

"Esprit" and the Soviet Invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia

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Esprit and the Soviet Invasions

of Hungary and

Czechoslovakia

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Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 symbolised important crises in the international Communist movement. In Hungary an explosive popular revolution threatened the Communist Party with loss of power. The Czechoslovak Communist Party retained substantial control in 1968 but proposed, with public support, a series of reforms that would have transformed the Soviet model of communism. The reactions of French left-wing journals to the Russian invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia were more than a reflection of these events outside France. France had its own revolutionary tradition and its own self-consciously *French* Communist Party. Hungary, Czechoslovakia and de-Stalinisation were therefore to become part and parcel of a peculiarly French crisis of ideas and politics.

Ever since the eighteenth-century Enlightenment French intellectuals had enjoyed great prestige within their own country, and indeed beyond the borders of France. However, French intellectuals' status would decline in the 1980s as they became increasingly marginalised. What then was the role of French intellectuals in the period between the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968? How did these crises affect the way in which the attitudes of the French intelligentsia were evolving and changing? The left-wing Catholic journal *Esprit* provides interesting parallels with and contrasts to, such essentially mainstream Marxist-oriented journals on the French left as *Les Temps Modernes* and *Le Nouvel Observateur*. *Esprit's* own evolution between 1956 and 1968 highlights the de-Stalinisation crisis in France itself and the manner in which the French left-wing intelligentsia developed.

In the years between the liberation of Paris in August 1944 and Stalin's death in 1953 many French intellectuals were attracted by Marxism, moved to the left and tacitly defended the Communist Party in France and Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. After Khrushchev's secret speech and the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, sections of the intelligentsia, influenced by events in Algeria and the war in Vietnam, turned away from Europe and towards the Third World. May 1968 revived interest in working-class revolution in Europe, but 1968 was also the year when the Soviet Union once more invaded a fellow Warsaw Pact country, snuffing

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out the Czechoslovak attempt to give socialism 'a human face'. In the 1970s a younger generation of 'New Philosophers', influenced by Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, launched attacks on Marxism, communism and 'totalitarianism'. Ironically, the Socialists' electoral triumph in 1981, after years in the political wilderness, came only after left-wing intellectuals had rejected Marxist socialism. In the 1980s French intellectuals finally abandoned their search for a 'grand theory'. Writers in *Esprit* and the newly formed *Le Débat* were to analyse empirical problems in the very style that their non-ideological academic confrères in the United Kingdom, West Germany and the United States had adopted decades earlier.

The dramatic popular revolutions that so unexpectedly toppled the communist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the even more momentous collapse of communism in the former Soviet Union in 1991 have provided new perspectives from which to evaluate French intellectual history after the Second World War and to explain the fascination exerted on so many French intellectuals by communism. In 1992 Tony Judt's *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals 1944–56*, published simultaneously in English¹ and French,² generated heated controversy in France, particularly in the circles centring on *Esprit*. In 1993 Sunil Khilnani's *Arguing Revolution*³ provided a history of the intellectual left in postwar France, and in 1995 François Furet, the doyen of historians of the French Revolution, published *Le Passé d'une illusion*,⁴ focusing on the history of the myths that communism engendered. The debate over the very nature of communism became more acrimonious with the publication in 1997 of *Le Livre Noir du Communisme: Crimes, terreur et répression*.⁵

Controversies over French intellectuals' support for Stalinism did not begin with *Esprit* or *Les Temps Modernes* in the period 1945–50. Fellow travellers and communist true believers were prominent throughout Europe in the 1930s, the epoch of the Popular Fronts, the struggle against fascism, the Spanish Civil War and Stalin's purges and treason trials. Richard Crossman's classic *The God that Failed*⁶ contained the testimonies of six prominent ex-communists who explained why they had converted to communism but later broke with the faith. Although they saw communism as a 'secular religion', Isaac Deutscher rejected this religious metaphor in his article 'Heretics and Renegades'.⁷

The pro-communist atmosphere of the 1930s survived in postwar France (and Italy) between 1945 and 1953, informing important debates over labour camps in

¹ Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944–1956* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992).

² Tony Judt, *Passé imparfait: Les Intellectuels en France, 1944–1956* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1992).

³ Sunil Khilnani, *Arguing Revolution: The Intellectual Left in Postwar France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

⁴ François Furet, *Le Passé D'une Illusion: Essai sur l'idée communiste au XX^e Siècle* (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1995). François Furet died on 12 July 1997.

⁵ Stéphane Courtois, Nicholas Werth, Jean-Louis Panné, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartosek, Jean-Louis Margolin, *Le Livre Noir Du Communisme: Crimes, terreur et répression* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1997). This book was reviewed in *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*.

⁶ R. H. S. Crossman (ed.), *The God that Failed* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1950).

⁷ Isaac Deutscher, *Heretics and Renegades and other Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969).

the Soviet Union and Stalinist trials in Eastern Europe. In 1955, in a sophisticated and devastating critique appropriately entitled *L'Opium des Intellectuels*,⁸ the liberal philosopher Raymond Aron analysed the attraction that Marxism exerted on French left-wing intellectuals. In 1964 the British historian David Caute⁹ attempted to refute Aron's thesis by arguing that many French intellectuals were not seeking a substitute religion, but came to communism as a rational choice.

In *Past Imperfect*, his most recent work, Tony Judt pays homage to Raymond Aron. Studying the peculiar shape of French intellectual discourse, Judt asks in what ways French responses to totalitarianisms differed from those of intellectuals elsewhere? For Judt the high point of pro-communist faith in France was between 1945 and 1950, although even then some intellectuals were disturbed by Stalin's campaign against Tito, the Rajk trial in Hungary, and the Slansky trial in Czechoslovakia. These events had therefore softened them up before 1956, and after the shock of Khrushchev's secret speech and the Hungarian Revolution they would turn to the Third World without formally repudiating communism in Europe. It is in this sense that Judt sees 1956 as the beginning of a break in the history of the French intellectual left.

It is particularly interesting that Judt condemns *Esprit*, the chief left-wing Catholic non-Marxist journal, for its willingness to condone Stalinism after the Second World War. Judt refers in detail to the writings of Emmanuel Mounier¹⁰ who founded *Esprit* in 1932, and of Jean-Marie Domenach,¹¹ editor of *Esprit* between 1957 and 1976. In 1993 the wheel came full circle when Judt's book was reviewed rather lukewarmly in *Esprit*¹² itself. Even more striking was Jean-Marie Domenach's bitter attack on *Past Imperfect* in the pages of *Commentaire*¹³ that same summer. Describing him as 'a poorly informed inquisitor', Domenach accuses Judt of writing 'pseudo history' concentrating 'with a kind of zoom lens' on the French Communist Party, the Soviet Union and the popular democracies whilst ignoring

⁸ Raymond Aron, *L'Opium des Intellectuels* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1955).

