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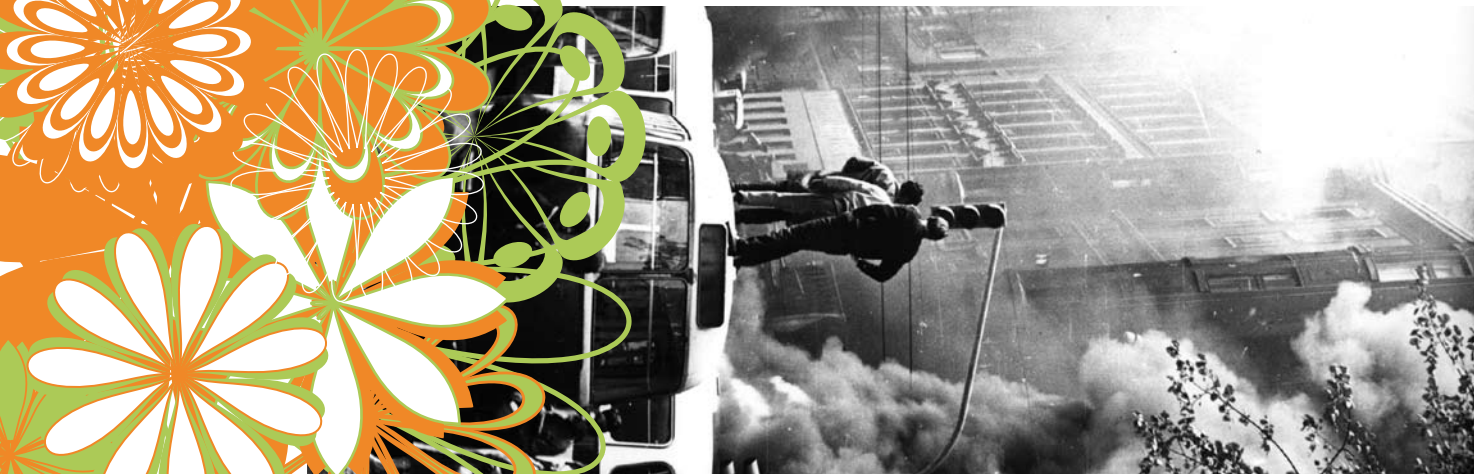
1968 revisited

40 years of protest movements

Edited by Nora Farik

Essays and interviews with protagonists of 1968:
Teresa Bogucka (Poland), **Daniel Cohn-Bendit** (France/West Germany), **Alexander Daniel** (Russia), **Benoît Lechat** (Belgium), **Klaus Meschkat** (West Germany), **Bill Nasson** (South Africa), **Nebojša Popov** (Yugoslavia), **Marcelo Ridenti** (Brazil), **Wolfgang Templin** (East Germany) and **Oldřich Tůma** (Czech Republic)



HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
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40 YEARS OF PROTEST MOVEMENTS

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As Director of the EU Regional Office my deepest gratitude goes to Nora Farik,
without whom the production of this timely publication would not have been possible.
Claude Weinber

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Preface

2008 marks the 40th anniversary of the worldwide protests of 1968.

The meaning of the protest movements of 1968 does not only consist in the political results that were immediate achieved in various countries. In a certain sense, through their global range and global perception, the events of 1968 represent the first case of a 'global concurrence' in which the war in Vietnam, the Prague Spring, and the student protests in Western Europe and the USA are blended together.

Above all, 1968 stands for fundamental social change and the emergence of a new political culture. This includes the growing participation of minorities in the public sphere, the changing gender roles and the 'coming out' of sexual minorities, as well as changes in the fields of science such as the evolution of women and cultural studies. In essence, all these events have been initiated and pushed by the protest movements.

Despite the diversity of the 1968 movement, each country's movement still had its overall individual characteristics and emphases.

We asked a number of the protagonists of 1968 to share their memories with us and assess the events from today's perspective. Authors from Brazil, Poland, the Czech Republic, Russia, Germany, South Africa, Serbia and Belgium speak out on the individual characteristics of the protest movements in their respective countries, the long-term effects on political and social conditions and the role that the protagonists of 1968 and their ideas play in contemporary politics and public.

In Brazil, the demonstrations in 1968 were distinguished by being part of the struggle against the military and civil dictatorship. The regime was confronted with a political and social struggle on three fronts: the student movement, the worker movement and the cultural agitation on the part of artists and intellectuals. And, as Marcelo Ridenti points out, the protesters shared strong rebellious and revolutionary visions and the feeling that profound changes were possible and taking place with the protest movements in other regions of the world.

Teresa Bogucka shows a different face of the 1968 protests: In March 1968 Polish students took over Warsaw's streets not to 'smash the state' but to fight for the fulfilment of the system's promises. The opposition was swiftly and brutally suppressed by means of large anti-intellectual and anti-Semitic campaigns, which resulted in the expulsion of thousands of Jewish people.

The Polish opposition was greatly influenced by the events in Czechoslovakia.

In his essay, Oldřich Tůma focuses on the two movements in Czechoslovakia at that time: the party reform movement within the Communist Party and the society-wide movement. During the military intervention both blended and complemented one another briefly. For Tůma the experience of the events of 1968 and 1969 in Czechoslovakia significantly aided the emancipation of the younger generation from communism. Even though the regime was relatively stable, it no longer had its roots in a society capable of truly revitalizing that regime.

The events in Czechoslovakia also fostered the growing opposition of many intellectuals in Moscow and other large Soviet cities against the 're-Stalinisation' taking place in the country. According to Alexander Daniel, the spectrum among the intelligentsia active in the opposition ranged from anarchists to monarchists, who were nevertheless united by the shared political concept of anti-Stalinism and a world view based on human rights.

Wolfgang Templin assesses the events of 1968 from an East German point of view. For Templin, the reactions of the eastern regimes towards the protesters demonstrated the regimes' total inability to reform. In the following years the main challenge for the opposition movements consisted of bringing about a peaceful, yet radical change of system– eventually resulting in the peaceful and liberating revolutions of 1989.

In South Africa the Apartheid regime tried to seal off the country from political and cultural events in other parts of the world. But, as Bill Nasson mentions, measures such as censorship or the confiscation of passports of government opponents could

not prevent the growth and consolidation of an alternative political culture like the black consciousness movement led by Steve Biko or the new literary movement, known as the *Sestigers*, or the Sixties generation, symbolised by novelists such as Ingrid Jonker. In the former Yugoslavia Nebojša Popov observes the danger of falsification of cultural, political and social history by the government. This also includes the 1968 student movement in Belgrade, which had been systematically cracked down by the authorities through police trials, restricted movement, job dismissals, barriers to employment and eventually political trials. In the end, the rise of the nationalist movement embodied by Slobodan Milošević, would smash the remains of the New Left and the counter-culture.

Benoît Lechat regards the 1968 protests in Belgium as a reflection of its society: clearly partitioned. Despite these divisions along religious, social and cultural lines the events of 1968 and at the beginning of the 1970s changed Belgium on institutional, social and cultural levels. Nevertheless, Lechat perceives the memory of these transitional years being carefully preserved in the division within Belgian society.

This collection of essays is rounded off by interviews with Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Klaus Meschkat.

The selection of authors and the regions/countries they represent is merely a reflection of our endeavour to show the diversity of the 1968 movements. It is not to be understood as a disregard of the protagonists and movements and their struggles in other parts of the world.

We would like to express our thanks to the following contributors for their collaboration: The authors Teresa Bogucka, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Alexander Daniel, Benoît Lechat, Klaus Meschkat, Bill Nasson, Nebojša Popov, Marcelo Ridenti, Wolfgang Templin and Oldřich Tůma. Our colleagues in the Regional Offices of the Heinrich Böll Foundation: Keren Ben-Zeev, Dragoslav Dedovic, Thomas Fatheuer, Malgorzata Kopka, Jelena Micovic, Paola Petric, Sabrina Petry, Eva van de Rakt, Agnieszka Rochon, Jens Siegert, Ingrid Spiller as well as Eike Botta-Venhorst, Stephan Ertner, Ralf Fücks, Annette Maennel and Marianne Zepp from the Berlin headquarters. The translators and proof readers, especially Margaret Cameron, David Fenske, Dimitri Lemaire, Benoît Lechat and Geneviève Warland for their support!

Nora Farik, Editor

Claude Weinber, Director EU Regional Office in Brussels, Heinrich Böll Foundation

What is left? 1968 revisited

introduction by RALF FÜCKS*

***Ralf Fücks** was born in 1951 in Edenkoben (Palatinate, Germany). He studied social sciences, economics and politics at universities in Heidelberg and Bremen, where he was also a student activist. He lectured at the University of Bremen and worked as an adult education instructor. He edited *Moderne Zeiten* (Modern Times), which he co-founded in 1980, and *hefte für demokratie und sozialismus* (Journal for Democracy & Socialism). Ralf Fücks joined the Green Party in 1982 and was elected to the Bremen state parliament in 1985. From 1989 to 1990 he was co-president of the national Green Party. He returned to regional politics in Bremen in 1991, serving as Senator for Urban Development and Environmental Protection and as Deputy Mayor. He held the latter position until 1995 when the coalition between Greens, Liberals and Social Democrats collapsed. Ralf Fücks has been co-president of the Heinrich Boell Foundation since 1996. The primary focus of his work is sustainable development, reshaping the welfare state, migration, the future of European integration and international policy. He is responsible for the foundation's programme development in the divisions of domestic political education, Europe and North America, German-Israel-Relations, the Green Academy, the scholarship programme and the archive «Grünes Gedächtnis». He is also a regular contributor to numerous newspapers and political periodicals.

1968 has become a political myth that refuses to go away. This is evident from the fact that the debate on its interpretation continues. It marks a historical break, comparable with the beginning of the Cold War or the fall of the Berlin Wall. Only at first glance is this comparison an exaggeration. The cultural and political upheavals that arose from the events of 1968 were certainly revolutionary.

It is true that the protest movement of 1968 did not lead to a dramatic overturn of the political order in the manner of the French or Russian revolutions and that the extent of the violence and counter-violence associated with the revolts during this period was not comparable with the excesses of past wars and civil wars. It was the Prague Spring – an event that is often ignored in connection with 1968 – that came closest to being a revolutionary overthrow of a regime. It was this peaceful revolution, begun in Czechoslovakia, that shook 'real socialism' to its core. The revolution was crushed by the tanks of the Warsaw Pact. The tragedy of these events went far beyond the symbolic and theatrical actions of the student protests in the West. The Soviet invasion of Prague buried the hopes of 'socialism with a human face'. The communist hegemony over Eastern Europe became a hopeless cause. From then on, it would only be a matter of time before a system incapable of reform collapsed. The inherent link between 1968 and 1989 is that the defeat of the Prague Spring led to the collapse of the Soviet empire.

In the West, things were different. The superiority of the capitalist democracies was demonstrated by their ability to absorb the momentum created by the events of 1968 – even in the face of opposition from their ruling elites, who feared this would lead to the decline of the West. Open systems transform opposition into innovation. In other words, 1968 gave western societies powerful innovative momentum, ranging from the triumph of popular culture and the emancipation of women to the emergence of new forms of political participation. The ideological recourse to Marxism, the admiration for the Chinese Cultural Revolution and solidarity with the 'anti-imperialist liberation movements' in Vietnam and Palestine disguised the fact that 1968 was actually reformist in character. As is so often the case, the protagonists' view of their significance and their impact on society were poles apart. If the revolutionary rhetoric espoused by the movement is taken as a benchmark, the '68 generation has failed. However, in terms of the cultural and political changes set in motion by the movement, it was highly successful.

Fundamental changes

The fundamental changes that emerged from 1968 included an increase in popular political awareness, evident in two ways: the protest movement became the precursor to a new global society and expanded the sphere of the political community using new media and forms of action. Even if the extra-parliamen-

tary opposition in France, Italy, Germany, and America was specific to each country, it was nevertheless a cosmopolitan movement. The Vietnam War, the American civil rights movement, the struggle against the colonial system in Southern Africa, the events in Czechoslovakia and the Chinese counter-revolution either outraged or inspired hundreds of thousand of activists; they fired imaginations and became the basis of action. At the same time, they enabled left-wing groups to see themselves as part of a worldwide revolutionary movement. While this was a fiction, it was also highly inspiring. A whole flood of publications discussed international questions, links were forged and international congresses held. 1968 became the point of departure for people all over the world, who were now able to view far away events as being part of their own cause.

A direct connection can be established between the emergence of the 1968 political counter movement, with its pamphlets, newspapers, alternative radio stations and publishers, and today's Internet society that gives everyone access to global communication. The visual media i.e. photography and television played an especially decisive role in spreading the protest movement. On the one hand, images of war zones in other parts of the world fuelled action and campaigns at home; on the other hand, movements created their own images to get their political messages across: sit ins; demonstrations; blockades; 'happenings'; and open-air festivals were highly effective visual means of expression. An exhibition dedicated to examining the power of images in the context of 1968 would be a worthwhile undertaking – images that literally went around the world and made a very lasting impression on collective awareness.

A long, second wave of changes consisted of the expansion of the sphere of democracy. While American democracy is rooted in an active civil society, based on republican principles, Europe has been faced with the legacy of absolute states. The democratic order in Western Europe, re-established in the wake of World War II, consisted of little more than a system of state institutions deriving democratic authority from elections. The call for the democratisation of schools and universities, for co-determination in industry and involvement in the political process (apart from elections) embedded democracy more deeply into society. Above all, 1968 stands for a new democratic political culture. This also includes the numerous self-administered projects and plethora of NGOs that have changed the political landscape since the end of the 1960s. It goes without saying that democratic virtues such as having the courage of one's convictions, grass-roots involvement, citizens' groups and self-determination were not invented in 1968. It was only post 1968, however, that these came to define the political culture in Western Europe. The American civil rights movement and the culture of non-violent opposition that is associated with Dr. Martin Luther King had immense influence, as did the new forms of political action that spread to Europe from the United States. It is not presumptuous to say that the new political direction during those years played a decisive role in creating a self-confident civil society that saw itself as being on equal footing with the state.

A third far-reaching change was in the politicisation of the private sphere. 'Private has become political' was one of the principal slogans of 1968. Relationships between children and adults and between men and women became public issues, as did questions of sexuality, consumption and lifestyle. It goes without saying that this unleashed immense potential for individual emancipation. Domestic violence was no longer a taboo issue, patriarchy was rejected, the way opened for greater personal expression and sexual minorities won equality. 1968 was a catalyst for the women's movement and gays coming out.

Politicisation of the private sphere, however, also led to unpredictable developments. The publicity surrounding the private life of politicians has been one of the more harmless consequences of the blurring of the public and the private person, between the political and the private sphere. The emergence of an 'identity policy' that assumes political expectations beyond the demands for equal treatment on such issues as ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, has created a political dimension to the personal sphere. If this tendency continues to its limits, it will lead to a particularisation of the political stage. Identity policy is in conflict with the idea of a republic of equal and free citizens, manifesting their political will in open debate.

Errors and confusion

Those who defend the emancipatory aspects and democratic potential of 1968 also need to address the aberrations that emerged from the revolt. 1968 is also an excellent example of how a protest movement can lose its way. Although '68 was a call for the realisation of the ideals of democracy in the face of a repressive

reality, the radical groupings within the movement actually committed themselves to an 'anti-imperialism' that took on authoritarian traits. The more radical the avant-garde protesters became in their opposition to the system, the more they distanced themselves from the libertarian and emancipatory impetus of the movement. This probably holds more true for Europe than for the United States. It is no coincidence that SDS means Socialist Students' Association in Germany but Students for a Democratic Society in America.

An interesting question is why anti-capitalism became more important for large sections of the European protest movement than democracy. It would be a mistake to explain the espousal of socialism in terms of popular theoretical misconceptions, even though they did play a role – in particular equating capitalism with war and fascism. In fact, the idea of liberal democracy was in its infancy in continental Europe. Its short-lived spring during the democratic revolutions in the mid-nineteenth century had ended in the restoration of the authoritarian state. The constitutional democracies that followed the old order after its collapse in 1918 had no stable foundation; the political landscape of Europe was characterised by anti-democratic movements and totalitarian ideologies. The emancipation movement of industrial workers was socialist in nature as was the opposition to World War I. Most anti-colonial movements in the Third World, which gained momentum post 1945, also adopted socialist ideologies. The intellectual beacons for student protesters – Benjamin, Adorno, Marcuse, Sartre, Bloch – were grandmasters of the criticism of capitalism; this applied even more so to other political icons such as Rosa Luxemburg, Che Guevara and Salvador Allende. In contrast, contemporary liberal theorists, such as Popper and Hayek, were, at best, outsiders. Without realising it, by rejecting liberal democracy and espousing anti-capitalism, the left-wing radicals of 1968 found themselves in an unholy tradition of resisting the modern values of the West.

The protest movement of 1968 was never a uniform phenomenon and its fall-out took different forms: hippies and spiritualists; Maoist groups and orthodox leftists; citizens' action groups; feminist projects; third-world groups; pacifists and militants. A part of the movement drifted into the conspiratorial, make-believe world of the armed struggle and left a trail of blood in its wake. Its members persuaded themselves that a new form of fascism threatened and therefore the means justified the end. It is no coincidence that the most virulent forms of the 'armed struggle' were in two post-fascist states. Neither Germany nor Italy had any tradition of a civil, political culture; a militant left in both states was generally suspicious of political institutions and saw itself as the continuation of 'anti-fascist resistance'. Furthermore, it viewed violence as a legitimate means to prevent the return of fascist dictatorship.

There was no 'Chinese Wall' between the red terror and other radical leftists of the time. Even so, it would be absurd to conclude that the '68 movement began a process that eventually led to left-wing terrorism. 1968 was indeed a decisive moment for millions of young people. While some opted for revolutionary cells and communist cadres, others set up anti-authoritarian children's day care, special schools, alternative publications, free theatres, human rights groups, women's shelters and citizens' action groups. Others became involved in alternative medicine or embarked on the long march through parties and parliaments.

If, after all the mistakes and confusion, the legacy of 1968 is a heightened political awareness that, with sustained commitment, society can improve from within and that in an interdependent political world we must insist on self determination and democratic participation, then it was no mean feat!

1968 – Again! Reference year for an age. The events in Brazil

by MARCELO RIDENTI*

***Marcelo Ridenti** was born in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1959. After graduating with a degree in social sciences ('82) and law ('83) from the University of São Paulo, he then received his Ph.D. in sociology there in 1989. He has been Professor of Sociology at the University of Campinas (Unicamp) since 1998, executive secretary of the Associação Nacional de Pós-graduação e Pesquisa em Ciências Sociais (ANPOCS, Brazilian Association of Research in Social Sciences) since 2005, and researcher at the Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq, Brazilian Council of Scientific and Technological Development) since 1992. He had previously served as director of the Edgard Leuenroth Archive (Unicamp, 2004). In 2000 he spent three months in Paris as a researcher at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*.
His research interests lie in intellectual activism as well as left-wing political parties and movements in Brazil. His many publications include *Em busca do povo brasileiro: artistas da revolução* (Record, 2000), *O fantasma da revolução brasileira* (Ed. UNESP, 1993), *História do Marxismo no Brasil*, vols. 5 and 6 (Ed. Unicamp, 2007, with Daniel Aarão Reis), *Intellectuels et politique, Brésil-Europe* (L'Harmattan, 2003, with Elide Rugai Bastos and Denis Rolland) and *L'intellectuel, l'État et la Nation – Brésil-Amérique Latine – Europe* (L'Harmattan, 2006, with Elide Rugai Bastos and Denis Rolland).

Some noteworthy events – such as the May street demonstrations in France, the Tet offensive which changed the direction of the Vietnam War, the Prague spring and the police battles against students in Mexico, Japan, Brazil and other countries – made 1968 a mythical and magical year, a symbol of the rebellion around the world in the 1960s. While one cannot deny the symbolic impact of these events, one must also question the substance of certain dates, as if they were significant in themselves. Undoubtedly, they represent important historical events, which, nevertheless, are not bound to precise chronological limits within a certain year or decade. Thus, to speak of '1848', '1968', 'the 1920s', 'the 1970s' and so on, functions more as an analytic tool for explanatory purposes than as an expression of historical accuracy.

Perhaps it is more appropriate to deal with time periods in which certain views of the world and ways to act upon it gained unexpected momentum and not be tied to precise dates. Thus, analysing 1968 means trying to understand the time period (which ran roughly from the end of the 1950s to the middle of the 1970s) in which the events of the year occurred and what the year symbolized. In a world context, it is plausible to think that this era can be dated for 'didactic-explanatory' purposes from the time of the denunciation of the Stalin crimes at the 20th Soviet Communist Party Congress in 1956 to the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. In Latin America, it would be the time period beginning with the victorious Cuban revolution in 1959 and ending with the coup that overthrew the Allende government in Chile in 1973.

In Brazil, it can be dated from the rebellious years at the end of the Kubitschek[1] government (symbolized by the inauguration of Brasilia as the new federal capital in 1960, representing the rapid modernization of the country), to the issuance of Institutional Act No.5 (AI-5) in December 1968. This Act put an end to the flourishing political and cultural environment and made it clear that a military and civil dictatorship was in power, which would have no mercy on its enemies. An alternative would be to 'stretch' the period to 1974, the year in which the 'Araguaia guerilla' ended and in which the legalized opposition party, Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (MDB), was victorious in the parliamentary elections.
These two possible ends to a time period in Brazil indicate that the dates are only symbolic and propositions for explanatory analysis purposes. So that it would also be correct to cite historical events, different from those mentioned, as establishing the boundaries with the preceding and subsequent time periods.

1 Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira (September 12, 1902 – August 22, 1976), President of Brazil from 1956 to 1961

Perhaps it is appropriate to speak of grey zones in the boundaries of time periods, in which certain individual and collective ideas and positions became the reference for social actions, but they were not the only ones, nor were they dominant, since other ways of seeing, thinking, feeling and acting, which sometimes occurred with significant force, did not disappear from the scene.

Although it is difficult to avoid grey zones in the boundaries of time periods, one can say that everywhere there was a period which was marked by strong rebellious and revolutionary visions of the world, in which there was a generalized feeling that profound social changes were at hand and that the world was moving towards them – views linked generally to the 1960s and especially to the year 1968. It was a time when politics became more valued and in particular, intellectuals and artists were seen as agents for change, politicising beauty and beautifying politics: art and life, public and private, merged and people believed strongly in the creative and revolutionary potential of actions to change all aspects of life and the world, envisaging the possibility of attaining modern alternatives to both North American capitalism and the Soviet socialist model.

