
LETTERS

Prague & Warsaw

THERE IS MUCH to be said in favour of Ota Filip's comparison between the Prague Spring of 1968 and the Polish Summer of 1980/81. (ENCOUNTER, November). Quoting Goethe I am inclined to exclaim "*Wie anders wirkt dies Zeichen auf mich ein!*" (How different is my impression . . .) Right from the beginning, all laudable endeavours in Czechoslovakia to build a better future were hampered by the fact that the men in power, the leading Reform-Communists, were both unable and unwilling to make a clean break with a shameful past. Even the "Action Programme" of April 1968, the most liberal document ever to be published by a Communist Party, insisted, though in a watered-down form, on the "leading role" of that party.

But Filip paints a wrong picture by minimising the Prague Spring as a mere "struggle for power between young Party members against the decrepit old Stalinists." There were two factors which alone made the changes of 1968—with all their limitations—possible. The first one—and it is amazing that Filip who is a writer and not a politician is silent about it—was the magnificent fight of the Czech writers against the Stalinist leadership, culminating in their defiant Congress of June 1967 and vividly described in Dušan Hamsík's *Writers against Rulers* (London, 1971). Some of them had been Communists before; but some of them, like Kundera and Havel, had never even formally joined the party. It seems unjust to me not to mention this fact.

Furthermore, Filip is wrong in stating that all that happened in the trade-union field was that the existing "trade-union organisation" was "allowed to introduce some small first measures of democratisation within the factories, but the leadership . . . remained safely in the hands of tough old Party loyalists." The story is unknown in the West because nobody cared to describe a rather involved development; but the facts are that the allegedly inactive Czech workers (Slovakia is a case for itself) purged in the first months of 1968 the so-called "Unified trade-union movement" (not deserving that name before 1968 and after 1969), threw out the discredited leadership and insisted on a resolute change of direction. Long after the Soviet occupation, the thus purified organisation arranged a congress in March 1969, adopting a programme which included the demand for the right to strike. True, they had no Lech Walesa in their ranks. Some of the new leaders had a more or less dubious past, but by no means all of them. They all were forced to disappear from the scene again, when "normalisation" was introduced. Since then, the Czech workers are inactive to a degree which drives the leading dissidents to desperation.

The attempt of some courageous old Czech Social Democrats in 1968 to rebuild their party, suppressed in 1948, brought them (although they had only a P.O. box as address) within two weeks 200,000 applications for membership from all parts of the country. This greatly embarrassed the Dubček leadership, which neither dared to say No to the Social Democrats nor to give them the

green light. I have not heard so far of any attempt to renew in Poland the glorious tradition of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), brutally suppressed by Gomulka in 1948.

J. W. BRUEGEL

London

"Candu"

IN THE ARTICLE by Mr Norman Moss "Has Non-Proliferation a Chance?" (ENCOUNTER November) he makes reference to Canada as a supplier of uranium, but not as a supplier of nuclear technology. This is the more curious in that the Canadian technology used in the CANDU reactor has specific application to two of the points he notes as problems.

Unlike most reactors, the CANDU does not require enriched uranium as fuel. It uses natural uranium, which is fairly plentiful in nature, and can even be extracted from seawater if necessary. Thus, it frees the reactor-owner from the strictures of such countries as the United States and the USSR, which are the major sources of enriched uranium. Further, the waste from the CANDU reactor cannot as easily be used for making nuclear weapons as the waste from American light-water reactors. However, the Science Council of Canada (of which I was the former secretary) drew attention some two years ago to the fact that it seems likely that CANDU waste can be recycled with thorium. Should this turn out to be feasible on an industrial scale, it would to some extent make breeder reactors less attractive.

LESLIE MILLIN

Vancouver

I DID NOT give space to Canada's role as supplier of nuclear technology in my brief survey because, apart from the gift of a reactor to India, it has not been important. Perhaps it should have been: a House of Commons Select Committee said the CEGB should have looked more closely at the CANDU reactor.

It is true that the CANDU produces less plutonium than light-water reactors, but it is more dangerous on a weapons proliferation point of view in other respects. As Mr Millin says, the user is less susceptible to pressure from the suppliers of enrichment services and therefore more free to use the reactor for any purpose he wants. (He is not entirely independent of outside suppliers unless he has a domestic uranium mine, however; nobody has extracted usable quantities of uranium from seawater.) The fact that fuel rods can be removed while it is operating complicates inspection.

NORMAN MOSS

London

The Irish Debate

EDWARD PEARCE (ENCOUNTER, August) says that world opinion is blinkered to the excellence of the "astonishing" British Army in Northern Ireland and suggests that the world should give the British forces "a prize for peace."