⁹ David Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914–1960* (London: Deutsch, 1964).

¹⁰ Emmanuel Mounier was born in 1915. He founded *Esprit* in 1932 and remained its director until his death in March 1950.

¹¹ Jean-Marie Domenach was born into a middle-class Catholic family in Lyon in 1922. He had been a member of an extreme right-wing group in his youth, before the Second World War. During the war he joined the Resistance, an experience which profoundly marked him. He was subsequently decorated with the Médaille de la Résistance and the Légion d'Honneur. During his struggle in the Resistance, he became convinced that the communists were also patriots. He felt that the Resistance created ties between himself and the communists which their disagreements could not sever. For a while he believed that the French Communist Party reincarnated the revolutionary mission of France. In 1948, however, *Le Coup de Prague* worried him and in 1949 he left the communist-controlled organisation *Le Mouvement de la Paix*, disgusted by the international communist campaign against Tito. Domenach was director of *Esprit* from 1957 to 1976. His more recent works include *L'Europe et le défi culturel* (Paris: La Découverte, 1990); *A temps et à contretemps* (Paris: SPI, 1991); *Une morale sans moralisme* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992); *La Responsabilité* (Paris: Hatier, 1993); *Le Crépuscule de la culture française?* (Paris: Plon, 1995); *Regarder la France: essai sur le malaise Français* (Paris: Perrin, 1997). He died on 5 July 1997.

¹² *Esprit*, no. 191 (May 1993), 167–70.

¹³ 'Un Inquisiteur mal informé', *Commentaire*, Vol. 16, no. 62 (Été 1993), 404–408.

other important developments. Judt replied that 'certain attitudes, which I analyse in my book, have not changed as much as one might wish'.¹⁴

Sunil Kilnarni argues that the real break in the history of the French left occurred neither in 1956 nor in the period 1956–68 but in the mid-1970s, when the ideas of ex-Maoists from 1968 tended to echo the views of an older generation of Marxist critics of communism in France, such as Claude Lefort, Cornélius Castoriadis¹⁵ and Raymond Aron. The catalyst was the French-language publication of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, which enabled this new generation to accept the term 'totalitarianism' to attack communism and Marxism. The worship of revolution, and of Marxism as a modern theory of revolution, which had dominated the French intellectual scene for three decades, was now discredited. Finally, Kilnarni argues that François Furet's classic *Penser la Révolution Française* drained the very ideal of 'revolution' of its content and discredited terror and dictatorship.

In *Le Passé d'une Illusion*, his latest work, François Furet focuses on the history of the myths of communism. His analysis of fellow travellers and true believers concentrated on the period from the Russian Revolution to 1956. In his previous works he had examined the relationship of the Russian Revolution to the French Revolution. In this work he speculated on the relationship between fascism and communism and argued that Nazism and Stalinism, in spite of their ideological differences, could be seen as 'frères ennemis'.

It is hoped that this study of *Esprit*'s reactions to the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956 and of Czechoslovakia in 1968 will illuminate the evolution of the French left and the way in which intellectuals, who may have once been considered fellow travellers, were changing their orientation. The study of *Esprit* is of especial interest since, as a left-wing Catholic non-Marxist journal, it had shared some of the prejudices of more orthodox Marxist journals such as *Les Temps Modernes* and *Le Nouvel Observateur* without being burdened by the intellectual heritage of Marxism. *Esprit* for a time had tried to reconcile the ideal of socialism with Christianity but its preferred form of socialism could refer back to the libertarian tradition in France. The idea of community, implicit in both Christianity and socialism, led some intellectuals in *Esprit* to reject the Third Republic and briefly flirt with Vichy before adopting a Resistance mystique and turning towards the Soviet Union. Later, like *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Les Temps Modernes*, *Esprit* was to abandon its illusions about the Soviet Union, but its analysis of the crisis in the international communist world between 1956 and 1968 would be subtly different.

Esprit, founded in 1932, became one of the most prominent journals of the French intellectual left throughout the decades that followed the Second World War. It occupied centre stage in the 1950s and 1960s, together with the more Marxist-oriented *Les Temps Modernes*. Later, in the less ideologically intense 1980s and 1990s, when *Les Temps Modernes* was eclipsed by the influential new journal *Le*

¹⁴ 'Reponse à Jean-Marie Domenach', *Commentaire*, Vol. 16, no. 62 (Été 1993), 408–12.

¹⁵ Claude Lefort (born 1924) and Cornélius Castoriadis (born 1922) were two of the more important founders of the journal *Socialisme et Barbarie* in 1948.

Débat, *Esprit* still continued to play a very important role in the French intellectual scene.

Like their colleagues in *Les Temps Modernes*, writers in *Esprit* had been deeply influenced by the Resistance mystique and the struggle against Nazism. In the years immediately following the Second World War, *Esprit's* director Emmanuel Mounier (the journal's original founder) adopted a political position very close to that of Jean-Paul Sartre, and looked to a third force that could occupy the gap between the French Socialists, whom he distrusted, and the French Communist Party that he admired, in part for its Resistance record. Mounier's criticisms of Stalinism were muted and on those occasions when he did take the Communists to task he appeared wary of falling into the camp of the 'anti-Communists.' This changed when *Esprit* became uneasy with Stalin's campaign against Tito, particularly during the Rajk trial in Hungary and the Slansky trial in Czechoslovakia. The Yugoslav crisis moderated *Esprit's* 'fellow travelling' phase only a couple of years before Sartre was to adopt a new position within *Les Temps Modernes*, favouring the Communists. As Sartre and the Communists drew closer between 1952 and 1956, the gap between *Esprit* and the Communists continued to widen. In the era of de-Stalinization between the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956 and the early 1970s, *Esprit* could be described as a journal of Catholic socialist inspiration that rejected modern capitalism and repudiated Marxist materialism.

Esprit viewed the events of Hungary and Czechoslovakia and the general crisis within the international Communist movement in a perspective that bore little relation to orthodox Marxism. Many of the other journals of the French left, particularly *Les Temps Modernes*, subscribed to Marxist tenets and felt concerned by the crisis of the international communist movement. They wished to influence evolution and change in the 'communist world' in a direction consistent with their ideological leanings and often they greeted events such as the Hungarian revolution with a certain embarrassment. *Esprit* occupied a more fortunate position in this respect; it was no longer influenced by the myths that identified Soviet communism with the interests of the international proletariat, or the French Communist Party with the French working class. It was able to consider the de-Stalinisation crisis in terms that were socialist but not Marxist and authors in *Esprit*, unlike their opposite numbers in *Les Temps Modernes*, were not embarrassed by the Soviet interventions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In fact they used the events in Hungary to deepen their understanding of 'Marxism' and of 'socialism'.