Throughout the world, the 1968 era was characterized by certain material conditions, such as the increase and spread of the middle classes, growing urbanization, the consolidation of cultures and urban life styles, greater access to higher education, the significant presence of youth in the population, the difficulty of the established powers – including the Soviets – to represent societies which were changing and renewing themselves. It was also the beginning of the democratisation of technological advances, which established what subsequently was called the consumer society. In themselves, however, these conditions do not explain the spread of rebellious and revolutionary movements across the whole planet: the student demonstrations in France, Brazil and Mexico; the protests everywhere against the Vietnam War, particularly in the United States; the Prague spring; the cultural revolution in China; the alternative of *hippies* and counter-culture; and the emergence of so called minorities' issues manifest in the feminist, black and gay movements. Nor do they explain the outburst all across the world of actions by armed groups, inspired by revolutions, either underway or recently victorious, for national liberty, such as the 1959 Cuban revolution and the independence of Algeria in 1962. However, the material conditions did create an environment conducive to producing a variety of transforming cultural and political actions.

In Latin America, societies underwent structural changes, with rapid modernization and urbanization. With respect to Brazilian society in particular, the state coup in 1964 signified the end of the social and political democratisation process, which had been backed by a significant popular movement, demanding structural reforms and which was also supported by artists and intellectuals committed to generating awareness in a people who should be the protagonist of a revolution.

Brazilian society underwent one of the more rapid urbanization processes in world history. The country was predominantly rural until the 1950s and became substantially urban in the 1970s. Such an accelerated transformation generated social, political, economic and cultural problems, but at the same time opened the door for a wave of extraordinary creativity in all those areas.

The events of 1968 in Brazil

The demonstrations in Brazil in 1968 were in tune with what occurred in the world at the time, but were distinguished by being part of the struggle against the military and civil dictatorship, which had interrupted the democratic process in 1964. The regime was confronted with a political and social struggle on three fronts: the student movement, the worker movement and the cultural agitation on the part of artists and intellectuals.

The worker movement – which had been out of action since the state coup in 1964 – was resurrected in 1968. First, there was a strike in Contagem, an industrial city near Belo Horizonte, in the month of April: leftist union factions led a movement that forced the federal government to make concessions to the workers.

The more moderate union factions made up the Movimento Intersindical Anti-arrocho (MIA)[2], which soon became extinct. The governor of São Paulo, Abreu Sodré, was invited by the MIA to a rally on Praça de Sé, on 1 May 1968. He attended the event, perhaps hoping to win some popular support for his plan to become a candidate for President of the Republic, to

2 Inter-union movement against worker oppression. (Translator)

be nominated by the regime, after a realignment of its internal powers. He and the union leaders present, considered untrustworthy (the so called 'pelegos'), had to take refuge in the cathedral, after being driven from the stage by groups of workers from Osasco and the ABC region[3], students and militants of the new left. After burning the stage, the insurgents marched through the streets, with shouts of 'only an armed fight will bring down the dictatorship'. In fact, some of those present already belonged to, or would end up joining organizations which intended to take up arms and confront the dictatorship, conducting one or more armed actions in 1968, precursory to the escalating urban guerrilla activity in subsequent years.

In July 1968, workers conducted a legendary strike in Osasco, a city in greater São Paulo. At the time, Osasco was considered the 'Mecca of the leftists', as result of the belligerency of the Metalworkers Union there – which contrasted with the generally weak worker movements in most of the country. The government took hard action against the strike, having decided not to make concessions as they had in Contagem. The more militant union leaders went underground: and those among them, who had not yet established links with leftist organizations, did so. The president of the Union, Jose Ibrahim, as well as the main leaders of the movement, worked during the day and studied at night. They were student-workers, influenced by the model of the Cuban revolution. The coming together of workers and students in Osasco and other cities was not only because some young workers were also students, but also because university students were politically active supporting the workers and even took jobs in the factories to become workers. While the worker movement was significant, there is no doubt that, in terms of numbers and national presence, the student movement was greater.

The student movement adopted its own dynamic, before the famous May events in France. 1968 began with student demonstrations, particularly in Rio de Janeiro. The students demanded free public education for everyone, reforms that would democratise higher education and improve its quality, with students playing a bigger role in decision-making and more funds for research – directed to solving the economic and social problems of Brazil. The students also opposed the dictatorship and the curtailment of democratic liberties. Most of the university students studied in public colleges, free of fees, but the access to higher education was restricted, since demand for university places exceeded supply.

Body of sixteen-year-old Edson Luis de Lima Souto, killed during a confrontation between students and the police 28 March 1968

The student rebellion had been taking shape since 1966, but only became fully developed in 1968. By that time there were students known as the 'excedentes', i.e. the students, who had obtained sufficient grades in the entry examinations, but had not enrolled in university because of a lack of available places. At the beginning of the year, they mobilized themselves to press for more places. At the same time, the frequenters of Calabouço, a student restaurant in Rio de Janeiro, whose clientele was mostly poor high school students, demanded the broadening of and improvement in education in general. These demands were linked to the overall struggle against educational policy and the dictatorship itself.

3 Industrial region in Greater Sao Paulo. The name originally refers to the cities of Santo André, São Bernardo do Campo, and São Caetano do Sul. (Editor)

The *One-Hundred-Thousand March* on 26 June 1968 (Reason for circles in the original picture are unknown)

The police stormed the Calabouço restaurant on 28 March 1968, the first big street conflict of that year. Some students were injured and one high school student, Edson Luis de Lima Souto, was killed. His body was taken to the State Legislative Assembly. Thousands of people attended his funeral in Rio de Janeiro. Protest marches spread across the rest of the country. In Goiânia, repressive police action killed another student.

There were new public demonstrations in April and May 1968, but in general the students, seeking to rebuild their forces, withdrew into the universities. The student movement went back to the streets in June, the month in which activity reached its peak all across the country. There were marches and strikes and occupations of universities. The students exploited differences among the leaders of the government, who could not decide whether to soften or harden the regime. The main scene was in Rio de Janeiro, where the students won popular support for their demonstrations: more than one hundred people were arrested after six hours of confrontation in the streets on June 19; the scene was repeated on June 21, but the situation was worse, with four dead, dozens injured and hundreds arrested during 'Bloody Friday'. The first of a series of school occupations across the country took place on June 22 at the traditional Law School in São Paulo, soon followed by the occupation of the Philosophy School. Protests, demonstrations, occupations and marches also took place in Belo Horizonte, Curitiba, Brasília, Salvador, Recife, Fortaleza, Porto Alegre, João Pessoa, Florianópolis, Natal, Belém, Vitória, São Luis and at other university centres.

On 26 June 1968, the celebrated *March of the Hundred Thousand* took place: students, intellectuals, religious leaders, artists and ordinary people took to the streets of Rio de Janeiro to protest against the dictatorship and the police actions against the demonstrations. Pressured by public opinion, the government took no action against the march. A broadly representative committee was nominated to start a dialogue with the government, but this was not successful. The student movement had reached an impasse: the authorities were not making any concessions and were intensifying repressive action.

In the meantime, a series of attacks was conducted by an extreme right wing paramilitary organization,

4 Organization whose goal was to hunt down communists. (Translator)

the Commando de Caça aos Communistas (CCC)[4], made up of students and police. On the other hand, some leftist organizations also took action, such as exploding a bomb in the Headquarters of the Second Army in São Paulo on June 26, killing a corporal.

On 3 August 1968, the principal student leader in Rio de Janeiro, Vladimir Palmeira, was arrested. On August 29, the police stormed the University of Brasília. As a result of the repressive actions, the number of marches and participants diminished. On October 3, in São Paulo, right wing students and paramilitaries, who had been sheltered in the Mackenzie University, attacked the Philosophy School and murdered a student. In the days following, further marches and clashes with police took place.

On 15 October 1968, the National Union of Students´ Congress (UNE) in Ibiúna, in the interior of São Paulo, was disbanded, even before it got underway. All those present were arrested, including around 700 university students and the most influential leaders, such as José Dirceu. Thus, the 1968 student movement in Brazil was defeated. Some of its members ended up pursuing political, clandestine militancy against the dictatorship, as members of left wing organizations.

The radical opposition to the established order was also spread throughout society, in the cinema, the theatre, popular music, literature and in the fine arts. In the 1960s, especially in 1968, diverse cultural demonstrations spoke out in prose and verse of the coming 'Brazilian revolution', which would be based on the action of the popular masses and in whose struggle the intellectuals of the left would be an organic part.

In 1968, the artists who opposed the government could be roughly divided into two camps: the avant-garde and the nationalists. The latter sought to use a language, genuinely Brazilian, in the struggle to establish a 'popular national' identity, which, taken to the extreme, would be considered socialist. Meanwhile the avant-garde camp – led by the movement of Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil called 'Tropicalismo' – criticized the 'popular national' concept and strove to be in tune with the avant-garde of Europe and North America, particularly with the counter-culture movement, incorporating it creatively into Brazilian culture. Despite the differences and rivalries between them, the artists involved in the two movements suffered persecutions, censorship of their work and even imprisonment and exile.

However, there was a new and decisive counterpoint to the post 1964 involvement: the development of the culture industry and with it, the emergence of a market segment prone to 'consume' cultural products, which opposed the dictatorship. This was demonstrated, for example, by the huge success of the statement songs in the televised popular music festivals. They were signs of change in the configuration of Brazilian society: the dictatorship promoted a certain authoritarian modernization, which contributed, in the medium term, to a change in the revolutionary inclinations manifest in the work of artists and intellectuals.

On 13 December 1968, the military-civil regime said 'that's enough' to its opponents: it issued Institutional Act No.5 (AI-5), known as 'the coup within the coup'. The Act authorised state terrorism, which lasted until the mid 1970s. The National Congress and the State Legislative Assemblies were placed in temporary recess and the government assumed full power to suspend the political rights of citizens, legislate by decree, try political crimes in military tribunals, revoke the mandates of elected officials, dismiss or retire judges and other public employees etc. At the same time, the imprisonment of opponents, the use of torture and murder, all became commonplace in the name of maintaining national security, considered essential for the development of the economy, which was later described as the 'Brazilian miracle'.

Innumerable students, intellectuals, workers, politicians and other opponents of all kinds, had their mandates revoked, were arrested, tortured, killed or forced into exile, after AI-5. Strict censorship was imposed on the communication media, as well as on the works of artists. The dictatorship sought to put an end to the political and cultural agitation of the time.

Final considerations

In 2007, during the presidential campaign in France, the victorious candidate, Sarkozy, stated that it was necessary, once and for all, to dispense with the legacy of 1968. In Brazil, just as 2008 was about to begin, the journalist Elio Gaspari – author of a series of books which revealed the secrets of the military dictatorship – addressed the tone of certain reviews, which he described as 'the 1968 nostalgia session' and which he predicted would occur this year, 40 years since 1968. (*in Folha de São Paulo,* 26 December 2007, page A9). He criticized the 'sanctification' of 1968, since it ignored

Strike in Minas Gerais (1968) - Metalworkers Union

the fact that the young people then adhered to a cult of mass violence. In his opinion, the really important year was 1989, representing the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe.

A young person reading Gaspari's article could well imagine that the rebels and revolutionaries of 1968 were linked to Soviet powers. But look, 1968 was precisely the expression of non-conformity with the world of the Cold War, criticizing what Guy Debord called, at that time, the 'Society of the Spectacle'. There was both 'the concentrated spectacular' of the 'bureaucratic capitalism' of the countries that had inherited Stalinism and the 'diffuse spectacular' of the abundance of contemporary capitalism that had emerged victorious and still remains sovereign today.

The various struggles of 1968 were very much differentiated: from the pacifism of the hippies to the revolutionary activity of the Maoists and 'Guevaristas', from the Prague spring against true socialism to the insurgencies against capitalism around the world. But they all had one thing in common: a certain dissatisfaction with the established order.

The experience of history will no doubt come to reveal the limits and illusions of the struggles in 1968, but nevertheless the year has left a legacy tending to eternalise the spirit of the era: non-conformity, which contrasts with our time, where conformity to the world order of the winners of the Cold War prevails.

Statements such as those of Sarkozy and Gaspari express a certain desire to reject alternatives to social, political, economic and cultural organization in other than capitalist moulds. They express resistance to the forces stemming from the struggles in 1968, which had generated from different perspectives the slogan 'another world is possible.' A world in which the fundamental values are not those of profit, but rather of living in harmony and the complete fulfilment of human beings, in their relations with themselves and with nature. Concerning this last point, the struggle to preserve the environment is particularly relevant, since it tends to clash with the logic of capital and is thus a legitimate corollary to the non-conformity which 1968 symbolizes, as a precursor to, among others, the Anti-Psychiatry movement, feminism, the gay movement, that of ethnic minorities and the new struggles for democratic socialism.

Poland in 1968: „The freedom we needed so badly was so obvious elsewhere“

by TERESA BOGUCKA *

*__Teresa Bogucka__ was born on 5 April 1945 in Zakopane, Poland. She attended the Holy Family School in Warsaw. After completing her schooling she studied sociology at the University of Warsaw from 1963–68, but eventually earned a degree from Lodz University in 1977. From 1969–1990 Teresa Bogucka worked in the editorial department of the biographical encyclopedia of Polish theatre at the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IS PAN). She has also worked together with the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR, *Komitet Obrony Robotników*) and had been a clerk in the editorial department of the Polish underground journal *Zapis* ('Notes'). Since 1989 she has been working for the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* as an editor. From 1977, in exile, she has had works published in *Aneks, Zapis* and *Tygodnik Mazowsze*. From 1989 she published proceedings in the periodicals *Gazeta Wyborcza, Tygodnik Powszechny, Dialog, Znak* and *Polityka*. Furthermore, Teresa Bogucka is the author of the books entitled *Polak po komunizmie* ('The Pole after Communism'), released in 1997, and *Cienie w ogrodzie*, released in 2000. Two years later her novel *Tryumfujące profanum* was published. She has received the Ksawery Pruszyński award from International PEN, the Marian Dąbrowski award from the Krakow Culture Foundation and the Jan Górski and Stefan Kisielewski prizes. Teresa Bogucka took part in the student protests at the University of Warsaw in 1968.

During the trial of the students, who had organised the 'March events' of 1968, one of the lawyers argued that his clients were simply inexperienced and unreasonable. 'It was such a strange year, 1968, young people almost everywhere in the world began to rebel. We do not know the reason – spots on the Sun perhaps?' For a communist era barrister these were extenuating circumstances. The system could forgive those misled by the class enemy or by solar eruptions. Following one's own conscience, however, could not be forgiven!

But for us, the participants of that surge of action, comparisons with May events in France and other rebellions seemed far-fetched. The Polish explosion was a result of a process, which had commenced about 1964 and were possessed its own internal logic. The only foreign impulse had been a Czech student demonstration – unsuppressed, which lead us to believe that the system had weakened. We thought it was an opportunity worth seizing.

On most counts we were different to our counterparts in the West. The freedom we needed so badly was so obvious there. Indeed, so obvious, that to our dismay our western peers wanted a revolution, the outcome of which we already knew. They threw the dreams of Che Guevara and achievements of Cuba, China, even the Soviet Union in the face of their democratic establishment, while we could not even dream of breaking free of the guardianship of our 'big brother'. All we wanted was for the Soviet Union to change and better respect those norms and rights so natural in the West.

To put it in a nutshell, our emotional approach to the Western rebellions resembled that of people hungry for freedom watching those who had the rights we yearned for using them to fight for a revolution that would take them away!

On the other hand, we did have a few things in common. For us, left-wing simplicity was not a revelation but something we had absorbed by osmosis. School, the mass media, all created a deep conviction that history was on a logical course towards universal happiness; how close we were to this ultimate goal depended on the form of ownership of the means of production; that the working class was the depositary of progress and correct judgement and that personal satisfaction and human decency depended on the political system. Youth likes to believe that bettering the world is simple – all it requires is one big effort, one change and society will run in a new, better direction. We believed that something had gone wrong both in Poland and the entire socialist camp. We were surrounded by poverty, fear, depression, stupefying propaganda, suspicion and mutual distrust. We wanted Poland to change: less fear, a bit more freedom, a few more opportunities and prospects. Shameful as it was – we wanted the communist party

Warsaw, March 1968

to come to its senses and start fulfilling the system's promises!

In such enforced silence, every independent voice was heard loud and clear undermining the authority of the party. The Polish United Workers' Party legitimised its domination on the grounds that its rule was so obviously right and 99% of society supported it. The only people against it were enemies financed by the vindictive West. Anybody questioning party rule was an enemy of the authorities but it came as a surprise to the people that they did not have to conform in silence.

In this situation, the strategy of Warsaw University students was to point out the wrong and, at the same time, to argue that our concern was to improve socialism – we were not the enemies, we did not want capitalism. Some of us actually did think like this but for others (Catholics, centrists, liberals) it was a front. 'Socialism – yes! Distortion – no!', 'Socialism with a human face' – these were the slogans calling for more freedom in our part of Europe.

In the Poland of the 1960s, the ferment began among intellectuals and students as a reaction to the removal of the 'dose of freedom' that had been won in 1956. 'Revisionists' appeared, who wanted to analyse Marxism anew, check where the Communists had gone wrong and fix their mistakes. In 1964, Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski produced five typewritten copies of a revisionist manifesto, for which they were arrested. Their arrest only served to underline the importance of their text – it became a subject of analyses, discussion and argument. When the authors left prison in 1967, their friends had already rejected the theses of their manifesto, unwilling to trust the mechanisms of history and the instincts of the working class. They were turning towards a different way of thinking: individual freedom, human rights, the uniqueness of historical experience, the national question, the role of religion and the Church.

Opposition to the system focused on the question of freedom of speech. Students met to discuss forbidden things. The authorities called us paratroopers – as we conducted sabotage behind the lines – and reacted with repression when we protested against university expulsions, fines and arrests. In January 1968, a Polish national drama *Dziady* by Adam Mickiewicz was taken off the stage. A riotous protest took place during the last performance, followed by a march to Mickiewicz's statue. Selected students were arrested or expelled. On March 8, we called a rally in their defence and from that moment on history took over. The 'paratroopers' were arrested, but a wave of protest and rebellion swept through all major academic centres in the country.

In the course of their investigations, the militia tried in vain to find links with other cities, emissaries or enemy networks. The scale of the rebellion terrified the authorities and we were also surprised. Surprised and reassured – our protests had proved to be more than the mere whim of a handful of Warsaw students. Across Poland, young people were feeling the same suffocating atmosphere of universal fear and hopelessness. Beatings and arrests at Warsaw University broke the barrier of submissiveness and helplessness. Obviously, the proclamations of the student movement contained the routine incantations about socialism free of distortions, but at the same time, the demands went against the very core of the socialist system. The students demanded respect for the constitution: they wanted fixed rules, whatever they might be, to replace the arbitrary wishes of party secretaries; freedom of speech – they demanded limitations to censorship; independent trade unions – perhaps the workers would wake up, they were the ones the Communists really did fear! For the communist authorities, the March rebellion was not as dangerous as workers' riots, which would require use of violence and undermine the ideological legitimisation of absolute communist power. However, on a certain level the rebellion of the young was more of a predicament, since its intellectual examination of the legitimacy of the state had exposed its shortcomings. One day, it would come to light that the Communist Party was a usurper

Demonstration in factory with banners against the student protests, i.e. "Anti-Semitism - No! Anti-Zionism - Yes!", March 1968

acting to the detriment of society. At the time, communist power was based mainly on lies, universal control and a terror that paralysed the people.

The authorities decided to combat the unrest using psychological terror. A large anti-intellectual campaign commenced, joined within days by an anti-Semitic one. The government argued that it was intellectuals i.e. Jews, who had used the money of workers and peasants to educate themselves and gain high status – in the party, at universities, in hospitals, in film industry, theatre etc. These people now had to account for their deeds and all institutions and the state had to be cleansed of this 'hostile and parasitic element'. Jews were also given passports.[1]

The student rebellion was suppressed within a month, as was the intellectual ferment when a wave of cleansing swept through all institutions in the form of rallies and mass meetings. Middle level officials, as well as all sorts of frustrated people were free to get rid of 'inconvenient' men and women and those whose jobs were needed.

In May, when Paris rebelled, the Polish propaganda campaign died down and the Red Guards were restrained. Trials and the remaining acts of cleansing were conducted under party control. From the authorities' point of view the result was unclear. They had stamped down on the youth protest, suppressed the intelligentsia and won zealous support from middle level officials, whose opportunities for promotion had been blocked for several years. The party allowed them to take over accommodation and jobs formerly occupied by those people of Jewish origin, who had left Poland. It used anti-Semitism to cement the apparatus and as a tool for dividing the country. After being initially overflowed by the eruption of anti-Semitism, the Communist Party also awoke other demons: hatred for the elites was permanently ingrained in the post-peasant society, especially in the masses who had advanced from rural backgrounds to the state apparatus; the civil service; the army; the police; and those party structures where the real power lay. All they lacked was the social prestige possessed by their

1 In fact, the issuance of passports to Jewish citizens was equivalent to expulsion. Between 1968 and 1970 about 20.000 Polish Jews received 'one-way passports'. In practice this meant that they were driven out of the country, they lost their Polish citizenship and their properties were expropriated. (Editor)

Militia on the streets of Warsaw, 1968

predecessors in pre-war independent Poland. Anti-Semitism remained an attribute of the Communist Party right to the end – protests against communism never referred to these anti-Semitic sentiments.

For the opposition, March 1968 appeared disastrous. The centres of intellectual life had been destroyed. Fear and silence prevailed once again. The former 'paratroopers' had been cordoned off to make sure they never spread their influence again. Inside the cordon, however, these confirmed opponents of the system were free and their sense of freedom attracted others. Within a short time, the circles of dissidents, opposition writers and Catholic activists had joined ranks. In the mid-1970s, these people renewed open protests: after the outbreak of workers' riots, they created the Workers' Defence Committee (Komitet Obrony Robotników – KOR); they supported the strikes of 1980, helped 'Solidarity' and joined the underground movement during the period of martial law; they constituted the core of 'Solidarity's' political representation at the Round Table and the first non-communist governments; they created the party responsible for transforming the entire political system.

This party, the Freedom Union (Unia Wolności – UW), straddling the political centre between social sensitivity and liberalism, was hated equally by the right-wing populist nationalists and the poorest social groups, who had lost security of employment and the protection of the state. Recently, poor electoral showings have pushed the party off the political scene. It is a sign that times have become normal and that we now understand what motivated our western counterparts in 1968.

