

Agora International Obituary Note

Alasdair MacIntyre, Cornelius Castoriadis, Solidarity, and Socialisme ou Barbarie

Preamble

A number of [Cornelius Castoriadis/Agora International Website](#) subscribers have over the past few years contacted us, prior to Alasdair MacIntyre's death, about MacIntyre's relations with Castoriadis, the postwar French revolutionary group Socialisme ou Barbarie Castoriadis cofounded in 1948, and S. ou B.'s sister organization, Solidarity (UK). Some of those in contact with us have shared their own research on these relations, while others have expressed their surprise about the existence of such relations and/or their desire to learn more about them. We have in the course of our correspondence answered these individual inquiries by providing essentially bibliographical information for them to use as they see fit.

This gathered information, which has been built up over time thanks to leads and contributions from CC/AI Website subscribers and other contacts who together form the backbone of our CC/AI Website, has now been organized below in a summary form for all our free subscribers and other potential readers. We make no claim to exhaustiveness, since the supplementing of the currently available information depends on further documentation provided by others. Also, the ambition of the present Agora International Obituary Note is, too, principally bibliographical in nature: providing extant references for others to read, examine, and perhaps write about on their own responsibility, with the hope that the current literature bibliographically organized by Agora International will grow as well as foster new reflections and exchanges. It is with this purpose and in this spirit that the present Note, itself liable to future correction and modification based on readers' [feedback](#), is published here.

The Thomist Catholic Scottish philosopher [Alasdair MacIntyre](#) (January, 12 1929 – May, 21 2025) is remembered principally for his neo-Aristotelian book [After Virtue](#), which was published in 1981, or more than a half decade after the [original \(1975\) version](#) of Cornelius Castoriadis's key 1978 essay [“Value, Equality, Justice, Politics: From Marx to Aristotle and from Aristotle to Us.”](#) Yet MacIntyre was known earlier in Britain as a Marxist. As [English-language Wikipedia](#) reports: “In 1951 in student debates at Manchester, MacIntyre described himself as a [Disraeli Tory](#) but later was a member of the [Communist Party of Great Britain](#) (leaving in 1956), briefly of the [Trotskyist] [Socialist Labour League](#), and later of the [Socialist Review Group/International Socialists](#)” (founded by the Trotskyist Tony Cliff). And to the surprise of many when they first learn this news, from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s MacIntyre engaged in a dialogue with the political positions of [Cornelius Castoriadis](#), [Socialisme ou Barbarie](#), and [Solidarity \(UK\)](#).

In the [October-November 1959 issue of *Labour Review*, 4:3: 98-100](#), MacIntyre made implicit reference to S. ou B.'s key category of analysis for workers' experience and contestation, using the phrase “at the point of production” (*ibid.*, 99). This article by MacIntyre on “The ‘New Left’” drew the ire, the next year, of the British historian of working-class history E. P. Thompson, author in 1963 of [The Making of the English Working Class](#), when, as “Edward Thompson,” the latter replied to MacIntyre in “The Point of Production,” *New Left Review*, 1:1 (January 1960): 68-70, to challenge MacIntyre's use of what he understood to be S. ou B.'s phrase and position.¹

¹Thompson later offered a mixed assessment of Castoriadis in [The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays \(London: Merlin Press, 1980\)](#)—see pp. 168-69, 196n45, 196-97n57, 204nn167,171, 207 (SouB)—mentioning “[Modern Capitalism and Revolution](#) (75p[ence, from Solidarity]) and [History and Revolution](#) (20p). The latter pamphlet is twenty pennyworth of the best emetic to prescribe to Marxist theologians and theoretical practitioners—a sectarian emetic to

Nineteen Sixty was also the year of the formation of Socialism Reaffirmed, which soon became Solidarity, with affiliates in London and other British cities and regions and later Philadelphia and Los Angeles. Even before the publication of the first issue of [its journal *Agitator for Workers' Power*—which started in October 1960 and ran for ten issues before becoming *Solidarity for Workers' Power* in its second year](#)—Bob Pennington published [Socialism Reaffirmed. An Analysis of the Crisis of Contemporary Society and An Outline of the Road to Working Class Power \(July 1960, 28pp.\)](#), which was a translation of Castoriadis's eponymous “Socialism or Barbarism” article for [Socialisme ou Barbarie's first issue](#) in 1949.²

The next year, 1961, saw the publication of “Socialism and Capitalism,” which was originally composed in English by Castoriadis (with subsequent French translation by him as [FR1979D4](#)) under his pseudonym of the time, Paul Cardan, and which appeared in [International Socialism, 4 \(Spring 1961\): 20-27](#). [International Socialism](#) was the review, founded in 1960, that was published by the abovementioned [Socialist Review Group/International Socialists](#), with MacIntyre as coeditor for an eighteen-month period.³