The editorial greeting the Hungarian Revolution was entitled 'Les Flammes de Budapest'. Although it was unsigned, the author is known to be Albert Béguin,¹⁶ director of the journal from October 1950 to 1957. In this editorial, appearing in the December 1956 issue, Béguin expressed his wholehearted commitment to the Hungarian experience in a prose that 'burned' and was at times almost lyrical.

¹⁶ Albert Béguin was born in Switzerland in 1901 and died in 1957. He was the author of *L'Ame romantique et le rêve*, *Cahiers du sud*, *Marseilles* 1937, and wrote a number of literary essays on German romanticism, and on French authors he admired such as Balzac, Péguy, Pascal and Bernanos.

Béguin viewed the revolution essentially as a spiritual phenomenon and he attempted to convey, through his prose, something of the triumph of the revolution's spirit and the tragedy of its suppression. The style of this editorial contrasts with the articles of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *Les Temps Modernes*. Béguin made absolutely no attempt to balance the positive features against the negative of the Hungarian Revolution, nor did he see the drama in the context of a de-Stalinisation crisis. Instead he viewed the Hungarian revolution as a renaissance within the socialist movement, a symbol of hope that could transform and transcend Marxism.

The first paragraph of his editorial made it clear that the Hungarian revolution should not be seen in the cold light of critical political analysis. Something else was at stake:

It was of a different type, infinitely more serious . . . and it would need a very obtuse intelligence or a warped heart to content oneself, on this occasion, with analysing economic factors, international events and the predictable consequences of issues which call for a completely different response.¹⁷

Emotions aroused by the Hungarian Revolution were those of the same anxious hope followed by sadness mingled with shame that have already been known 'at those very rare moments in our history – at those exact moments which mark and serve as outstanding points of reference for us'.¹⁸ Such moments occurred with Spain where Béguin referred to the struggles around Madrid and Catalonia, where men fought with empty hands against the 'foreigners' fine new weapons'.¹⁹ The Warsaw rising, where the Poles struggled against the Germans in the sewers 'under the gaze of the treacherous liberators',²⁰ was also eulogised, as were the June 1848 rising and the Paris Commune in France. A common bond united these struggles in what Béguin described as 'the litany of our defeats':²¹

The vanquished number not only those who fought; humanity itself has been damaged, checked in its progress, thrown back into the dungeons of tyranny.²²

The very names of the cities where such struggles had taken place were given special significance and Budapest stood beside the Warsaw of the Resistance, the Madrid of the Spanish Civil War and revolutionary Paris in the nineteenth century:

The insupportable sight which the names of Warsaw, Paris, Madrid, Budapest evoke is always the same: that of organised force, equipped with all the technology and weapons of power, pitilessly crushing, in the name of Order, a people inspired by their fidelity to more humane, more fundamental, more heartfelt values – Liberty, a free country, Justice.²³

In this editorial the terms 'right' and 'left' as the Marxists saw them were transcended:

¹⁷ *Esprit*, no. 245 (Dec. 1956), 769.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 770.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 770.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 770.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 770.

²² *Ibid.*, 770.

²³ *Ibid.*, 770–1.

Each time the victors drive against the force of life, even as they claim, as in Budapest, to embody the logic of history. They are abstraction's guardians, ideology's policemen, the horsemen of conservatism, and their deadly work leads to the destruction of vital, burgeoning life. The atrocious violence committed by the steel fist of despotic power on an innocent crowd of helpless and unarmed people is indeed far worse than a crime: it is the naked demonstration of reactionary terror, that is to say the enemy of the forward march of humanity across the centuries.²⁴

The first part of Béguin's editorial ended on a mystic note. Defeat was to be transformed through martyrdom.

But it is here that their victory will prove an illusion. For if the executioners are seen in their abominable reality, the victims also show their own real character, and over the years only the second testimony – that of the martyrs – will remain in human memory. Even under successive defeats one must not give way. Their funereal repetition is not a hymn of despair, but the swelling rhythm of an anthem which rises to obliterate the turmoil of destruction.²⁵

In the second part of the editorial Béguin was calmer as he speculated on the future of the 'socialist movement'. He pointed out that in the Soviet Union 46 years had gone by and there were still 'so many injustices and lies'.²⁶ The Hungarian Revolution proved that modern tyranny was not invincible. The editor still believed that even in the twentieth century, there were grounds for hope and optimism:

The fatal despotism of theory, which leads inevitably to a police state, has still not triumphed in men's souls . . . Freedom has been reborn with such strength as to inspire unarmed crowds to risk everything and throw themselves against tanks and guns . . . Even in the century of tanks and bombs, revolution has not yet become a dream.²⁷

This upsurge of the Hungarian people could only be defeated, Béguin indicated, through the massive intervention of the Soviet army.

The third part of Béguin's editorial began by posing the question: why had the Soviet Union intervened in Hungary at the height of de-Stalinisation? *Les Temps Modernes* had condemned the Soviet invasion of Hungary in terms of what it considered were the real interests of the international communist movement. Thus for that journal the Soviet intervention was seen as a false step undertaken in the midst of the difficult process of de-Stalinisation. For Béguin, however, the Hungarian revolution proved that the whole communist experiment was rotten, and this meant that the basic tenets of Marxist theory should be reconsidered. *Esprit* dismissed those explanations of the Soviet intervention that referred to the difficult international situation or to the defensive reactions of Soviet bureaucracy. The evils must have had their roots in the ideology of communism and might even have originated in nineteenth-century Marxism.²⁸

Béguin analysed Marxism by considering it as embodying qualities of both faith and science. He attempted to show how Marxism, through its very successes,

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 771.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 771.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 772.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 774.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 775.

overreached itself. He accused Marxism not merely of claiming the status of a social science but of viewing itself as an absolute science:

More and more it has claimed to be not only a social science, but the absolute and ultimate science, a universal doctrine able to answer all human questions. This science has transcended all restrictions in the quest to become a faith.²⁹

In his final judgement he argued that whilst it would be an exaggeration to conclude that Marxism was false, it did not seem excessive to assert that in 'transcending the field of legitimate science it has perverted socialism into a monstrosity'.³⁰

This editorial had placed the Hungarian Revolution in the tradition of the great revolutions of the nineteenth century. Its critique of Marxism also referred back to the nineteenth century – perhaps the original faults in the system could be found in that epoch.³¹ Returning to Eastern Europe, Béguin pointed out that the men of Budapest, Berlin and Posnan

had risen against oppression of a kind quite other than that of economic alienation defined by the genius of Marx.³²

The editorial criticised the Soviet practice of 'condemning today's populations to death on the pretext that their holocaust will bring about a future good'.³³ In Eastern Europe this was aggravated by the oppressive weight of an alien nationalism.

