC, the Labour Party was a large institution encompassing a wide range of political viewpoints rendering decision-making proce-

151 AM Fisher: “PSC at Brighton Conference,” *PSC News* 4 (1981), 9–10.

152 Ibid.

153 On the period of left-wing control of the Labour Party NEC, see Shaw *Discipline and Discord*, 222–224.

154 “News from Labour’s National Executive Committee,” *PSC News* 5 (1982).

155 Fisher, “PSC at Brighton Conference,” 9.10. It is worth noting that Heffer was a member of the CPGB until 1948. Firmly on the Left of the Labour Party, he opposed the expulsion of Militant from the party.

156 Phone interview with Tony Saunois, 19 February 2021, London UK.

157 On the development of relations between the Labour Party and the communist bloc see Brian White, *Britain, Détente and Changing East-West Relations* (London: Routledge, 1992), 135–136.

dures slow and cautious. This reluctance and even inability to take a strong position was compounded by the factional war taking place. The ‘Gang of Four’ split with the party in April 1981 to form the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Given that Solidarność enjoyed support from Thatcher, right-wing trade unionists like Chapple, and the recently departed SDP, it is not surprising that the Left who controlled the NEC were reluctant to partake. Despite calls from the Trotskyist Left for the Labour Party to take a lead in support of Solidarność and to expose the hypocrisy in Thatcher’s backing, the debate became entangled in the turbulent political context.

The first expression of concrete support for Solidarność from the Labour Party was moved at a meeting of the NEC International Committee in January 1982.¹⁵⁸ Again proposed by Heffer, the meeting resolved to urge the labour movement to “refrain from any fraternal contact with the Polish United Workers’ Party [...] whilst the military regime continues.”¹⁵⁹ The meeting also outlined the party’s intention to hold a public meeting in support of Polish workers which was held on 16 March 1982.¹⁶⁰ The Labour Party demonstration, however, was dubbed “the secret rally” given the party’s failure to publicize it adequately.¹⁶¹ A call was made in the *Socialist Organiser* for its readers to attend lest a poor turn-out be used by the party as “an excuse for further inaction on Poland.”¹⁶² In the event, and despite the appeal of high-profile speakers like Denis Healey, then Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, only seventy people attended.¹⁶³ Peculiarly, Roy Evans of the ISTC also addressed the crowd, despite him having opposed Heffer’s NEC motion in December 1981.¹⁶⁴

The rally was followed by a series of declarations of solidarity with Solidarność. Under pressure from PSC, the NEC decided in July 1982 to sever links with the PZPR.¹⁶⁵ The September 1982 Labour Party Conference passed a resolution calling on the Polish government to “end martial law, release [...] political prisoners, and to honour the Gdańsk [...] agreement.”¹⁶⁶ The motion was moved by Heffer, and seconded by Sam McCluskie, the General Secretary of the National Union of Seamen.¹⁶⁷ That McCluskie, who had opposed Heffer’s NEC motion twenty-one months earlier,

158 “Labour Rally,” *Socialist Organiser*, no. 70, January 28, 1982, 5.

159 “Labour Party News,” *PSC News* 6 (1982), 15.

160 Singleton: “British Response” 38–39.

161 “Labour Party News,” *PSC News*; Hyamson, “Labour Party Rally,” 15.

162 “Labour Poland Rally,” *Socialist Organiser*, no. 76, 11 March 1982, 13.

163 Hyamson, “Labour Party Rally.”

164 *Ibid.*

165 Moszczynski, “Extracts,” 96.

166 “Labour on Poland,” *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 5, nos. 5–6 (1982–83), 26.

167 *Ibid.*

seconded the conference resolution reflects the way in which the increased severity of the situation in Poland shifted the perceptions of some.