He says that the IRA is "a fascist organisation" with-

out analysing what that much abused epithet means in the Irish context. He never mentions the para-military UVF which has not yet been proscribed by a British government supposedly doing its "brave best" to keep separate the internecine "tribes" of Ireland. His "peaceful, cleansing, beneficent and endlessly frustrated" army murdered eleven people in Londonderry in 1972, many of whom were shot in the back. Little is known of the savage underground war conducted by the SAS in their cross-border raids. All lurid examples of IRA atrocities have to be balanced by examples of outrage on the "other" side.

There is no attempt to examine the resurgence of IRA violence or to find a peaceful solution. Nothing is said of the serious abuses of power exercised by the Stormont régime prior to the outbreak of troubles: nothing on plural voting, discrimination against Catholics in jobs and housing which did so much to create the "tribal" belligerent mentality. Mr Pearce also declaims against the "soiled politics" of the Haughey government but says nothing of the infinitely more sordid British creation of the gerrymandering Ulster state in 1921 and, perhaps more damning, the blind eye turned by every British government since then to the institutionalised discrimination within the Ulster state. The trouble with people like Mr Pearce is that they condemn the Republicans for remembering too much, too vicariously. The real problem is their convenient amnesia. There has been no gain made by Republicans throughout history from a persistently obstructionist British Parliament except when it had been preceded by violence. Britain is now doing penance for its legacy of historical sins in Ireland. It is only when Britain is historically forgetful that they can deride the symptoms of the Irish curse and deny that there is a solution to it.

Therefore, we cannot speak of IRA atrocity without British Army atrocity, hunger-strikers without "Diplock" courts, "feuding tribes" without a history of persecution, a divided Irish island on grounds of religion and heritage, and a unified British island on the same grounds. In the Republican vision of things, which is understandable to understanding men, the British army conjures up atavistic hatreds of occupation, Auxiliaries, torture and outrage. So if the only possible policy for Northern Ireland is "the keeping of the Queen's Peace by the Army . . ." then we are inviting more years of fruitless deadlock in which a full-scale war would be the only outcome. The age-old British policy of muddling through to the next débâcle with manufactured, unworkable compromises has been seen to be both useless and tragic in the last twelve years. Some moves must be made to unify Ireland while simultaneously safeguarding the heritage, culture and political persuasion of the "tribes" occupying the Irish island.

Impasse and social atrophy thrive upon Mr Pearce's anti-idealistic plans; the idea that everyone will grow tired of struggling for a united island because the security forces can and will eradicate terror and that everyone must break out of the prison of history because it is foolish is the British attitude towards Ireland throughout the ages in microcosm. Unfortunately for Britain, Irish memory and conviction are stronger than de-terrorisation, and whenever complacency and forgetfulness return as British standards, then the IRA will jar the ex-colonial power back to life, brutally.

Paris

CHARLES J. DOYLE

AS FOR MR DOYLE, the fascism of uniformed masked men under paramilitary discipline does not require analysis, merely eyes. He lists the wrongs of Stormont and forgets Conor Cruise O'Brien's just observation that these did not justify the breaking of a single leg, let alone a death. He speaks with approval of the IRA's ability to "jar the ex-colonial power back to life, brutally", and talks of my "anti-idealistic plans." How right he is. What Ulster and the Republic need supremely is a period of benign disbelief . . . that, and the mentality of adults.

EDWARD PEARCE

London

F.D.R., "Only Child"?

TO MY SURPRISE Mr Averell Harriman makes the following remark in his interview with George Urban [ENCOUNTER, November 1981]: "I knew Roosevelt pretty well. His brother was in my class at school. . . ." I think I have consulted most biographers of F.D.R. but no one mentions the fact that he had a brother (there was, of course, a half-brother, much older than F.D.R.). I would be happy to know which Roosevelt it was Mr Harriman went to school with, if only because this revelation ruins all explanations of Roosevelt's character based on his being the only child of Sara and James.

A. LAMMERS

Koudekerk Aan Den Rijn
The Netherlands

Urban's "Horizon"

THE LATEST of George Urban's brilliant series of interviews, that with Averell Harriman in your issue of November, contains a couple of points that should perhaps not have been let pass by one or other interlocutor. (Incidentally, the article might also have mentioned that Harriman was actually US Ambassador to the Soviet Union, from 1943-6.) Harriman is quoted as saying:

"If we had refused to evacuate the Soviet Zone [of Germany, in 1945] the Soviets would most probably have retaliated in Austria by refusing to withdraw from *our* zone of occupation there, in which case Austria would be a Soviet satellite today."