The concluding paragraph of the editorial reverted to a lyrically optimistic style and asserted that the struggle of the Hungarian people for their freedom had brought humanity a step forward. The struggle had united progressives of East and West in a mutual communion:

But the people of Poland and Hungary have not risen up in vain. Theirs was not a hopeless battle, if, as we believe, their revolt will validate our gamble and confirm our faith . . . The uprising has been smashed, but not the true revolution, that which springs from the hearts of workers, peasants and writers. Our shared captivity has ended. A deeper communion has been born between us and the men of Eastern Europe.³⁴

Esprit's 'detachment' did not imply lack of passion. 'Les Flammes de Budapest' illustrated this. The burning fervour of the prose bore testimony to the emotions the Hungarian revolution generated. Moreover *Esprit* had its own vision of socialism. 'Les Flammes de Budapest' stated openly that it was necessary to hope – hope that generosity, spontaneity and mankind's innate love of liberty would ultimately triumph, for without this hope there could be no socialist movement. For *Esprit* the Hungarian Revolution appeared to confirm this hope and the editorial interpreted it as a 'renaissance of the spirit', a renaissance involving a regeneration of the international socialist movement after years of darkness under Stalinism.

In May 1957 Paul Ricoeur, who was to become one of the leading French

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 775–6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 776.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 776.

³² *Ibid.*, 776.

³³ *Ibid.*, 777.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 777–8.

philosophers and the author of important works on the philosophy of history, religion and language, wrote an editorial entitled 'Le Paradoxe politique'. He viewed the Hungarian Revolution with less passion and analysed its repercussions in the context of key problems in French domestic politics:

It must be assessed, and taken out of its special position and placed in its broader context, with the Algerian war, the Socialist party's treachery, the Republican Front's ever-worsening decline, French Communism's resistance to de-Stalinisation; in brief, we must move from unadulterated emotion to detached analysis.³⁵

Two articles dealing with the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution in the French context were published in *Esprit* and developed their arguments along the lines advocated by Paul Ricoeur. The first to appear was by Jean-Marie Domenach³⁶ (who became director of *Esprit* after Béguin died in 1957) and the historian Jacques Julliard³⁷ and was entitled 'Réveillez la France'.³⁸ The second was by Paul Fraisse,³⁹ entitled 'Refaire la Gauche', which appeared in May 1957. The first article condemned the French socialists for intervening in Suez and for their policy in Algeria. The communists were also considered largely responsible for the paralysis of the left through their refusal to de-Stalinise. Communist intransigence blocked the prospects for a Popular Front. Paul Fraisse in his article echoed the same themes and indicated that, in the context of the Algerian crisis, the paralysis of the French left was extremely dangerous. Algerian nationalism had the support of the Arab world and the newly emerging nations. An Algerian crisis could lead to a general worsening of the political situation in France with an erosion of civil liberties. Both articles concluded that only a spiritual regeneration could save the French left.

A survey of the main articles appearing in *Esprit* in 1956–68 indicates that the crisis in the international communist world did not feature as the main theme, although naturally many articles appeared devoted to different aspects of the crisis – to developments in Eastern Europe and to the Sino-Soviet split. Similarly *Esprit* also minimised the importance of revolutionary movements in the Third World. They were not seen as a new force threatening Moscow as the centre of revolutionary orthodoxy. The whole process of the 'disintegration of the secular faith' so important for *Les Temps Modernes* seemed to be of marginal interest for *Esprit* in the period between the Hungarian revolution and the upsurge of new revolutionary movements in France in 1968.

In this period *Esprit* was largely concerned with some very broad themes, primarily geopolitical issues, the relations between the power blocs, the emergence

³⁵ *Esprit*, no. 250 (May, 1957), 721–2.

³⁶ See n. 12 above.

³⁷ Jacques Julliard contributed regularly to *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Esprit*. He organised important seminars in intellectual history in the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales*. His latest works include *Chroniques du septième jour* (Paris: Seuil, 1991); *Ce fascisme qui vient* (Paris: Seuil, 1994); *L'année des dupes* (Paris: Seuil, 1996); *Pour la Bosnie* (Paris: Seuil, 1996).

³⁸ *Esprit*, no. 246 (Jan. 1957).

³⁹ A Professor at the Sorbonne who had been a member of the PSU. He was the author of a number of works on psychology.

of new powers and the breakdown of old alliances. This whole process was viewed from a non-Marxist perspective. The journal did, however, continue to give some attention to communism in Europe. In a special edition devoted to Eastern Europe,⁴⁰ containing contributions from writers of *l'Autre Europe*, an attempt was made to define the common cultural and historical traditions of eastern and central Europe.⁴¹ Many authors emphasised the ideological problems of the satellite countries, the history of Stalinism and its breakdown in Eastern Europe, but it is also interesting to note that Domenach in his introduction to these articles spoke of Eastern Europe 'as victim of a retarded destiny',⁴² and expressed his hope for a renaissance in the East.

In March 1968 Jean-Marie Domenach published an editorial entitled 'Une Seule Cause', introducing a series of articles devoted to political oppression and persecution in the Soviet Union,⁴³ Spain, Greece and other parts of the world. Domenach argued that Catholics had a special need to protest against oppression in Spain. In the same way he believed socialists were obliged to cry out against the new trials in the Soviet Union.⁴⁴ He welcomed the Czechoslovak 'springtime', where 'a slide into tyranny had been reversed by discussion, candour and change'.⁴⁵ He concluded on a note of optimism:

By various converging routes, all that is most positive in the world is perhaps about to rediscover the élan which burst out in 1848, the springtime of the European people. Rebellng against weak and harsh appression alike, men struggle and suffer for liberty everywhere. There is only one cause and only one hope.⁴⁶

The editorial that welcomed the events of May 1968 in Paris attempted to connect the student movement in France to protest movements in Eastern Europe. Both seemed to fit into *Esprit's* vision of a renaissance of socialism – a rejuvenating revolt of a new generation which was to bypass the international Communist movement and reinvigorate the non-Marxist revolutionary tradition:

We have just lived through the first phase of the first post-Marxist revolution in Western Europe. It strengthens the hopes murdered at Budapest, reborn in Prague . . . For the first time in fifty years the possibility of revolution outside the communist world has reappeared.⁴⁷

Esprit's reactions harked back to pre-Communist themes. However, even before the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, writers in *Esprit* were taking a closer look at what was happening in France to modify some of their earlier

⁴⁰ *Esprit*, no. 356 (Feb. 1968).

⁴¹ One of the contributors was a Hungarian, Akos Puskas, an émigré from 1956. In 1968 he created a small organisation at Censier which he labelled Paris-Prague. This was badly received by the Marxist students but welcomed by the anarchists.