As with the TUC and NUM, the ambivalence of the Labour Party leadership was not reflected in its grassroots membership, or even in individual MPs. It appears that, given the divisive effect of *Solidarność*, as well as other competing commitments, the party leadership were content with allowing individual MPs to express support, delaying the need for any official statement. Heffer was the most prominent Labour MP supportive of *Solidarność*.¹⁶⁸ He inadvertently contributed to the fundraising efforts of PSC by sporting a *Solidarność* T-shirt at the 1981 Labour Party Conference. While the *Mirror* criticized the Shadow Minister for Europe for taking “informality too far,” by printing Heffer’s photo and the details of PSC, the newspaper facilitated the sale of over one thousand T-shirts.¹⁶⁹ Heffer recalled in his memoirs that “some NEC members were annoyed” at him for having worn the T-shirt to conference, further demonstrating the ambivalence of the party leadership towards *Solidarność*.¹⁷⁰ It is worth noting, however, that *Solidarność* was not a relationship-defining issue on the Left. For example, Heffer recognized that Scargill “did not support Solidarity” but noted that “in the great miners’ strike we had to put that aside.”¹⁷¹

Heffer was not alone in his support for *Solidarność*. Other high-profile Labour Party MPs campaigned for *Solidarność* including Neil Kinnock (before he was party leader) and Peter Shore, Shadow Chancellor between 1980 and 1983.¹⁷² In his memoirs, Denis Healey recalled being “deeply moved by the rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland.”¹⁷³ By receiving support from Kinnock, considered a moderate in the party, and Heffer on the left wing of the party, the ability of *Solidarność* to unite those with quite different politics was as much the case in the Labour Party as in British politics more broadly.

The supposed silence on *Solidarność* from Tony Benn MP was used both by the Right to discredit the inaction of the Left, and by the grassroots Left who complained of a lack of left-wing leadership in support of *Solidarność*.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, E. P. Thompson remarked that *Solidarność* had “become a football kicked between small leftist sects and the conservative Right.”¹⁷⁵ Berger and LaPorte dubbed Benn a “prominent

168 Hart, “A Brief History,” 10.

169 “Eric Goes for the Informal,” *Daily Mirror*, 30 September 1981, 15; Hart, “A Brief History,” 20.

170 Heffer, *Never a Yes Man*, 208.

171 Heffer, *Never a Yes Man*, 204.

172 Hart, “A Brief History,” 35.

173 Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London: Penguin, 1990), 527.

174 “Boot-licker Benn is Poles Apart,” *Daily Mail*, July 17, 1986, 6; “Poland: Where Do Labour Leaders Stand?,” *Socialist Organiser*, no. 68, January 14, 1982, 1.

175 Thompson: *Double Exposure*, 124.

doubter of *Solidarność*,” citing a diary entry from July 1986.¹⁷⁶ While Benn did have his doubts, he was supportive of *Solidarność*, albeit to fluctuating degrees throughout the decade. As early as February 1981 Benn issued a statement for the ‘Hands Off The Polish Workers’ campaign which read, “All democratic socialists should support the efforts of ‘Solidarity’ to introduce real democratic accountability into Poland.”¹⁷⁷

That said, claims that Benn was sceptical of *Solidarność* are not completely unfounded. In a similar vein to the diary entry cited by Berger and LaPorte, Benn, in September 1984, expressed his “anxiety about Solidarity” privately to interviewers from *Socialist Organiser*.¹⁷⁸ Accepting that the Polish workers’ demands were genuine, Benn questioned whether the Left was “wise to be widely enthusiastic about it [*Solidarność*].”¹⁷⁹ This mindset is characteristic of the increased scepticism towards *Solidarność* on the Left given its right-wing supporters, and particularly following the publication of the aforementioned article in which Wałęsa appeared to attack Scargill while praising Thatcher.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, Benn’s disquiet for this article featured in the *Socialist Organiser* interview.¹⁸¹ The fluctuation in Benn’s support for *Solidarność* reflected that of the NUM, with oscillations determined by the British political situation.