In fact, the only portion of the agreed Western zones in Austria—apart from our sectors of Vienna—that the Russians occupied militarily at the end of the war was the (British) province of Styria: and, by contrast, that part of Upper Austria, north of the Danube, which had been allocated to them was initially occupied by US forces. A reciprocal hand-over duly took place later in the year.

As to Soviet policy for Austria, I have no wish to repeat arguments I have developed elsewhere (e.g. in the July 1981 journal of the British International Studies Association). But briefly, it became evident from the outset that this was not only to treat Austria as a separate case from Germany but also to reject as impracticable any division of the country on German lines—let alone any attempt to take over the whole of it, which would have brought armed conflict with the West.

Vintage Words

London

THE ENGLISH language is there to be complained of. When we bother to stop and think about the stuff we use to talk and write with, it is usually because we are irritated.

Some clod has been misusing the notorious adverb "hopefully"; a split infinitive has been sighted; or somebody has been described as "disinterested" when what was clearly intended was "uninterested."

You then have an argument between the "Fowler's English Usage" supporters and the Humpty Dumpty theory of language: "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less." The argument is a drawn match, inevitably futile, since neither side can prove the other is wrong.

IT IS MORE FUN to watch from the pavilion and observe, without taking sides, the changing styles of play. And increasingly what seems to be the dominant reason for changes in language is the fear of being laughed at.

Perhaps that is nothing new. It was the reason, I suppose, why privy was changed to water-closet and water-closet to w.c. and w.c. to lavatory and lavatory to toilet (I'm not sure I have got the order quite right): one didn't wish to be thought crude, but inevitably each euphemism became tarnished by association with the natural functions. At Winchester College, that most refined of academies, I believe they call it the "topos", Greek for the "place."

IT SIMPLY SEEMS to be less embarrassing to say "I'm in refuse disposal" rather than "I'm a dustman." At the other end of the scale, there is the inverted snobbery of saying "I bash bits of metal for a living", rather than "I'm a steel extrusions executive"; or "I'm an old hack for my sins," rather than "I'm an editorial executive with the Standard."

In all such cases, we only wish to avoid being thought ill of, either as being too common or too pompous.

EVEN WINE CATALOGUES have been afflicted by the fear of mockery. You used to be able to wallow in prose of the most unashamedly juicy purple:

"This impudent young demoiselle pouts her rosy lips at you and whispers of the enchantments hidden in the bosky gorges of the pouffeuse. Château Soupçon is not so much a wine, more a dangerous rendezvous."

Wine prose has unfortunately never fully recovered from the shock administered by the immortal Thurber cartoon of the host saying to his guests:

"It's a naive domestic Burgundy without any breeding, but I think you'll be amused by its presumption."

Now I notice, a newer, sterner style of wine-manship is employed. The writer talks of wines in the tones of an old-fashioned headmaster reviewing the term's exam results.

THE LATEST CATALOGUE from the Wine Society constantly speaks of wines as possessing "length" and "backbone." The 1979 clarets are said "to show signs of greater character than was at first apparent", rather as though an inky little squirt had surprisingly matured into promising prefect material. It is a matter of time before we are told that last year's Burgundies "lack moral fibre."

Better still apparently, "the '79s are more complex than the succeeding year." The '80s class, one fears, may not be up to their O-levels. The most outstanding wine of the 1978 vintage is said to be the "Château Léoville-Las-cases, a St Julien 2nd growth which no serious cellar should be without."

At a mere £105.48 per dozen, can you afford not to buy a case? Would you really like it to be known that you keep a shallow, frivolous cellar?

IN THE CASE of A Guide to Etiquette and Modern Manners (Debretts), the primary object of not being laughed at is obvious. And yet it is remarkable how more elevated reasons continue to be given for bringing out such guides.

In his preface, Sir Iain Moncreiffe of That Ilk says that "manners' object is to put everybody at their ease, whatever their age or rank." We are enjoined to remember the words of Cardinal Newman that "it is almost a definition of a gentleman to say he is one who never inflicts pain."

Alas, the world is not such a kindly place, and the original version of that saying was "a gentleman is one who never inflicts pain without meaning to." And the effect, if not the intention of all such rules of behaviour is to distinguish between those who know the correct way to eat peas and those who don't, thus adding to and not subtracting from the general store of unease.

IS IT A QUESTION of acting natural to follow the Guide's firm instruction to bring in the dessert knife and fork on the dessert plate with the finger bowl? As far as naturalness goes, would you not put your guests more at their ease by sticking your dessert cutlery behind your ear?

"Candles", we are told "are indispensable" (though correct spelling, it seems, is not) "both for setting the mood and making the table—and the people round it—look their best." The rule for hostesses is "the shorter the candlestick, the taller the candle"—not, as some may have thought "the taller the candle, the shorter the hostess."