⁴² *Esprit*, no. 368 (Feb. 1968), 165.

⁴³ In February 1967 *Esprit* had published a dossier on the trial of Siniavski-Daniel in the Soviet Union.

⁴⁴ *Esprit*, no. 369 (Mar. 1968), 419.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 419.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 421.

⁴⁷ *Esprit*, no. 372 (June-July 1968), 969.

conclusions. For many on the left 1968 was the year of revolution symbolised by Paris in the West and Prague in the East. Both the French May and the Czech springtime could be interpreted in terms of socialism, and both repudiated communist orthodoxy.

Many of the articles in *Esprit* presented a historical perspective on May 1968 in order to determine what was new in the movement and what could be related to communism and to older revolutionary movements. Jean-Marie Domenach⁴⁸ in an article in the June–July edition of 1968 entitled ‘L’ancien et le nouveau’ compared May with past revolutions. Another article by Jacques Julliard⁴⁹ appeared in the same edition. He asked whether the students should be seen as *primitifs de la révolte* or as a *nouvelle avant-garde révolutionnaire*? He concluded that their relation to the working class during May was very similar to that of the anarcho-syndicalist militants in the years 1890–1914.

In the following edition Jean-Marie Domenach analysed the ideology of the movement and pointed to several disquieting features, modifying the earlier picture of a libertarian resurrection. In the first place he noted that the revolutionaries appeared almost entirely devoid of theory and he expressed anxiety in the face of their ‘ignorant self-confidence’. Many of their tactics also displeased him and in some respects reminded him of the Stalinists and the Nazis. Turning to the ideological origins of the movement, he stressed the importance of the Vietnam war in discrediting Western society. He also pointed to the influence of Che Guevara in making the Paris militants aware of Third-World movements.

Domenach also emphasised the positive features of the movement. Opposition to the ‘bourgeois democracies’ and to *le socialisme étatique* had much in common with the position of *Esprit* at the time of its founding in 1932:

It is remarkable that the movement had occupied the same ground as *Esprit* did in 1932: opposing both bourgeois democracy and state socialism . . . In doing so it is reviving the thinking of the 1930s, and its fruitless search for a third road to revolution.⁵⁰

Here Domenach pointed to the strange pedigree of the May movement:

One can recognise the tradition and trace it back to those pre-marxist revolutionary sages, Proudhon, Bakunin, Fourier and Rousseau – under a patchwork folklore which mingles Cuba, Bolivia and China with Trotsky, the great heretic.⁵¹

Domenach admitted that the political and economic aims of the movement were generous, but took it to task for criticising liberalism without proposing any safeguards for the preservation of liberty. Whilst the younger generation had not known Nazism or Stalinism first hand, Domenach argued that it was urgent ‘France’s students take account of what the students in Czechoslovakia and Poland had been through’.⁵² He believed that the French could learn from East European

⁴⁸ See n. 12 above.

⁴⁹ See n. 38 above.

⁵⁰ *Esprit*, no. 373 (Aug.–Sep. 1968), 42.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 50.

experiences but feared that May might be inaugurating a new age of fanaticism and totalitarianism:

A political revolution is only desirable, even conceivable if it does not lead Europe along the road of totalitarian fanaticism. Contemporary society has too lively a memory of oppression and is not prepared to barter fundamental liberties, however devalued they may be, and replace them with the dictatorship of minorities.⁵³

The manner in which *Esprit* under Jean-Marie Domenach ignored the Prague spring and responded only belatedly to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia contrasts dramatically with Béguin's anguish over the martyrdom of Hungary in 1956. However, *Esprit* was not alone in downplaying the importance of developments in Czechoslovakia.

Neither the May revolutionaries nor intellectuals writing for *Les Temps Modernes* were genuinely really interested in the Czechoslovak attempt to renovate communism from within and give socialism 'a human face'. For many French Marxists, the Czechoslovak reformers appeared to lack the glamour of either Third-World revolutionaries or the militants of May 1968, who for a short time seemed capable of implementing revolution in France. Furthermore, *Les Temps Modernes* made little attempt to face the unpleasant aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia or the revival of neo-Stalinism in the Soviet Union itself.

Whilst many Marxists subordinated Czechoslovak affairs to May 1968 but felt embarrassed by the destruction of Alexander Dubcek's experiment, leading writers in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, which had become a forum for moderates and 'enlightened' Marxists in France, were fascinated with the potential significance of the Czechoslovak reform movement for the future of socialism. They were attracted by the attempt to give socialism 'a human face' in a country that, unlike Russia in 1917, had been Westernised, industrialised, and contained a sophisticated and educated proletariat. *Le Nouvel Observateur* did more than try to draw lessons from what had happened in Czechoslovakia; it also sought common ground between the Prague Spring and May 1968 in France.

While some editorials in *Esprit* connected reforms in Czechoslovakia with May 1968, comparatively little attention was devoted to Czechoslovak affairs before the Soviet invasion in August. It was not until June 1970 that *Esprit* issued a special edition containing articles from Czechoslovak authors analysing the Prague Spring in detail and comparing developments in Czechoslovakia with those of Hungary in 1956. French reactions to the Prague Spring in the columns of *Esprit* were thus very limited.

One short article that did appear in the May edition of 1968 was by Paul Thibaud,⁵⁴ pessimistically entitled 'Est-ce que ce rêve est réalisable'? The article concluded that none of the changes sweeping Czechoslovakia had led to any real

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵⁴ Paul Thibaud was director of *Esprit* between 1977 and 1988. His recent works include *La Fin de l'école républicaine [avec Philippe Raynaud]* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1990); *Discussions sur l'Europe [avec Jean-Marc Ferry]* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1992); *Et maintenant* (Paris: Seuil, 1995).

alterations in the structure of power and that the best guarantee for the newly acquired liberties was to institutionalise them. In the August–September edition of *Esprit* Pavel Tigrid, an historian of Czech origin, condemned the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in a short article of a little over two pages:

In one night brute force, without warning or justification, has shattered those Czech dreams which the rest of Europe shared.⁵⁵

A spirit of great sadness and impotence in face of the Soviet invasion appeared in the concluding lines of an article by a young Czechoslovak writer living in Paris who had been in prison during the Novotny era. Jan Benes's article was entitled 'La liberté ne se promène pas en rouge' and he wrote:

I feel sad and despairing, as if I had missed the very last bus, just as if I were last lone survivor on the planet: sad and despairing.⁵⁶

The November edition of *Esprit* also paid surprisingly little attention to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia; however, in a short article in the section *Journal à Plusieurs Voix* entitled 'Que Pouvons Nous Faire Pour la Tchécoslovaquie?', Jean-Marie Domenach replied to those who regretted *Esprit*'s failure to devote sufficient attention to the Soviet military invasion of Czechoslovakia and the passive resistance of the Czechoslovaks:

Frankly, I find it difficult to stomach the literary outpourings over the past two months glorifying the heroic Czechoslovak nation, considering how France abandoned Czechoslovakia thirty years ago.⁵⁷

Echoing the views of Paul Thibaud, Domenach argued that the only form of solidarity possible with the Czechoslovaks was communication on the level of mutual humiliation:

They were humiliated by outside power just as we are humiliated by our own lack of power.⁵⁸

Domenach wrote: 'We console ourselves with the courage of other men, we ramble on about other men's feats of resistance.'⁵⁹ There was little optimism in his articles. He saw the Czechoslovaks as being completely at the mercy of their Russian masters, who with the slightest pressure could obtain exactly what they wanted – the destruction of the attempt to create a democratic humanistic form of socialism. The only hope for the Czechoslovaks was that evolution would take place within the communist world itself. Subsequent articles concentrated on the struggle for reform within the Soviet Union.