From today's perspective, the differences between the riots east and west of the iron curtain, which used to seem as sharp as the differences between our countries, have faded away.

We were the first generation to be born after the war. We entered a world constructed by parents, who had survived war and poverty and built a peaceful order for us that reflected their dream of peace, quiet and some kind of prosperity. But our dreams were different. We wanted personal freedom, freedom from state brutality and from the watchful eye of society.

Today, I believe, we all know that a single surge of effort is not enough to change the course of history towards a better future. The reality is different. A plethora of forces and self-interests continuously clash and values are never safe. They must be guarded, sustained and protected.

Streets of Warsaw, 1968

1968: Czechoslovakia

by OLDŘICH TŮMA*

***Oldřich Tůma** (born 1950) studied history at the Philosophy Faculty, Charles University in Prague. For political reasons he was expelled from the university in the 1970s, served two years in the military and worked for several years in different jobs unrelated to his academic specialization. After finishing his degree by correspondence course, he devoted himself to Byzantine studies, was a staff member of the magazine *Byzantinslavica* and published in foreign journals and magazines. Since 1989 he has worked at the Institute of Classical Studies at the Academy of Sciences and is a co-author of *The History of Byzantium* and *The Byzantine Society.* Since 1992 he has worked at the Institute of Contemporary History, where he has been Director since 1998. He has published numerous articles in Czech and in international magazines, among them extensive works on the anti-regime demonstrations of the 1960s and 1970s (i.e. August 69).

In considering the causes of the Prague Spring, i.e., the causes of the great 1968 crisis in the Czechoslovak communist system, it is not enough to merely analyse the causes of the reforms that the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ) leadership tried to realize at the time. If we want to understand the dynamic and meaning of the events of 1968, we must actually begin by understanding that the development of events that spring and summer was determined not only by reformists in the KSČ leadership, but also by other forces in society. The social forces that set the stage for the reform efforts, opening the way for them and giving them energy, were not identical in terms of aims, political programmes, or orientations.

The majority of society went much further in its desire for freedom and democracy than the party reform programme did and the social movement's efforts were basically incompatible with any communist programme, even a reformed one. However, when we say this movement was systemically incompatible with communism, it does not mean KSČ members were not involved. Some movement members also had a rather strong influence in some party organs (e.g., at municipal committee level in Prague and Brno), primarily among communist artists and intellectuals. The majority of efforts, of course, were realized outside the Communist Party and this movement or social force had neither a leadership nor a clearly formulated programme. Rather, various groups (for example journalists or artists) supplied these elements, while students gradually became more influential over time as the group with the clearest political profile. Various political programmes and visions were considered without engagement and there were no serious, responsible political preparations. Nevertheless, considerations of democracy, pluralism, civil society, basic civil rights, state and national sovereignty, were all a very strong component of the social discourse. Moreover, the aim was not merely to consider these ideas, but to gradually realize them: The existence of what was termed 'total' freedom of speech; the emancipation of several social organizations (youth organizations, cultural organizations, some of the unions, etc.) from Communist Party control; the creation and activity of openly politically-oriented groups (the former political prisoners' organization K231, the Club of Engaged Non Party Members, an attempt at renewing social democracy); and the existence of a critical public opinion. This all created a *de facto* pluralistic environment, i.e., something the KSČ reform programme leadership had not counted on at all and which it could not prevent.

The reform movement inside the KSČ was not a firmly fixed entity. It was in constant motion, full of internal discord, nuances, accents and a broad palette of areas for reform. The mainstream of this reform movement was by no means pushing for a fundamental change to the political and economic system. Its aim was a renaissance, the engineering of development, efficiency and definitely a certain humanization of the existing regime as well. To a greater or lesser extent it is safe to say that

"Wake up Lenin, Brezhnev has gone crazy!" Prague, 1968

this applied both to those who represented this main reform movement – Alexander Dubček[1] and the people around him – and to the majority of the KSČ at the time. If we are to resort to a single term for simplicity's sake, the reformists in the party leadership were not interested in democratising the system, but in liberalizing it. The programme was not at all aimed at renewing state or national sovereignty and it did not question the place and position of Czechoslovakia inside the Soviet bloc. All foreign policy questions were consciously set aside in the naïve belief that simple loyalty in international political affairs would create a safe space for domestic reforms. This was, of course, a cardinal error. The military intervention by the Warsaw Pact occurred on 21 August 1968 and, to a certain extent, clarified the complicated domestic situation for a short time.

Concern over the KSČ reform programme was definitely not the reason for this intervention. The reason was that the Soviet leadership did not believe that Dubček's leadership was either able or willing to bring the gradually decomposing system back under control. Czechoslovak society – or that part of it labelled in Moscow, as counter-revolutionary and anti-socialist – paradoxically did not lose in the first days after 21 August 1968. On the contrary, the intervention and the resistance to it marked an enormous mobilization, providing society with the ethical and emotional basis for a powerful awakening of civic self-awareness and responsibility. Moreover, on August 21 the threat of external attack, which until then had had such a strong, self-restricting influence on domestic political developments, fell by the wayside. Now that foreign troops were already here, 'yes' could really mean 'yes' and 'no' could mean 'no'. In a strange way, for the Czechoslovak public that first week after the invasion was inter alia an intense experience of total freedom. Now the social force that had been hinted at before August exerted itself in full.

It is essential that we attempt to identify the causes of both of these reform movements that were being promoted in Czechoslovakia in 1968: An attempt at a rather wide-ranging reform of the system on the one hand and, on the other, a spontaneous, little-organized attempt at a much more fundamental transformation of relationships, which could not be overlooked. Of course, both movements somewhat blended together and complemented one another in this specific situation, i.e., the situation created by growing pressure and the external threat.

The reform of various spheres of Czech social life had already been thoroughly prepared – not in 1968, but during the first half of the 1960s. A large circle of people advocated reforms at various levels of the party apparatus, the state administration, the economy and academia. With a bit of simplification, we can state that these were the same people who, after 1945 (when most of them were in their youth), had supported and prepared the communist takeover of power and the establishment of the communist system out of conviction – and sometimes out of fanaticism. Later, in the 1950s, under the influence of various circumstances, many of them began to reflect critically on the reality that had been created after 1948, which had little in common with their original idealistic imaginings. However, critical debate inside the party was halted in 1956 and was not renewed until the start of the 1960s. In the interim, many of those with critical opinions had reached rather significant positions. The reasons for their disillusionment were various: Weak economic performance, illegalities that had come to light, suppression of free artistic expression, etc. Primarily, however, it was awareness of the already 'fatal' backwardness of Czechoslovakia in comparison with the countries to the west, countries with which Czechoslovakia had been on a same or similar level after 1945. This concerned not only the tangible backwardness of the economy, but also Czechoslovak technology, culture and its civilization in general. When the strict isolation in which the country had found itself during the 1950s was finally broken, this backwardness became immediately

1 Alexander Dubček (27 November 1921 – 7 November 1992), first secretary of the Central Committee of the KSČ (1968-1969).

apparent. The preparation and application of essential reforms to reverse this development seemed to be the solution (albeit one coming at the eleventh hour). Such reforms were thoroughly prepared: In cooperation with party, state and academic institutions, teams were created to prepare reforms in various spheres. These teams received rather generous support, finances, possibilities to study abroad, etc.

The programme of reforms, therefore, had been worked out and adopted a relatively long time prior to the arrival of Alexander Dubček at the head of the party. In 1965, a thoroughly developed reform of the economic system was begun, which was to combine state ownership and limited planning with market economy principles. The political reform programme was much more conservative, counting as it did on the creation of a kind of limited political plurality over the course of several decades. General acceptance that reforms were essential was one thing, but it was another to implement them thoroughly and both the KSČ leadership and an important part of the party and state apparatus approached this with distrust and repugnance. In 1967 rival camps were created within the KSČ leadership, split on the one hand between devotees of continuing and deepening the reforms and on the other hand those, who were afraid to go farther and preferred some kind of halfway resolution. By the decisive moment at the end of that year, the forces within the Central Committee were also divided according to other points of view: Some joined the anti-Novotný[2] camp for various personal reasons, while the 'Slovak question' played an important role as well.

The logic of some of the steps taken by the new party leadership after January 1968, therefore, was determined by tactical considerations of the need to eliminate Novotný's influence rather than by a well-considered reform programme. The newly awakening civil society and critical public opinion began to formulate demands that went far beyond the reform programme. Moreover, even though for the time being the reforms had been partially thought through in the academy, they were far from having been elaborated into a concise political programme. Dubček and other reform-oriented members of the KSČ leadership were truly popular with the public, authentically popular in a way that no other previous Czechoslovak communists had ever been. Of course, the public wanted

Demonstration against the occupation, Prague, August 1968

and expected much more than what the KSČ reform leaders were offering and had there not been external pressure and threats to push the reformers and society together into a single camp, a conflict would have eventually occurred over the further direction of political developments in the country.

The essentially negative attitude of the public to the communist system, even though it undefined and did not have a political profile, understandably had its roots in the situation prior to the spring of 1968. The reasons were similar to those that had inspired the calculations of the reform communists: The malfunction of the communist system, economic problems and falling behind the West. Paradoxically, the weight of this latter factor had been increased precisely because of certain liberalization measures instituted during the Novotný era. In the mid-1960s, regulations on travelling to the West were relaxed and tens of thousands of Czechs and Slovaks, who were able to look beyond the Iron Curtain for the first time literally experienced culture shock during their brief trips to Austria or the Federal Republic of Germany: The department stores or highways they saw there had nothing in common with what they knew from their own reality at home. Understandably, the reception and admiration of Western culture played an important role, primarily among the younger generation. When the classic film *High Noon* was screened in Czechoslovak cinemas in 1962 (the first real western the younger generation was able to see for itself) it was a real turning point, a symptom of the end of cultural isolation. A little later, the music of the Beatles, sometimes broadcast on Czechoslovak radio (not as often as young listeners wanted), played the same role. It is fascinating how,

2 Antonín Novotný (10 December 1904 – 28 January 1975), President of Czechoslovakia 1957-1968.

Vinohradská street in Prague, 21 August 1968

despite intensive indoctrination, total isolation and widespread repression, the elements of continuity with the West markedly came through again during the 1960s, mostly in culture at first and later even in politics. It is quite startling that the attempt to model a 'new, socialist man' ended in total failure, as it was an experiment for which the regime had been equipped with all the necessary instruments. It is notable that the whole of the younger generation in the 1960s, in terms of the values it recognized (or aimed at) and the models it followed, found itself somewhere completely different to where the communists had intended.

In the end, both of these movements, the party reform movement and the society-wide movement, united briefly in resistance to the military intervention. After August 21, the KSČ truly became (with a few exceptions) a significant part of the nationwide resistance. Of course, this situation did not last long and after the signing of the Moscow protocol, which was only one step towards total capitulation (as further developments soon demonstrated), a Communist Party composed of orthodox communists, pragmatists and primarily opportunists and careerists once again clashed with society. Supported by the presence of foreign troops it renewed its control over society and succeeded in consolidating the regime over the next two decades. The protagonists of reform (if they did not try to save themselves by quickly joining the other side) only realized in retrospect that reform of the communist system was not possible and that their experiment with reform and the tactical approaches through which they had wanted to draw support from society while simultaneously losing control over it, had truly opened up the road to much more fundamental transformations. Some grasped this immediately after August 21, some later as part of the dissident movement, whether in exile or even in prison during Husák's[3] 'normalisation' regime. Some did not arrive at this bitter realisation until after November 1989.

3 Gustáv Husák (10 January 1913 – 18 November 1991), President of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (1975-1989). (Translator)

The defeat which society suffered at the time in its (partially unconscious) conflict with the domestic communist regime and in its very conscious conflict with the entire Soviet bloc lasted a long time, but it was not permanent. Viewed from a long-term perspective, the year 1968 occupies an important position in the failure and collapse of the communist regime.

This fact and the meaning of 1968 are perhaps best demonstrated by the specific reflections that a 20-year-old student, today a famous Czech historian, noted in his diary at the time. On 21 August 1969, he participated in the turbulent demonstrations in Brno on the first anniversary of the military intervention and in the evening he noted down his experiences. He describes everything that happened: What streets the demonstrators operated in; where they set up the barricades; how the police, soldiers and People's Militia[4] attacked them. At one point he describes something that happened during a kind of lull in the conflict, when the crowd was on one side of the square and the 'forces of order' on the other. He noticed his friends and contemporaries among the demonstrators and he says to himself (in 1969!): 'Everybody is here – both we who are 20 years old and those on the other side with the nightsticks and machine guns – and even if it goes particularly badly, this regime cannot last longer than 20 years.'

That is perhaps the most important point about 1968. The painful experience of the events of 1968 and 1969 significantly aided the emancipation of the younger generation in Czechoslovakia from communism. Even though the regime was relatively stable again in terms of power, it no longer had its roots in a society capable of truly revitalizing it. When eventually the international constellation passed away that had decided to crush the Czechoslovak experiment with freedom in 1968, the regime collapsed like a house of cards.

In many respects, 1968 in Czechoslovakia was similar to what was happening in the West. In the streets, young people were dressed in the same blue jeans and green army jackets, wearing the same long hair, listening to and singing the same songs, recognizing similar values and distancing themselves from the lifestyle and values of their parents' generation in similar ways. Politically, of course, the Czechoslovak revolt had little in common with the revolt in the West. In Czechoslovakia, the idea of the need to return to the tried-and-true values of the First Republic[5] (perhaps by augmenting some elements of socialism – of course, an unspoiled socialism) was always somewhere in the background and after the August intervention, national pride and the fight for national and state sovereignty emerged. Despite all their sympathy for the cultural and lifestyle preferences and values they shared with their western counterparts, young Czechs and Slovaks viewed the ideals and inclinations of western youth towards left-wing political concepts to be expressions of total naiveté. They looked at their western counterparts with a mixture of irony and a receptive understanding, an understanding based in their own experience with the reality of a communist regime and their reflections on the previous enthusiasm of their parents' generation.

Of course, at first glance the difference between events in Czechoslovakia and the West was not so obvious. External similarities and also a significant internal kinship dominated (in the emphasis on human freedom and individuality). It is possible that these circumstances explain why 1968 in Czechoslovakia struck such a chord with the media and the public in the West.

There was something there with which to identify. It was possible to compare events in Czechoslovakia with events at home and to feel an immediate sympathy. Right at the end of August 1968, for example, the American media compared the unrest that had accompanied the Democratic Party convention in Chicago with events in the streets of occupied Prague. It did not really matter so much that the political contexts were completely different (and not always correctly understood). Rather, it was important that images of young people facing violence on the streets of Czechoslovak cities in August were so similar to the images coming from Berlin, Chicago and Paris. Later, analyses of how the western media reported on Czechoslovakia in 1968 and 1989 showed that in 1968 the reporting really was done with much less socio-cultural distance than it was 20 years later.

4 The People's Militia were workers' militia units created by the Czechoslovak Communist Party. They were established on 23 February 1948 as part of the communist putsch.

5 The interwar period in Czechoslovakia is referred to as the First Republic. (Editor)

1968 in Moscow – A Beginning

by ALEXANDER DANIEL*

***Alexander Yuliyevich Daniel** was born in Moscow in 1951. He attended the State Pedagogical Institute and has worked as a teacher and computer programmer.
In the 1970s and 1980s he worked for a number of underground magazines (samizdat), such as *Chronicle of Current Events,* and was an editorial member of *Pamyat* (Memory), a historical anthology.
Since 1989 Daniel has been a member of the board of directors of the human rights organisation *Memorial'*. He is responsible for *Memorial's* publications and also serves as programme director of *History of Dissidents in the U.S.S.R.*
He also served as an advisor on the Human Rights Committee for the President of the Soviet Union from 1990–93.
Daniel has published numerous articles in both Russian and international magazines on the history of the human rights movement in Russia as well as on other human rights issues.

The remarkable simultaneity of the emergence of protest movements in Western and Eastern Europe – in fact, in America too – is unmistakably intriguing. By the same token, the differences in the structure and general aims of those movements are worthy of investigation: the democratic reforms in Czechoslovakia initiated by the January palace coup in the Central Committee in Prague, the nationalist/patriotic demonstrations of young students in Polish cities in March triggered by the première of a new production of Mickiewicz's classic play *Dziady* (Forefathers) and the May 'festival of disobedience' on the streets of Paris staged by student groups of left-wing, Trotskyist, Maoist, and heaven knows what other ideologies. What element is common to all of them? Another question, which I consider the most important one while writing these lines, is whether there is a place for 'Moscow 1968' in this collection of European capitals and American campuses that were all caught up in the sudden determination of young people to demonstrate their disapproval of the establishment and their rejection of conventional norms of behaviour and value systems.

In Moscow, 1968 began with yet another big political court case known as the 'Trial of the Four'. Before the court stood on trial the 32-year-old samizdat editor Alexander Ginzburg, who had compiled just a year earlier a documentary book entitled *Delo Sinyavskogo i Danielya* (The Sinyavsky-Daniel Trial). This book, which came to be known as The White Book, recounted an earlier political trial (1966) of two writers from Moscow who received long prison terms for having secretly published their prose in the West -as it happened, the *White Book* was also being published outside the Soviet Union. Also on trial were Yuri Galanskov, Aleksei Dobrovolsky and Vera Lashkova, all friends of Ginzburg who had been involved in compiling The White Book and in other samizdat activities. The investigation went on for almost a year, and before the trial began, the liberal-minded Soviet intelligentsia had already received a strong impression that the trial would represent yet another step towards the country's 're-Stalinisation'. (Discussion of whether this assessment adequately describes the actual intentions of the Soviet leadership under Brezhnev would exceed the scope of this article.) Some three years earlier, such a prospect would have driven the majority of the 'audience' into silent panic and caused individuals to retreat back into their protective shells. In early 1968, though, many intellectuals in Moscow and other large Soviet cities felt both the inclination and the strength to offer resistance to such a development. This mindset was, no doubt, fostered to a large extent by the news coming out of Czechoslovakia, where the political rhetoric of the new leadership of the party and the country sounded more and more like the protesting rhetoric of the liberal-minded in Moscow with each passing day. This analogy raised hopes – after all, one of the triggers of the process leading to the downfall of Antonín Novotný and Alexander Dubček's rise to power had been the protests of writers and students in 1967.

In the case of the Soviet intellectuals, neither their sympathy for the 'socialism with a human face' heralded in Prague nor their antipathy for Brezhnev's 'developed socialism' implied any significant ideological prefer-

ences. Among those following the events in Czechoslovakia with eager attention were few convinced adherents of the communist idea (whereas they were, as it seemed, in the Czechoslovak Central Committee), and there weren't many convinced anti-communists either. In the ranks of the 'opposition-minded' intelligentsia, the whole range of the ideological spectrum was represented, from anarchists to monarchists. Naturally, there were some communists, and socialists as well, and people of generally leftist thinking, but by no means did they outnumber the Western-style liberals or the nationalists/*pochvenniks*[1]. However the liberals, and the *pochvenniks*, did not predominate either – many, if not the majority of the intellectuals had no ideological preferences at all. They felt inclined to take an indifferent or even a distrustful view of any ideology. They weren't interested at all in the first part of the Prague slogan 'socialism', but rather only in the 'human face'.

Thus, society (not the entire society, of course, but the part that did care) awaited news from Prague with bated breath. They also looked for news from Kalanchevskaya Street in Moscow, where the 'Trial of the Four' was being held at the Moscow City Court.

A sinister picture emerged from the sketchy news leaking out of the courtroom: it appeared that the trial's organisers had abandoned any pretence of genuine judicial procedure and were steering the trial towards a guilty verdict, not flinching from manipulation or falsification. The trial was conducted in this way, and initiated in the first place, in order to demonstrate the regime's determination to put an end to the open expression of dissent in the U.S.S.R. Spectators were not allowed into the courtroom – even though the trial had officially been declared public, and supporters of the accused stood for days on the street in front of the Moscow City Court as a kind of counter-demonstration. But that did not seem to be enough: one felt the urge to protest in some non-trivial way, to do something beyond sending the fruitless, somewhat boring petitions addressed to the regime.

On January 11, the third day of the trial, foreign radio stations broadcasting in the Soviet Union interrupted their programmes to read "an important document just in from Moscow." The document was the *Obrashchenie k mirovoi obshchestvennosti* (Petition to the World Public) by Larisa Bogoraz and Pavel Litvinov; both authors were already well-known for their protest activities. Bogoraz and Litvinov listed in great detail all the violations of law and justice that they knew were being committed in the rooms of the Moscow City Court. They also reminded their readers of the catastrophic consequences that the population's indifference had had for the country during Stalin's reign of terror. They concluded their petition with a call for the mobilisation of the Soviet and world public in order to fight for the reintroduction of justice.

It does not really matter, though, exactly which historical analogies were used to support that petition or what it was calling for. What was unprecedented and stunning for their compatriots, as well as for all insightful outside observers, was not to be found in the content of the text, but in how it was addressed and to whom: as a direct appeal to world public opinion (i.e. to both the outside world and Soviet institutions!). Today it is difficult to understand, to picture what kind of revolution this represented in the minds of the recipients. Until then, protests – even those intended for publication abroad – had always been formally addressed to Soviet state or party institutions, to the Central Committee of the CPSU, to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, the Supreme Court, the Attorney General's Office, etc., or in the worst case, to *Pravda* or *Izvestiya*. Addressing petitions in this way represented a kind of umbilical cord, connecting the petitioners to 'their' Soviet regime, as if to say, "Well, we don't like certain reversions to Stalinism that we have been seeing in our lives; we consider trials, like those against Brodsky or Sinyavsky and Daniel to be political mistakes, damaging to the political reputation of the Soviet Union, but we are loyal Soviet citizens, and we are expressing our discontent not to just anyone, but to competent Soviet institutions." The Bogoraz/Litvinov petition retained the legalist approach of earlier petitions with respect to its content, protesting the violation of Soviet legal principles Nevertheless, it struck its readers as unbelievably rebellious: Soviet citizens caught up in a dispute with their regime had addressed their appeal for support directly to the outside world for the first time!

1 The term originally referred to a member of a 19th-century group of writers known as pochvennichestvo, the 'native soil' movement; later in the Soviet Union it referred to writers of the 'village prose' school.

From left to right: Ivan Yakhimovich, Larisa Bogoraz and Pavel Litvinov, summer 1968

Moreover, this represented a strike against one of the standard elements of Soviet psychology, one which had been cultivated over many decades: the concept of 'hostile encirclement', the complex of the 'besieged fortress'. To appeal to world public opinion, to the 'enemies' – i.e. airing dirty laundry in public – was equivalent to treason, to betrayal of the homeland.

