

A b s t r a c t s

The Enzyme of Freedom 1968 and Selective Consciousness

Gerd Koenen

From 1968 to 1989 and Back

Eastern Europe and West Germany's New Left

The liberal-democratic spirit of 1989 seems to deny the liberal-socialist spirit of 1968. With regard to the history of mentality, there is in reality a subtle connection between the two events. The new left in the West and dissidents in the East were for a time closer to one another than is remembered. They may have been unable to develop a common force to overcome their respective systems. Nonetheless – despite all the blindness and ideological blinders – they provided much of the ferment behind the upheavals.

Christoph Klessmann

1968 in the East and in the West

The Historicisation of a Controversial Turning Point

In discussions about 1968, adherents, sympathisers, and critics often follow their personal experience than academic sobriety. In order to name and assess the conditions, forms, and consequences of the protests, a historicisation of the period is necessary. As a result, the differences between the movements in Europe's East and West become obvious. They do not seem to have much in common aside from a point in time.

Jan Pauer

The Prague Spring 1968

A Departure and a Double Burial

The reforms of the Communist Party of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic under Alexander Dubček gave "Socialism with a human face" a push. From this grew a social movement that, with its calls for more democracy and self-determination, went beyond the original goals of this idea. The party leaders of the Communist "fraternal countries" saw in it nothing more than a "counterrevolution", which they stopped by means of military intervention in August 1968. The reformers were forced to bury the reforms themselves. As the first peaceful attempt at reform in a Communist state, the Prague Spring was a precursor to 1989.

Aleksandr Daniel'

The Birth of the Human Rights Movement

1968 in the Soviet Union

In Moscow, 1968 began with a sensational trial against Aleksandr Ginzburg and three other writers who were critical of the system. Numerous Soviet citizens protested on their behalf. If such appeals had previously been addressed only to Soviet institutions, now, for the first time, Soviet citizens called on world public to condemn this political trial. As a part of these protests, the first samizdat newspaper was created, and a network of dissidents formed as a result of its distribution. The Soviet human rights movement was born.

Lev Gudkov

Post-Totalitarian Amnesia

The Prague Spring in Russian Public Opinion

The Prague Spring, the intervention of Warsaw Pact troops in Czechoslovakia, and the suppression of the democratisation process, which was connected with the rejection of "Socialism with a human face" and later the idea of Socialism itself, have left hardly any traces on Russian public opinion. Not only does this give expression to specific shortcomings in Soviet society, where there was neither a free press, nor a free public, but totalitarian propaganda instead. The far-reaching repression of the memory of Prague '68 and its consequences also have something to do with the fact that an imperial attitude still persists in broad segments of the population.

Elfie Siegl

Twilight of the False Gods

The Prague Spring in Documents

Most recently, hundreds of previously secret documents on the Prague Spring appeared in print. They shed new light on the experiment of "Socialism with a human face", Brezhnev's role in the conflict with Prague's reform Communists, and the decision-making process that led to the Warsaw Pact's invasion. Militarily, the intervention was apparently a success. Politically, it was a debacle. It discredited the Socialist idea and deprived the authoritarian Communist parties of their legitimacy, something they temporarily compensated for by means of repression but could not win back – as 1989 was to show.

Hans-Christian Petersen

March 1968 in Poland

A National Event and Transnational Movement

Only a few observers in Western Europe associate 1968 with Poland, although Polish students and workers were the first to rebel in Europe that year. They criticised Warsaw's decrepit regime, which reacted with repression and set in motion an anti-Semitic campaign that drove 15,000 Polish Jews into emigration. But "1968 in Poland" is more than an anti-Jewish witches' Sabbath. The protests of Poland's youth have much in common with those in France and the United States, and all of these movements in turn influenced one another.