Domenach condemned the French Communist Party for welcoming the Moscow Accords as 'positive' after it had originally disassociated itself from the

⁵⁵ *Esprit*, no. 373 (Aug.–Sep. 1968), 254.

⁵⁶ *Esprit*, no. 374 (Oct. 1968), 268.

⁵⁷ *Esprit*, no. 375 (Nov. 1968), 506.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 506.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 507.

invasion. He then emphasised the dangers in the new Soviet doctrine of 'limited socialist sovereignty' that had been used to justify the invasion of Czechoslovakia. This doctrine could lead to future conflicts with Yugoslavia and even with China. The Brezhnev doctrine could also be applied to France if the French Communist Party ever took power. Domenach criticised the French Communist Party for its ambiguous position:

For several years, it has played a double game, turning its liberal and conciliatory face towards France, but showing the rest of the world, by contrast, an orthodox and rigid countenance. The occupation of Czechoslovakia will oblige it to reconcile its internal contradictions.⁶⁰

In answer to the question 'what can we do for Czechoslovakia?', Domenach stated:

We can at least encourage our own communists to continue with their progress towards truth which some of them have already embarked upon.⁶¹

In November 1969 *Espit* devoted a series of articles to intellectual dissent in the Soviet Union. The title of Jean-Marie Domenach's introduction to articles from dissident Soviet intellectuals captured much of their spirit - 'Au nom de la Loi des Soviétiques Contestent'. He emphasised that then present repression could not be justified in terms of the Cold War or the rivalry of power blocs. On the contrary, he saw both the Czechoslovak experiment and the movement of intellectual dissent within Russia as gaining their impetus from a climate of peaceful coexistence. Within the Soviet Union many intellectuals, argued Domenach, were gravely disturbed by their country's military intervention in Czechoslovakia. Here Domenach reiterated his idea that the fate of Czechoslovakia was in the long term dependent on the movement of dissent in Russia. He justified *Espit's* extensive coverage of the Soviet literary and intellectual underground:

If, as some Czechs think, we must henceforth accept that this country's liberation depends entirely upon Russia's political evolution, then we must pay even more attention to the signals and deeply moving examples sent us by that courageous minority which is fighting for its rights, which are also universal rights.⁶²

For Domenach the movement in Russia was very remote from Mao, Trotsky or *d'aucune autre chapelle marxiste*. The Soviet opposition's objective was the restoration of fundamental liberties, but how could this be done?

By legal opposition? Certainly, but there, where freedom does not exist, legality is despised. And by a spiritual opposition, too, for it is man's dogged faith in the power of words, of love, the sort of superhuman humanity we see among the prisoners in *First Circle*, and in Dostoyevsky, which inspires a resonance which may well end by tearing the Russian people from the grasp of their tyrants.⁶³

In the same edition Jean-Marie Domenach published an article in *Journal à Plusieurs Voix* entitled 'La Nuit sur Prague. Un an après l'invasion, la Tchécoslovaquie est

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 508.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 509.

⁶² *Espit*, no. 386 (Nov. 1969), 634.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 634.

rentrée dans la nuit'. He criticised the Western press for trying to wash away its 'Munich complex' by exalting the Czechoslovak form of resistance that was expected to lead to the expulsion of the invader. Once again he argued that the process of repression was irreversible, and he compared the existing Czechoslovak situation with that of France under Nazi occupation between 1940 and 1942. Domenach was deeply saddened by 'normalisation' in Czechoslovakia. The future for the Czechoslovaks seemed gloomier than that of the Hungarians after the 1956 Revolution:

The Hungarians fought the invader, and were beaten, but Kadar was an improvement on Rakosi.⁶⁴

Domenach employed religious terminology to invoke the tragedy of the Czechoslovak people:

It is probable that the country will continue to disintegrate in disgust, in a tedium broken by explosions of despair. Edgar Quinet described France as 'the Christ of Europe' – an exaggeration. The description could better suit contemporary Czechoslovakia, if we could venture to use such nineteenth-century language. But it is as though the resurrection was bound by two crucifixions.⁶⁵

The article ended on an even more bitter note of pessimism by connecting the destinies of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, France and the Mediterranean dictatorships.

The proletarian revolution becomes a general system of oppression and degradation in Eastern Europe . . . if so, all those who believe that socialism has a human face should recognise all the consequences, since between the decay of socialism in the east and the Mediterranean dictatorships (Greece, Portugal, Spain), there is the same sort of connection as there is between the decay and impotence of the French left: a connection of demoralisation. Events in occupied Czechoslovakia, as in the Soviet Union, are fraught with dire consequences for Europe's future.⁶⁶

In a new edition of *Esprit* in July–August 1971, Soviet intellectuals revealed that they were beginning to despair because of the severe repression within the Soviet Union and because of their isolation from the mass of the population who they felt were hostile. The masses lacked a tradition of political liberty and should the Soviet Empire disintegrate after a conflict with China, a new oppression would only arise to replace the present one. These intellectuals looked back with nostalgia to the last twenty years of Tsarism, when it seemed possible that Russia might evolve in the same direction as western European countries.