And I am sure you are already aware that "a conversational gambit which is always taboo is malicious, ill-natured or ill-worded gossip about someone who is not present." Such advice is, of course, strictly followed in all the best houses.

Ferdinand Mount

in THE STANDARD (London)

In other words, however parlous the situation may have seemed at times, there was no real basis for Austria becoming a Soviet satellite.

I feel, however, that Harriman was right in playing down the practical importance of the "percentage" agreement between Churchill and Stalin in Moscow in 1944: and that Urban himself when quoting from Churchill's own memoirs, might have included such passages as:

"We were only dealing with immediate wartime arrangements. All larger questions were reserved on both sides for what we then hoped would be the peace table . . ." [and] "it is not intended to be more than a guide . . . nor does it attempt to set up a rigid system of spheres of interest."

In any case, the determining factor in the eventual absorption behind the Curtain of the three countries in question—Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria—was not this (or any other) scrap of paper, but the brute fact of occupation by the Red Army.

MICHAEL CULLIS

*Bushey Heath
Hertfordshire*

French Definition

ON "DÉTENTE" Mr Hugh Ragsdale (ENCOUNTER, September) should also have consulted a good French dictionary.

PETIT LAROUSSE (1960)

"*Détente* n. f. Pièce du mécanisme d'une arme à feu, en agissant sur la gâchette, permet de faire partir le coup.— Diminution brusque de la pression d'un gaz par augmentation de son volume.—

FIG. Distraction, repos: 'ces enfants ont besoin de détente'.— Diminution de la Tension entre Etats.

FAM. "Etre dur à la détente", ne donner de l'argent qu'avec peine."

"Détente": a Semantic Post-Mortem?

A. J. SALINGER-HORST

*The Hague
Netherlands*

ENCOUNTER acknowledges financial assistance from, among other generous donors, the Arts Council of Great Britain.

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AUTHORS

Clive Sinclair's collection of short stories, *Hearts of Gold* (1979), will appear in a Penguin edition in April, to coincide with the publication by Allison & Busby of his latest volume, *Bedbugs* (the title story was included in the November 1979 issue of ENCOUNTER).

Julian Lewis, who took a doctorate in Strategic Studies at Oxford University in 1981, is a consultant on international affairs. In 1976–78, with a fellow undergraduate, he organised a campaign against Trotskyite infiltration of the Labour Party.

Theodore Draper is a Fellow of the Institute of Advanced Studies at Princeton University. He is the author of a history of American Communism (2 vols., 1957, 1960), and of works on Cuba (1962, 1965), on US policy in Viet Nam (*Abuse of Power*, 1967), and on *Israel & World Politics* (1968); he is working on a two-volume study of America and World Power. Among his articles in ENCOUNTER are "Intellectuals in Politics" (December 1977) and "The Idea of the 'Cold War' & Its Prophets" (February 1979).

François Bondy is an editor of the monthly *Schweizer Monatshefte* and of *Die Weltwoche* (Zurich).

David Mata is a French writer who contributes regularly to *Contrepoint* in Paris, where his article first appeared.

Edward Pearce is a leader writer and Parliamentary sketch writer on the *Daily Telegraph* in London.

François Fejtö is Paris correspondent for *Il Giornale Nuovo*. He is the author of *The French Communist Party* (M.I.T. Press, 1967) and *History of the People's Democracies* (Penguin edition, 1974).

Indro Montanelli, an Italian historian and journalist, is editor-in-chief of *Il Giornale Nuovo* in Milan.

Maria Couto was born in Goa. She has taught English literature at the University of Delhi, and is currently living in London, writing a book about Graham Greene.

Anthony Bailey's most recent book, *America Lost and Found* (Faber, 1981), described his experiences as a British evacuee in the States during the Second World War. A collection of his *New Yorker* essays, *Acts of Union: Reports on Ireland 1973–79*, was published by Faber in 1980.

Max Beloff was until his recent retirement Principal of the University College at Buckingham; he became a Life Peer in 1981. His most recent book (as co-author) is *The Government of the United Kingdom* (Weidenfeld, 1980).

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann is Director of one of Germany's leading public-opinion-poll research organisations, the Institut für Demoskopie in Allensbach. She is a Professor in the School of Journalism at the University of Mainz.

David Gress, a young Danish publicist and historian, is co-editor of *Indblik*, a Danish weekly newspaper which begins publication in April. He read Classics and History at Cambridge and at Bryn Mawr College. His interest in political philosophy resulted in a book on the subject, which was published in Denmark in 1978; he is now completing an introductory study of the modern European state.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY WATMOUGHS LIMITED,
IDLE, BRADFORD; AND LONDON