Richard Wagner

Communism in Romanian

Expropriated Memory and Its Supporters

The year 1968 stands for the suppression of freedom in Prague by means of a Soviet-led invasion. It is seen differently in Romania. There, the dissociation from Moscow culminated in Bucharest's condemnation of the Warsaw Pact's actions. But the consequences of the national-communist about-face under Nicolae Ceaușescu were in no way better than the normalisation process that took place in Czechoslovakia. The freedom of the nation from Moscow was far removed from the freedom of the individual in Czechoslovakia. The consequences of this manipulative treatment of Romanian history have yet to be overcome.

Doris Liebermann

"What Should I Do"

Jürgen Fuchs, 1968, and the Eastern Part of Europe

The Prague Spring and its violent crushing sparked the political thinking of lyricist Jürgen Fuchs. He increasingly opposed the East German regime. Accused of "subversive incitement" and seeking to establish a "democratic socialism" along the lines of the Prague Spring, Fuchs was arrested and maltreated by the Stasi. Even after being deported to West Berlin, the Stasi continued to persecute him. Fuchs thought in dimensions of a united and free Europe and called for the observance of human rights in Eastern Europe. There, people read his poems. In Poland, his texts were published in unofficial "second circulation"; in Prague, his poems were set to music and played at illegal concerts.

Tomáš Glanc
"Aimless Walk"

Culture in the Czech Lands during the 1960s

The creativity and diversity of Czech culture in 1960s are legendary. Their specific intentions and effects cannot be reduced to the Prague Spring: The temporary suspension of censorship played an important role for politically oriented artists. However, the rejection of any kind of political programme in art was both defining and typical of this phase. The traditionally important "Czech question" also receded into the background. It was precisely in film, which depended greatly on state funding, that this renunciation of programmatic content was especially conspicuous.

Jurij Murašov
Under the Spell of the Linguistic Idiom
On Yugoslav Philosophy of Practice

The philosophy of practice, which came into being in the 1960s, first worked mainly on a philosophical-historic basis. Unlike official Yugoslav philosophy, it gave a privileged place to Marx's early work, that is to say, a less analytical, more rhetorical, performative type of theory. With that, it corresponded to an international theory that was enjoying particular popularity. Specific South Slavic conditions led to the creation of nationalist tendencies within this milieu of a dissident philosophy.

Davor Beganović
The Warm Up and the Downfall
Yugoslav Culture in the 1960s

During the 1960s, demands were heard for more freedom and self-determination in Yugoslavia. Writers such as Danilo Kiš, Mirko Kovač, Borislav Pekić, and Antun Šoljan, but also filmmakers and philosophers created a degree of freedom for themselves. They developed new literary and cinematic forms of expression and openly discussed questions that the regime had previously deemed taboo. Critical artists and scientists, however, were soon silenced, oppositional politicians dismissed. This cost the state legitimacy. The first signs of Yugoslavia's break-up began to emerge.

Petr Drulák, Michal Kořan, Jan Růžička

Foreign Policy in East-Central Europe

Universalists, Atlanticists, Europeans, and Champions of Sovereignty

Political development of East-Central Europe gave rise to irritations. The growing strength of populist forces and the implications this had on foreign policy were observed with anxiety. The broad consensus on Western integration, which characterised the 1990s, disappeared. The forces that espouse unlimited sovereignty for the nation state grew stronger. In the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia, the proponents of a deepening of the European Union and a simultaneous strengthening of transatlantic relations were forced on the defensive. But the all-clear signal can be sounded: In Poland, the page has already turned; in Hungary, the champions of dual integration with the West were never really in distress.

Jan Karlas, Michal Kořan, Elsa Tulmets

Prague, Visegrád Group, and the European Union

The Czech Republic's Goals as President of the EU Council

The Czech Republic takes over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union on January 1, 2009. Prague aims to deepen the integration of the single market, improve co-operation with the EU's neighbours to the east, and suggest solutions for matters of energy policy. It does not have the other Visegrád states – Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia – on its side for all of its plans. These states have different positions, in particular with regard to energy policy and the liberalisation of the electricity and gas markets. The Czech Republic risks provoking misunderstandings with its Visegrád partners, but in doing so qualifies itself as mediator.