It was on June 5, 1965 that Castoriadis, identified as “coeditor of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*,” and MacIntyre, identified as “of the Editorial Board of *International Socialism*,” engaged in a discussion, organized in London by Solidarity, that centered around Castoriadis's “recent book, [Modern Capitalism and Revolution](#).” In its report, [“Cardan Meeting” \(Solidarity for Workers' Power, 3:10 \[16 August 1965\]: 22-25\)](#), Solidarity jocularly remarked:

The two main speakers, although approaching the problem from different angles, did not disagree on fundamentals. The similarity of many of their views led one comrade, who had come “expecting a debate,” to deplore the presence of “two Cardans.” The comments from the floor, following the opening statements, soon introduced the appropriate acrimonious and polemical note, without which some comrades would seem incapable of discussing anything, even the weather.

Tony Cliff, in particular, is quoted as saying that “Cardan's ‘whole book was a plagiarism of Marx pure and simple, a distortion of Marx pure and simple and a kick at Marx pure and simple,’” to which Solidarity ironically replied, in a footnote, “If the whole book is a plagiarism of Marx, it is difficult to see why it should so annoy traditional marxists.” Coming to Castoriadis/Cardan's defense, “Alasdair MacIntyre said there was ‘a very bad tone in what [International Socialist members Mike] Kidron and Cliff had said,’” explaining, tongue in cheek, “This was because it was translated from ‘the Russian, about the year 1905.’” Later in the discussion, MacIntyre added:

be administered only to sectarians.” See also [J. C. “The Poverty of Theory” \(review of E. P. Thompson's book, with reference to Cardan\), Solidarity for Social Revolution, 7 \(March - April 1979\): 6-7](#).

²“Socialism or Barbarism” is now available in the [first volume of Castoriadis's Political and Social Writings](#). Preceded by an unsigned *Socialism Reaffirmed* introduction, “What is Socialism?”, on the inside front cover, [The Socialist Programme](#) (a translation of [FR1952B](#)) was published in [Socialism Reaffirmed, 2 \(\[September?\] 1960, 12pp.\)](#).

³Castoriadis/Cardan's text “Socialism and Capitalism” was reprinted in slightly altered form as *The Meaning of Socialism* (London: Socialism Reaffirmed, September 1961). This new version was reissued as [Solidarity Pamphlet #6 \(November 1966\)](#) and then reprinted many times by the Solidarity group and by [its American sister organization Philadelphia Solidarity](#). A newly edited version of *The Meaning of Socialism* in English that combines the *International Socialism*, *Solidarity*, and French versions recently appeared in the electro-Samizdat [More Political and Social Writings, 1945-1997, Books 1 and 2, The Question of the Workers' Movement](#), vol. 2, pp. 269-300.

Kidron and Cliff know this won't do. We know it won't do. And perhaps Cardan won't do either. But there is a problem posed here between the bureaucratic political forms and the economic transactions of our society which isn't in traditional marxism and which Cardan's book poses very sharply.

Retrospectively, Ian Birchall wrote of the effects of MacIntyre's encounter with Castoriadis and Solidarity in a [Letter to the Editor of the *London Review of Books*, 46:5 \(March 7, 2024\): 4:](#)

In the summer [*sic*] of 1965, a debate was organised in London between MacIntyre and Cornelius Castoriadis of the group Socialisme ou barbarie. IS members like myself who turned up were disconcerted to hear MacIntyre agreeing with Castoriadis and attacking his own organisation. As far as I know MacIntyre never attended another editorial board meeting or any other IS activity. In January 1966 he wrote to the IS Working Committee to say he didn't want to receive the IS fortnightly paper, *Labour Worker*, any longer because of its criticism of Richard Gott's decision to stand as an anti-Vietnam-War candidate in the Hull by-election (until 1968 IS were Labour Party entrists).

Solidarity's report includes another footnote: "A recording was made of the proceedings. We hope to publish the main contributions in a pamphlet, which will also deal with the various reviews, criticisms, queries, comments, deafening silences and apoplectic strokes provoked by the book." However, in reply a dozen years ago to Agora International's query, "Any idea whether Solidarity printed a pamphlet based on this second Solidarity/Cardan meeting of 1965?",⁴ Solidarity cofounder Ken Weller e-mailed back August 23, 2013: "I don't recall any pamphlet I would be amazed if there was one." It is unknown whether this "recording...of the proceedings" has been irretrievably lost....

A secondary literature has been developed over the past two decades about MacIntyre in relation to Castoriadis, Socialisme ou Barbarie, and Solidarity. Several Cornelius Castoriadis/Agora International Website subscribers and others have helped us to discover and then post a surely still-incomplete list of references, now available in our [English-Language "About" Bibliography](#):

Paul Blackledge and Neil Davidson. "Introduction: the Unknown Alasdair MacIntyre." *Alasdair MacIntyre's Engagement with Marxism: Selected Writings. 1953-1974*. Eds. Paul Blackledge and Neil Davidson. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006: xxix (S. ou B.), xxxn47, xli-xliii (S. ou B./Solidarity/CC/Cardan).