It is remarkable, how unresistingly these concepts had collapsed in the minds of the Soviet intelligentsia within a few hours of the announcement of the 'Petition to the World Public'. There was not so much as a shadow of condemnation for the two who had committed 'sacrilege' in liberal circles; on the contrary, there was nothing but excitement about their impudence, even from those who would not have risked following their example. Obviously, the bogeyman of 'hostile encirclement' had lost its potency in the 15 years since the death of its creator, remaining in the psyche of the informed public only through a kind of inertia. At any rate, on January 11, the Iron Curtain definitely revealed a new, substantial breach – though, admittedly, it had not crumbled into a heap of rust.

The regime suffered a clear defeat in the 'Trial of the Four', despite the long prison sentences issued to the two main accused, Ginzburg and Galanskov (the latter would never regain his freedom – he died in 1972 in a camp hospital after an unsuccessful abdominal operation). The 'epistolary revolution' had entered a new stage.

In the second phase of the petition campaign, the open letters went beyond merely protesting certain specific cases of unlawful treatment and entered the realm of criticising the system. Discussion turned to the suppression of civic freedom, the persecution of dissidents and the slide towards re-Stalinisation of the regime under Brezhnev. This movement towards re-Stalinisation deserves particular attention. Today's cultural historians are surprised to conclude that the first two to three years of Brezhnev's rule, which are associated in the public consciousness with an attempt to steer the country back to Stalin, were actually very liberal and productive years for the literature, the arts, cinematography, theatre and science. To say the least, those years saw distinctly more freedoms than had the final two to three years of the rule of that petty tyrant Khrushchev[2], the persecutor of abstract art, jazz and genetic science. This discrepancy between the real state of affairs and the public's perception is fairly easy to explain: the public's assessments were simply not based on the actual state of affairs but reflected the expectations within the society, which had been growing higher since 1956; in other words, expectations to which the Soviet leadership could not and did not want to respond, and would not have been able to satisfy. 'Neo-Stalinism' in the country was measured not by its real level, but by the growing discrepancy between the society's expectations and reality.

Andrei Sakharov's work *Razmyshleniya o progresse, mirnom sosushchestvovanii i intellektualnoi svobode* (Reflections on Progress, Peaceful Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom) became a manifesto for those expectations, one more shaped like a minimal programme of necessary reforms than a criticism of the system. Twenty years would pass before a new generation of Soviet leaders grew to recognise the wisdom of launching such a project to modernise the country. Reading that essay by the Soviet Union's greatest physicist, who would later become the best-known and most influential member of the human rights movement in the Soviet Union, you will be more than impressed today by the almost word-for-word correlation between the main points of his *Razmyshleniya* and those of Gorbachev's reform programme. Moreover, Sakharov's essay would also provide a conceptual basis for the emerging civic movement by linking the concept of human rights, which was quite present in the public awareness, with the global challenges of the time. Sakharov's *Razmyshleniya* lent new meaning to work on behalf of human rights by transferring

2 Nikita Khrushchev (17 April 1894 – 11 September 1971), First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) from 1953 – 1964 (Editor)

From left to right: Elena Bonner (wife of Andrei Sacharov), Larisa Bogoraz and Alexander Dubček at a ceremony to extend the freedom of the city of Prague to those who demonstrated 25 August 1968 in Moscow, 21 August 1990

it out of the realm of the merely empirical into that of ideology. Sakharov recognised the key feature of the civic movement of the 1960s: its significance as society's reaction to the postponement of modernisation, which had failed to take place in the post-war period, and was then undertaken only in a half-hearted and unbalanced way under Khrushchev.

Once this essay had appeared, the concept of human rights was no longer merely an aide for moral orientation; it had taken on a new character (not only for Russia, but for the whole world), that of political philosophy. *Razmyshleniya* appeared in April of that year, 1968, undoubtedly influenced by the events unfolding in the country and abroad.

Finally, another event occurred, almost simultaneously, one that completed the consolidation of aprotest milieu: the first issue of the *Khronika tekushchikh sobytii* (Chronicle of Current Events), a typewritten bulletin written by human rights advocates and the first and only samizdat newspaper. The date the first *Khronika* came out, 30 April 1968, can be seen as the day the human rights movement in the U.S.S.R. completed its development. Over a period of 15 years (1968–82), the *Khronika* was the undisputed backbone of the movement.

The term 'backbone' applies to the *Khronika* in several respects. First, with the launch of the *Khronika*, the dissidents' world took on a temporal dimension. Until then, the public consciousness had been unable to reflect upon the preceding period in categories of historical time, because resistance against imminent evil that was motivated by existential fear does not recognise categories of that kind. Many of those who were inclined to describe that evil in political terms – by identifying it, for example, with the Soviet regime, Communism, Stalinism, etc. – understood their resistance as a moral, or even aesthetic issue, one that precluded a historical perspective. If that were so, what kind of 'chronicle' could there have been? And what kind of 'events'?

What influenced what? Did the name of the bulletin alter the world view of the human rights defenders, or on the contrary, did the name chosen for the bulletin reflect a change in their world view that had already occurred? It is hard to find an answer to that question today[3]. Regardless, the *Khronika* provided a temporal axis, along which the future events in the world of Soviet dissent could be plotted. It also conferred an additional significance to every individual act of resistance, that of being a moment in the *history of the dissidents;* it forged the image – probably a mistaken one – of the human rights *movement*.

Along with the acquisition of a temporal perspective, the human rights movement owed its first progress in building an internal structure to the *Khronika*. Vladimir Lenin was right once again when he pointed out that an underground paper – admittedly, he was referring to a different one – was"… not only a collective agitator and a collective propagandist, but also a collective organiser". The bulletin, usually with an initial 'circulation run' of 10 to 12 copies (also known as *nulevaya zakladka* [roughly, 'zero generation manuscript']), spread throughout the country in hundreds of typewritten copies. The traditional samizdat mechanism functioned effectively: the number of issues in circulation increased through the process of distribution. At the same time – and this feature was seen for the

3 As a conjecture, I can point out that the authors of the bulletin allegedly first picked the first line of the front page – 'The year of human rights in the Soviet Union' – as the name of the bulletin. The words 'Chronicle of Current Events', which were also on the front page and obviously borrowed from one section of the BBC's Russian service, were intended to characterise the genre of the bulletin. The readers' perception, though, was different: the new publication was never referred to anything else other than the Khronika ('Chronicle') and its first line was read as a kind of motto. It is interesting to note that after 1968, declared the Year of Human Rights by the U.N., the editor who had begun, like everyone else, to call the bulletin 'Chronicle of Current Events' put a new motto on the front page, beginning with the 6th issue, one saturated in timeless pathos: "The year of human rights in the Soviet Union continues!" This motto continued to be used throughout 1969. In the 12th issue, dated 28 January 1970, it was changed to "The movement for the protection of human rights in the Soviet Union continues!"

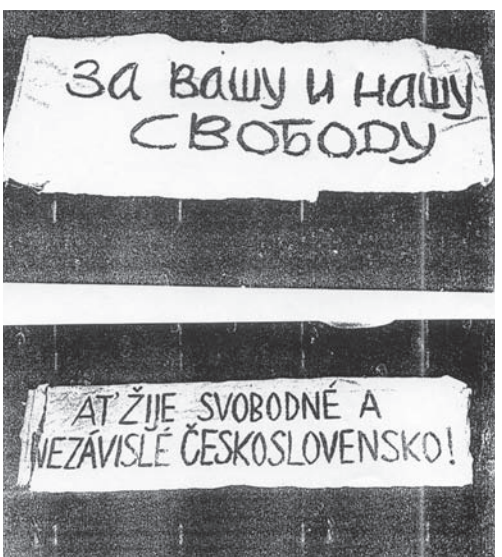
first time with that publication – the many lines used to distribute each new issue began to work in the opposite direction as well, functioning as channels for gathering and conveying back information for future issues. This system of reader feedback specific to the *Khronika* and as far as we know, unique within the Soviet samizdat was laconically described in the *Khronika* itself in its 5th issue, dated 31 December 1968:

... [A]nyone who is interested in ensuring that the Soviet public is informed about events occurring in the country may easily submit information to the *Khronika*. Give your information to the person from whom you received the *Khronika*. That person will pass it on to the person he received the *Khronika* from, and so on.

The system of multiple, branching lines that had built up around the *Khronika*, based on personal relationships at first, appears to have been the proto-structure of the dissident community. It was of extreme importance that this system, which was initially restricted to certain large cities (Moscow, Tbilisi, Novosibirsk, Riga, Tallinn, Vilnius, Nizhny Novgorod [formerly Gorky], Odessa), quickly spread to encompass all of the large cities in the Soviet Union. Every new place named on the bulletin's pages meant a new permanent correspondent, or at least a temporary one.

How many potential protesters were there in the Soviet Union by 1968? What were the resources that a protest movement to come would have at its disposal?

According to data collected by Andrei Amalrik, a total of 738 persons signed the various petitions in support of Ginzburg, Galanskov, Dobrovolsky and Lashkova. Of course, that figure takes into account only those protests that were publicly known. Amalrik conducted a sociological analysis of the composition of the signers: 45 per cent were scientists, 22 per cent people engaged in the arts and 13 per cent engineers or technicians. In view of the country's enormous size, 738 people was a mere handful. However a significant fraction of that small group, which had begun to perceive itself as a community, came from the intellectual elite. One should not be misled by the fact that at the beginning of the campaign the protesters expressed themselves in highly loyal terms – in the form of petitions addressed to party and government bodies. Most of those who had appended their signatures to open letters in support of the four 'heretics' were well-aware that they were committing a disloyal act, impermissible for a Soviet citizen. The repressions that started in the spring of 1968 – people being fired, expelled from the party, etc. – proved that the regime also considered such acts to be disloyal. It didn't have another choice as the breeze of the Prague Spring was stirring in people's minds, and if the Kremlin had let the signers go unpunished – or, heaven help them, made concessions to their demands – it would have faced not hundreds, but thousands or tens of thousands of protesters in the next campaign, possibly even on the streets and squares instead of just on paper. In fact, the Moscow 'epistolary revolution' of 1968, which, by the way, also affected a number of other cities, constituted an open quarrel between the regime and the liberal-minded intelligentsia. The latter was now fully conscious of what it had earlier only suspected: for one, they, the intelligentsia, disapproved of the political regime in the country, and for another, that regime was, in ideological terms, alien and even hostile to the intelligentsia. Moreover, that hostility was not elicited by one ideological position or another adopted by certain intellectuals; the regime evinced an allergic reaction to all independent types, including Marxist-Leninist, of thinking. This was now understood by those who protested as well as by those who considered protest futile or too dangerous. In any case, it became clear that the protests were eliciting a significant response in society, even though they would bring no practical results, and that the protesters, despite their relatively



Demonstration banners, 25 August 1968, Moscow. Top one reads "For your and our freedom," the other, in Czech, "Long live a free and independent Czechoslovakia!"

small numbers, could expect sympathy and the direct or indirect support of social groups of the population that played an important role in the country's life.

How can one describe the conceptual basis of the opposition in 1968? To reduce it to two phrases, the political concept can be described as 'anti-Stalinism' in a broad sense, and the world view was one based on the concept of human rights, freshly rediscovered by the Soviet intelligentsia in the years 1965–67. As a result, a few years later the protest movement that emerged in 1968 came to be called the human rights movement. As to the infrastructure of the emerging movement, the samizdat had successfully taken over that function.

God is not alone in knowing precisely what resources were available for protest: to put it bluntly, when it came to exerting real influence on politics, there were next to none. But as limited as they were, those resources had one very important characteristic: They were renewable. After the initial wave of repressions had swept over the signers, the choice became simpler. Either you refrained completely from any kind of civic activity, or you joined the ranks of the 'heretics' (the term 'dissident' was not in use yet) and faced all the sad consequences for your career and biography that this choice entailed. Naturally, the majority – not without some moral suffering – chose the first option, but quite a large minority decided to retain a position of resistance. In the years following, the repressions drove those who were most prominent and most active out of the dissident community. More were washed away by the wave of (partly forced) emigration of 1970–72. But nonetheless, right through to the beginning of the 1980s, the circles of dissident activity were constantly replenished by a permanent influx of new volunteers, new enthusiasts.

This did not become obvious until autumn, after the first wave of protests and repressions had passed its peak.

The finale of 'Moscow 1968', the fateful night of August 20–21 that put an end to the Prague Spring, produced a tremendous psychological fissure in the souls of several generations of the Soviet intelligentsia. Many years later a group of young people conducted a kind of sociological survey on the subject "What does August 21 mean to you?". They received a wide variety of responses, but there was nonetheless one feature common to all: all of respondents were able to remember precisely where and how they spent every minute and hour of that day. This rare phenomenon of collective individual memory occurs only at the turning point of an era. In Russia people remember only three other 20th-century dates in this way: 22 June 1941 (the beginning of the war); 9 May 1945 (Victory Day) and 5 March 1953 (Stalin's death). It is interesting that the public did not perceive the much bloodier suppression of the revolution in Budapest in November 1956 with that level of tragic intensity. That event was not perceived as the end of an era. This fact testifies to the remarkable evolution undergone by the civic mentality between 1956 and 1968.

The most dramatic reaction to the events was a demonstration conducted by eight citizens (including the two authors of the *Petition to the World Public*) at noon on August 25 on Moscow's Red Square. That desperate act, which was motivated by personal moral considerations that were essentially not political at all, became both the ultimate expression and the conclusion of the entire period of consolidation of the protest movement in the U.S.S.R. It set a pattern for dissident activity that remained in place for years to come and at the same time, put the final stroke on the era of the rise of civic protest. From this moment on it was clear: civic protest as a mass phenomenon did not exist. The numerically small, but highly determined community that continued to exist after August 1968 as the sober remains of the 'epistolary revolution', which was soon to be called the human rights movement, was founded on the idea of civic protest as an existentialist act, one not burdened with any political connotations. This situation continued into the mid-1970s. The human rights movement in those years remained a subject of cultural rather than political history.

The story of the human rights movement does not end in August 1968, but a discussion of its further evolution, the history of its institutions, society's response to it, etc. is beyond the scope of this article.

From left to right: Vaclav Havel, Alexander Dubček und Larisa Bogoraz, 21 August 1990

1968 – An East German perspective

by WOLFGANG TEMPLIN*

*__Wolfgang Templin__ was born in Jena, (former) East Germany, in 1948. He initially received training as a printer (1965–66), which he never completed, and later as a librarian (1966–68). From 1968–70 Templin studied at the *Fachschule für Bibliothekswesen* (College of Librarianship) in Berlin, and in 1970 he began his studies in philosophy at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Templin graduated in 1974 and began working on his dissertation but was later prevented from obtaining his Ph.D. Templin became a member of the SED (East German communist party) and worked as a civilian informant for the Ministry of State Security (1971–1975). He later terminated these activities through deliberate disclosure.
He was active in an illegal Trotskyist student association and made initial contacts to Polish dissidents during an academic stay at Warsaw University in 1976–77. Starting in 1977 he worked as an academic assistant at the Central Institute of Philosophy of the GDR Academy of Sciences. When he resigned from the SED in 1983, Templin was dismissed from employment and disbarred. He then worked as a cleaner, woodworker and heater. Since the end of the 1970s he has been active in various peace and human rights groups. In 1985 he co-founded the Initiative for Peace and Human Rights (IFM) and was co-editor of the samizdat magazine *grenzfall*. In January 1988 he was arrested and deported due to his participation in the protests at the Liebknecht-Luxemburg demonstration in Berlin. He eventually returned to Berlin in November 1989. In 1990 Templin became member of the Alliance 90/The Greens (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*) faction in the *Volkskammer* and was active on the founding council of the Alliance 90 party from 1991–1992 as a full-time member. He participated in the Programme Preparation Group of the Berlin branch of Alliance 90 for the merger with the Green Party/Alternative List but eventually left the Green Party soon after due to disagreements regarding the association treaty. Templin has been working as a freelance journalist and contributor to projects on adult political education since 1997. He is a contributor to the Central and Eastern Europe Initiative (MOE) and the travel-study programme of the Federal Agency for Civic Education.

Looking back at 1968 from today's perspective, a collage of places and events unfolds in our minds. In March, it is Warsaw's turn. Forty years ago Warsaw was the epicentre of the student protests. Paris and Prague followed in the spring and summer, along with a large number of other large cities that were swept up in the revolutionary mood of change that was the hallmark of the era. Ralf Fücks and many other writers see 1968 as a global event, a political and cultural turning of the tide.

But despite everything that points to that year's profound consequences for the cultural codes in both East and West, we should not forget the huge gap that existed between the two, as well as the very different backgrounds of the various events.

Warsaw and Prague – and in terms of how the occurrences were seen in East Berlin, Moscow and other cities in the Eastern bloc – essentially represented the inevitable failure of an aspiration to release the reform potential of the communist system from within and to achieve the utopian ideal of creating a 'socialist system with a human face'. The attempt to democratise a system whose power was based on the negation of democracy ended with tanks rolling into Prague and the successive capitulation of the reformers. In contrast to Western democracies, whose deficiencies and anachronisms were on the whole successfully attacked by the generation of 1968, the Eastern regimes demonstrated their total inability to reform. Those who insisted on opposing these regimes were neither able to march before their respective institutions, nor hope that a new generation of reformers would emerge. After the reformers had failed and their illusions had been destroyed, the challenge that presented itself was one of bringing about a peaceful, yet radical change of system. The peaceful and liberating revolutions of 1989 provided the answer to the problem twenty years down the road. Even though the aspirations and impulses that propelled the events of 1968 and 1989 can be compared on many levels, there is no direct path that connects the two years. For the Eastern bloc, the twenty years that lay between 1968 and 1989 were a time of debilitating depression, but were also the formative phase of a new democratic opposition.

Soldiers returning from deployment in Prague are welcomed in Halle/Saale, 28 October 1968

The lessons of Warsaw and Prague

The event that triggered the legendary student protests of March 1968 in Warsaw was the banning of the play *Dziady* by the Polish national poet Adam Mickiewicz, which was being performed in the National Theatre. The banned production, which had drawn standing ovations from its audiences, presented the struggles of the 19th century and the suffering of the Polish revolutionaries under Russian occupation as a barely masked allegory of the situation in contemporary Poland. Twelve years after the great thaw of 1956, the hard-won freedoms had been continuously reduced while the short-lived moments of social and cultural liberalisation had failed to trigger a genuine process of reform. Polish intellectuals like Leszek Kolakowski who tried to interpret Marxism as a 'philosophy of freedom' were condemned and persecuted as revisionists by the ruling cadres. Warsaw University was seen as a hotbed of revisionism, and from the mid-1960s onwards many of its members were subject to Party disciplinary proceedings, demotion or other repressive measures. Against this background of tension and resistance, the conflict surrounding the banned play unleashed a wave of student protests demanding the reinstitution and readmission of disciplined teaching staff and students, together with political and economic reforms. In the PVAP (United Polish Worker's Party), the few voices advocating reforms were opposed by the party leader Wladyslaw Gomulka and an overwhelming majority of hardliners, who overrode the tensions in the party to assert their monopoly on power. The peaceful protests at Warsaw University in March were answered by the denunciation of the students as hooligans and anti-social elements, the use of the police – together with rowdies disguised as 'armed worker units' – to beat them into submission, and by mass arrests and further crackdowns. This wave of repression was accompanied by a disgustingly anti-Semitic hate campaign, labelled as 'anti-Zionism' that forced many thousands of Jewish intellectuals into exile. For Poland, 1968 marked the definitive end of all hopes of reform, a tough lesson for the opposition, which was to find its footing again many years later on a different basis from the critical Marxists and Revisionists of the 1960s.

In Czechoslovakia, which had been a paragon of Stalinist rule until the 1960s, murmurs of reform within the ruling party also became audible long before 1968. Demands for cultural liberalisation, such as those made

at the famous Kafka Conference of 1963, came hand in hand with economic reform concepts that envisioned a socialist market economy and hopes for a more democratic society. The Slovak Alexander Dubček, who succeeded the Stalinist hardliner Antonin Novotný as First Secretary of the Communist Party in January 1968, came to personify the Prague Spring – the decisive period of reform before the fateful month of August. The reform initiatives proceeding from the party leadership permeated all levels of society and unleashed a hugely dynamic movement that propelled the whole country into action. Associations, societies and clubs of non-party members mushroomed everywhere, and the call for independent trade unions became vociferous. The 2000-word manifesto edited by the writer Ludvik Vaculik presented a whole catalogue of demands for wholesale democratisation. The spark that had ignited in Prague threatened to set the entire Eastern bloc ablaze, and the tentative initiators of the reforms process began to lose control of the process. The Soviet leadership under Leonard Brezhnev made increasingly forceful interventions, supported by other Eastern-bloc hardliners like Walter Ulbricht. But even if they had been more circumspect, the Prague reformers would have been unsuccessful. When the Warsaw Pact troops marched into Prague on 21 August 1968, they put a final stop to all attempts to breathe the air of freedom in a system based on repression.

A country like the GDR (German Democratic Republic), a pioneer of the communist experiment as well as its most vulnerable and least protected outer edge, experienced the heady days of the Prague Spring and 1968 in a very particular way. There was no hint of reformist tendencies within the party, as Walter Ulbricht had successfully done away with any potential rivals and unified the ruling SED party in the 1950s. The bulk of the country's intellectuals had also been harnessed or bribed into submission. Those who had not left the country before the Berlin Wall was erected in 1961 either adjusted or went into a state of inner exile. But the events in Warsaw, the Prague Spring and 1968 in the West still had some effect here too, as the historian Stefan Wolle so impressively describes in his recently published book *Der Traum von der Revolte* (The Dream of Revolution) Wolle shows how a glimmer of hope arose in all sections of the GDR population, a hope which did not develop into a movement or active protests but retained the character of a daydream:

"Sympathy for the reform movement in Prague and the anti-authoritarian revolts in the West were not inspired by grandiose theories but the simple desire for a little breathing space. The window had finally opened slightly and a waft of freedom blew through the stale air of the walled-in state. On 21 August 1968 the window was slammed shut again. Many tears were shed that day."

The tears, anger and desperation were accompanied by individual acts of protest such as flyers, graffiti on walls and crowds in front of the Czech Embassy in East Berlin expressing solidarity with the Prague reformers.

With meticulous thoroughness, the GDR secret police documented the mostly individual, occasionally collective acts of protest, and there were preliminary proceedings against 1,300 individuals, arrests, demotions and professional bans. Whole lives were thrown off kilter in the process.