Esprit also tried to analyse Marxism itself. In 'Impasse de la Gauche', appearing in the July–August 1969 issue Jean-Marie Domenach criticised both French socialists and communists in much the same terms as in those articles published at the time of the Hungarian and Suez crises. Domenach had already referred to the force of nationalism in destroying the Second International and he next introduced the

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 692–3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 693.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 693.

important idea that the left had been broken in two by the First World War. He described how both European socialism and communism had often been defeated by fascism and how, after the Second World War, the socialists adopted nationalist programmes which militated against the colonies whilst communist internationalism foundered on the national rivalries of the Russians and Chinese. Historically socialism could not stand up to nationalism. Socialism was in need of a spiritual dimension greater than Marxist materialism, a spiritual dimension that might heal the grave split that followed the First World War and create a force capable of achieving something new in Europe and aiding the underdeveloped countries of the Third World:

Marxism has become a Tower of Babel: incomprehensible and inaudible to outsiders. Marx himself progressed from indignation to scientific thought, but today's Marxism generates magical fantasies which avoid the necessity of practical action. We need a theory of revolution sufficiently comprehensive to unite the awareness of all those, at all levels, who suffer under a lawless regime . . . the core of their alienation springs from levels deeper than those explored by Marxist sociology.⁶⁷

In October 1971 in an article entitled 'Propositions' Jean-Marie Domenach criticised Marxism from new perspectives. Turning his attention to Third-World affairs he argued that with reference to Biafra (in Nigeria), Sudan, the then Ceylon and Bengal (the then East Pakistan), Marxist analysis was completely inadequate. Many of these problems and crises could be explained, Domenach believed, in conceptual terms developed by pre-Marxist historians such as Taine and de Tocqueville.

Domenach then posed a question of crucial importance:

The real question is to know whether Marxism, or rather Marxisms, do not play a conservative role.⁶⁸

He put forward two reasons why 'Marxisms' should be considered as a conservative force:

First, because they hamper efforts to face the world as it actually is, so delaying the formulation of a theory of history adapted to our times, thereby diverting energy and spirit into fruitless sectarian quarrels.⁶⁹

He also argued that Marxism was conservative because it had a particular relation to the 'bourgeois' world and could not bypass 'bourgeois' vision. He maintained, through a dialectical-style analysis, that Marxism had emerged as a reaction to capitalism but that very little progress had been made as a result of the clash between the two movements:

Marxism is a philosophy of the period of capitalist ascendancy – its opposite, of course, but is it not, as Mounier appreciated, bound to its adversary by their common origin, so that today its true strength and power is to be seen in the organisation and disciplines of industrial society?⁷⁰

⁶⁷ *Espit*, no. 383 (July–Aug. 1969), 65.

⁶⁸ *Espit*, no. 407 (Oct. 1971), 361.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 361.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 361.

Finally Domenach advocated a radical break with both nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of Marxism:

And so, the fact that Marxism complements the bourgeois world calls for another theory of revolution, unless we are prepared to resign ourselves to a balance – strategic, political, philosophical – bolstering, above all, the established order. Such a repudiation of Marxism would reverberate beyond Marxism itself, it would lead to the most radical break with the European system of the last two centuries.⁷¹

This concept of the ‘renaissance’ which appeared so often in the columns of *Esprit* was of key importance. It signified a profoundly non-Marxist approach to history and suggested that Marxist materialism would ultimately be transcended by greater spiritual forces. Thus for *Esprit* the Hungarian Revolution signified an upsurge of the human spirit transcending Marxism in its communist forms. Béguin’s editorial linked the Hungarian explosions with the great revolutionary movements of the past in a sense that also cut across standard Marxist terminology.

Hungary had illustrated the possibility of a spiritual regeneration of a people. *Esprit* regretted that the French were not able to follow the Hungarian example. In a series of articles analysing the impotence of the French left and the double failure of French communism and socialism to deal with the Algerian crisis, *Esprit* could only register pessimism in the face of so little desire within the main parties of the French left to initiate reforms or alter established patterns of thought and behaviour.

In its broad survey of the period 1956–68 *Esprit* did not devote much attention to the new revolutionary movements that were to transform the Third World. This neglect was perhaps due to *Esprit*’s lack of sympathy, since these new movements using Marxist terminology were often nationalist. Instead *Esprit* occupied itself with more empirical considerations relating to the changing nature of the power blocs, and the problems facing countries such as India. *Esprit* did not adopt the terminology of the New Left such as ‘neo-colonialism’ ‘imperialism’ and ‘Zionism’. Even in its treatment of the Algerian crisis, where the French left had inherited a ‘legacy of guilt’, *Esprit* dissociated itself from the attitudes of *Les Temps Modernes* and on occasion expressed some reservations about the FLN (the Front de libération nationale – the socialist pro-independence political force in Algeria).

In 1968 developments in Czechoslovakia and in Paris appeared initially to confirm *Esprit*’s earlier optimism concerning the future of socialism in Europe. The unforeseeable had happened. The Czechoslovak experiment represented an attempt to reform communism from within to give communism a human face, and the May events appeared to many at the time as a huge popular explosion expressing the will of the people and bypassing the traditional political parties. *Esprit*’s editorial greeting the events of May was ecstatically over-optimistic and tried to interrelate the movements in France and Eastern Europe in a universal vision of change and renovation. This process of change was paradoxically considered as both ‘post-Marxist’ and ‘pre-Marxist’, and it was hoped that the fifty years of orthodox communism would be wiped away. Subsequent articles modified this reaction, and

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 361.

the optimism that had permeated the pages of *Esprit* evaporated. The movement of May clearly carried the germs of a new fanaticism and intolerance.

The drama in Czechoslovakia was in its turn seen as an unmitigated tragedy, as the Russians intervened to snuff out the new experiment in humanistic socialism. However there was no editorial on Czechoslovakia equivalent to 'Les Flammes de Budapest'. Jean-Marie Domenach, when interviewed by the author, stressed that he had never really expected the Czechoslovak experiment to survive after the Soviet Union had so readily intervened in Hungary twelve years before. Domenach emphasised that his journal had presented a fundamental critique of Marxism in 1956 and viewed the Hungarian Revolution in the context of this critique. In this respect, he argued, *Esprit* was well in advance of other left-wing journals of the time which had failed to come to grips with the issues raised by Hungary. However, in Domenach's view Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia was in keeping with the unchanged nature of the Soviet system, and it was almost 'normal' for the Russians to intervene to suppress the Czechoslovak attempt to reconcile socialism and liberty.

Domenach also tried to explain why more Marxist-orientated intellectuals such as Gilles Martinet (who wrote for *France Observateur* and *le Nouvel Observateur*) and Roger Garaudy⁷² (a former hardline Stalinist who was eventually expelled from the French Communist Party in April 1970 because of his protests over the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia) had believed, at the time, that the Czechoslovak affair was more important for the future of socialism than Hungary. Domenach argued that Garaudy and Martinet, victims of the Marxist assumption that the development of productive forces would increase liberty, had been more deeply shocked by the Soviet Union's neo-Stalinist crime of invading highly industrialised Czechoslovakia than they had been by Stalin's far more brutal intervention in Hungary. For men like Garaudy, Stalin's crimes could be justified by the backwardness of the Soviet Union and her fears of capitalist encirclement. It was more difficult for them, according to Domenach, to use the same arguments to justify the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Domenach as a non-Marxist had been more traumatised by Hungary than by Czechoslovakia, whilst the Marxists he was criticising were far more shocked by the Soviet Union's suppression of the Czechoslovak attempt to give socialism a human face.