<https://archive.org/details/alsadairmacintyr0000maci>

Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2008.

<https://vdoc.pub/download/alsadair-macintyres-engagement-with-marxism-selected-writings-1953-1974-rnc4ai72hf40>

Paul Blackledge. "Alasdair MacIntyre: Marxism and Politics." *Studies in Marxism*, 11 (2006): 95-116; see: 101 (Solidarity/S. ou B./CC/Lefort), 104-108 (S. ou B./Socialism Reaffirmed/Solidarity/Pallis/ Pennington/CC), 110 (CC/Solidarity), 114n23, 114n24 (S. ou B.), 114n34, 114n36-37, 115n49-52, 115n62 (Cardan/Solidarity).

Neil Davidson. "Alasdair MacIntyre and Trotskyism." *Virtue and Politics*. Ed. Paul Blackledge and Kelvin Knight. Notre, Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011: 152-176; see: 161, 169-70.

<https://dokumen.pub/virtue-and-politics-alsadair-macintyres-revolutionary-aristotelianism-026802259-9780268022259.html>

⁴This was the "second Solidarity/Cardan meeting of 1965" because Castoriadis/Cardan had already given a lecture "in May 1965, in Tunbridge Wells (Kent, England) before the comrades and supporters of Solidarity" that was published as [Solidarity Pamphlet #23, *The Crisis of Modern Society*](#) (and subsequently edited for [the third volume of his *Political and Social Writings*](#)). Castoriadis's June 5 Solidarity discussion with MacIntyre in London presumably (i.e., subject to correction) occurred during a single late-May/early-June trip to England.

Ian H. Birchall. *Tony Cliff: A Marxist for His Time*. London: Bookmarks Publications, 2011: 116, 120, 223, 253-54, 281, 281 (CC/S. ou B./Cardan/Solidarity/MacIntyre).
<https://archive.org/details/tonycliffmarxist0000birc>

Instead of summarizing or discussing these contributions, we invite interested readers to explore these references themselves and provide their own analyses and conclusions as well as engage in and make available original research and reflections. All published texts, posts, audio recordings, and videos dealing with this matter will be included in future CC/AI Website updates.

We may also note that, starting two years after the last of these above-mentioned English-language references, two French-language texts have appeared that, in part, relate MacIntyre to Castoriadis, Socialisme ou Barbarie, and Solidarity. The first, written by a former member of S. ou B. who has become a philosopher, examines MacIntyre and Castoriadis as two formerly Marxist philosophers who turned toward Aristotle instead of toward the Postmodernism championed by another former S. ou B. member, Jean-François Lyotard:

Vincent Descombes. "Alasdair MacIntyre en France". *Revue internationale de philosophie*, 264 (2: 2013): 135-156; voir: 143, 151-56.
https://shs.cairn.info/article/RIP_264_0135/pdf?lang=fr

Another reference to MacIntyre may be found in a French-language "intellectual biography" of Castoriadis that, despite its voluminousness, may leave one wanting at times both as to its accuracy and as to its ability to provide an adequate account of Castoriadis's political itinerary:⁵

François Dosse. *Castoriadis. Une vie*. Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2014.

It is stated there (note 24 on page 445): "This group [Solidarity] is made up of Christopher Pallis, H. Ralph, Roy Prior, Alasdair Mac Intyre [*sic*], Bob Pennington, and John Daniels (*Ce groupe [Solidarity] est composé de Christopher Pallis, H. Ralph, Roy Prior, Alasdair Mac Intyre [sic], Bob Pennington et John Daniels*)."

Finally, let us note what Castoriadis himself wrote about the later MacIntyre in his 1993 essay, "The Ethicists' New Clothes":⁶

This crisis is a crisis of "values," and, more profoundly, a crisis in what I call social imaginary significations, the significations that hold a society together. In this crisis must also be included what very well must be called the crisis of philosophy, which is expressed, among other ways, in the grandiloquent proclamations, from Heidegger and others, about the onto-theo-logo-phallo-centric "closure of Greco-Western metaphysics." This crisis leads some into reactive attempts to revive or to recycle a traditional ethics. To be included therein are, for example, Alasdair MacIntyre's "neo-Aristotelian" book on ethics, *After Virtue*, Jürgen Habermas with his "communicative ethics," or John Rawls and his quasi-Kantian theory of justice.

—David Ames Curtis, August 2025

⁵See [David Ames Curtis, "Quelques remarques concernant François Dosse, *Castoriadis: Une vie*" \(30 septembre 2014\)](#).

⁶Now in [Crossroads in the Labyrinth, vol. 4: The Rising Tide of Insignificance](#), tr. and ed. David Ames Curtis; translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service, electronic publication date: March 2022; see: p. 285.