But if these protests in the GDR hardly became known and were quickly swept under the carpet, reactions to the events of 1968 in other Eastern bloc countries and the Soviet Union itself faded into even greater obscurity.

In its struggle for national identity and liberation from Russian rule, the Ukraine felt a special bond with the Czech and Slovak nations. In the 1920s many Ukrainian political exiles found a temporary home in Czechoslovakia under Tomáš G. Masaryk[1], to the extent that Prague was dubbed the second capital of the Ukraine.

Demonstration of solidarity with the Czech opposition, May 1968 in Berlin. The two men carrying the banner "Role model Czech Republic" were arrested shortly after this picture was taken.

1 Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (7 March 1850 – 14 September 1937), first president (1920 – 1935) and founder of Czechoslovakia. (Editor)

The news of the Soviet invasion was met with protests across the Ukraine, and centred on the Czech consulate in Kiev. A few months before the invasion, 139 Ukrainian intellectuals, white- and blue-collar workers and students had written an open letter to the Soviet leadership. The content of this letter and its range of signatories made it clear to Moscow that Kiev was also turning into a problem along with Prague and Warsaw. The Ukrainian cultural dissidents of the 1960s developed into a movement for national independence.

At the end of August 1968, after Alexander Dubček had been summoned to the Kremlin to be heaped with accusations, a handful of people gathered on Red Square and unfolded banners proclaiming 'Hands off Czechoslovakia – Shame on the Invaders'. Although they were dragged off and arrested just a few moments later, the people standing on this square at this moment represented the honour of an entire nation, of a different, democratic Russia. Defamed as 'dirty Jews' and 'enemies of the Soviet Union' by the KGB, the participants in this act of protest went on to form the core of the Russian civil rights movement of the 1970s and 1980s.

For the Eastern experience of 1968, the following years were ones of deep depression. In order to salvage some of the leeway for action they erroneously presumed to have, the reformers around Dubček capitulated in stages. They did not lead the country's non-violent protest movement that continued for a week after the invasion, but tried to create the impression that it would be possible to reach a compromise with Moscow. When, a year after the invasion, the students and citizens of Prague took to the streets again they were not met by Russian tanks but their own forces of law and order. Chanting 'Dubček, Dubček', the demonstrators were clubbed down by the police on orders from Dubček himself. The time that followed became known as the leaden years of Prague.

It was not 1950s-style terror that brought the civilian protest to its knees, but the new strategy of relentless persecution. When Erich Honecker succeeded Walter Ulbricht as party leader, the GDR experienced a new false spring. In Poland, Edward Gierek promised veritable wonders, while Hungary invented its own 'communist goulash', which promised peace and prosperity in return for submission.

New approaches

If we compare the manifestos and texts of a new wave of opposition that began to take form in the mid 1970s and were imbued with the hopes of 1968, we see a growing distance and a range of different approaches. Although many 1968 activists participated in the Polish Workers' Defense Committee (KOR), Charter 77[2] in Prague and the Hungarian democratic opposition, they had abandoned all hopes of reforming the system. Marxism and its promise of salvation had largely been exposed as an illusion. The opposition groups brought together disillusioned communists, social democrats, liberals and conservatives, who were united by their belief in human and civil rights and their solidarity with those being persecuted. Long before 1989 they had declared their identification with a free and democratic Europe. But in a climate of national oppression and a total lack of political and social freedom, the challenges they faced were great indeed.

They used the opportunities offered by the emerging CSCE[3] process, but refused to rely entirely on quiet diplomacy and the declarations of goodwill between the governments of the East and West. A policy of peace and de-escalation intended to exclude the dissidents from participation was seen by us as a destabilising factor and unworthy of its name.

In the GDR, the Marxist dream of transforming the cage of Real Socialism into an ideal socialist community retained its hold on the popular imagination for quite some time, as seen in the example of Wolf Biermann, Rudolf Bahro and Robert Havemann. But before long, this group also began to be influenced by Central European dissidents and their experiences. Vaclav Havel's 'attempt to live in truth' and the ethos of a common, international resistance that did not rely on new reformers or party factions, such as the Communist League, proved stronger than the old recipes.

The creation of the independent *Polish Solidarity* trade union, a mass movement with millions of supporters that started in the summer of 1980, marked the beginning of the end for the communist system. Neither the threat of a new invasion and occupation nor the national state of emergency declared in December 1981 could block or break the power of this movement

2 Human rights initiative in Czechoslovakia from 1977 to 1992 (Editor)

3 Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe which preceded the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (Editor)

"Occupiers – get out of the Czech-Republic!" "Free Dubček!"
17-year olds Frank Paul Bortlik and Bernd Franz protest against the military invasion of Prague. Bortlik was sentenced to 1 year and 4 months in prison. Franz received a ten month suspended sentence.

for long. Confronted by the developments in Poland, the system's lack of resources and the increasing superiority of the West, the ruling communists were forced into an increasingly defensive position.

Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* and *perestroika* was a last attempt to rescue a system faced with defeat. His greatest achievement was his refusal to use arms to stop the events of 1989, although he did resort to force when the survival of the Soviet empire was at stake in Armenia and Lithuania.

In the two decades that were to pass between the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and the eventual collapse of the Soviet empire, the Western generation of 1968 developed in very different ways. Some activists embarked on a long and peaceful march through the various institutions[4], seeing themselves as part of a successful civil force for change. Others still saw the total defeat of the system with militant or even terrorist means as their main task, and enthused about the superiority of the socialist system and found support in international terrorist organisations or the very worst communist dictatorships. But those who embraced the opportunities for democratic change in an open society and the possibilities of real emancipation were at some point able to look east and appreciate what the dissidents were working for and join forces with them. People like Rudi Dutschke, who had always moved intellectually between East and West, set about building the necessary bridges.

An analysis of 1989 and its consequences implore an analysis of the events that followed. Did the fall of the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall signify the collapse of the communist system and the definitive victory of capitalism and the Western democracies, or did it also in some ways herald a new beginning? Did the emancipatory mission of the Western generation of 1968 contribute to the great movements for freedom and independence of 1989, or were they entirely unrelated? The Central European countries that had shaken off their dictatorial regimes had to deal with total systemic change, social upheaval and a mass of nationalist and populist demands. In the Soviet Union, some nations managed to disentangle themselves from the rubble of the empire and find their way to independence and their own reform course, while others fell back into a post-Soviet state of petrification. Russia itself seemed to struggle for democracy for a while before returning to a neo-imperial, autocratic pattern of government.

Germany provided the opportunity to unite the Western experience of democracy and the achievements of 1968 with Eastern European and East German dissident demands for self-determination. The merging of Bündnis 90/East and the West German Green party, which was shaped by the spirit of 1968, came to exemplify more of the problems than the success of this kind of enterprise. It will not be a political party project but an ongoing difficult process of social integration that will unite our various experiences and energies. Those who take seriously the ideal of pan-European integration based on the values of democracy, human rights and social justice, and the rejection of their infringement or renewed national separatism, are bound to draw on the positive experiences of the generations that shaped the definitive years of 1968 and 1989.

4 The term to „march through the institutions" describes the strategy to change the system from within e.g. to get hold of key positions in politics etc. (Editor)

Germany 1968 – SDS, Urban Guerrillas and Visions of *Räterepublik*[1]

interview with KLAUS MESCHKAT*

*__Klaus Meschkat__ was ten years old at the end of World War II. He therefore belongs to the in-between generation, too young to be a 'Flakhelfer'[3] but older than most of the '68 generation. It was the early post-war years in the Soviet occupation zone that influenced his development. He attended secondary school in West Berlin and lived in the GDR (German Democratic Republic) on the outskirts of Berlin. From 1950 to 1954 he commuted daily between the two systems. He entered the Free University of Berlin (FU) in 1954 where he immediately became a member of the SDS (Socialist Student Organisation). His was involved early on with the SPD (Social Democratic Party) and he was an active member of the editorial staff of the SDS magazine *Standpunkt*. He held various student representative offices (chairman of the student's union at the FU, then chairman of the VDS [the overall representative body of the Federal German Students]) in Bonn. Meschkat was co-founder and first chairman of the *Republikanischer Club*, which has been the most important centre of extra parliamentary opposition in West Berlin since 1967. He was awarded his doctorate in 1965 after which he became an assistant lecturer at the FU. Between 1970 and 1972, and in 1974, he did research in Columbia. He was a guest professor at a number of universities, for instance at the New York University, in Medellin/Columbia in 1969/70, in Concepción/Chile in 1973 and in Cali/Columbia in 1985. Since 1975 Meschkat has been professor at the Institute for Sociology at the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz University in Hannover.

One theory in the debates surrounding the 40th anniversary of 1968 implies that '68 was an inter-generational conflict in which sons and daughters of the National Socialist generation distanced themselves from their parents. Or put another way: did 1968 offer Germany a way to come to terms with its past?

In political discussions people are quite happy to interpret this as a conflict between generations. There was certainly a conflict between young people and the National Socialist generation, who were often their parents. Some members of the SDS had Nazi parents; others came from anti-Fascist homes or claimed non-political backgrounds. If we only emphasis the generation conflict, other issues are automatically covered up. It is, in fact, nearly impossible to give 'generation' a global definition. If we only consider the nature of the generation conflict in Germany that will automatically exclude the international character of the events, about which we will speak later. Our relationship with our elders was in no way always contentious: we looked up to older comrades, particularly great teachers like Ernst Bloch or Herbert Marcuse, who was a father figure to me. We also admired anti-Fascist survivors such as Wolfgang Abendroth, Willy Huhn or Fritz Lamm.

Ultimately, you have to bear in mind that important and influential historical events, such as the end of the war, were perceived and experienced in totally different ways in each part of divided Germany. I myself grew up in the Soviet zone of occupation on the outskirts of Berlin, in Hohen Neuendorf, in what was later to become the GDR. We witnessed the removal of all the Nazi teachers: post May 1945 we came across our brown uniformed[4] class teacher, who had inflicted corporal punishment on us, working as a cemetery gardener. The break with National Socialism was more radical than in the Western zones of occupation. It is necessary to understand these political differences before subjecting National Socialism to a generation specific interpretation with psychological depth.

1 German term for 'republic of councils'. (Editor)

2 Klaus Meschkat was interviewed 26 February 2008 by Dr. Marianne Zepp, Head of department for Contemporary History and Democracy at the Heinrich Boell Foundation, Berlin.

3 Term commonly used for German school children deployed as child soldiers during World War II. (Editor)

4 i.e. he was a member of the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers Party). (Editor)

Photographer: W. Albrecht – © Landesarchiv Berlin

Berlin Wall, June 1965. Pavement and street are on East German territory - the houses are on West German territory.

What role did the conflict of the Cold War play?

For the emergent Federal Republic, Western integration and rearmament involved taking over and even resurrecting large parts of the previously existing state. Integration into a 'free' world that included fascist dictatorships such as Spain and Portugal put a very different complexion on debate about the Nazi period. Former senior officials in the Nazi economic ministry, indicted Nazi lawyers and high-ranking officers in Hitler's Wehrmacht were rehabilitated and given high-ranking positions in the new state. The Cold War, at least with regard to large parts of the administration, promoted the continuity of the Nazi regime. During the Adenauer regime, any analysis of the Nazi past was also an analysis of the present.

What caused the SDS to separate from the SPD?

Polemically one could say that the SPD separated itself from the SDS. The SDS wanted to cling to the old social democratic principles that prior to Godesberg included a Marxist programme, fundamental economic reorganisation and opposition to West Germany rearmament. However, those in the SPD leadership who favoured the Western alliance, NATO entry and rearmament gained the upper hand and were willing to sacrifice socialist aims in return for the chance to form a national government. This therefore made conflict with the critical student faction unavoidable. In addition there were also figures such as Herbert Wehner, whose ideas of party discipline came from his Stalinist past. These members of the SPD wanted to force the rebellious student union into line using the tried and tested methods. The idea that the SDS included small groups controlled from East Berlin was just a pretext – but those involved in the student magazine *konkret* with Klaus Rainer Röhl admitted this later themselves. At the time we had only suspected it. The majority of the SDS, to which I had also belonged as an editorial staff member of its national medium *Standpunkt* from 1955, was equally critical of the former GDR, the Soviet Union and the capitalist restoration in Western Germany. What is more, the party leadership knew it! What it actually meant can best be seen in the example of the *Ungesühnte Nazijustiz* exhibition; this exhibition was organised by SDS member Reinhard Strecker based on his research about Nazis in the West German judicial system. It went on display in November 1959 despite objections from the SPD-executive committee. Disclosures such as these contradicted the SPD's change of course that culminated in 1966 with the Grand Coalition that had former Nazi Kurt Georg Kiesinger as Federal Chancellor and anti-Fascist Willy Brandt as Vice Chancellor.

The discussions at the Göttingen conference in 1959, whose 50 year anniversary ought to be commemorated next year, were a last attempt to mend the break between SPD and SDS. The reconciliation did not last long. At the beginning of 1961, the party executive passed a resolution in which membership of the SPD was declared incompatible with membership of the SDS. It therefore founded its own student organisation, the SHB (Social Democratic Union of Colleges) but, after a few years, it also clashed with the party.

The SDS was able to maintain its position with the help of a sponsor organisation that included prominent professors such as Wolfgang Abendroth, Ossip Flechtheim and Heinz-Joachim Heydorn – however, the sponsors were then also excluded from the SPD.

What did the separation from the SPD represent for the SDS?

It was about politics but also about the party careers usually open to student political activists and it was these opportunities that some of the founders of the SHB definitely did not want to give up. In my case: as a former chairman of the VDS I was appointed to the youth policy committee by the SPD party leadership. From one day to the next I received no further invitations after acknowledging my support of the SDS. The separation from the SPD initially meant loss of political involvement in the usual sense, although many of us increased our commitment to union education work. At the same time SDS members devoted themselves to intensive theoretical work. This resulted in the *Hoch-*

schule in der Demokratie, the book that defined the theoretical debate about university reforms in the early 1960s. It was not until the middle of the 1960s that Rudi Dutschke and his friends brought a new activist element into the SDS, which initially irritated many of the older overly intellectual comrades. But the significance that the SDS had for the student movement can only be understood in the context of the history surrounding the successful break away from the SPD.

Rudi Dutschke was a central figure of the SDS as of the mid 1960s. He and others brought the movement out into the street. How would you describe these new elements? What influences played a part?

The SDS regarded themselves as a part of the New Left that had an international orientation. The English left led the way with their journal the *New Left Review* and campaigns against nuclear armaments. However, the influence that came from the United States was particularly important. Some activists such as Michael Vester had been to the United States and gained firsthand knowledge of the civil rights movement. Naturally the Vietnam War helped overcome thinking just in terms of the Cold War.

But the roots of SDS interest in international affairs go back earlier. The first unusual demonstration that I recall took place in July 1961. It was a protest against a meeting in the American Harnack-Haus in Dahlem to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the 1936 Franco putsch; two comrades posing (in appropriate clothing) as handymen managed to unfold the flag of the Spanish Republic for all to see. We wanted to shed light on the sort of company the Federal Republic and its protector power the United States were keeping and how the dictatorships of the Iberian Peninsula were supported by the Western alliance. In the 1960s there were many protest actions particularly against figures symbolising colonialism and neo-colonialism in Africa. The culmination was the protest against the visit of the Shah of Persia in mid-1967.

There was a controversy between you and Wolfgang Kraushaar[5] regarding attitudes to violence, associated with the term *Stadtguerilla* (Urban guerrilla). Kraushaar sees it as a clear commitment to violence. How do you see it?

In some rather polemical articles, Kraushaar has recently retreated from the views he used to hold. The serious objections he made in his analysis of Dutschke and Krahl's organisational study have since been softened to make them more appealing to public opinion. Kraushaar demonstrated that when Rudi Dutschke spoke of *Stadtguerilla* he did not advocate transferring Latin American methods of armed combat to the Federal Republic of Germany. Dutschke and all of us tried to ensure a more balanced and different approach to public information but this was not easy given the monopoly enjoyed by the Springer press. Our information activities were best served by using small groups, whose creative actions helped break the silence surrounding American war crimes in Vietnam and questioned traditional conformist views in important social areas such as the trade unions. Whether the term *Stadtguerilla* was a good idea, is something about which we can still argue today. At any rate, for an overall understanding of the protest movement, it is inappropriate to simply concentrate on the issue of violence.

Looking back, some of the political demands and programmes appear utopian and strangely unworldly. How would you assess them today? In your opinion what mistakes did the left make?

The reproach that we were unworldly came from all sides even at that time and it was not just from cold warriors in the West. GDR-ideologists regarded independent western socialists as adventurers who had failed to understand the true nature of power relationship. The term 'real existing socialism' was invented in response. Forty years on, one can ask: who has proved to be correct about the decisions made at that time? An icon such as Willy Brandt was absolutely loyal to the United States during the Vietnam War and as foreign minister he continued to support his Portuguese colleague during their colonial war. Hardly anyone remembers this. Certainly, we also had some strange ideas; the creation of a *republic of councils* in West Berlin for example was not very realistic. However, the basic policy of disapproval of the Vietnam War at that time seems just as appropriate as the protest against the war in Iraq today.

Since you are asking about mistakes: there is one point on which we made a decisive mistake: we thought that the USSR could reform and be viable. Precisely be-

5 1968 activist in Germany. Today Kraushaar is one of the most controversial critics of the German `68 movement. (Editor)

cause we knew about Stalin's crimes we assumed that the path to a better Soviet Union would be opened up after they had been revealed. But we were not alone in this error. There were, for example, the advocates of the convergence theory (popular at the time and involving very different people to us), who also thought that the Soviet empire was a viable system. After the disappearance of the Soviet Union one can, however, raise the question of the viability of its counterpart – but that is a different chapter.

I would like to return to the fact that it was a global event. What were the influences that affected Germany?

I have already referred to the United States. We might have invented the so-called 'strolling demonstration' but apart from that, we simply copied most of the new American forms of protest: teach-ins, sit-ins etc. It was not easy for us to formulate our position vis à vis US policies. We belonged to a generation that had been freed by the Americans; American troops had eliminated German fascism. The anti-war movement in the United States was very important to us. It provided not only a political lead but also a source of, tremendous encouragement. Infamous current interpretations by renegades such as Götz Aly[6], who play about with the fashionable anti-Americanism reproach and deny that, at the time, it was the daily reports about US horrors in Vietnam that were the decisive motivating force. We were not just looking for a cheap excuse for to riot.

How do you explain the fact that protests broke out simultaneously worldwide independent of national (both east and west) borders?

I still do not have a clear answer for that. It is said that the formation of armed groups willing to use violence only occurred in post-Fascist countries such as Germany, Italy and Japan but that still does not explain much. It still needs to be analysed as to what exactly influenced what. There was certainly a drive on the part of the New Left to free themselves from the torpor of the Cold War and become capable of action. In addition, we were experiencing the last phase of the anti-colonial battles and the development of neo-colonial forms of rule. Solidarity with liberation movements had been a spur to action as early as the Algerian war. The protest against the Vietnam War brought various movements together as was shown at the West Berlin Vietnam congress forty years ago in February 1968. After this conference, Rudi Dutschke travelled to Prague, where we sympathised with the aims of the reform communists, who were crushed in August 1968. We protested against that too. The breakdown of the protest movement began soon after, but that is another topic.

6 Historian and 1968 activist in Germany. Like Kraushaar, Aly is one of the most controversial critics of the German `68 movement. (Editor)

Apartheid South Africa in 1968: Not quite business as usual

by BILL NASSON*

***Professor Bill Nasson** was born in Cape Town in 1952 and attended Livingstone High School, where he was an editor of *Impact*, an annual magazine, which in 1969 commemorated the significance of 1968 in Europe. A founding member of National Youth Action at the end of the 1960s, he later studied in Britain at the Universities of Hull, York and Cambridge. In Britain he also worked as a researcher and as an administrator in a refugee agency. He has held visiting fellowships at the University of Cambridge, the Australian National University and the University of Illinois. For many years he has been working at the University of Cape Town. After serving on the Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa in the 1980s, Bill Nasson moved into a research position in oral history, before becoming a lecturer in economic history. Since 1991 he has been in the Department of History, where he is presently King George V Professor of History. His interests lie in 19th and 20th century history, particularly in the social and cultural history of war. A former editor of *The Journal of African History*, his many publications include *Education: From Poverty to Liberty* (1991), *Abraham Esau's War* (1991), *The South African War 1899-1902* (1999), *Britannia's Empire* (2004), and *Springboks on the Somme: South Africa in the Great War 1914-1918* (2007). He is co-editor of the forthcoming *Cambridge History of South Africa.*

South Africa, at the end of the 1960s, has often been described as an extreme apartheid society and as an authoritarian or even a police state. In many ways, that picture appears to be convincing. Certainly, obsessive racial segregation was at its greatest extent, even affecting those who could not see a thing! In 1968, the South African National Council for the Blind announced that it would be reorganising itself to ensure that blind whites and non-whites would be treated separately. At the same time, National Party rule had become harder and more absolute than ever before. By the early 1960s, mass black opposition to apartheid had been crushed, the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) had been banned and repressive security legislation imposed.

Granted, by the mid-1960s there were divisions among National Party Afrikaners over the rigidity of racial policy. Those in an enlightened (verligte) camp favoured minor reform to ease some aspects of apartheid, while a right-wing (verkramp) faction opposed any tampering with race laws. Although both factions supported white domination under Afrikaner leadership, conservative verkramptes smeared verligte reformers as disloyal liberals whose belief in greater personal freedom would open the door to 'Communist' subversion. But the ruling order had good reason to continue feeling confident. After all, with South Africa's economy continuing to flourish and with its state administration modernising rapidly, a secure and arrogant white minority government was able to impose its will upon ever more areas of life.

One of the most important of those areas was contact with undesirable political influences from the rest of the world. Earlier in the 1960s, civil rights figures like Martin Luther King were refused permission to visit South Africa. Likewise, more radical domestic opponents of government policy, including churchmen and sports administrators, had passports refused or confiscated to prevent them from travelling abroad. Several prominent anti-apartheid critics were denied the right to travel overseas in 1968 and 1969.