Much as the sluggish response of the TUC was not reflected by grassroots trade unionists, so the Labour Party’s weak response was not shared by its membership. Fringe events at Labour Party conferences were organized on the topic of Poland.¹⁸² Militant, a Trotskyist group who had entered the Labour Party in the 1970s, were supportive of *Solidarność*.¹⁸³ Motions passed at CLP meetings provide a useful measure of grassroots support. The shadow cabinet received a resolution from Westbury CLP arguing that the “Labour Party has a vital role to play in highlighting the complexity and danger of the Polish situation to the British people.”¹⁸⁴ CLPs also supported local solidarity initiatives; Leeds North-East CLP, for example, supported the foundation of the Leeds Polish Solidarity Committee.¹⁸⁵ Young Labour Party members appeared

176 Berger and Laporte, “Between Avoiding Cold War,” 138.

177 “Hands Off The Polish Workers Advert,” *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 4, nos. 4–6 (1981), 2.

178 Tony Benn, *The End of an Era: Diaries 1980–90* (London: Arrow, 1994). For the 1986 diary entry cited by Berger and LaPorte, see 461. For the 1984 entry, see Benn, 378.

179 Benn, 378.

180 Eringer, “Why Scargill is Wrong—by Lech,” 7.

181 John Bloxam, Martin Thomas, “Labour and the Miners: Phone interview with Tony Benn,” *Socialist Organiser*, no. 199, October 4, 1984, 6–7.

182 “EESC Meeting at Labour Party Conference2, *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 5, nos. 3–4 (1982), 38.

183 Michael Crick, *Militant* (London: Biteback, 2016), 88.

184 BOA, British Labour Party Papers, 1330/SC/1981/82: Minutes of Parliamentary Committee Meeting, 21 April 1982.

185 Dale, “Leeds Polish Solidarity Committee.”

to be naturally sympathetic towards *Solidarność*. Hamilton Labour Party Young Socialists in Scotland, for example, adopted Tadeusz Jędynak, the aforementioned imprisoned *Solidarność* miners' leader.¹⁸⁶ Young socialists had less affinity with the Soviet project than did older labour movement activists who, as mentioned, possessed natural sympathy towards the Soviet Union for their contribution to the war effort. That said, youth support for *Solidarność* was not guaranteed. A motion at the 1982 National Organisation of Labour Students Conference moved to sever links with their Polish counterpart was narrowly defeated by three votes.¹⁸⁷ While naturally sympathetic towards *Solidarność*, left-wing youth organizations were not immune from the factionalism that defined the Left in the 1980s.

Labour Party members were evidently more forthcoming in their support for *Solidarność* than the party's leadership. There was likely considerable overlap in personnel, with the grassroots activists campaigning for *Solidarność* in the Labour Party also doing so in their union. As was the case throughout the labour movement, grassroots activists and supportive individuals provided the impetus in support of Polish workers, while the official line of the leadership typically trailed behind.

Conclusion

Za wasza wolność i nasza (for your freedom and ours). This had long been a defining motto for Poles supporting liberation struggles globally, whether in solidarity with the Russian Decemberists in the nineteenth-century, or as part of the International Brigades fighting for Republican Spain in the twentieth. Come 1980, the Polish tradition of international solidarity was reciprocated as Polish workers were supported politically and materially by labour movements across Western Europe. It was with this slogan that John Taylor concluded his book urging the British labour movement to adopt the mantra and support *Solidarność*.¹⁸⁸

The relationship between the British Left and *Solidarność* was one of delay from major labour organizations in contrast with genuine expressions of solidarity from rank-and-file activists. Grassroots solidarity campaigns like PSC lobbied tirelessly for the leadership of the British Left to throw its political weight behind the oppressed Polish workers and to cease friendly relations with their oppressors. *Solidarność* members stranded in Britain after the implementation of martial law played an invaluable

186 Marek Garzdecki to Chris Ford, 3 July 1985, Private Papers of Chris Ford.

187 Steve Davies, "The National Organisation of Labour Students and Poland," *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* 5, Nos. 5–6 (1982–83), 45.

188 Taylor: *Five Months*, 108.

role as representatives, presenting a human and working-class face to sceptical elements in the labour movement.