On another level *Esprit* may have devoted relatively little attention to Czechoslovakia because the sight of the 'Czech resurrection being followed by a second crucifixion' was too much to bear. *Esprit* now turned its attention to new hopes – the struggles of dissident intellectuals within the Soviet Union – since it was argued that the only hope for Czechoslovakia lay in the possibility that the Soviet Union might be transformed from within. Articles and letters smuggled out of the Soviet

⁷² He had been a Protestant as a student before becoming a communist in 1933. Following his expulsion from the French Communist Party in April 1970, he was first converted to Catholicism and in 1982 turned to Islam. He supported Irak during the Gulf War and in the 1990s contributed to a Neo-Fascist journal entitled *Nationalism et république*. He bitterly denounced Israel in a revue entitled *La Vieille Taupe* (No.2 Winter 1995).

Union were published in *Esprit*, but those that appeared in July–August of 1971 testified to a deep sense of despair and utter hopelessness within Russia itself.

The journey that has been traced in the columns of *Esprit* is one from optimism to pessimism concerning the prospects of progress in the international communist world. *Esprit*'s comments on Hungary and Czechoslovakia must be seen in terms of its broader view of Marxism. Evils and injustices in the communist world indicated that there was something wrong with communism as an ideology and this in turn led to more fundamental questioning of the doctrine of Marxism. In the editorial 'Les Flammes de Budapest', *Esprit* suggested that as both a faith and a science Marxism had overextended itself. Domenach's article of October 1971 reviewed Marxism after the events of May in France and the Czechoslovak crisis had placed it in a new perspective. The revolution of May had embodied certain non-Marxist libertarian traits, and the movement of intellectual dissent in the Soviet Union could also be related to Russia's great nineteenth-century non-Marxist revolutionary traditions. Marxism was thus criticised for its historical limitations. It had appeared as a reaction against the capitalist world but within the Soviet Union it had failed to transcend its 'bourgeois' spirit or contribute anything new and positive to the left.

Esprit's views on Marxism during the whole period bounded by the Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia were encapsulated in Domenach's citation of the French anarchist Proudhon's famous warning to Karl Marx in May 1846:

We must not make ourselves the leaders of a new intolerance, or put ourselves forward as the apostles of a new religion, be it the religion of logic, the religion of reason.⁷³

Were the twelve years between the Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia a turning point or a period of transition for *Esprit* within the French left? In some respects any survey of Marxist journals such as *Les Temps Modernes* and even *Le Nouvel Observateur* raises the question of where those intellectuals who had been sympathetic to Marxism and international communism could turn. *Esprit*'s left-wing Catholic intellectuals had not been Marxist, but immediately after the Second World War as 'fellow travellers' they had flirted with Stalinism. Their reactions to the de-Stalinisation crisis between 1956 and 1968 are intrinsically interesting and also illuminate the trajectory of their Marxist fellow traveller confrères away from Stalinism.

For *Esprit* the Hungarian Revolution was the last straw, following the campaign against Tito, the Rajk trial and the Slansky trial. *Esprit* totally broke with communism in 1956 and reassessed its attitudes to Marxism. 1956 can be seen as a turning point for *Esprit* and its rupture with the past contrasts with *Les Temps Modernes*, even though the latter was disturbed in 1956 by communism's failure to live up to its own ideal. *Esprit*'s break with Soviet communism was more dramatic and its reactions to 'tiers mondism' were muted.

Whilst 'Les Flammes de Budapest' testified to the enormous impact the Hungarian revolution had on *Esprit*, its failure to comment at greater length on the Czechoslovakian crisis of 1968 is most significant. The relative silence of *Esprit* over

⁷³ *Esprit*, no. 238 (May 1956), 643.

what had been happening in Czechoslovakia is comparable to Sherlock Holmes noting the curious behaviour of the dog that 'did nothing in the night-time', in Conan Doyle's short story 'Silver Blaze'. This silence raises more questions, answered by Jean-Marie Domenach in an interview in which he compared his reactions to the tragedy in Prague with those of Gilles Martinet and Roger Garaudy. Surprisingly, in its limited reactions to the Czechoslovakian crisis, *Esprit* occupied the middle ground within the French left between two streams of Marxist thought.

Domenach's explanation that he had never really expected the Czechoslovak experiment to succeed and that he himself had been more traumatised over Hungary does not fully account for his silence as editor of *Esprit* in 1968 and 1969. Perhaps it is significant that it was Albert Béguin, not Domenach, who wrote 'Les Flammes de Budapest' in 1956, although of course Domenach and Béguin worked closely together. It is also possible, as Jean-Marie Domenach's polemics with Judt indicate, that Domenach never fully outgrew his 'fellow travelling' phase. Clearly Domenach's Resistance experiences and the excitement of the years immediately following the Second World War were a formative period in his life. 1968 was not a turning point for either *Esprit* or Domenach. Yet Domenach testified that he had been saddened by the winter that followed the Prague Spring. He realised that change must come from the centre of the Soviet empire, not from its periphery. In retrospect Domenach ignored Dubcek in the long wait for a Gorbachev.

How did *Esprit* adjust to the dramatic change within the French left in the mid-1970s, as a new generation of ex-Maoist militants from 1968, influenced by Solzhenitsyn, rejected communism and even Marxism as 'totalitarian'? Did the 'fellow traveller' past of many of the older generation handicap *Esprit's* adjustment to the new mood? Writers in *Esprit* had seen 1956 as a turning point in their reactions to communism, whereas for writers in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 1968 was the year of crucial importance. *Esprit* reacted positively to Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* and to the ideas of the 'new philosophers'. In contrast to *Esprit*, writers in *Les Temps Modernes*, who had not entirely rejected communism in 1956 and had not been traumatised by 1968, became marginalised in the context of the intellectual climate of the 1970s and 1980s.

By the 1980s *Esprit* was to abandon ideology and attempt to analyse political, social and intellectual problems empirically, without reference to ideological constructs. Many of those contributing to *Esprit* were academics, and the journal would first bear witness to the momentous collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and then the Soviet Union. *Esprit* had long since rejected the anti-liberalism of its founder Emmanuel Mounier. Under new editors such as Paul Thibaud and Olivier Mongin,⁷⁴ it opened its columns to younger writers and historians of a high calibre whose liberal, rather than socialist, study of the significance of European communism and the different stages of its collapse was to be sophisticated and perceptive.

⁷⁴ His most recent works are: *La Peur du Vide: Essai sur les passions démocratique* (Paris: Seuil, 1991); *Face au Scepticisme [1976–1993]: les mutations du paysage intellectuel ou l'invention de l'intellectuel démocratique* (Paris: Editions la Découverte, 1994).