In effect, by the later 1960s, the state was attempting to seal off South Africa from political and cultural currents in other parts of the globe. To achieve this, it asserted close control of the media. One objective was to block reporting of opposition to white domination, especially from foreign anti-apartheid movements. Another was to prevent radical liberal or socialist ideas from European societies having a subversive effect upon the thinking of South African society. A third concern was the preservation of a conservative Christian moral purity. Through a Publications Control Board, established in 1963, the authorities checked the content of various books, periodicals, films and music for immoral influences. Some items were banned, not least those that promoted a relationship between rock

music, drugs and youth revolution or which attacked Christianity. Lastly, while controlling all local radio, the government refused to permit the establishment of any kind of television service. Its paranoid Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, Albert Hertzog, declared that it would have been impossible to prevent the showing on television of imported Western programmes. These would have corrupted the high morals of a Christian South Africa. In a sense, then, an effective authoritarian state appeared to be regulating the expression of ideas and shutting out dissent. At the same time, however, the picture was also more complex and this had significant implications for how the global upheavals of 1968 were experienced by sectors of society. Granted, for the African majority, repressive controls over movement and a lack of common political freedoms and civil liberties meant autocracratic rule. Yet, in some other respects, the regime was never entirely totalitarian. Thus, South Africa's ruling minority maintained a parliamentary party tradition. Outside of parliament, some voicing of grievances was also tolerated. There, within narrow legal limits, liberal churchmen, academics, journalists and lawyers were able to exercise a degree of public freedom of speech and action and could expose and condemn racial discrimination and injustice. In the high apartheid era of the later 1960s, this was a very small pool of alternative political culture, but it was an important and lively sphere, within which democratic ideas could be expressed.

Beyond this, there were other marginal liberating forces and traditions, which were at odds with a strict enforcement of conservative conformity. Given its claim to represent the values of western Christian civilisation, the South African Republic could not be run entirely on the basis of arbitrary rule. It had to observe the basic liberal freedoms of its political community of white citizens. Thus, despite mounting government intolerance in the late 1960s, the mainly white National Union of South African Students sustained an organisational opposition to apartheid at English-speaking universities.

Moreover, as the country could never be insulated completely from the outside world, there was always a small sideshow of subversive influences. Modern rock and pop music was broadcast to South Africa from abroad, particularly from the commercial LM radio station in Portuguese Mozambique, which brought the sound of hippie 'counter-culture' from music festivals such as Woodstock and Altamont. Small experimental theatres in larger cities like Cape Town and Johannesburg staged the works of radical writers like Bertolt Brecht and Jean Genet, which had clear allegorical meaning for the condition of South Africa. Poetry groups held readings of works by famous left-wing English writers of the 1930s, such as Stephen Spender and John Cornford and by the 'Beat' poets of American counter-culture, like Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Academic libraries were still able to stock British Marxist publications, including *New Left Review* and *Socialist Register*. Reuters news bulletins in independent local publications like *Newscheck* kept people in touch with developments abroad.

Although state censorship had an extensive reach by then, major European newspapers, weekly periodicals and the records of protest singers such as Bob Dylan and Joan Baez were available in shops. Also available were the Penguin Modern European Poetry anthologies of anti-Stalinist Russian authors like Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Anna Akhmatova and English translations of works in German by progressive writers such as Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Gunter Grass, and Heinrich Boell. A strong local currency kept imported publications and records cheap for a tiny minority of urban consumers.

While more free-thinking individuals were mostly white, English-speaking liberals or radicals, there were also younger Afrikaner dissidents, who had turned against apartheid and white Calvinist nationalism. The earlier 1960s saw the evolution of a new literary movement, known as the *Sestigers*, or the Sixties Generation, symbolised by avant-garde Afrikaner novelists like Etienne le Roux and Jan Rabie and by provocative poets such as Ingrid Jonker and Breyten Breytenbach. This eclectic body of Afrikaans culture identified with a world that was secular, modern, racially mixed and sexually free. In writings, which adopted experimental European literary techniques, *Sestigers* explored controversial subject matter, which challenged conventional apartheid stereotypes of Afrikaners and their history. Although some works were banned by the authorities, an imaginative literature offered an alternative modern vision of Afrikaners, which differed sharply from the oppressive image of Pretoria's aged political and cultural leadership. For this disaffected minority, too, the idea of an alternative West was increasingly an imaginative refuge from the stifling rule of Afrikaner nationalism.

By the later 1960s, this group of non-conformist, anti-apartheid South Africans had developed an

Personal photograph supplied by Bill Nasson

Students of Livingstone High School, Cape Town, with a copy of their 'Impact' magazine of February 1969 which celebrated the 1968 rebellion. The author, aged 17, is on the right at the rear.

intense interest in the hopes, ideals, energies and anger of popular movements abroad. They inhabited a political and literary world of small circulation journals, student societies, educational fellowships, debating clubs, university forums and library circles. There lay a dialogue of internationalism and a burning interest in issues that were generating resistance to the ruling establishment of Western states overseas, especially those with governments seen to be accepting of an apartheid South Africa. There was hostility towards the USA for its war in Vietnam and for its civil rights crisis. In 1967, Britain was denounced for not imposing tougher sanctions on a white-ruled Southern Rhodesia that had declared independence illegally and for failing to put pressure on South Africa to stop supporting its neighbouring racist regime.

In the same year, continental Europe became another focus of critical interest. *The Educational Journal*, published by the Trotskyist Teachers' League of South Africa, called for solidarity with the Greek people in its fight against fascism following the April 1967 military coup. As apartheid was described as a form of fascism, it was natural for progressive South Africans to demonstrate solidarity with oppressed Greek compatriots. Left-wing opinion was also stimulated by the upheaval of China's cultural revolution, with intellectuals and commentators filling rooms and small lecture halls with discussions of Maoism and its significance for liberation struggles. However far South Africa had marched into international isolation by 1968, the existence of distant radical political forces was real enough and far from remote to some of its educated inhabitants.

Thus, when the events of 1968 entered the consciousness of South African society, there were already within it pockets of political and cultural engagement with the wider mood of the 1960s. Yet, given the dramatic atmosphere of such episodes as the Prague Spring and the subsequent Soviet Russian invasion, one obvious and peculiar feature was that the general wave of protest and resistance was not experienced through the exciting medium of moving pictures and sound. Certainly, television viewers in Southern Rhodesia and Zambia could watch live news coverage of student riots in Paris and the massive anti-Vietnam war demonstration in London's Grosvenor Square during October. Yet, still denied a service by the National Party, very few South Africans had ever laid eyes on a television set, let alone seen news events depicted through it.

Instead, the militant moment of 1968 was transmitted either through radio or the printed media. For the radio news and current affairs services of the South African Broadcasting Corporation there was a sobering lesson to be drawn from the unrest overseas. Under its firm Prime Minister, B.J. Vorster, and its strong Minister of Defence, P.W. Botha, the country was being kept peaceful and stable, safe from the subversive communist and liberal agitators, who were undermining good order in the streets of Paris, Berlin and London. The passing in the previous year of legislation introducing military conscription for all younger white males would instil discipline and respect for law and order.

Similarly, pro-government newspapers like *Die Burger* and *Die Beeld* compared continuing calmness in South Africa with public chaos in liberal Western democracies. There, far too much freedom and far too many rights had allowed pacifists, anarchists, revolutionaries, Marxists, drug-crazy hippies and other offenders to threaten civil order and moral decency. Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Rudi Dutschke were wild radicals, who should have been watched more vigilantly and locked up, not given the publicity they were currently enjoying in the European media. It was a blessing for Pretoria that its security services and police knew how to stay on their toes, thus ensuring that it would remain untouched by the revolutionary anarchy of 1968.

Then there was the issue of communism itself. By 1968, Pretoria's Department of Foreign Affairs had had many years of experience in responding to chal-

lenges caused by changes in the world order. Earlier, as tropical African countries had been decolonised and became independent, the National Party had presented its tribal Homelands or Bantustan policy as the same process of granting political freedom to Africans. Starting with the Xhosa in 1963, ethnic groups received a limited form of self-government. H.F. Verwoerd, the prime minister and architect of separate development, informed a British audience that, on this basis, South Africa would secure peace, prosperity and justice for all. The widespread mass demonstrations and marches of 1968 now presented South African foreign propaganda with an even more powerful opportunity to present a positive national image. Indeed, for exploiting the Cold War anxieties and fears of Europeans and Americans, the timing and character of 1968 was perfect.

In the argument of South Africa's rulers, Russia's brutal suppression of reform in Czechoslovakia illustrated the belligerent nature of Soviet communism and the danger of having any dealings whatsoever with Moscow. It was also said that popular protests in western Europe were being directed or manipulated by Russian agents. The young, who were campaigning for disarmament and peace, celebrating 'flower power' and proclaiming 'make love not war', were deluded and drunk, blind to the dark realities of the Cold War. Moscow's aim was ascendancy in Europe, followed by world domination.

Here, South Africa knew what it was talking about. After all, it had already had a taste of its very own 1968 in 1960, with the crisis of the shooting of African protestors at Sharpeville, the ensuing strikes and mass demonstrations and the imposition of a state of emergency. It was alleged that Communists had been responsible for that uprising. What mattered now was keeping the country a strong member of the global anti-Communist alliance and making sure that it did not become a victim of menacing left wing infiltration. As the French authorities battled to clear Parisian streets of communist students and workers, South Africa was holding on calmly as an orderly, civilised and indispensable member of the 'Free World' in its relentless struggle against international communism.

Such views were, of course, not the only perspectives on the significance of 1968. The few newspapers that had explicitly supported the black anti-apartheid struggle had, by then, mostly been banned or the police had constantly harassed their staff. Still, popular Johannesburg periodicals for African readers like *Drum* and *Golden City Post* carried views, which pointed out that black South Africans did not need the inspiration of angry American folk music or French student street barricades to feel angry about apartheid.

Steve Biko, Black Consciousness Student Leader, NewsCheck, December 1968

But where the 1968 crisis featured most prominently was in the main English newspapers, broadly liberal in outlook and still remarkably free in this period. It was there, too, in illustrated weeklies and other news periodicals such as *Newscheck*, which carried Reuters and other agency stories and pictures. Views and beliefs from this quarter reflected not so much outright condemnation of mass militancy and the destructiveness of protests. It was rather a sense of shock and anxiety over how leading western European democracies had slipped so rapidly into instability and chaos after so many contented years of progress and prosperity. Among wealthier, white citizens comfortable assumptions about the rich attractions of old Europe had been badly shaken. Previously, Paris or Rome had been romantic, ageless cities of urban elegance, art and fashion. Grand holidays of the 1960s had often meant 'France and Italy' or 'down the Rhine' to wealthier South Africans with a taste for continental Europe.

Suddenly, though, Europe did not look quite so charming, and there were holiday cancellations in 1968 and for 1969. What was the point of risking it, if between Marseilles harbour or Orly Airport and the Louvre stood Daniel Cohn-Bendit and his rioting army of militant French students? Equally, a sophisticated

Roman Italy of expresso coffee and Vespa scooters was being dragged down and spoiled by the lawlessness and labour militancy of car and other industrial worers in Milan and Turin. As one shocked correspondent writing to Cape Town's *Cape Argus* declared in August 1968, it was impossible to understand why so many people in Europe were protesting with such violence and passion. Even worse, where would it all end?

South Africa, on the other hand, was fortunate, concluded another letter writer. It had its 1967 Terrorism Act to ensure the safety of citizens. This was another piece of repressive South African legislation with a uniquely wide meaning. Anyone suspected of 'causing feelings of hostility between whites and non-whites', or of 'embarrassing the affairs of the state' could be detained without any judicial process. There can be little doubt that the existence of such measures did much to discourage local student leaders in the National Union of South African Students and other movements from associating too publicly with the inflammatory slogans of the European generation of 1968.

In that respect, whatever1968 did to heighten local political consciousness, it did not lead to discontented South African students or workers coming out into the streets and mobilising for the cause of a transformed society. Yet, in some other ways, the late 1960s was actually a vital period for consolidating an alternative political culture.

Granted, there was nothing massive or even direct about the response to global political influences. It was more quiet, unassertive, often symbolic and careful to take account of the limits of political expression and local reality. Towards the end of 1968, for example, students attending coloured high schools in Cape Town would arrive for classes in the morning to discover that 'free Mandela' and 'one man one vote' slogans had been painted on walls during the course of the previous night. To put it at its simplest, the invigorating impact of 1968 can be measured best by looking at what was going on behind the scenes.

What was going on? It was a chance for some young individuals with the means to do so to break away from South Africa and to discover radical scholarship and academic theory in Britain, France, and West Germany. One example was Jeremy Cronin, who went to study at the Sorbonne in 1969. He returned to South Africa a Marxist and is today Deputy General-Secretary of the South African Communist Party. Others pursued the study of Third World underdevelopment at radical British universities like Sussex, or Marxist interpretations of South African history at London University. Another kind of generational experience was at a Cape Town high school where senior pupils produced an annual magazine in celebration of rebel youth culture and Third World guerrilla struggles. Called *Impact,* and appearing early in 1969, it featured the sayings of such such anti-bourgeois icons as Jean-Paul Sartre, Herbert Marcuse, and Che Guevara. Daniel Cohn-Bendit's declaration of love for 'The Revolution', also featured, as did the German radical student leader, Rudi Dutschke, with his call for a long march through oppressive institutions.

In particular, for more prosperous, yet alienated and restless younger South Africans, mainly but not exclusively white and English speaking, the new world overseas was being defined by the young and their youthful impulses. Popular mass cultural forms flowed with remarkable ease across the country's national borders. Records, posters, shoes, clothes, and hairstyles created a distinctive urban style in South Africa, which became an outpost or a market for the trans-national culture of insubordinate European youth. By the end of the 1960s, to listen to British or American rock and modern folk music, especially protest songs like 'Universal Soldier' and 'Blowin' in the Wind', was more or less the equivalent of listening to smuggled recordings of Martin Luther King's speeches. The records, so to speak, protested on behalf of those, who listened to them.

Equally, it was not all about listening. For some high school students there was National Youth Action, a multiracial movement, which concerned itself not only with educational issues, such as the government's failure to supply textbooks to African schools, but also with civil liberties: holding silent public protests against detention without trial; drawing up petitions in support of rights and campaigning for equal education. Of far more lasting national significance was the simultaneous emergence of the black consciousness movement, incorporating discontented black university students, who broke away from the liberal National Union of South African Students during the course of 1968 and 1969.

Led by the confident and articulate Steve Biko, the black consciousness movement rejected co-operation with white anti-apartheid organisations on the grounds that whites were incapable of identifying fully with the experience of oppression and therefore could not share in the need for full emancipation. Tactically,

there was a heavy emphasis on drawing together African, Coloured, and Indian South Africans to identify themselves in common as black in the face of apartheid oppression. The black consciousness movement built up its strength through the creation of a network of self-help, social and cultural associations and in July 1969 founded the South African Student Organisation with Biko as its first president.

Interestingly, in this period the state was tolerant of black consciousness. After all, its insistence on racial separatism and on cultural self-reliance did not necessarily threaten apartheid ideology. Yet, beneath Biko's call for greater black autonomy and the assertion of independence lay a crucial radical influence of the 1960s. In this instance, it was not Europe but the inspiration of the Black Power movement in the USA, embodied in the Black Panthers and fiery black power radicals such as Huey Newton, Angela Davis and Bobby Seale.

Black consciousness ideas spread through various communities, equipping followers with the conviction that only black people acting on their own could end racial oppression. At the same time, organisations like the Students' Christian Movement, the liberation theology University Christian Movement and high school groups such as the South African Students' Movement failed to reach out beyond educational institutions to bring together masses of people into organised resistance. Yet, their young activists still had a striking role in building up consciousness and in shaping a political culture of mental resistance. To be sure, black consciousness was not a movement of marches, sit-ins and occupations. But, in its intellectual battle of the mind against apartheid, it demonstrated that open black resistance had returned for the first time since the banning of the ANC and the PAC.

Furthermore, the black consciousness of the late 1960s left an important longer-term legacy in African townships. Its militant culture established an influential presence in a number of urban high schools. Two of these in Soweto, Morris Isaacson High and Naledi High, would later be at the centre of the student uprising of 1976. It was then that the mass protest wave of 1968 at last arrived in South Africa, even if a few years late. Today, although a minor element in public life, black consciousness remains a part of South African politics and culture.

All these developments, taken together, illustrate that for a distant South Africa, the impact of 1968 did not see the creation of mass popular movements. Equally, the country could not avoid something of what it had invested – resistance capital. It was there, in the spirit and the mind, with inspirational rhetoric, with radical scholarship, in literature and in music. That meant that it played its part in breaking down the walls of spiritual apartheid and in encouraging established traditions of popular dissent. In any historical perspective, it is also worth remembering that South Africa had had a recent past of student disruption of institutions and structures of educational authority. In the 1950s, African students in Eastern Cape boarding schools and training colleges had been involved in riots and occupations in protest against overcrowding and poor food.

As South Africa drifted on towards its own crisis of mass workers' strikes in 1973 and the Soweto student rebellion in 1976, the global influence of an alternative culture of rights and opinion came to play some part in the processes of a slowly changing society. For those on the left, there was deep fascination with the revolutionary romanticism of university and factory demonstrations proclaiming such slogans as 'smash the state, don't change it'. Living under an oppressively powerful state, the meaning of these words could not have been lost on them.

The fact that such 1968 questions could be addressed publicly in educational arenas and in debates suggests that South African society did not feel itself to be wholly unfree. In its islands of critical questioning and dissent, inhabitants were able to speak, argue and communicate with others to their heart's content. True enough, telephones were being tapped in 1968. But repressive surveillance co-existed with varying kinds of open communication, through which the country remained part of an internationalist culture, including a global New Left. Not all of its expressions left a mark. Environmentalism and ecological concerns were not, as yet, on any movement agenda; nor was pacifism and conscientious objection to military service. But, in later years, these issues, too, would come to form part of an anti-apartheid 'popular front'. In that sense, some of the intentions of 1968 would go on to be part of South African struggles, still hopeful of finding liberation.

* I am grateful to Keren Ben-Zeev for valuable comment on an earlier draft of this essay.

Belgrade, June 1968

by NEBOJŠA POPOV*

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Imagination is more important than knowledge.

Albert Einstein

Most people know something about May 1968 in Paris but what do they know about June 1968 in Belgrade?

It is to be expected that people involved in an event that took place forty years ago and who are now somewhat older, would have the sort of sentimental memories one has for a youth long departed. It is also possible that the significance of an event, as well as the role one played within it can be overestimated. A person might also lament having lost the opportunity to do something of significance. A feeling of anger cannot be ruled out either, although the passage of time can dim the intensity of its memory. I hope that I can resist all of these emotions and allow my professionalism as a sociologist to dictate an analytical approach.

My memories rely on a study begun at the time of the event, which continued for ten years and was published as *Social Conflicts – A Challenge For Sociology;* a book that was banned by the courts just before going to press on the grounds that there was a danger it could 'upset the general public'. The danger was such that the book was ordered to be destroyed by cutting it vertically, so that not even a single line could be read!

Although there is an enormous worldwide wealth of literature on the events of 1968, the Yugoslav authorities restricted and prevented studies (not just mine) on what took place in Yugoslavia. Despite Yugoslavia being 'the best of all worlds' – 'self-governing socialism' – superior and above capitalism and 'realist socialism' it felt it could not allow such publications. For a long time it remained a taboo subject. Critical opinion outside our country found the idea of Yugoslav 'rebellion' absurd and not worthy of study. This text is therefore based on knowledge gained from my own study and not as an offended victim of censorship or an unjustly neglected author.

Before I briefly portray what happened in Belgrade in 1968 (and other events in connection with Yugoslavia), I would like to remind the reader that many studies have shown that student movements in the majority of large universities across the world had many common characteristics. These movements were regarded as 'worldwide phenomena' from New York to Paris, Warsaw and Belgrade, and from Cairo to Tokyo.

Everywhere these movements aspired to expand communication, widen the freedom of thought and expression, and affirm academic liberty and the autonomy of cultural institutions. They objected to ideologies, authoritarian and totalitarian governments, and especially violence (the paradigm at the time was the Vietnam War). They had a vision of a different, more humane world, in which every individual could achieve his/her intellectual potential. These common components were tempered by individual characteristics, determined by local culture and politics that defined the context of change and the level of violence.

As in other countries the happenings in Belgrade were a complicated series of events with an immediate outcome that also shaped future change.

Incident – Conflict – Movement

The cause of the escalating conflict during the 'Belgrade June' was an incident on June 2, which took place during a performance of a play for the youth work action brigades at the Cultural Centre in New Belgrade. Students from the nearby *Studentski grad* (Student City) area, where between 7,000 and 8,000 people lived during the examination period, wanted to enter the building uninvited. The police, with the help of fire fighters dispersed the students but resistance continued. In the middle of the night, the students set off towards the centre of Belgrade, 10 kilometres away, where the university was situated. The police stopped them in front of the passageway under the railway tracks, from where the road led to Belgrade and dispersed them using firearms. Many students were beaten and wounded. In the early morning of June 3, the official media branded the students as hooligans bent on violence. In the wake of this, the students, meeting at *Studentski grad*, formed a group to protest against the regime's physical and verbal violence. Around noon, the students set off towards Belgrade again but the police stopped them at the same bridge and dispersed them even more brutally. More than one hundred students and several professors were injured or beaten up. News of this event then reached the University of Belgrade with its some 5,000 professors and assistants and approximately 50,000 students.

That same afternoon, the University Council, which included several representatives of the government, announced a seven-day strike by the University of Belgrade to protest against the brutal violence. They demanded that the relevant authorities acknowledge their responsibility for the use of violence and that appropriate sanctions be applied. Unrest spread throughout the city. During the evening, several thousand citizens gathered in front of the Rector's building, next to the Philosophy Faculty. A series of protest speeches and demands for the scheduling of free elections grew ever louder.

The government banned street demonstrations and prevented public gatherings. With the support of the administration, students and professors locked themselves inside the faculty buildings. Action committees were formed within each faculty, as was a joint one for the entire university. Political gatherings were organised, at which information on current events was discussed and criticism of the government's actions became more severe. Lively debates on the size and cause of the conflict and on the ideas and goals of the emerging movement were held parallel to the public gatherings. Bulletins and special editions of the *Student* newspaper were printed (several tens of thousands of copies) and some were banned while others were permitted.

The faculty buildings were surrounded by the police. The police controlled the entrances from the outside and from the inside students kept guard. It became increasingly difficult to communicate with the outside world (electricity and telephone lines had been cut). The general public supported the students both morally and materially (food, drinks and money). Nevertheless, verbal contacts, some bulletins and leaflets were able to penetrate the blockade. The official media also published information.