The cautious approach of both the TUC and Labour Party can be explained. As organizations encompassing a range of left-wing thinking, both had to reconcile their policy on *Solidarność* with the maintenance of political unity. That *Solidarność* enjoyed the support of Thatcher and the conservative Right only heightened the potential for internal discord. As such, ambiguity ruled. The Labour Party's response to *Solidarność* became entangled in the factionalism that defined the 1980s. For both the Labour Party and TUC, the cordial relationships that had developed in the preceding decade with official communist parties and trade unions in Eastern Europe in the interests of peace and mutual understanding prompted caution.

While the TUC provided material support to *Solidarność* from March 1981, it was only after the severity of the situation in Poland increased with the proclamation of martial law that unequivocal support was granted. The same applied to the Labour Party, only with a slight delay. The lukewarm response of the leaderships of key left-wing organizations have lumped the British labour movement as among the weakest supporters of *Solidarność* in Western Europe. By documenting the grassroots support, however, this generalization has been challenged.

Genuine grassroots links developed between the British and Polish working classes; indeed, various British trade unions and regional branches expressed personal concern after martial law for the fate of *Solidarność* members with whom they had specific contact. Twinning arrangements developed between British and Polish workers at a regional, industrial and workplace level. No institution was monolithic. Rank-and-file trade unionists, as well as Labour Party members and elected representatives expressed considerable sympathy for Polish workers despite the ambiguity of their institution. That said, provided above is not a survey of grassroots attitudes towards *Solidarność* as indeed many did express scepticism. Instead, this article simply demonstrates the presence of considerable rank-and-file sympathy for the Polish union. As well, support or otherwise for *Solidarność* was not static, but fluctuated over the decade, determined by the domestic political context and the severity of the situation in Poland.

It would be redundant to speak of the success of the British Left's activity in solidarity with *Solidarność*. Their contribution to the eventual achievement of freedom in Poland was incomparable to the sacrifice made by Polish workers. That said, the efforts of grassroots solidarity campaigns certainly influenced the TUC and Labour Party's policy shift. The provision of material and political support from the British labour movement contributed to the international solidarity effort which no doubt was an important lifeline for Polish workers following martial law. While the British Left contributed to the international solidarity effort, this article corroborates God-

deeris' conclusion that there lacked a multilateral dimension to solidarity activity.¹⁸⁹ Only a comparative study of grassroots solidarity campaigns with Poland across Europe will decipher why groups like PSC, along with their French equivalent, Solidarité France-Pologne, dealt with Poland bilaterally, and why Solidarność did not enjoy a transnational movement on the scale of the anti-apartheid movement in the same decade.¹⁹⁰

This article further facilitates a transnational analysis to be taken of solidarity with Solidarność. While *Solidarity with Solidarity* began documenting national studies, the British case hitherto lacked historiographical work outside of Goddeeris' volume. There is room for further study of the British Left's assistance to Solidarność in trade union archives, and particularly in the Labour Party and PSC archives. Just as Christiaens and Goddeeris compared the Belgian solidarity efforts with Poland, Nicaragua and South Africa in the 1980s, the mobilization for Poland in Britain should be compared with movements in support of other oppressed peoples, whether the Chile Solidarity Campaign, or the support for South African workers.¹⁹¹ Finally, there is scope to compare how sympathy from the British Left with Eastern European dissidents in 1980 compared with 1956 and 1968 to consider how different Cold War contexts impacted the extent of solidarity. In so doing, the origins of pro-Solidarność activism can be traced to better understand the rise in transnational consciousness in Western Europe from the 1960s.¹⁹² Above all, an understanding of East-West grassroots and institutional political interactions facilitates a clearer understanding of the permeability of the Iron Curtain and the end of the Cold War. While it is impossible to analyse the contribution of the above events in ending the Cold War, as a case study of East-West grassroots and institutional political interactions it facilitates a clearer understanding of the permeability of the Iron Curtain.

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189 Goddeeris: "Transnational Scope," 65.

190 Goddeeris: "Transnational Scope," 71.

191 Christiaens and Goddeeris, "Beyond Western European Idealism," 633.

192 Ibid.