Over several days of non-stop political and intellectual activity, at public gatherings and theoretical debates, a lively community of young people and a student movement emerged. Physical violence and propaganda were at the top of the agenda. The immediate acknowledgement of responsibility by the editors of the most powerful media and police chiefs was demanded, as well as the introduction of appropriate sanctions. The intensity of these demands decreased over time. After a bitter debate within the student movement, the majority decided to drop the demand for the dismissal of those who had instigated the violence as a condition for ending the strike.

Each day that the strike continued, the criticisms of the regime, bureaucracy, social inequality, unemployment and rising poverty grew increasingly stronger. The movement adopted a policy platform. Hundreds of professors, writers, actors, musicians and thousands of students, many speaking in public for the first time, exchanged ideas, many in the tradition of humanism, liberalism and socialism. Different visions of social and political change were outlined. Ideas from the new left and counter culture dominated. In the spirit of pluralism, both dogmatic ideas and militant attitudes were expressed, ranging from historical Jacobinism to modern Maoism. For the most part it was the gap between the ideals and the reality of socialism that was emphasised. They demanded a balance be reached between the normative democratic and self-governing system and

Personal photograph supplied by Nebojša Popov

"Press Freedom and democracy! " "Stop the Killing!"
Demonstration in Belgrade, June 1968

the actual order, of a single, political party monopoly (the Communist Party of Yugoslavia/League of Communists of Yugoslavia).

A feeling of solidarity with the colleagues in Belgrade spread to nearly all of the universities in Yugoslavia. For several days, public political gatherings and debates were held in Sarajevo, Zagreb, and Ljubljana. Everywhere, violence was strongly condemned, the monopolistic government regime was criticised and visions for democratic changes were laid out. In June, there was polarisation when a countermovement appeared to challenge the leftist movement. This was most noticeable in Zagreb and it spread to Pristina that autumn. This will be discussed in more detail later.

In response to the rise of the student movement, the regime became more repressive. It rejected all dialogue about the character of the movement and the necessity for change. Criticism was denounced as hostile to 'self-governing socialism' and, on a larger scale, as 'an enemy of all colours'. Allegedly, the government understood and supported 'the content of the students' demands', but it condemned the 'method' – demonstrations and the organisation of a protest movement. The government infiltrated the movement with its own people in order to break it up from within. Signs of paranoia were noticeable and, within the student movement, there were suspicions of a revolutionary change within the government. As the most ardent of defenders of the regime said, 'this government was put in power by blood and without blood it will not surrender.'

As the conflict grew tense, so did the uncertainty of the outcome – a democratic solution or a new wave of violence? There were also rumours of a military attack. However, a 'third', temporary solution emerged. At the end of the seventh day of the University of Belgrade strike (June 9) Josip Broz Tito (president of the party and the state and the supreme commander) delivered a speech on state television. Surprising even his closest supporters, he said that he backed '90% of the students' and their 'demands' and that he personally wanted the 'burning problem' to be resolved. He announced that the government would do so without delay and the students could disperse and get back to their examinations. Just as in an operetta, the excitement of the climax quickly dwindled. Many of the students and professors, who trusted the words 'of the highest authority' were relieved that there had been no dramatic outcome. People folk danced as an expression of loyalty to Partisan folklore. Those who were more sceptical suspected that it was a ruse. They suspected that the reforms were false promises and that a crackdown on the suspicious '10%' would soon follow. Public gatherings and debates continued to discuss this for some time. Ten days later, Tito became more critical of certain elements in a speech at the Trade Union Congress, demanding a swift crackdown on 'the culprits' responsible for 'the June events'. He skilfully took the advantage of announcing his own interpretation on the day the strike was due to end. He was anxious to remove the 'disorder' in the capital, where an important visit by the Indian president was expected. Although, for years, he insisted on cracking down on 'the culprits', the dirty work was always carried out by the lower ranks of the government. Tito wanted to maintain his 'image' as the undisputed life long head of state and a world leader (he always hoped to win the Nobel Peace Prize).

The crackdown on the student movement was systematic. A brutal attack by the armed forces on the university, however, something, which had happened even in a democratic country (for example, Kent State University, USA) did not happen. Nevertheless, under the slogan of separating the 'black sheep' from the 'white sheep', the conflict with those who thought and worked freely and autonomously continued for years. Public gatherings were the first to be stopped, then the action committees and finally the student newspapers. A fierce battle was fought against the student press in 1969 and 1970. The followers of the regime failed to change the editorial staff of *Student* at three student assemblies but they were able to dismiss unsuitable editors after the fourth assembly (prepared with military help) and this opened the path to the appointment of 'favoured' and 'suitable' candidates.

With the death of the student movement, the way was clear for the final conflict. The propaganda campaign against the participants in the 'June events' lasted for years. There were police trials, restricted movement, and job dismissals as well as barriers to employment. This was followed by numerous court proceedings and eventually the 'political trials'. One of the first to be targeted in 1970 was Vladimir Mijanović, a sociology student. Vladimir was one of the student leaders and president of the Philosophy Faculty Student Committee (in response to this 'political process', students from four faculties went on a ten day strike but without any success). Finally, the climax occurred in 1975, when those who had been classified as the main 'perpetrators' of 'corrupting youth' were expelled from the university. (This 'cleansing' also included the writer of this essay). More suitable people, who would create a completely new 'landscape', were placed in scientific, cultural and educational institutions.

If we were to limit ourselves to only the most obvious of the empirical facts available, independent of the memory's capacity, the description of these events could end here. Certain facts, nevertheless, illustrate the complexity of the conflict.

Contradictory Visions

It is known that memory fades over time; that it forms part of knowledge but it cannot replace a complete or objective based knowledge. This especially applies to complicated social conflicts, in which it is difficult to remain an objective investigator. To be objective I therefore propose to adopt the attitude of the winning side, despite being, for many years, on the losing side myself. The victors in June saw the core of the conflict not so much as an ideological, political, economic and social struggle but predominantly one of culture. This is underlined by the concentration of almost all government resources in the fight against the 'black wave in culture', particularly in the period from 1969 to 1975. This fight was most evident in the banning of films, theatre productions, books, newspapers and magazines and science gatherings; in the stamping out of creativity and critical thinking in art, philosophy and sociology; in the elimination of the humanist tradition in education and upbringing; in the establishment of an obligatory norm of 'moral and political suitability' for employment; and in the battle against 'enemies of all colours', including the wide practice of informing. Many available sources can testify to this, but they will not be examined here.

Karl-Marx Red University, Belgrade, June 1968

Personal photograph supplied by Nebojša Popov

If we focus purely on culture then we get a very different perspective on events. Post 1948 and the break with Soviet ideas, the rise in creative freedom and critical thinking in art, philosophy and sociology became even more powerful. At that time the government itself encouraged the development of culture, but tried to keep the process under control. The process of spiritual liberation, however, freed itself from the imposed bounds of state allowed freedoms. The removal of the 'socialist realism' doctrine from art opened up the possibility of different thoughts on, and the practise of, aesthetics. The ideological veil that covered real life disappeared. Various taboo themes were discussed: the role of violence in war, in post war 'construction,' in the violent acquisition of private property and in forced collectivisation; the illegality of violence against various 'enemies' and the torture carried out in labour and prison camps (of which the most well known was on Goli Otok).

One of the turning points came at a conference of Yugoslav philosophers and sociologists (Bled, 1960), when dogmatic Marxism was abandoned as the core of the governing ideology. The concept of freedom returned to the heart of philosophical and social theory and the importance of critical thinking was established in research and communication. This was facilitated by calling the process 'Young Marx', something which the

government did not disapprove of because it was still some form of Marxism. However, concern mounted when the understanding of Marxism as the 'ruthless criticism of everything existing' became more pronounced. Of course, the concept of freedom cannot be limited to any individual school of thought, rather it opens the road to dialogue between the various humanist, liberal and socialist trends not only in domestic culture buy also in world culture. In this area, the Korčula Summer School made the most noticeable contribution. Between 1964 and 1974, Yugoslav philosophers and world intellectuals met here to participate in fruitful dialogues. The articles produced by this school 'of permanent education', (as one of the school's key figures, Rudi Supek, defined it) were published in domestic and international editions of the Zagreb journal *Praxis*, edited by Gajo Petrović, until both the school and the journal disappeared in 1974. Similar publications were the Belgrade journals *Gledištia, Filozofija* and *Sociologija*, the Ljubljana *Perspektive*, the Sarajevo *Pregled* and *Lica*, as well as many youth and student magazines and newspapers across the whole country. For almost twenty years, the process of spiritual liberation and free communication continued to varying degrees. The beginning of this process can be marked by a performance of Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* in 1955. One year after its world premiere, after being shown first in private artist 'workshops' because it had been removed from the Belgrade Drama Theatre programme, this particular play founded a new theatre, Atelje 212. Atelje 212 was, and still is today, the framework of one of the most famous theatre festivals (BITEF). The process ended in 1974, when the film *Plastični Isus* (Plastic Jesus) by Lazar Stojanović was 'concealed' and the author was sentenced to three years of hard labour.

In this wide turmoil we can look at the student movement as a prominent method of providing the stimulus for attempts to exceed the limits of controlled and manipulated freedom. Independent student groups in Yugoslavia and throughout the world provided this stimulus. Everytime there was violent suppression of student demonstrations there was a resurgence in the movement: Belgrade in 1954; Zagreb in 1959 and Ljubljana in 1963/64; and Belgrade, Sarajevo and Zagreb in 1966, when demonstrations against the Vietnam War were brutally broken up. Up until June 1968, student newspapers and magazines carried information on student conditions around the world and protests were made against the restricting of the student movement in Warsaw (due to the Stalinist cleansing at the University of Warsaw) and Berlin (due to the assassination of Rudi Dutschke). The inspiration for this emerging movement originated from the schools of critical thought in western philosophy and sociology, of which the most famous are the 'Frankfurt School', the Parisian existentialists, the American beatniks etc. The anti-colonial movement in the third world, criticism of the personality cult in the Soviet Union, worker demonstrations in East Berlin in 1953, Poznan and Budapest in 1956, and the Prague Spring in 1968 were all supported. Change was also encouraged by the workers' strikes in Yugoslavia, which began in 1958 and became more common, despite the fact that their existence was not even acknowledged by the government. At the peak of the 'Belgrade June' the government was particularly concerned about an amalgamation of student and worker rebellions, as had happened in the 'Paris May', but this did not occur.

In order to understand events in Yugoslavia, it is also important to consider the international context. The fact that for a long period of time the country had been a buffer zone between East and the West is of great importance. We benefited from both sides to increase our standard of living, encourage openness and improve our reputation in the world as leader of the non-aligned movement.

Events in Yugoslavia and the world at large reflected the various visions of change that centred on both individual freedom and that of society in general. It was this kind of viewpoint that irritated the government the most. With the announcement of de-Stalinisation, the government was prepared to allow some relaxation of its ideological and property monopolies, but not to the monopoly of government. The moment the government felt threatened in that area, it proved that it was prepared to use any means necessary to defend itself against anyone who questioned its one party monopoly. (The final argument being that it was better for order to be maintained by a domestic government, rather than by Russian tanks). The government justified this not only through the merit of its past but also through the defence of its vision of the future as an inexorable victory of socialism/communism. As a result, it was not even afraid of reviving the arsenal of Stalinism and, in this fashion, the monolithic party monopoly, the party state and the personality cult were strengthened.

Personal photograph supplied by Nebojša Popov

Belgrade, June 1968

The government was even prepared to ally with the nationalists, with whom it had had a long and bitter battle. One of the final fights was an armed conflict at the end of November 1968, with an Albanian national movement in Pristina. The second one, in Zagreb, saw the Stalinists and the nationalists join together to fight an emerging leftist movement. The first one ignited the government's arsenal, and the other ideological logistics. Holding on to the vision of strengthening the national state, left-wing ideas were denounced as a 'crazy utopia', undermining the natural unity of 'the organism of the nation'. Visions of the future were drowned out by visions of the nation's 'glorious past'. As a result of this, the beginnings of a nationalist mass movement emerged in June 1968 and continued until 1971, when it threatened the ruling party's government monopoly. The regime then brutally eliminated its most outspoken nationalist allies (through arrests, trials and removals from work and public life).

To discuss the course of the conflict with regards to the opposing visions of change would exceed the scope of this examination and would require research into the long period of the wars to create sovereign national states. During a whirlpool of rarely seen violence, this period saw not only the country of Yugoslavia disappear, but also (through murder, plunder, displacement and 'ethnic cleansing') the lives of millions of people destroyed, and the process of democratic change in the Balkans, and indeed the world, threatened.

Following the traces of 'Belgrade June' prior to the period of populist revolutions (the last decade of the previous century and this one), it can be said that from this we are only left with ever weaker fragments. One of the last moves made by the remnants of the student movement was the attempt at the beginning of 1974 by philosophy students in Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana to form a union of their three faculties. This ended with the arrest and sentencing of the initiators in Ljubljana (among them was Zoran Djindjić, who was killed three decades later as the first democratic prime minister of Serbia). Smaller groups of students and professors gathered on Cres, Lošinj and Vis, but these debates were also broken up. The same intellectual circles issued numerous petitions against the various forms of repression and for the defence of human rights, but only in one case did they gather more than 100 signatures. After the death of Tito (1980) a ray of hope appeared for the renewal of critical thought, especially on the causes of the ever more noticeable crisis. However, the government obstructed it, defending its own political and ideological monopoly with the slogan 'After Tito – Tito'. Debates held in private residences or in various forms of 'free university', did not survive for long; in 1984 the last spectacular Stalinesque rigged trial was organised against the participants of one such debate. The new regime in Serbia (1987 to 2000 and the embodiment of party leader Slobodan Milošević's personality cult) would bring to an end the conflict with the last remnants of the new left and counter-culture. Only a 'black hole' would remain. With its violent assaults, Serbian populism added a new destructive power to the populist movements of that time and gave it a signature of war, crime and rape, from which the scars have not yet healed. To find a solution to this huge confusion, much intellectual effort is needed but which cannot be a substitute for any memory, or even today's available knowledge.

Before concluding this text, I would like to mention the colossal irony that the old left (in reality, the Stalinist right), otherwise the main gravedigger of the new left, is even today considered as some kind of left. A more than ironic turn of events is the falsification of cultural, political and social history so that the trends, which do not fit in with the interests of the current government, are eliminated. Such a fate also threatens the student movements of 1968 and not only in the wreck of the former Yugoslavia.

Returning to the beginning of this text, I would say that the memory of my personal testing of freedom in a crisscross of large-scale liberation move-

ments fills me with a unique sense of satisfaction. I do not consider such a life to have been a failure or in vain. I do not know how much of the vision of freedom and democracy was attainable at the time. I am convinced that the potential of culture could have at least minimised the all destructive violence, such as the one that befell us after the crackdown on 'the black wave in culture', if not made such destructive violence impossible.

More reliable knowledge regarding the concrete experiences of the recent and distant past also benefits the understanding of today and a realistic assessment of the future. If we agree with the declared need for socialism (as in the past) or for capitalism (in the present), the space for freedom disappears under the hammer of this or that rigid determinism. Despite all the terror we have endured, I cannot accept that there is no alternative to having a single constellation of power. It would not only be the end of history, which several prophets predicted long ago, but also the end of mankind and his world. Experiencing the search for an alternative, of course, is not normatively necessary, and this is also applicable to the visions of 1968.

It would be nonsensical to interpret the 'Paris May' slogan 'power to imagination' literally because imagination can in no way be in power. It never has nor will it ever be. This does not mean that imagination is unimportant to human life. Quite the contrary; without imagination nothing can be created, not even knowledge of historical events. In this context, we can also understand the quotation at the beginning of this article, which was taken from one of the greatest scientists of modern times, Einstein. Not even the most ignorant person would be able to say that Einstein did not appreciate knowledge. In this quotation, it is the interaction that is important. It is the effect of the imagination on knowledge and vice versa, which Wright Mills summed up in his syntagm 'sociological imagination'. With this in mind, we can propose that this new era also has new challenges for the ascent of imagination and for new knowledge relating to a person's ability to form and transform his/her individual and collective life. It is my memories of the 'Belgrade June', in addition to what is known today about the events that happened during and after this time, that led me to this discovery.

May 1968 in Belgium: The crack bursts open

by BENOÎT LECHAT *

***Benoît Lechat** was born in Eupen, Belgium, in 1960. He graduated with a degree in philosophy and communications and started his career working as a journalist for *BRTN* and *Agence Belga*, where he covered the news on social and political events in Belgium. In 1999 he became the spokesman for Isabelle Durant, then the Ecolo party's Minister of Mobility. Since 2004 he has been working at *Etopia*, one of Ecolo's organisations. Lechat is responsible for *Etopia's* publications and publishes *Revue Etopia*, a political magazine on ecology. He is the author of many articles on Belgian politics and particularly on Belgian problems, which are published in *Revue Nouvelle*.

On 13 May 1966, Belgian bishops published a pastoral letter addressed to all the country's Christians. In this letter they reasserted the legality of a bilingual Catholic university on Flemish land. What the bishops probably did not realize was that this pastoral letter would initiate a period of political turmoil that would eventually radically transform Belgian society and how people viewed the state. The wave of student protests that affected the majority of western societies therefore began in Belgium as a result of this letter. At that time, the younger generation viewed the religious hierarchy as archaic but the pastoral letter led to a reawakening of the Flemish nationalist movement (born in the second half of the nineteenth century) as well as the emergence of a different and new kind of student movement. In the French speaking part of the country, there was, of course, no such nationalist mobilization but it there was a student protest that opposed the university authorities, particularly the board of the Free University of Brussels (ULB) denounced as especially undemocratic. Later, the French–speaking students at Louvain University would take advantage of their transfer to Wallonia to reform drastically their institution. Thus, 1968 in Belgium was, above of all, a reassessment of the power of the universities.

In a society that was strongly divided along religious, social and cultural lines, the protest movement was never able to unify itself. The Belgian '68 protest was a reflection of its society: clearly partitioned. Nevertheless, the disruption that arose changed the face of Belgium, on the institutional, social and cultural levels. Forty years later, we are better able to understand the effect those years of protest had. Little by little the changes, the ambiguities, the failures and frustration have become clearer. The main actors of this period are now retiring thus closing a period that they opened. But the inheritance is ours to keep.

In 2008, the uncertainty of Belgium's future and the anxieties provoked by unregulated globalisation should not mislead us as to how those who were 20 years old in '68 perceived their own time. This period might evoke images of well being, sustained by economic growth and almost full-employment but behind these images there was an unease that took many forms. In Wallonia, the shock of the winter of 1960 was still remembered by many.

Eight years earlier, a few months after the granting of Congo's independence, the Belgian government announced an economic reform that sparked several weeks of strikes in the Walloon industrial region. The Walloon workers were protesting against the Belgian capitalists increasing reluctance to invest in their region. The sixties also saw the reversal of economic power between Wallonia and Flanders. The latter was experiencing unprecedented development, taking advantage of the reorientation of capital inflows as well as the emergence of a network of small businesses supported by a number of banks, clearly in favour of Flemish development.

In Wallonia, it took time to heed the call for a structural reform of the economy even for the socialist party. In Flanders, the economy began to grow in a society still strongly under the influence of the Catholic Church. The Flemish population was acutely aware of the humiliations they had suffered for decades at the hands of the French-speaking bourgeoisie in their region and throughout the Belgian state. At that time, the Belgian system of social consultation was consoli-

dated by a series of measures: for example the legal recognition of the collective conventions agreed between the social partners; the creation of a system of union allowances (the reimbursement by the employer of union contributions) to reinforce the position of the unions within the Belgian decision making process.

The development of the Belgian welfare state also involved increasing access to higher education for all. After years of confrontation between secular and Christian parties, the School Pact of 1958 ensured the financing and development of several different education systems: state schools; non-confessional liberal catholic; communal and provincial. The national education budget almost doubled in the first part of the decade. But a gap still existed between economic and cultural modernisation, as if acquiring more materialistic comfort was a priority over the renewal of educational methods that had not really changed since the pre-war years. This educational reassessment was made easier thanks to the development of mass education and the increase in the social expectations that arose from improved education.

It was in this context that the bishops' pastoral letter, issued on 13 May 1966, confirmed their will to preserve a bilingual (French and Dutch) university on Flemish territory. Yet, in 1962 the Belgian parliament had drawn the linguistic border dividing the country into two homogeneous parts: French-speaking in the south and Flemish in the north. This exception to the rule, supported by the bishops in the name of the intellectual tradition inaugurated by Pope Martin V in 1425, aroused fear of the 'oil stain' amongst Flemish public opinion. That is to say they feared an increased in the French influence that had already strongly reduced the Flemish presence in Brussels and its outskirts. At the Catholic University of Leuven Flemish student opposition was immediate. Since the 1950s, the Dutch-speaking students had been in a majority at Leuven University but the French-speaking section was still present and growing and needed new infrastructure. The catholic French-speaking authorities wanted to build an extension for the French-speaking section at Leuven.

The Flemish rallied together with different entities participating: the traditional associations of the Flemish movement such as the Vlaams Volksbeweging; and the cultural organizations belonging to the Flemish political parties. The spearhead of the movement was the Studenten Vakbeweging (SVB), a student's union led by a former seminarian, Paul Goossens, whose subsequent notoriety made him a kind of Flemish Daniel Cohn-Bendit. His motivation was principally political and social. For Goossens and his followers the aim was to reject the domination of the religious hierarchy, the monarchy and the French-speaking bourgeoisie of the north and south. His scapegoat was the Prime Minister Paul Van den Boeynants, a businessman from Brussels, who perfectly embodied the power that the Social Christian Party had over the Flemish community. In 1966, the movement took no action during the summer holidays but resumed the following year. It reached its climax in January 1968 after it was announced that the French-speaking section would be expanded. Leuven then experienced weeks of demonstrations. The two linguistic sides of the Prime Minister's party opposed each other ferociously and on February 7, the government resigned.

Thus, the Flemish '68 is the only student movement that forced a government to resign. But the victory was ambiguous as was the slogan 'Walloons go home' which mixed the anti-imperialist claims of the movement against the Vietnam War with the claims of the nationalist struggle against the Walloons, who were often confused with the French-speaking bourgeoisie of Flanders. Of course, the SVB changed its slogan to 'bourgeois go home' but it was incapable of avoiding its use by the nationalist movement, even though the movement feared the leftists and workers as well as the claims for the democratisation of access to higher education. At that time, the SVB increased its presence at the gates of factories on strike (for instance at the Limburg mines, which were being closed). A few years later, some of its leaders founded a Maoist party – All Power to the Workers – which became the Parti du Travail en Belgique (PTB – the Belgian Labour Party).

Flemish student support for the separation of the catholic university began early. Demonstration, 1 February 1967

University of Brussels, barricade on the Avenue Héger, 4 December 1968. The students protest against the intrusion of the police on the campus.

Today, this party is still the only Stalinist far-left party in Belgium. Of course, the revolutionary message of the Flemish '68 terrified traditional Flanders, especially the one that claims its cultural autonomy in the very Catholic daily *De Standaard*.

At the ULB, located on the green edge of Belgium's capital, the students debated the attitude to adopt towards what had happened at Leuven. On 12 February 1968, Paul Goossens was invited by the Flemish students of the ULB (they had to wait until 1970 for their own Flemish speaking board of administrators in the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, VUB). The police had to protect him from the French-speaking students, who prevented him from taking the floor and expressing his views. The Students Association claimed they would not let anyone come and 'sow discord, hatred and violence at the ULB, something which had been accomplished so well at Leuven'. The left-wing students proved to be more open-minded. The Brussels ' federation of socialist students expressed their support for the 'Flemish students' battle for a democratic and autonomous university'. The truth was that the Brussels' students did not want to see the Université catholique de Louvain (UCL) settle in the Brussels' agglomeration.

The Mouvement Universitaire Belge d'Expression Française (MUBEF), the French-speaking Students' union was also divided on the question. On 17 March 1968 in Liege, its Congress approved the motion stipulating that 'Belgium is a bi-national state composed of two communities and one entity, Brussels, which have different socio-cultural traditions and economic situations'. Clearly inspired by the regional Walloon movement, the Liege students got the union to approve the motion: 'community autonomy is necessary for any policy of democratisation of the education system'. This was unacceptable to the Leuven delegation, which decided that night to pull out of the MUBEF. It was difficult for the children of the Catholic French-speaking bourgeoisie to accept federalism since it implied accepting the scission of their university. Once the decision had been made by the newly elected government (the elections were on March 31), they rallied to obtain all the necessary means for the transfer of the French-speaking section of their university to Wallonia. They supported anyone within the Catholic French-speaking establishment, who was prepared to lobby for funding for the university's transfer and plans for the transfer were put very discreetly in motion.

The reformist side of the student's representation fought for a transfer that would include democratic transformation. 'Transfer equals transformation' was the slogan of the Students General Assembly. At the end of 1968, an assembly was put into place with an equal number of representatives from the board of administration (professors, administrative and technical staff) and students. They came up with ideas for a reform that would profoundly transform the university's organization and teaching methods. Nevertheless, the reform was submitted to a vote and rejected by the professors. The students' representatives abstained. At that time, the students' representatives had been infiltrated by Maoists, who considered participation a bourgeois' illusion. The choice of the UCL's future location was also debated. Building the university's headquarters in the rural area of Brabant Wallonia, instead of the Charleroi region, meant that the institution was unable to bring its huge development potential to a former industrial area that certainly needed it, suffering as it was from an economic crisis. The local socialist administration, strongly anticlerical, was probably afraid that the presence of the Catholic university would undermine its monopoly of power. The president of the Socialist Youth Movement at that time, Jean-Claude Van Cauwenberghe strongly opposed the university being situated in the area.

It was only at the beginning of May '68 that the ULB students mobilized. The events in Paris certainly sparked the protest and encouraged the students to occupy the university's administrative buildings, but the movement actually arose from a discomfort specific to the ULB. In fact, the issue wasn't the bishops'

authority but the university's. The university had been founded in 1834 by the Freemasons to counterbalance the influence of the Catholic Church in higher education. During its history, the ULB has always been prone to lively debates between conservative and progressive liberals and socialists. In the middle of the twentieth century, the university was still run by a board consisting of members appointed without any consultation with the students or the academic body. At that time, the majority of the board consisted of businessmen occupying important functions in the financial and economic fields. This lack of democratic legitimacy generated a protest, in which the left and far-left students were able to pull along the rest of the more or less indifferent students.

On May 13, the action really began at a meeting, attended by the actress Melina Mercouri, against the dictatorship of the Greek colonels. Two days later, a tract was distributed stating: 'Applying the principle of direct democracy and in solidarity with French students and workers, 500 participants have decided to gather as a free assembly of students, in their own building, to discuss critically their university's structure and its current purpose'. This assembly then began a long occupation of the central buildings of the university. On June 20, the university board made some concessions with the introduction of the principle of democratic and financial representation. The few dozen 'enragés', still resisting after that decision, published a statement claiming that the free assembly was 'aware of the contradictions which hinder its attempt to abolish the bourgeois' oppression and has decided to return to its roots and undertake a permanent struggle against a society plagued by the consumption of material goods and based on profit'. Additionally, and in the same flamboyant style, the assembly declared 'its total indifference to any university problems that are dealt with in an isolated way and hands over the premises to whoever will take them'. On July 10, the police ended their action and evacuated the last occupied buildings.

Ultimately, not much happened in Belgium in 1968, at least compared with the French or German protest movement. The conflict was limited to the education system and was always divided. It was only on 3 December 1970 that the Belgian students agreed a joint objective. That day, 15.000 students demonstrated in Leuven against government restrictions imposed on the length of time foreign students could stay in Belgium. The slogan was 'we are all foreigners' and was an indicative phrase in a series of scattered protests. The lengthy hunger strike that was organized ended in semi-failure but enabled the emergence of a new form of solidarity between Belgian and foreign students based on the feeling that they belonged to a same generation.

In Belgium, the spirit of '68 arrived with a little delay at the beginning of the seventies and led to the emergence of a new wave of militants. Some of them hung on to the dream of a proletarian revolution, in which the university would play a role. Others happily joined political institutions and became journalists, civil servants, politicians or academics. The latter were at the core of a genuine boom in Belgium's associative life. The debate on the methods of production in an industrial society and the rebellion of a generation raised a new question. The class struggle became a struggle for the meaning of work. The question was no longer the replacement of a capitalist dictatorship with a proletarian dictatorship, but defending every aspect of the collective autonomy. The awareness of the rights of women, young people, rural communities and immigrants as well as the defence of neighbourhoods threatened by real-estate projects led to the creation of a large number of associations and committees that even today demonstrate Belgian enthusiasm for associations. The enthusiasm and dynamism of what would later be called the 'cultural creatives' was encouraged by the re-introduction of theoretical reading lists, especially the sociological writings of Frenchman Alain Touraine, who analysed social movements and offered insights into history as it was being written.

In the education sector, the '68 turmoil led to reforms to fight inequalities and reconsider the hierarchal character of the pedagogical relationship. Unfortunately, the implementation of these reforms was undermined by the budget crisis of the late seventies, in particular in the French-speaking regions. This led to school conflicts throughout the eighties and nineties.

The frustrated hopes of those involved in the education sector provided a base from which the Ecolo party developed in French-speaking Belgium. Well before that, political ecology had arisen from claims for self-management, urban and environmental struggles as well as Walloon regionalism.

A number of 1970s militants contributed to the creation of the Ecolo party with their convictions

Francophone students at Louvain University demonstrate for a more democratic education system and proper financial support for the transfer of the university to Wallonia, 20 March 1969.

that capitalism and consumerism destroy the natural surroundings and environment of society's groups and individuals. On 27 February 1980 at Louvain-la-Neuve, Daniel Cohn-Bendit and the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis took the floor in a debate entitled 'from autonomy to ecology'. The audience was able to sense the utopian expectation of a revolution that did not claim political power but could reclaim the 'power of living'. This slogan was actually used by Ecolo in its 1984 European parliament election campaign. In Flanders, at the beginning of the seventies, the movement 'Anders Gaan Leven' (live differently) emerged from a series of social and environmental struggles rooted in the post-materialist values flourishing at that time everywhere in Europe. It became a political movement in 1979 when it participated in elections under the name of Agalev, the ancestor of Groen!

Forty years on, dare we risk an evaluation of the '68 movement? The memory of these years of transition is carefully preserved in the divisions within Belgian society. A global reading of the changes that arose in Belgium at the end of the 'glorious thirties' has still to be undertaken. The division of the political landscape continues to undermine proper discussion on the role of learning in society, the subject that the sixties revolts against organisational powers also wanted to address. Forty years later, the isolation of most French-speaking universities in a rural area is a form of functional confinement. Its contribution to the emancipation of a society with internal borders has not yet been fulfilled. Society? What society? To a great extent, the division of Belgian French-speaking society still prevents its members from finding their place in history. On the Flemish side, the struggle against clerical power and the control of the Christelijke Volkspartij (CVP) led, at the end of the nineties, to the creation by Guy Verhofstadt's government of coalitions, which excluded the Social Christian parties. The daily *De Morgen* founded by Paul Goossens at the end of the seventies, contributed greatly to the trend. Nevertheless, the '68 movement also sparked a surge of a populist nationalism that has left the Flemish left temporarily orphaned and troubled.

Today the big political game is 'bashing the 1960s'

interview with DANIEL COHN-BENDIT*

***Daniel Cohn-Bendit** was born 4 April 1945 in Monatuban, France. He studied sociology at the University of Nanterre and became well known as spokesperson and leader of the student protests before and during the 1968 May riots in France. In the aftermath of the May events, Cohn-Bendit was expelled from France. He went to live in Frankfurt where he joined activist Joschka Fischer in the Frankfurt Sponti movement, whose protest methods included squatting, street fighting and anti business demonstrations. In 1978 Cohn-Bendit became the editor and publisher of the Sponti movement's house organ, the alternative *Pflasterstrand* magazine. In the same year the ban on his residence in France was revoked but he decided to stay in Germany. In 1984 he became a member of the Green party where he opposed the eco-socialist fundamentalist wing, preferring the more pragmatic approach of the 'Realo' members. He was a supporter of Joschka Fischer during his term of office as Minister for Environmental Affairs in Hessen. In March 1989 he became an honorary city councillor for the newly established office for multi-cultural affairs in Frankfurt. In June 1994, he was one of two Green party members elected to the European Parliament, having been nominated the previous November to the top of the *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* party list. In 1999 Cohn-Bendit became the leading European Parliament candidate of the French Greens (les Verts). Since January 2002 he has been co-president of the Greens/Free European Alliance Group in the European Parliament where he is also a member of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, a member of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs and substitute member on the Subcommittee on Security and Defence.

Before starting with the current events linked to May 1968 and what it all means today, let us go back to what the movement meant for society at that time. You said then that the protest movement wanted to provoke a 'crack' in society. What did that mean?

The end of the 1960s is characterised by a series of historical ruptures that formed what we at the time called the 'crack'. In fact we actually need to talk about 'cracks' in the plural since they were different in each country. In Warsaw for instance, some young people demonstrated against the censorship of a theatrical play and for the right to listen to jazz. In fact, behind this cultural claim lay a democratic struggle against communist authoritarianism. It was an initial crack in a wall that would eventually fall twenty years later. May 1968 in France was the first break in the closed society of a Gaullist-communist system. Communism ruled the working class and Gaullism ruled political France. The movement heralded the end of Gaullism and of Western communism, which had started to irretrievably break up. In Germany, the crack opened up a society that had emancipated itself from Nazism through pro-Americanism and the non-political character of the economic miracle of the post-war years. This anti-establishment movement broke the authoritarianism of society and ended the silence about the past. In the U.S., the youth movement attacked conservatism and the self-sufficiency of a society that considered itself above all the land of freedom. The 'flower power' movement against the war in Vietnam, basing its demands on the U.S. constitution, made a crack in the conservatism of a society that believed in the myth that everyone has the right to live the life he/she wants. As Hannah Arendt put it, this crack broke the concept of a society that was politically a democracy and socially a form of communism; it was a society characterised by being both homogeneous and greatly segregated at the same time.

Today these movements seem to be both extremely far from, and very present on the political scene ...

Today the big political game is 'bashing the 1960s'. In Germany, the militant past of Joschka Fischer led to a debate on the use of violence in protest actions. In France, Sarkozy brought up May 1968 in order to prevent a coalition between Bayrou and Royal, which he thought was being prepared by the former 1968 groups, to which I belong. In Germany as in France,

"We are all Jews and Germans"
Popular chant among French students to demonstrate solidarity with Daniel Cohn-Bendit .

we have observed similar attempts to make 1968 responsible for all of society's troubles. For example, if today there is no respect, no authority, if school doesn't work, if individualism and selfishness is growing, it is the post-1968 ideology that should be blamed. It is fascinating to observe how the bourgeoisie and the descendants of the world we fought against have a huge need for revenge, even today, as if they had never accepted the fact that their power had started to collapse then. Paradoxically, someone like Sarkozy has a real fascination for 1968 and his behaviour truly follows the style of 1968. When he steps up onto the stage, when he puts on his show of 'boundless pleasure and orgasms', he does what we called in Germany thirty years ago, politics in the first person singular. In other words, he does not act in the name of the revolution, but in his own name. At that time we said that everything was political and Sarkozy even makes politics out of his private life. His 'rupture', supposedly symbolising a will to modernize French society, is driven by a form of self-determination that says: if you want something, you can get it. In other words, if you want more purchasing power, you can get it. His problem is that it is not working. Everyone knows that. That is why, today, he is has to say that the coffers of the State are empty.

Sarkozy – heir to May 1968? You must admit there is quite a difference?

The difference between Sarkozy and May 1968 is that the self-determination of 1968 was collective. The anti-authoritarian German movement did not want young people to have to adopt the same lifestyle as their parents. Warsaw youth did not want to hand over their lives to communism. Flower power in the U.S. was clearly a collective voluntarism. It was not one person who gave you the power to improve your life, but everyone working together in a collective action that allowed you to reclaim your own life. May 1968 was a revolt, not a revolution. Apart from the leftists and the followers of Mao and Trotsky, the aim was not to seize political power but to claim power to control your own life. We protested in front of ministries but we never thought of taking possession of them. That was the novelty. Naturally, this generated huge hopes that could only produce disappointment since nothing can change from one day to the next. This was also observed in '68 in France, when after the Grenelle agreements, some young workers refused to go back to their jobs in the factories, which they compared to military barracks, and they thought that a general strike would change everything.

The other aspect of May 1968 was that it was a different concept of politics ...

This project to collectively reclaim our own lives in order to allow individual autonomy went hand in hand with the idea that 'everything is politics' and that all of society, from schools to factories, should be organised into a self-governing system. We were somewhere between Rousseau and post-modernity. Individual autonomy meant the constant politics of the individual. And that is where a mistake might have been made when we criticised traditional democracy. Actually most people do not want to be permanently involved in politics, only a minority does. The majority wants to delegate. The real modernity of the 1968 movement was the opportunity to interfere in politics at any time.

Today this fact is no longer very clear ...

Over the past few years we have seen the emergence of a Trotskyite critique, whose objective today would be to create a May 1968 that would actually succeed,

in other words a revolt able to seize power. There is also a workers' critique that divides the May 1968 events into the petit-bourgeois slogans of the students, on the one hand, and a traditional social movement that aspires to greater purchasing power in a period of strong economic growth, on the other. We tend to forget that at the end of the 1960s, social democracy was underdeveloped in France and that the working class was ruled by the Communist party and the CGT (one of the largest trade unions and associated with the Communist party). At that time it was the young workers who went on strike and who, little by little, brought the factories into the movement. That was exactly the time when the CFDT (French Democratic Federation of Labour) emerged as an alternative to the CGT and that union delegations were finally created in companies. The general strike mobilised the whole of French society. Everything was opposed from the inside. The young workers' main demand was not so much a rise in purchasing power but to have a say in their own lives at the work place. The government tried to answer these demands by organising the Grenelle negotiations, which granted significant salary rises. But it was not enough. The ingenious idea of De Gaulle was then to organise elections. He was in control once again; a choice had to be made between him and the communists.

There wasn't really any political alternative to De Gaulle at that time?

Indeed, there was not. At that time in 1969 in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), the anti-authoritarian movement resulted in Willy Brandt winning the national elections. This was because he represented an alternative that was not communist and he believed that it was necessary to attempt greater democracy. Nevertheless the complexity of the German situation then was that, on the one hand, there was a trend towards democratisation and, on the other, professional restrictions for people who were part of the far-left terrorism movement.

Marxism was also undergoing a crisis ...

At that time the traditional Marxist reading of capitalism began to lose some of its strength. In 1968 it was not the exploited groups that caused the cracks despite what the traditional Marxist readings had foreseen. Only France experienced workers' strikes, but there was nothing in the U.S., nothing in the FRG and nothing in the communist countries. It was also the beginning of the fragmentation of society with the first revolts beginning to tackle the problem of alienation. It was the beginning of a change. Society's superstructure, i.e. the ideas, knowledge and representation upon which it was based, became the driving force of the breakdown of the structure of production. It was not, as orthodox Marxist theories put it, the relationship between the social classes originating from the system of production that determined the superstructure. Marxism, nevertheless, remained true to its description of exploitation and its methods and the system of social class.

Today the social context seems to be more difficult. Which crack should be opened?

1968 was indeed a revolt without unemployment, AIDS or climate change. The people of 1968 were innovative; believing everything was possible. They demonstrated a degree of naivety and sometimes even stupidity as, in the name of freedom, they battled for the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Cuba, North Korea or the U.S.S.R. It was quite something! Then there were the old-fashioned libertarians who dreamt of the Catalonia of 1936 or Hungary of 1956, recalling all of the revolutionary and anti-Leninist self-government ideas.

"Chaos it's him"
French student movement slogan created after Charles De Gaulle spoke angrily on TV saying "La réforme oui, la chienlit non"
(Reform: yes, shit: no).

"Be young and shut up"

With the arrival of the crisis of the 1970s, political conditions changed. We progressively became an anxious society, in which fear of what was not working became the driving force. The extent of today's decline has paralysed society and there is no alternative model. The famous phrase of 1968 stating 'another world is possible' has become very abstract today. We agree that we do not want a world as it is today, but it is far more difficult to agree on what new form it should take. It is no longer a crack we need to make but effective proposals that can regulate the social and environmental aspects of globalisation. It is not only technical solutions that the world needs but also a real change of lifestyle. Our perception of the complexity of the world can sometimes paralyse us and the crack we need to make today is to overcome our paralysis of thought and action.

Should we still believe that it is possible to change our world?

Of course the issue of changing the world reoccurs regularly in our society. It is currently the motto of Barack Obama's presidential campaign: change is possible, even if his concept of change is still quite abstract. The difficulty for the Greens, who have had to develop a reformist programme, is that they are challenged by a visionary desire for radical change embodied in the global evolution of today. Consequently each one of us is confronted with inequality. Everything is transparent within countries and between continents. People from the suburbs see and live the inequality around them. This brings about daily frustration and humiliation. Those have-nots are shamed by the riches of others and this feeling of humiliation can engender revolt, riots and refusals. But at the same time this feeling cannot find a way to express itself or it is completely misunderstood. Today the challenge for the Greens is to be back on the offensive and to move forward with a more visionary project, challenging ecological degradation, world-wide social inequality and not just on the national level. The challenge is to be responsible for our reforms and to put forward a new vision of hope.

All over Europe we feel that this race for competitiveness is meeting more and more resistance ...

Neo-liberal capitalism has gone too far and has reached its breaking point. The neo-liberal ideology of European competitiveness at global level and with China is totally inept because, no matter what we do, we will never have the same hourly wages of the Chinese or the Indians. But it is a weapon that pushes productivity even further. Compared to the 1960s, we have lost sight of the equilibrium between time for work and time for living. Rather than Sarkozy's 'work more to earn more', we must return to the debate 'work differently in order to live differently'. We must make specific proposals in this direction and refuse to be locked into this sort of competitiveness; otherwise, our lives will be devoid of projects. The objective of life is not only to work. In work, there must also be life and apart from work, there must be the opportunity to engage in activities that give direction to our lives.

It's surprising to observe that today there is a form of communication existing between all the different scattered movements at national level. Do you think it has developed itself consciously and that, with time, it will play a role in the process of building a European collective?

It is true that May 1968 brought together the different European civil societies, which had been scattered apart, to communicate with one another. That generation was deeply marked by the media. Information enabled the different national movements to be interconnected. We heard slogans such as 'Paris, Warsaw, Rome, Prague, same fight.' This demonstrated that the movements' consciousness transcended national borders. This aspect shows how May 1968 constituted an important step towards the creation of a European public space.

Which conditions would bring back a new form of collective energy and enthusiasm to the project? Or, how to become Promethean again in a world

"Fresh supplies for the strikers". The woman in the picture is the allegory of the French republic, the so-called "Marianne".

dominated by fear without falling back into totalitarian rifts?

I think we should come back to the idea invented by the French sociologist Edgar Morin of a 'civilization project', even if it has been somewhat spoiled by Carla Bruni's husband. To be Promethean today is to believe that we can build a new society, or in the words of Barack Obama, 'Yes, we can.' The alter-globalization movement's motto of 'another world is possible' becomes 'another civilization is possible' for the ecologists. Today's civilization, which is based on financial speculation and petrol, is beginning to collapse. Consequently, a reflection on 'how to live together' and on 'work less to live better' is strongly needed. The beginning of the collapse of the equation of the consuming society that we are witnessing reintroduces that paradigm of a society, in which conviviality enables a good level of life without constantly consuming and working more. In the post-May 1968 era, we must reopen the cultural creativity space and reinvent our relationship with work and consumption.

Isn't a new perspective on globalisation one of the conditions for a new positive historical acceleration, in which democratic societies would be actors of their own destiny? Shouldn't we make an effort to move away from our European point of view on globalisation and consider that acceleration could come from emerging countries, with which we should strengthen the dialogue?

The challenge of globalization is also a choice that the emerging countries have to make. They have to make the choice between the invention of a new carbon-free civilization or keeping the old model, which destroys the environment. Brazil with its biofuel is going in the latter direction. These biofuels, a new kind of productivism, are leading us to a food disaster. Bio-fuels and GMOs are the symbol of the next great source of conflict for civilization. Either we will head towards a new model of destructive productivism or we will achieve real sustainable development that will enable us to enter a new civilization. To move away from our European point of view is also to understand that we have to build the conditions for emerging countries not to choose the old system.

"Frontiers - we don´t give a damn about them"
Popular slogan in 1968

2008 marks the 40th anniversary of the worldwide protests of 1968. The events of that time such as the protests against the war in Vietnam, the Prague Spring and the student protests in Western Europe and the U.S. are closely connected – it was truly a global movement!

In this brochure protagonists of 1968 in Brazil, Poland, the Czech Republic, Russia, Germany, South Africa, Serbia and Belgium share their memories and assess the events from today's perspective.

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